



A GENTLEMAN COACH

By Hishamuddin Aun

He once refused to sign a contract with Kelantan so that he could walk away when he felt he had failed

Even from his hospital bed at the University of Malaya Medical Center (PPUM), B Satianathan does not just want to lie down and do nothing.

With his mobile phone still in hand, he was busy sending WhatsApp messages to the members of the Football Coaches Association of Malaysia (PJBM) committee that he led as president, to help a member who needed urgent advocacy.

This comes after the head coach of PDRM FC, Azzmi Aziz, was sacked with immediate effect from 19 June 2023, which shocked local football fans as he was considered one of the better coaches in the Super League.

There was no official announcement from the club's management, nor was any reason given except that it was claimed as part of the restructuring process of the team which was then eighth in the league after winning six, drawing one and losing seven to amass 19 points from 14 games.

As soon as he was informed, Satia did not hesitate to call Azzmi to calm him down and offered advice on the steps the coach should take to obtain a defence in addition to claiming all his rights according to the contract agreement.

In a situation where he himself was bedridden from cancer and deserved sympathy, Satia still had compassion and a sense of responsibility for a coach who needed help.

"We are helping him (Azzmi) and I myself have spoken to him. He was made a scapegoat by his club management," he said in a WhatsApp message dated June 25.

A lot has been said about Satia, a coach for three decades from 1992-2022 who was described as 'brutal' and a loose cannon, but the story above is just an example of how big-hearted he was who cared about the fate of his peers.

However, contrary to his professional stance, Satia once set aside the need to sign a contract because he wanted to challenge his own ability.

"I was offered to coach the Kelantan team at the end of 2009 by Tan Sri Annuar Musa (president of the Kelantan Football Association at the time) and I accepted on the condition that no contract was signed. I mean I don't want any contract.

"This is indeed strange as this is not a common practice because it is the contract that will bind a coach to a team. But I did that because I wanted to immediately leave the team whenever I felt I had failed in my job as a coach.

"I don't want to wait for the team management's decision. I will inform them myself if I feel I have disappointed the team.

"So, the association does not have to pay compensation if they want to sack me or I resign. I also told Tan Sri Annuar that I will take Kelantan to the final of the Malaysia Cup in 2010," he said in an interview.

“ Good evening Mr.George, just trying to get a good sleep in the hospital.”

The above WhatsApp message on 16 July 2023 was the last communication I had with B. Satianathan.
George Das

In fact, more than just reaching the final, Kelantan, who lost in the final twice in 1970 and 2009, were crowned champions for the first time in the history of the Malaysia Cup by defeating Negeri Sembilan 2-1 thanks to goals from Hairuddin Omar (56th min) and Badhri Radzi (64th min).

"I have never been afraid to fail. For me, hard work and discipline is the only way to win titles. I always believe in team cooperation to succeed and not because of the coach alone," he added about Kelantan's historic year.

However, Satia had to leave the team after that because he was suspended for six months from January 2011 for his criticism of the parent body, the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM), which they did not like.

On the other hand, it highlighted that he was not afraid to speak up to defend his principles even if he risked himself of being made a sacrificial lamb.

Once accused of being a "bootlicker" because of his praise for the Johor Darul Ta'azim (JDT) facility while his Selangor team could not even train at the Shah Alam Stadium before the start of the league in 2019, Satia insisted that his character has never changed despite what people think.

"I want to continue with the same attitude. Some people may agree with me, some others will contradict me. But what is important to me is to be honest in whatever I want to say.

"I will not hold back from expressing my sincere views. It's not my job to try to win people's hearts. Bootlicking is not my trade," he insisted.

Another side of Satia was that he does not take compliments easily and even considers most of them to be mere jokes, and even worse, sarcasm.

Once asked for his coaching background for an article, Satia sent through a WhatsApp message a CV loaded with various courses, recognitions, and a string of trophies he had won.

When teased that his CV qualifies him for the presidency of the International Football Federation (FIFA), Satia responded with a series of laughing emojis.

In the end, anyone could assume the anxiety he went through during his time at PPUM until he breathed his last at 1.25 pm on Tuesday, based on his confession of being addicted to watching football regardless of time up to many hours a day.

"I am crazy about football because I have nothing without football. More than being flesh and blood and a source of income, football is my life," he said.

The broadcasts of the Italian Serie A league were the most he followed, especially Napoli, not only focusing on the game pattern, but also studying the team's formation and tactics in depth to share with other coaches who needed some insight.

Now, Satia is gone but Malaysian football will not let go after all the memories he left behind as a former national player and coach, more so a gentleman.

Personally, Satia will continue to be remembered for his friendship, his always frank assessment, not shying away from sharing his experiences, and his utmost respect of anyone who held his personality in high esteem.

(In memory of B. Satianathan, who died of cancer at 65 on 18 July 2023.)

