

KANGA CUP 2019

LUGARNO U9

The first Lugarno FC team to enter the Kanga Cup. After this experience, it won't be the last. Coach Dom and Manager Vlado worked hard to bring together a group of 10 boys from the Lugarno 9A and 9I teams.

The team had one light training run together in the weeks prior and then the we were off to Canberra.

Kanga Cup Team was as follows:

- | | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 2. Zac S (9A) | 7. Kai M (9A) | 11. Oliver M (9A) |
| 3. Riley T (9A) | 8. Lucas R (9I) | 14. Emmett J (9I) |
| 4. Isaac W (9I) | 9. Arnold S (9I) | COACH – Domenic C |
| 6. Sam E (9A) | 10. Samuel C (9A) | MANAGER – Vlado M |

SUNDAY 7 JULY

Parents and kids assembled for the Kanga Cup opening ceremony at the old Parliament House in Canberra. The Lugarno contingent found each other amongst the herds of parents and children congregating. It was to be the start of a great week. After Dom and Vlado took the boys to the marshalling area, the team were announced to make their entrance into the ceremony.



Lugarno U9 Team in the Kanga Cup Opening Ceremony. From left – Arnold, Ollie, Zac, Riley, Lucas, Samuel, Isaac, Kai

The boys did a few laps with coach and manager in tow. Excitement was in the air as the team got a great cheer from the Lugarno parents in the corner of the grounds. This was a journey that all the families were taking as one.



Lugarno U9 family members after the opening ceremony

That evening the parents and kids all got together for a welcome dinner at the Dock pub in Kingston where parents and kids mingled and got to know each other better. Once the kiddie burgers were done, coach Dom joined the boys to see how they are feeling, set some expectations and basically show off his Roma T-shirt. The boys were excited.



Coach Dom gives the team a pre-tournament pep talk

MONDAY 8 JULY

Kanga Cup Day 1 – Game day. On a cold morning, the team was happy to know that they had a first round bye meaning that their actual first game was not until early that afternoon. Dom and Vlado decided to head out to the venue in the morning anyway on a reconnaissance mission to scope out the other 4 teams in our pool.

Hawker Football Centre and its artificial turf was the venue. Perfect fields with lots of space to warm up. Both games from our pool were playing the earlier game at the same time and Dom and Vlado left Hawker feeling that second place in the pool which would qualify for the second round was not beyond the realms of possibility.

The team arrived at Hawker at midday. Excited, ready and of course, cold. Dom set up ladders and cones at the practice fields then took the boys through their paces. Not 5 minutes of the warm-up had past, when one of the boys - Kai ran up to his dad Vlado almost in tears as he rolled his ankle, not used to the artificial turf. It was almost over before it had begun. Thankfully, it wasn't major and the warm-up continued.

Dom, feeling confident from the morning brought the team in for a talk. We were to play the team we believed was the strongest in the group first up. Easts FC from Bondi. With their coaches sipping on lattes, Easts arrived to Field 3 ready to play.

Lugarno FC U9 v Easts FC U9

The match kicked off and the conditions were fast. Easts could play. They controlled the ball effortlessly. Better than some of the All age teams at Lugarno. They moved the ball and found space but our boys pinched the first goal against the run of play. Ollie after pressing high for most of the opening parts of the game got his reward, taking the ball off their defender and then zeroing towards the goal. He took a great shot on the run which went in off the posts to give the boys a lead and Dom an opportunity to show his new star-jump. The kids were excited, coach and manager were excited and the parents were excited. This meant something.



Ollie celebrating with his teammates after scoring our first goal of the tournament

Easts hit back with 3 goals of their own but our boys were not going to give up the game just yet. After some good lead up play from Sam, Ollie took a great opportunity from the corner of the box, unleashing a right foot bullet into the top corner of the net to make it 3-2.



Ollie put a bullet away into the top corner to get his second

At this point, Easts found their next gears. Disappointingly in the final 10 minutes of the match, they put in 6 goals past our boys to finish the game at 9-2. A hefty hit to the for and against and the morning's confidence looked a distance memory.

