

GAME HAS EVOLVED INTO A 'PROFESSIONAL ADMINISTRATION'

PAST SUCCESS BUILT ON TEAMWORK: QUAH

Lions legend says demands of modern game make life tougher for current players, officials

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SINGAPORE – If his son Leon had seriously considered a professional football career today, Quah Kim Song would have pointed him to Europe, where prospects are far brighter, as the money in the local game is still not at a level where he could secure a viable future when he retires.

In an interview with TODAY, Quah, a Lions legend of the 1970s and early 1980s, said even a salary of between S\$10,000 and S\$15,000 a month for a top S-League player is not enough to put a footballer on sound footing when his playing days end in his 30s. This, added the former star striker, is probably why parents steer their sons towards academic excellence instead of a football career, even if they have the talent to excel on the pitch.

"I told my son, play football socially but study. He had a second-class upper (honours degree) at university and now has a good job and I am happy," said the grandfather of two-year-old boy-and-girl twins from daughter



Leonora. "But if he had played football, I shudder to think what would have happened to him because if you ask me if it is a good option to play football today, I'd say that well there is professional football here but the money isn't still that great."

Quah will be launching his book, *Pass Kim Song the %#@* ball!!* — *The Quah Kim Song Story*, at the Singapore Management University to-

night. Its narrative, however, steers clear of any comment on the current state of local football and instead covers the dizzying days of the Malaysia Cup almost four decades ago, especially Singapore's dramatic 3-2 win over Penang in the 1977 final.

The book, 62-year-old Quah said, is a tribute to dad Heck Hock and mum Lau Ah Noi, who had to raise 11 children who — apart from elder

Former national footballer Quah Kim Song says his book is a tribute to his parents, who had to raise 11 children, 10 of whom went on to don national colours.

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brother Kim Beng — all went on to don national colours. Six played for the Lions, three turned out for the national women's football team and the youngest, Kim Tiong, was a Singapore 400m runner who won gold at the 1975 SEAP Games.

Quah said he also wanted to honour FAS administrators, coaches, players and fans in the 1970s who gave Singapore football one of its best decades in history.

Under the presidency of colourful lawyer N Ganesan and legendary coach Choo Seng Quee, Singapore football sizzled with players such as Samad Allapitchay, S Rajagopal, Mat Noor and Eric Paine.

"During Ganesan's time, he had a group of people who shared the same ideals, same passion, and same ambition to achieve something big, and they did it without any interference," said Quah. "This was what they believed in and worked on as a team, even though sometimes there were little squabbles and arguments. I believe if we are to move forward, we need a big pool of people who share the same ideas."

But he conceded it will be difficult to replicate what Singapore football enjoyed 40 years ago as circumstances are different today. Ganesan was a well-to-do lawyer and the bulk of his team were volunteers who did not face the kind of pressures salaried staff do under their bosses.

Football, Quah said, has evolved into a professional administration and putting together a team that share common ideals is difficult.

"It is easy to find a civil servant at the top range of the salary range and ask him to administrate," he said. "He will probably do a good job, but whether he can assemble a team that can bring glory to Singapore football, I doubt it. Just like a footballer, you require exceptional skills to put up a good team and it is not easy."