

SALT Academy leagues kick off

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Battambang's reputation as a major footballing hub in the Kingdom was further enhanced when SALT Academy launched its fifth annual junior league for boys and girls, sponsored for the second year running by ANZ Royal Bank, with great fanfare on Sunday.

More than 1,000 players representing 62 teams drawn from local organisations, orphanages, schools and communities will vie for honours in five different categories – Boys U11, U13 and U16, and Girls U11 and U16 – over the next four months in a season stretching right up to March.



Photo by: Sam Schweingruber

FC Basel Chairwoman Gigi Oeri sits with the Battambang Province U13 girls team, who are wearing their new uniforms of a replica strip of FC Basel.

Many of the teams have been brought through the Indochina Starfish Football Program. Matches will be played every Sunday at the Institute of Technology pitch and Baek Chan ground in Battambang, while some matches will also be staged at the University of Battambang field.

The U16 events for boys and girls will feature nine-a-side games using one half of a regular pitch. All other categories involve seven-a-side fixtures on quarter of a pitch. All matches will be played over two halves of 30 minutes each.

An impressive and well attended opening ceremony on Sunday included special guest Gigi Oeri, Chairwoman of Swiss League champions FC Basel. Oeri was on a four-day visit to oversee the activities of the SALT Academy and also to support some of its developmental ideas and plans. Battambang province's U13 girls team were given FC Basel shirts to wear during their matches this season.

Coaches from both SALT Academy and ISF were given another round of intensive coaching by FIFA Grassroots Instructor Fritz Schmid of Switzerland on his second trip to Battambang in less than three months. Schmid, who had a long association with FC Basel as well as a short stint with English Premier League club Tottenham, has been a coaches educator for FIFA and the Swiss FA for many years. The thrust of the coaches workshop was on the Magic Square – an offensive formation of four players – as well as defensive movements.

Deputy Director of Battambang Province Sok Kung was among the dignitaries attending the gala opening. Representatives from the government, city administration and the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Education were also in attendance.

As part of the inaugural bash, a seven-a-side knockout tournament was held in five categories. ASPECA won the girls U13 event, and SOS triumphed in U16 girls. The Catholics team, meanwhile, took top honours in the boys U11 division, KCD emerged victorious in the U13 group, while Asia Hope needed penalties to clinch first in the U16s.