Easts FC – 9, Lugarno FC – 2

Ollie (2)



Teams shaking hands pre-match

TUESDAY 9 JULY

Day 2 – D-Day. The boys had it all to do playing against the team that Dom and Vlado believed would be challenging for that all important second position in the pool – Gungahlin United FC Devils. Temperatures had also gone down further and the team was nervous as we finished our warm-up and headed to Field 5.

Lugarno FC U9 v Gungahlin United FC Devils



Lugarno and Gungahlin teams walk onto the park for their all-important round 3 fixture

It didn't take long to realise that this game was winnable for our boys. The team was well on top with everyone playing their part. Samuel and Arnold winning balls through the middle, Riley, Emmett and Sam a pillar of strength at the back, Isaac confident at keeper, Zac and Lucas strong on the wings and Kai and Ollie putting lots of pressure on the opposition defenders with their physicality.

It didn't take long before the pressure turned into a goal. Kai stepped up to take a corner and his perfect corner was too difficult for the Gungahlin keeper to keep out. 1-0 Lugarno.

The team was searching for that all important second goal and it was Kai who almost came through with the goods after a great pass from Samuel, he took a shot from outside the box and shook the cross-bar. It was unfortunate as 2-0 would have been a fair reflection of the first half. But instead, the match took a disappointing turn moments later when Gungahlin scored a goal against the run of play on the last kick of the half to make it 1-1. A painful blow for the team heading into the half-time team huddle.

The boys put the disappointment aside and started the second half just as they did the first. Dominating but not getting the reward. Towards the middle of the second half, the team received a free kick close to the Gungahlin goal. As Dom was rallying the troops for the spot kick, the opposition keeper decided to kick the ball instead and ridiculously the game continued with play going down the other end. Our boys did not know what was happening nor did coach or manager and clearly not the referee either as Gungahlin kicked the ball into our net whilst we had stopped playing. The

young referee acknowledged his error but said nothing could be done. We were admittedly furious. For this to happen in a game of this significance was a cruel blow.

Prior to the re-start the call went out – ‘Lugarno Assemble’ and did they ever, with their heads up the boys kept throwing everything they had into the last 10 minutes looking for that all important equaliser. Shot after shot but no reward. Until the last minute when Ollie received the ball just inside the half, with his speed and poise he got into a 1 on 1 with their advancing keeper. Ollie calmly put it away for the equaliser! 2-2. Coach and Manager started throwing fist bumps in the air with such vigour that a torn bicep was imminent, this was a huge moment in the tournament.

We were ecstatic on the bench, as were the parents who earlier were in states of grief, confusion and frustration. The opposition coach acknowledged that we should have won the match but it was not to be. Post-game we went to discuss the refereeing error with officials who mentioned that the young referee made an error of judgement and was not sure how to fix it. But the result would stand. We were still in the hunt.

Lugarno FC – 2, Gungahlin United FC Devils – 2

Kai (1), Ollie (1)

It was now time to head out to the Australian Institute of Sport for a visit for the team which Dom kindly organised. A great opportunity for the kids to see what it takes to reach the pinnacle of sports in Australia and the brilliant facilities afforded to those who reach these heights.



Lugarno U9s (with siblings) assemble in front of the AIS

The boys got to inspect the gyms, volleyball courts, swimming pool but the real fun was the action in the interactive zone where all of the kids (and some parents) got to experience some simulation sporting experiences like skiing, skeleton, cycling, soccer, rugby, basketball to name a few. A great couple of hours and a great call from Dom in organising.



Some of the boys having some fun in the interactive zone at the AIS. From top left – Samuel and Sam cycling at the Velodrome whilst Kai competing at the skeleton.



AIS: Fun for kids of all ages...

Now this eventful day wasn't over just yet. As we all made our way back to our accommodation for dinner, messages were coming in from some of the parents. 3-2?! This was the score our game from earlier that day was now recorded as on the official website. Not only was there contention with the free kick, now they recorded the all-important Gungahlin game as 3-2 loss instead of a 2-2 draw. Dom immediately fired off a please explain to the organisers but given the late hour it was now a waiting game.

