



In a football match

“It reflects the changes in TEDA. More and more foreign companies have come here and with them, foreign experts from all over the world.” With players from 22 nations, ages spanning 5 decades and both sexes represented, it’s a true cross section of the expat community.

Football, a Universal Language

By Robert Watt

足球，我们共同的语言

在一个温暖的下午，一场足球赛即将在塘沽实验中学举行。滨海国际足球俱乐部的队员们正在为本周的比赛进行热身。看台上坐着球员们的女友们和俱乐部的经理张彦。

张彦在3年前成立了这个俱乐部。每个周末的比赛对所有的队员和张彦来说都是生活中十分重要的部分。张彦本身就是个足球迷，她一手创建的俱乐部现在已经在天津非常有名了。按她自己的话说：“拥有自己的球队一直是我的梦想！”

2011年5月，张彦的几个意大利同事希望她能帮助组织一场足球赛。于是，她率领着由5个老外和几个中国朋友组成的足球队和本地一支球队进行了一场比赛。对手看起来比他们要专业得多，但张彦认为她也可以做到。最初，他们需要自己找球队和他们打比赛。队员们一起买了队服，张彦自己开着车带着队员到处比赛。很快，越来越多的队伍找上门来要和他们一决高下。

每次比赛前，张彦都要组织两队进行合影。她的队员分别来自加拿大、波兰、德国、英国、日本和中国。比赛前的气氛非常友好，互相握手，大家说说笑笑。

比赛开始以后，张彦总是在场边喊得最卖力的那个人。她每次都会认真记录比赛情况，比如参赛队员名单，谁进了球。她说：“我们会评选出每场的‘最佳球员’，赛季末还会评选金靴奖、最佳新人和最有价值球员。这在队内形成一种竞争，每次评选‘最佳球员’都会让大家对当天的表现有一个反思。”

半场休息的时候，张彦不但要继续鼓励球员们，还会把准备好的水、咖啡、热巧克力发到队员手中。几乎每个队员都会打满半场，张彦指派的队长Helder负责人员调配。Helder还会在一个小白板上给大家讲解技战术。虽然气氛很轻松活跃，但每个人都对比赛认真对待。

张彦说：“本赛季我们队伍已经扩展到19个队员了。这也反映出滨海新区这几年的变化。越来越多的外国企业来这里投资，也带来更多来自世界各地的外国员工。”这支队伍里曾有过22个国家的队员，年龄横跨50岁，男女都有，这真是一个跨文化的外籍社区。

说到管理球队的秘诀，张彦认为“专业”是最重要的一点。“我们有队名、口号、赞助商和横幅。我们还有队伍章程，每个人都要签字并遵守。我们定期还会开会，举办团队建设活动，赛季末还会有颁奖活动。我们不只是为了好玩，我们还要赢得比赛！”

张彦的球队走到哪里都很受欢迎。有专业的摄影师做志愿者为大家拍照，主队经常主动承担全部场地费，餐厅也愿意免费提供用餐。张彦说：“大家都对我们很慷慨！”

张彦专业化的管理和凝聚力已经取得了很好的成果。俱乐部的成员不分性别和国籍，张彦说：“是共同的兴趣把我们聚在一起，我们只说一种语言，那就是足球。”

to play against us.”

Before the match begins, Yan gets both teams together for the traditional group photograph, taken by official photographer Wu Yan. Canadian, Polish, German, British, Japanese as well as Chinese stand shoulder to shoulder. There is some laughter, a lot of smiling and hand shaking before breaking away onto the separate halves of the field.

The match starts shakily and despite a lot of encouraging cheers from Yan, the foreigners are soon a goal behind. She isn’t worried though. The expats gradually settle into the game and start to threaten the oppositions goal. Two certain chances are missed before her confidence is confirmed by the equalizer. Yan is screaming on the sideline in celebration, then adds the scorers names into her book. “I keep records of who plays and who scores” she explains. “Later we all vote for ‘man of the match’.” At the end of the season we have awards for golden boot, best new player and the most times winner of man of the match. It provides a bit of competition within the team and voting for MOM makes us reflect on our performances.”

The half time whistle blows and the players wander off the pitch. It’s another busy time for Yan who is full of congratulations and encouragement for her players, as well as the odd joke at some mistakes. She has organised the bottled water. Cups of coffee and hot Chocolate arrive from the nearby McDonalds.

Everyone on the team plays at least half the match. It means significant team changes for the second half. Helder, who Yan has appointed captain, is responsible for balancing the ability of players. He explains the strategy using a small white board and marker pen. There is a buzz of excitement and enthusiasm, the atmosphere is relaxed, but everyone is taking the game seriously.

The second half starts like the first with the conceding of an early goal. It’s a problem with all the changes “We have grown to 19 players this season” says Yan. “It reflects the changes in TEDA. More and more foreign companies have come here and with them, foreign experts from all over the world.” With players from 22 nations, ages spanning 5 decades and both sexes represented, it’s a true cross section of the expat community. But, the secret of its success, Yan believes, is in her management approach. “Although we are not a professional team, I organise it in a professional way. We have a name, a slogan, sponsorship and a strip. We also have a constitution that everyone has to sign, regular team meetings, team building activities and of course, awards at the



Yan and Henri

end of the season. I believe these things are important because, while we are only playing for fun, we also want to win. To do that you have to take a professional approach to the game. We have to be a team.”

Its certainly well organised. It has all the trappings and appearances of a premier league match. “At the beginning”, she says. “I had to spend a lot of time finding teams to play against. But now we are well known and I get phone calls from teams asking to play us.

Part of their notoriety comes from the publicity. Yan started by putting up posters in the major places of TEDA. Then they had articles in the Jinwan newspaper, Morning Post and Tianjin Daily. Last season they appeared on local TV and in the China Daily. “We are very well known throughout Tianjin and the Binhai area,” says Yan. “The team members and myself often get recognised because of the publicity and because of the huge number of people that we’ve played against.”

Another indication of how far Yan has taken



Team photo

the team is their sponsorship by Etola whose name and logo emblazons their blue football strip. Henri, the CEO in China, says “Yan is so enthusiastic and positive, she has built something that’s an important contribution to local relations.”

The game has progressed into the final fifteen minutes. To the jubilation of Yan, her team are now a goal ahead. The match is evenly balanced and some of the players are clearly tired. It’s the point in the game where passions and frustrations can lead to errors, careless tackles and irritability. But there is never any serious trouble in the games. The constitution, that everyone has signed, makes it clear what behaviour is expected. Their fair play helps make the team popular to compete against.

Another measure of their popularity is the help they are offered. The photographer voluntarily attends every match and team social event, host teams often refuse payment for the playing field and restaurants host free dinners. As Yan says, “The local people are very generous towards us”

When the final whistle blows, Binhai International has won by 2 goals. It’s a victory against a generally younger, faster and more skilful opposition. Helder reflects “It’s a team game and we won because we played as a team.”

The players walk off the pitch. Yan is waiting with a large pack of cold beers. There is some post match analysis, but mostly, the talk is of celebrations later that night.

Her management style clearly produces results. You can see the respect the players have for her and for what she does for the club. They are a close team where gender and nationality are unimportant. As Yan says “We all come together for one common interest. We all speak one language: Football.”