

## **Geylang International ushers in new era for 2013 season**

By Kenneth Tan

You can buy anything but not history.

That was the statement made by Geylang International chairman Leong Kok Fann at a pre-season press conference held at the LiveWire outlet at Marina Bay Sands on Thursday evening.

The new club name, logo and various other initiatives was announced at the two-hour affair on Thursday evening in the presence of Football Association of Singapore president Zainudin Nordin, honorary general-secretary Winston Lee and S.League CEO Lim Chin and former players Samad Allapitchay, Malek Awab and PJ Roberts.

Formed in 1974, Geylang International Football Club used to be a giant in Singapore football, winning three successive titles in the then -National Football League from 1975 to 1977 and clinching six straight Premier League titles from 1988 to 1993.

Renamed as Geylang United in the inaugural S.League season in 1996, the squad oozed talent throughout with the likes of former World Cup players Hamid Estili and Mohammad Khakpour, promising young boys Robin Chitrakar and Kadir Yahaya, and the famous duo of goalkeeper David Lee and golden boy Fandi Ahmad.

In front of a near 40,000-strong crowd at the National Stadium, Fandi led the team to victory in the series final over Woodlands Wellington. The club picked up another title in 2001, but recent times have seen the Eagles' name being associated with mediocrity.

As such, Leong is bent on bringing back the glory days to Bedok Stadium, starting with the name change and new club logo. A vision statement, playing philosophy and values like discipline and commitment have also been clearly set out, and a six-week training routine planned for the players to follow.

As videos of those past successes were projected onto a large screen and watched by the current crop of players, the 54-year-old hopes they will be inspired to do well in the upcoming season.

Players pursuing tertiary studies will also be boosted by the announcement of a Scholarship fund where three selected players, either from the S.League or Prime League, who have been accepted into any of the three local universities, will receive \$2,500 annually to aid in their education fees.

Meanwhile on the community outreach side, there will be a new Geylang – Singapore Management University [SMU] Mentorship Programme, which includes opportunities to interact with the S.League players.

Thirty-six students from Bedok View Secondary School will be selected and mentored by members from the SMU male and female football teams, with the Eagles acting as the main facilitators for the program.

Leong hopes all these initiatives will culminate in a successful 2013 for the club on and off the pitch.

"I took on this unenviable task 11 months ago and I've been planning for the bigger picture," he said.

"Not just improving our league position, but also enhancing the values in our players. I set this vision statement and I have a responsibility to uphold it.

"It takes time for the players to change their mindset but it's a journey of enhancement for them.

"I believe I have the people, in terms of coaching staff and players to live [up to] the mission."

And he has set a bold top-six target for the upcoming season.

"So far, I can see the professionalism in the new signings: reaching earlier for training and even staying back after to practice. I don't think it's unfair to expect a top-six finish if we continue with the same level of commitment and passion," he concluded.,500 annually to aid in their education fees.

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