Given the stress of the day a few of the dads went out to have a few stiff drinks. With Dom sounding like a husky Demi Moore, the dads had some soothing bourbons and discussed the next day's double header, two must win games.

WEDNESDAY 10 JULY

Day 3 - Double header Wednesday. This day could only have two possible outcomes;

1. Our campaign was over, bowing out in the pool stages or
2. A proud moment for the club with the boys progressing to the quarter finals.

As soon as we arrived at Hawker Football Centre, Dom and Vlado got the boys doing their warm-ups. Dom went the marshals to discuss the erroneous score recorded on the website and came back with a look of content. They corrected yesterday's result thankfully. It was now recorded as 2-2 and rightfully so. The focus now shifted to field 5 and our next opposition – Majura FC. Queue the Rocky training montage music!

Lugarno FC U9 v Majura FC

Apart from Majura's Mohawk's giving Vlado some slight hair envy issues, they also proved to be a distraction to our boys who couldn't stop looking at their hairstyles. We started slowly but eventually got into the game. The first goal came after some nice lead-up play from Samuel and Lucas who made a great run down the left. After a scramble in the keeper's box, a high ball came to Samuel who controlled the ball effortlessly with his chest and put away the shot high into the back of the net. The second came from Ollie who blocked a keeper clearance and put away a great goal to make it 2-0 at the half.



Samuel's clinical finish to give the team a 1-0 lead

The second half saw more of the same Lugarno dominance. A free kick was given to our boys and Majura set up the wall. Ollie took the shot which was blocked by the wall. After another scramble, Samuel found the back of the net with a great side foot from close range. 3-0 Lugarno and well on the way to our first win. The fourth followed shortly thereafter as Ollie pounced on a loose ball at the halfway line and using his speed, drove to goal and put it away beautifully to make it 4. As the game was nearing close, Sam provided a short corner to Kai who trapped the ball and swung a curling shot from the corner to beat the keeper for a brilliant goal. 5-0 Lugarno and a well-deserved first win.



Kai ready to provide one of his trademark corners against Majura

The boys at the back cleared the way for the attackers to get the goals in this match. Emmett, Riley and Isaac in particular had fantastic games as they trapped and provided balls to the attackers. Majura had some attackers with some speed but they just couldn't get a look in. Lucas and Sam also had great games making some runs down the lines whilst Zac was strong in goals when called upon.

Lugarno FC – 5, Majura FC – 0

Samuel (2), Ollie (2), Kai (1)



Match played in great spirits – Lugarno FC and Majura FC post game

Pleased with the fact that half the job for the day was complete, the team with families in tow went to the local West Belconnen football club for some lunch. The boys as usual were relaxed as ever having their feed and laughing amongst themselves. Dom and Vlado got the abacus out to work out what was required going into the last game. We were currently running 3rd and 3 points behind team

2 - Gungahlin United FC Devils. Not only did we need to win our last match against Northbridge Academy and hope that Gungahlin lost their last pool match, we needed to make up a 5 goal differential to qualify for the second round. Tall task but not beyond possibility given Gungahlin had to play Easts who gave our boys a strong showing in the first match.

We arrived back at Hawker Football Centre. We knew what we needed to do. Northbridge would be stronger than Majura as they're an academy team so the challenge was set. Field 3 was the location.

Lugarno FC U9 v Northbridge FC Academy

Northbridge were fast and skilful but our boys had them in the physical department. As the clouds lowered and with light drizzle falling, we won ourselves a corner. As the short corner worked in the last game, Sam once again found Kai but this time on the right side of the field. Kai took another acute angle shot from the corner which curled in and proved too hard for the Northbridge keeper to handle. 1-0 and on track.

After peppering the Northbridge goal, the boys finally got another reward late in the first half. Off a throw-in, some good body positioning from Ollie saw him into space down the left sideline. A perfect left foot cross found Samuel in the middle who put it away nicely to give us a two goal buffer that Dom and Vlado crave.



Emmett about to unleash his rocket right foot

At half-time one of our dads Michael swung over to the adjacent field where the all-important Gungahlin v Easts match was taking place at the same time for an update. Easts winning 3-0 at the half. With our 2 goal buffer we were on track.

