

Singapore loses 2-0 to Vietnam in a football matchâ?¦ why do we keep going down this route?

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I lived during periods of Singapore football greatness. To the young, you will not know what this is. You have never seen the likes of Fandi Ahmad swivelling and placing a shot into the bottom corner. You have never seen the brilliance of V. Sundramoorthy which cumulated in a brilliant bicycle kick against Brunei. You have never known a super sub like Steven Tan. Kallang wave is not a shopping mall but a sign of collectiveness among the Singapore fans. We do the Kallang Wave when the Singapore team is winning. We do the Kallang Wave when the Singapore football team needs a second win to take the game by the scruff of the neck. Heck, we even do the Kallang Wave when the Singapore football team is winning. You know why we do it? Because we are proud of Singapore football. It was exciting, spellbinding and exhilarating. You want to know how to tell if you are young? If you are a football fan and what I have just narrated to you is foreign, then you are young.

Amazingly, Singapore made it to the semi-finals of the ASEAN Mitsubishi Electric Cup 2024. It was a two legged game. The first leg was held at the Jalan Besar Stadium. The second would be back in Vietnam.

Wait, why was it held at the Jalan Besar Stadium? We have a state of the art National Stadium and our football team made it to the semi-finals of the ASEAN Cup and we decide to host it at the Jalan Besar Stadium?



Source: Mediacorp YouTube

Atmosphere wise it is not the most ideal. Spectators do not encircle the football pitch. Perhaps the organisers were worried that we could not fill the seats? Trust me, if the football is good, the fans will come.

The attendance for this game was 5,233. That includes the Vietnamese fans. Ok I get why we chose the Jalan Besar Stadium. Any lower attendance and I think we could just play the match at some secondary school pitch.

I was at fault as well. I chose to stay home to catch the game on the television. My choice was because if this game was not entertaining, I could simply switch over to Starhub TV to watch Manchester City take on Everton. Spoiler alert: I did switch over.

While some reports hailed Singaporeâ??s performance as stoic, I choose to be less glowing in my depiction of their efforts.

It was toothless.

Here are my reasons why I say so.

Firstly, the Singapore team complicates matters. I find it perplexing that when a simple pass is on the cards, the midfielders choose to play the low probability cross field pass. Our midfielders Saharan,

Sulaiman and Syahin were particularly guilty. If they are not watching the English Premier League, they should. Look at how often teams like Liverpool and Chelsea play a cross field pass. In fact, in a later match after the Singapore and Vietnam game, most of Liverpoolâ??s 649 passes against Leicester were short passes. Such short passes were high probability passes. High probability of finding the intended target. Singapore played multiple cross field passes where the intended target was already outnumbered at least 2 to 1 against the Vietnamese defenders.

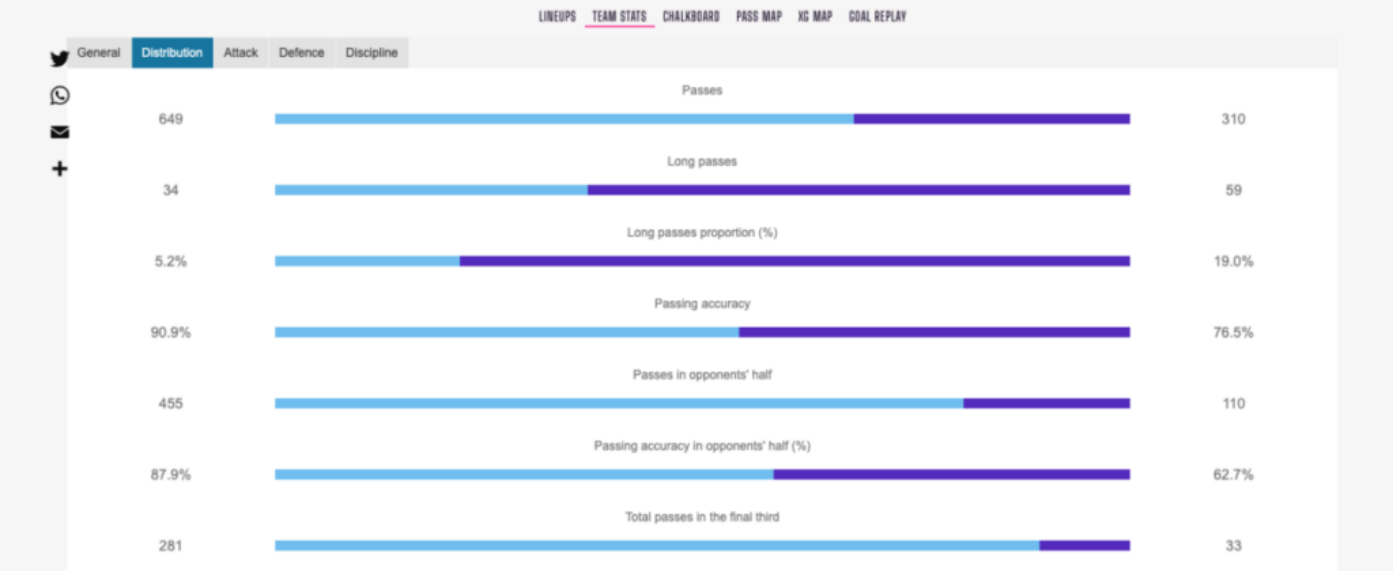
Why does the Singapore team do this? Are they unaware that such passes are unlikely to reach their intended target? Even if the pass reaches the intended target, it would take some effort and skill to control such a long pass. I genuinely wish that Shawal Anuar and Kweh Jia Jin were as skilful as Mohamad Salah. The truth is that they are not. Hence it would take them multiple touches to control such a cross field pass and the Vietnamese defence would have an extra few seconds to recover.

