

Hanoi Swans pictured here on the left alongside professional AFL players, who visited Hanoi last year, have joined forces with the Saigon Geckos and will compete as the Vietnam Swans at this year's annual Australian Football Asian Championships

Vietnam Swans all set to shine

Something that isn't fully appreciated is that wherever the boys from Down Under go, you're sure to find a footy team and Vietnam is no exception.

Australian-Rules Football, more comfortably called "footy" by the Aussies, might not be the number one sport in these waters but the Vietnam Swans will be flying the flag for Vietnam at the upcoming 8th Asian Championship to be held in Bangkok, Thailand on 14 July.

Hang on a moment! You've heard of the Hanoi Swans but not the Vietnam Swans...

Well, the Hanoi Swans have been determined to field a team in the Annual Asian Championships ever since they were reborn in 2003. However, sending a competitive team

abroad was always going to be a challenge due to a lack of numbers and finances. Hence, Hanoi has been courting Saigon players for approximately two years in an attempt to field a combined Vietnam National AFL team.

Sometimes fortune favours the lucky and in January of this year, Hanoi Swans President, Phil Johns was temporarily relocated to Saigon with work. Before going to the office on his first day, he caught up with the Saigon Rugby Club's President, Chris Paget for a high powered breakfast meeting and on April 21, as a curtain raiser to AusCham's Big Day Out in Saigon, the Saigon Geckos (comprising mainly of rugby players) hosted a footy match against the Hanoi Swans.

Saigon won easily, but the

Swans were happy as the Geckos had swallowed the bait and were now hooked on footy and keen to play in the Asian Championships.

Since then, the cooperation between the two football codes in Saigon has been second to none and the links between the two cities in the north and the south have never been stronger. Still fearing it may be difficult to raise the necessary number of players, invitations were sent to former Swans players.

But then more Hanoi and Saigon boys than expected

started to confirm. Further, acceptances started to be received from Tianjin, Phnom Penh, Vientiane, Singapore, Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne! When there were 44 confirmed tourists, Coach Scotty Stacey finally had to call a halt to the recruitment drive and so the Swans were forced to respectfully decline requests from the Philippines Eagles and Dubai Dingoes.

To assist with communication with players from the various cities and countries who would eventually play together



as the Vietnam Swans, it was decided to set up a blog (www.hanoiswans.wordpress.com). In the first 6 weeks, it had recorded 1,500 hits.

All of a sudden, Vietnam had its first National AFL Team. It had confirmed its inaugural appearance at the Asian Championships. And it had a blog site!

The boys will be up against teams from Bali, Jakarta, Singapore, Hong Kong, China, Japan, Malaysia United Arab Emirates and Thailand.

Swans' President Phil Johns is keen to use every trick in the book to help the Swans make their mark - even his marketing expertise.

For anyone who will listen long enough, he will tell them, "In marketing, we are always told of the need to differentiate. Footy is unique. It's different. It therefore makes a perfect marketing vehicle for some products, which is why the club, in

both Saigon and Hanoi, supported Austrade's Australian Schools' Open Days last month and..."

And so on...

If the Vietnam Swans can maintain that level of enthusiasm, they'll be unstoppable in the 8th Annual Asian Championships.

FANCY A RUN?

Those interested in playing with, cheering for or sponsoring the Vietnam Swans, in either Hanoi or Saigon, should contact Phil Johns, the Vietnam Swans President at 0904 322 547 or hanoiswans@gmail.com. For more info check out their blog at www.hanoiswans.wordpress.com. As Aussie Rules is trying to swim in a soccer sea, they are extremely welcoming of people from footy and non-footy backgrounds

By Duong Kieu

B I Z A R R E

• A real-life Robocop, hailed as a possible breakthrough in Russia, has failed on its first day. The 1.8m egg-shaped robot moves on four wheels, and has video cameras and sensors to relay pictures and data to police stations. But the first model soon

ran into trouble in the eastern city of Perm. It was only on the street for a few hours before heavy rains made it short-circuit.

• A student sparked a terror alert in Bulgaria after he borrowed a walkie-talkie from his secret agent father

to cheat in exams. George Dimitrov, 21, made the mistake of using the device in the middle of a security alert during US President George W. Bush's recent visit. Security agents working undercover with similar devices suddenly found their lines blocked. They traced the calls to Sofia's

Medical University, and a squad of local and US security agents searched the rooms until they found the cheating student, who was copying down data sent by a friend in the campus toilets.

• A piglet with six legs and two penises, born in

Croatia, has been nicknamed Octopig by his owner. The farmer told the daily *Večernji List* that Octopig also has two anuses, and was growing so fast he had decided to keep him as a pet. "Who knows? Maybe we can breed more, although the two penises might be a problem."

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