In what became his trademark in the tournament, Ollie took another ball on the run and smashed it past the keeper at pace to give us a 3-0 lead and some breathing room. We thought we were home. But then, Northbridge pulled a goal back to make it 3-1. Still ok but it got us thinking about the goal differential again. Suddenly, Northbridge pulled a second one back and Dom and Vlado were reaching for the Valium tablets. Forget goal differentials, we could almost lose the full 3 points here.



From left to right – Isaac, Sam, Lucas, Emmett and Arnold all had very strong performances

Fortunately, the boys held onto the 3-2 win! Now it came to goal difference. 5 was what we were after. We had 1 after our close win. Michael came back from the other game. Easts 7 - Gungahlin 0. We were in! First tournament and quarter finals here we come.

Lugarno FC – 3, Northbridge – 0

Kai (1), Samuel (1), Ollie (1)

Dom brought the boys into the huddle. They were asking loads of questions as they usually do. This time Dom had some great news. They qualified and we were all super proud of them for doing so. As he told the parents the good news, we went to find out the schedule for the following day. We later found out that our quarter final opponent was from an academy in Singapore. A huge challenge for the boys. Not only were they in the quarter finals, they would also be representing Australia, all be in in quasi Netherlands uniforms.



Lugarno and Northbridge players assemble pre-game. Manager and Coach watch nervously from behind.

That night, Dom, Vlado and a couple of the dads went to a local pub to watch State of Origin. And it must have been the Italian influence of try scorers James Tedesco and Paul Vaughan which inspired Dom to draw upon his Italian heritage and turn to playing defensive football (no offence to all Italians) in preparation of tomorrow's quarter final. A new defensive formation was to be implemented against the might of Singapore, all hail the Christmas tree.

THURSDAY 11 JULY

Day 4 – Finals Day. As the week was progressing, the weather was gradually deteriorating but today in what was a huge day for the team, the sun finally showed its face. Nothing to lose and everything to gain. Dom took the boys through a crash course of the new formation. The boys to their credit bought in and then asked if they were to sing the national anthem before the game now that they were all playing for Australia. Great kids.



Coach Dom taking the team through the new formation

They were nervous, they were full of jitters and they were sweating in 5 degree temperatures. But enough about Dom and Vlado. The kids were excited and ready for the game of their lives as we moved to Field 4.

Lugarno FC U9 v ActiveSG Football Academy (Singapore)



Lugarno FC v ActiveSG Football Academy (Singapore) – Quarter-final, 2019 Kanga Cup



New formation ready for kick-off

The new back 3 was in full swing. Ollie, one of our most potent attacking weapons was positioned as the central back to start things off and his instructions were clear, do not let them score. Together with Emmett, Isaac and Riley, the boys stood their ground at the back and Singapore couldn't find that early goals that they had grown accustomed to.

Nearing the halfway mark of the first half, some beautiful dribbling from Arnold earned the team a free kick, just inside the opposition's half. The Singapore team set up their wall and their keeper was ready. Up stepped Kai who takes the teams set pieces and corners. This would be a massive effort to score from this far out. Ollie stepped up to the ball to offload it. As Kai moved in, the moment froze in time as ball came off his boot perfectly, it climbed over the wall, past the advancing leg of their last defender and into the bottom corner, past the outstretched arms of the diving keeper. Perfection and our Lugarno boys now had the lead. 1-0.



Kai's sensational free kick giving Lugarno a brilliant start in the Quarter-final

As Ollie was relieved of his central defender duties, Sam stepped into that hole and played his heart out, clearing like his life depended on it. Zac our keeper for most of the tournament was absolutely enormous in goals. Reflexes like a tomcat, he parried, blocked, prodded shot after shot frustrating the Singapore side. But the Singapore team was just too hot to hold out and they got their equaliser right before half-time. 1-1.



All hands on deck as Singapore heap on the pressure on Lugarno

If someone had offered 1-1 halftime in a quarter final to Dom and Vlado before the tournament began, they would have taken it. Dom brought the team into the half-time huddle. It was going to be a tough second half. We had to just keep going. The second half began and to the boys credit, they kept playing their hearts out. EVERYONE played their part. Singapore went close so many times but the fight in the Lugarno kids reigned supreme.

