A TRIBUTE TO A SINGAPORE FOOTBALL ICON

Fandi *turns* 60

Things that define his life

1 Dad Ahmad Wartam is a goalkeeper and Fandi's first position is in goal.

2 First kicks a football at three.

3 At six, he cuts cigarette boxes into the shape of a footballer to play table football.

4 In his pre-teens, Fandi sells his mother's nasi lemak to supplement family income.

5 Wayward shots damage the lights at Woodbridge Hospital, where his father works.

6 Fandi's first neighbourhood team are the King of Tigers.

7 Gets caned because of disinterest in studies.

8 Sepak takraw helps his football close control.

9 Uses a cement rod and paint cans filled with cement as weights in his teens.

10 Helps Singapore U-16s win Lion City Cup at his first National Stadium outing.

11 At 16, Fandi is called up by national coach Sebastian Yap for a tour of Russia.

12 Works as technician after graduating from Singapore Vocational Institute at 16.

13 Develops soft spot for chocolate while working at Guthrie's.

14 Scores winner in Singapore's 2-1 win in 1980 Malaysia Cup final despite a fever.

15 Scores in Selangor's 2-1 defeat by Diego Maradona-led Boca Juniors in 1982.

16 One of Fandi's first gifts for his mother as a football pro is a colour TV.

17 Jersey No. 17 is synonymous with Fandi, but he has also worn 3, 7, 12 and 14.

18 Johan Cruyff's Ajax Amsterdam invite Fandi for a three-week trial in 1982.

19 Rejects three-year contract offer from Ajax; signs with Indonesia's Niac Mitra instead.

20 In a farewell match for Niac Mitra, Fandi scores in 2-0 win over Arsenal in 1983.

21 Signs two-year contract with Dutch club FC Groningen in 1983.

22 Scores against Inter Milan in first leg of Uefa Cup in 1983.

23 Bottles of sambal belacan help him beat homesickness while playing in Europe.

24 Helps Groningen finish fifth in 1984, fans vote Fandi Most Popular and Skilful Player.

25 The Straits Times reports he's joining Manchester United in 1984. An April Fool's joke.

26 Joins Federal Territory, later renamed Kuala Lumpur FA, in late 1985.

27 Helps KLFA win the Malaysia Cup from 1987-89, he wins Golden Boot in 1988.

28 At KL, he braids his hair to look like a reggae singer.

29 Buddy Malek Awab says Fandi is a cheeky cheat at card games.

30 Move to Greece turns sour, has to pay OFI Crete over $40,000 for release in 1990.

31 Becomes Singapore's first millionaire sportsman in 1992.

32 Face of brands like Uncle Tobys muesli bar, Carnation milk and Lotto boots in 1990s.

33 In 1992, a male doctor writes to him: Dear Fandi, get well soon. Kiss. Kiss. Kiss. Love.

34 Helps Singapore clinch the Malaysia Cup and League double in 1994.

35 Breathes and dreams football, Fandi mutters "pass me the ball" in his sleep.

36 Launches debut album Anugerah in 1996.

37 Helps Geylang United to the inaugural S-League title in 1996.

38 Marries Wendy Jacobs, a South African model, in 1996.

39 Fandi's first child Irfan is born in 1997. Ikhsan, Iman, Ilhan and Iryan follow.

40 Fandi's sons Irfan and Ikhsan play for BG Pathum United in Thailand.

41 Daughter Iman is a singer-songwriter, after excelling in sprinting.

42 Ilhan signs for the Singapore Premier League's Japanese team Albirex Niigata in 2022.

43 Outside of football, Iryan also plays rugby.

44 Starts restaurant and car dealership in 1999. Both eventually fail.

45 Wins S-League, FA Cup and League Cup treble with the Rhinos, SAFFC, in 1997.

46 Retires from international football in 1997 with 101 caps, 55 goals.

47 Has three silver medals from the SEA Games in 1983, 1985 and 1989.

48 Wins the S-League title, as well as S-League Coach of the Year award in 2000.

49 Hangs up his boots in 2001.

50 The compassionate Fandi raises funds for victims of the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia.

51 Becomes national team assistant to Radojko Avramovic and wins the 2004 Tiger Cup.

52 Guides Indonesian club Pelita Jaya to the top division in 2007.

53 Launches the Fandi Ahmad Academy in 2011.

54 Joins Malaysia's Johor Darul Takzim as technical adviser in 2012.

55 A wax figure in his likeness has stood at Madame Tussauds Singapore since 2014.

56 Becomes LionsXII coach in 2014 and 2015.

57 Leads the LionsXII to 2015 Malaysia FA Cup.

58 Fandi and Irfan light cauldron at 2015 SEA Games.

59 Named caretaker coach of Singapore in 2018.

60 Has two biographies: The Fandi Ahmad Story (1993) and Fandi: Honour & Sacrifice (2022).

TEXT: DAVID LEE SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS: BILLY KER, LEE YU HUI