

Cobras keen to silence Swans in Australian Rules Footy Friendly

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THE Cambodian Cobras are sharpening their fangs for their 15-a-side Australian Rules Football friendly against visitors the Vietnam Swans this Saturday at Northbridge International School.

Footy, as it is colloquially known in its homeland, is a mixture of soccer, rugby and Gaelic football, and is an Australian creation dating back to 1859. Today, it is the most popular contact sport Down Under.

This high-flying game is making its international debut in

the Kingdom, although several local expatriates have grown up kicking and chasing the prolate spheroid-shaped ball.

"For the first time, we have a well established Australian Rules Football team in Cambodia," said Independent Property Services Director David Murphy, who doubles as the Cobras' coach. "It is a multinational side. We have Americans, Brits, Cambodians and Australians coming together to form this unit. We are proud that Footy is up and running."

A village-level player back in the suburbs of Melbourne, Murphy has been living in Phnom Penh for just over a year, and was one of the initiators among half a dozen Footy-loving residents who came together to form a cohesive team.

"The word was out soon after that meeting four months ago. We had a lot of people calling in to join and support this venture. We formed a committee, and here we are as Cambodian Cobras."

Murphy revealed the origins of the team name. "The name bears some significance to the Khmer culture and heritage. Cobras have always been emblematic of Cambodian society. We had Crocs in mind, but that was snatched away by East Timor."

The coach described his sport as a "heady mix of skill and endeavour".

"It whips up lot of excitement and we want to share that experience with Cambodia," he said. "In fact, we will soon be



Cambodian Cobras teammates jump for a ball during practice ahead of their friendly against the Vietnam Swans. SRENG MENG SRUN



Cambodian Cobras coach David Murphy gives instructions to team members during a training session ahead of their Australian Rules Football friendly Saturday at Northbridge School. SRENG MENG SRUN

introducing Auskick, an Australian Football League initiative to promote the game at junior level here in the Kingdom."

As part of its Australian Football League Grand Final Day celebrations here on September 25, David Calthorpe and Paul Barnard, two former AFL stars from famous Melbourne club Essendon, will be visiting the Kingdom. "Their insight and expertise would be invaluable for us," said Murphy.

The AFL is backing the Cobras to the fullest possible extent and Burley-Sekem, who

manufacture the sport's balls and clothing, are sponsoring the team's outfits for the ensuing friendly.

"We have a lot of other sponsors supporting us like Aussie XL, Pickled Parrot, Sharkys and Gym Bar. Our aim is to regulate the sport and spread it among Cambodian youth," said Murphy during a training session Tuesday.

Unlike the Cobras, the Swans are a long standing entity with bases both in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Footy made its Vietnamese debut more than 40 years ago, though the sport became more organised in the

mid 1990s. In 2007, the two teams merged.

"The Swans are very active," said Murphy. "They go through tough training sessions and they undertake frequent tours. They are a good, strong team. But we are ready for them."

Saturday's match is slated for a 3pm kickoff, with four grueling quarters of 20 minutes each to be played. While the match length is consistent with AFL games, the teams have agreed to allow seven interchanges, or substitutions, during the contest as opposed to the four granted in professional leagues. ■