

MEDIA RELEASE: 30 March 2010

A new soccer team has been established in Wodonga - with a distinctly international flavour!

The team is made up of players from all over the world: Brazil, England, New Zealand, India, Burma, Italy ... and Australia! 25% of the players are refugees from Bhutan, Nepal, Sudan and Burundi.

Team spokesman, Dr Ajit Varghese, explains: "I started playing basketball at Wodonga's Leisure Centre last year along with my son, Adrian, and very soon a group of local dads and their sons joined us. The group gradually attracted other migrant families and, with the increase in number, we had to find a larger sporting outlet with minimal costs."

In January, inspired by the impending Soccer World Cup competition, the group found themselves on the picturesque Willow Park soccer pitch! Since then, the group has played soccer every Saturday morning.

They gather and organise themselves into two teams: the number of attendees on the day divided into two! One team wears white t-shirts; the other team wears any other colour! Once on the pitch, friendship and harmony goes out the window as the two teams compete fiercely for two 45-minute halves. Brazilian, Rafael, performs the critical role of referee! The rivalry is palpable!

"If the goal nets aren't in place, kids' bicycles become make-shift goal posts!" says Ajit. "Off the pitch, there is great joviality and camaraderie. Some of the refugee kids go home with the local families (Simon & Michael) to experience a bit of Aussie food and culture. It's all great fun."

The group relies on word of mouth for new recruits who are always welcome. Arrangements are kept very simple with the emphasis on having fun, meeting new people and physical fitness.

It's a practical way of integrating new arrivals into our local community. While many struggle with the complexities of English, the "language" of the international game is very familiar and comfortable.

"Soccer is the gel", says Ajit. "We want to promote this wonderful game in the border region and have some fun with other new families."

From little things big things grow!

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