I think this is what they have in mindâ?¦

The truth is, Singapore is not equipped with the relevant players to execute such a play.

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You know what is an interesting fact? Liverpool out of Liverpoolâ??s 649 passes, only 5.2% of those passes were long passes. That works out to about 34 long passes. In contrast, Leicester made 310 passes of which 19% were long passes. That worked out to about 59 long passes. The moral of the story, the team at the top of the Premier League is playing very few long passes. All their passes are short with a high percentage of reaching their intended target.



Secondly, why do we persist in playing players who like to dwell on the ball? The concept of one-touch football or first time passes seems foreign. I play football casually with friends as well. At times, I think more damage could be done with a simple first time pass than to take multiple touches and try to beat a player or two. One simple pass could split a defence much better than a mazy dribble. In most cases, quite a large number of dribbles that the Singapore players took on led them down into a dead end. The Vietnamese defenders kept on their feet and did not commit to the body feints and turns that the Singapore players tried to execute. The result was that the Singapore players were led further down into the channels. Their angles were narrowed and their options limited. Spaces were closed down

when the Singapore team continued to dwell on the ball.

Look at how Liverpool played against Tottenham.

For the first goal, Trent took one touch to steady himself and then whipped in a cross for Diaz to score. Look at Salahâ??s goal. Szoboszlai squared the ball immediately. The first time pass took all the Tottenham defenders out of the game. Just imagine what would happen if he took an additional touch. The space in front of Salah would have narrowed. He would have been closer to the keeper and the angle to play the pass would have been narrowed.

Next, look at Liverpoolâ??s sixth goal. Salah took one touch and then played a pass to Diaz who made a darting run. Diaz can anticipate a first time pass. He cannot anticipate a pass if Salah took any more touches.

Thirdly, what was this?

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Source: Mediacorp YouTube

How is throwing your body on top of the ball ever a good idea? I do not think that the Vietnamese player Rafaelson scores if Shakir Hamzah does not handle the ball. However, once you throw your body on top of the ball and the ball strikes your arm, it is a penalty.

You know what is more frustrating when conceding a goal in the 111th minute? Yes, the 11th minute of time added on. Singapore then goes up the field trying to score an equaliser only to leave the back open for the Vietnamese to score a second in the 114th minute.

They do know that there is a second leg right? Crazier things have happened and Singapore could have lost the first leg 1-0 and gone to Vietnam to win the second leg and the overall tie. However, at 2-0, the tie seems over.

I do hope that the Singapore team can overcome the 2 goal deficit in the second leg. However, they do seem to play a brand of football that is overly frustrating for long suffering fans like myself.

Something needs to change. It has been for too long already.

Letâ??s Make Singapore Football Great Againâ?¦

Yours sincerely,

Daryl

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Date Created
27/12/2024
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