

## Battambang season wraps up

Written by Sam Schweingruber  
Wednesday, 07 April 2010 15:00

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### The ANZ SALT Academy youth football season reached its exciting conclusion in Battambang Saturday, with finals in four categories deciding team standings



**Photo by: Sam Schweingruber** Kanniah (right) from the G-Girls teams converts her penalty against the Battambang Rangers in the U14 Girls final Saturday at Battambang's Institute of Technology field.

#### **Battambang**

Battambang's Institute of Technology hosted the thrilling conclusion of the ANZ SALT Academy youth football season Saturday. More than 35 teams had been competing since November last year in 9-a-side games played across half pitches, with the top 16 teams playing Saturday to decide the final standings in each of four age categories.

For players from teams that didn't make the cut, a fun 5-a-side competition was also organised, with the Corner Crown side triumphing in the U17 division while members of the Tschrey team sealed victory in the U12s by means of a penalty shootout.

The first of Saturday's grand finals featured U14 girls playing at lunchtime. The G-Girls looked physically stronger but the young girls from the SOS Children's Village, also known as the Battambang Rangers, displayed superior technical skill and a nice short pass game.

Minutes before half time, the Rangers keeper booted the ball against her own defender to concede an unlucky own goal. The G-Girls seemed in control, and capable of holding onto their slender lead with the Rangers failing to create any clear cut chances. However, with 3 minutes left on the clock Nou Sokhieng stunned everyone with an unstoppable left foot strike to level the scores, and force the game into penalties.

It was a day for the keepers, with only Golden Boot winner Srey Kanniah of the G-Girls successful with her spotkick to bring tears to the SOS girls and send the G-Girls into song and dance.

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In the U12 boys final, the Catholics boys faced the BB Rangers from the SOS Children's Village. During the season, the Catholics had dominated, but the Rangers were prepared to fight for every ball and focused on eliminating any mistakes.



**Photo by: Sam Schweingruber** Rven Tschomrak (front) scores a penalty during the U12s final to spark wild celebrations from the Catholics team.

Catholics striker Oum Vesna - the season's Golden boot winner with 17 goals - almost secured victory for his side with a last minute attempt, but it ended 0-0 in a poor reflection on the excitement of the match.

For the second time Saturday, the Rangers team showed weakness from the spot, this time losing 4-3. Catholics' Rven Tschomrak surprised himself with one of the goals for his team in his first ever penalty in competition. "I was so nervous before I shot because I didn't want to be the one responsible if we lost," he said afterwards. "For me I never wanted to shoot, but the coach decided for me. Now I feel so happy because we won and in the future I will volunteer to shoot a penalty again."

The U14 boy's competition featured yet another team from SOS Children's Village. Their boys displayed some fantastic skill against the team nicknamed Jerusalem, but despite having the majority of possession and creating some good chances, it was Jerusalem's Nut Tschomnan

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who netted the winning goal. His shot from outside the box took a wicked deflection off a defender, but it proved decisive as the team celebrated their victory to grant the SOS camp their third straight runners-up placing.

The final game of a high engaging season didn't disappoint. Just minutes into the U17 boys final, the Catholics team created a superb chance, but Kew Samnang failed to convert in front of the Jerusalem goal.

The very same player made amends near the end of the half, heading in from a corner kick to leave Brum Den in goal of Jerusalem not the glimpse of a chance.

The second half was crammed full of action. A Jerusalem striker was clearly shoved whilst going for a header, and the referee had no choice but to award a penalty and show a yellow card to the guilty defender. A heated debate followed, and much to everybody's surprise, the Catholics defender was then dismissed with a second yellow.

Long Piseth eventually stepped up to convert the spotkick and equalise for Jerusalem. The Catholics found themselves a man down and under a lot of pressure for the remaining 15 minutes.

A superb couple of stops by Jerusalem's Brum Den kept things even to ensure the third final of the day would be settled from the penalty spot. And it was Brum Den who emerged as the hero, saving two Catholics attempts to help his team to clinch the title and Jerusalem's second.

During the closing ceremony address, Sam Mary from the provincial government stressed the importance of developing young people into mature athletes and leaders and thanked SALT Academy for their ongoing efforts in Battambang. She also praised ANZ Royal – the official sponsor of the youth league – for their contribution to the local community before presenting the four trophies to the victorious sides as well as various other prizes.

With so many young players now involved in sporting activities in the Battambang area, including learning important life skills on and off the field, everybody could look back on a hugely successful season with pride and the knowledge that the future for these kids looks brighter than ever.