With 2 minutes to go of regular time, before penalties would have been taken, Emmett our RB got kicked in the ribs and went down. Emmett was courageous all game coming into the match unwell, the kick into the ribs was the last thing he needed. Dom and Vlado rushed onto the pitch to check on him. Tough kid, he got up and was then replaced. On the ensuing restart, tragedy struck. Ball back into play, straight to a Singapore player who shot and beat Zac in goals. Absolute heart-break moment.

The boys quickly assembled for the kick-off. They kicked-off, ball was cleared and full-time sounded. We lost in the most crushing of ways. The referee apologised to Dom that there was only 15 seconds left.

Lugarno FC – 1, ActiveSG Football Academy (Singapore) – 2

Kai (1)

The boys shook hands and walked off the field. Dom and Vlado brought them into a huddle. Dom was speechless. The boys were asking 'Are we out now?'. For once both Dom and Vlado had no words to offer. It was a difficult moment. But as quickly as the emotion came in, Dom and Vlado told the boys how proud they were of them. They couldn't have asked of anymore from the group of 8 and 9 year old boys. The boys, Coach and Manager put their hands into the huddle for the last time. 1, 2, 3 – LUGARNO.

The boys whilst disappointed started walking over towards the fenced spectator area where all the parents and family members were waiting. Where the people that matter most in the lives of the boys rode every wave with them today and the preceding days before. Dom told the boys to all hold

hands and make a run together towards the fence. They did and a deserved round of applause followed. A moment to be cherished. Lugarno U9 Boys – you did your families, the club and the community proud.



These boys did Lugarno proud. Players from left – Emmett, Zac, Sam, Arnold, Riley, Lucas, Isaac, Samuel, Ollie & Kai



Manager Vlado & Coach Dom. Slightly disappointed but immensely proud of the boys.

Later that evening, the team with extended families converged on a little Italian restaurant in Manuka to eat pizza and pasta, drink wine and celebrate the team's success. The boys all made their parents thank you cards to thank them for their support and Coach and Manager were given a special gift for their contribution.

Thanks also to Sanda (Ollie's mum) for putting together footage of the games and for all the mums who donned the orange Lugarno scarf and braved the elements to support their boys – Ursula (Samuel), Tanja (Kai), Sanda (Ollie), Wendy (Arnold), Ruza (Zac), Bernadette (Isaac), Debbie (Lucas), Jemma (Sam). Likewise to the dads who were able to make it there – Dom (Samuel), Vlado (Kai), Mick (Isaac), Arni (Riley), George (Lucas), Arn (Emmett), Andrew (Zac) and Kent (Arnold). Also, special thanks to Arni and Mick who added football linesman to their respective CVs filling in as our reps and at times fighting over the position. Also special mention to extended families that made it to the games with Samuel and Kai's grandparents at the games as well as Kai's uncle Tom, Lucas' sisters, Zac, Riley and Emmett's older brothers, Isaac's little brother Ethan and who can forget the little cheerleaders, Sofia and Juliette. Thank you all for being a part of it.

We couldn't be more proud of what the boys achieved during their first ever tournament. What they lacked in skills compared to some of these academy teams, the boys made it up with in fight and strength of character. You can't manufacture that stuff. You are born with it.

It was a brilliant experience watching the boys interact with each other on as well as off the field.

Introducing the Lugarno FC Kanga Cup 2019 Squad

Samuel – Operating out of the midfield Samuel was a rock linking defence with attack and dropping to help out the defence when the going got tough. He was delivering silky passes to the front line and racked up a hand full of assists. Samuel took advantage of his height and muscled out the opposition to score a couple of goals. Highlight of the tournament was scoring a belter of a goal controlling the ball with his chest and smacking the ball into the top of the net on a half volley.

Kai – Playing on the wing and deputising at centre forward he worked the flanks and frontline heaping pressure on the opposition. He became the short corner master and scored three goals from corners during the tournament. Highlight of the tournament was scoring an absolute screamer of a free kick from half way to give us the lead in our quarter final.

Isaac – Excellent effort at both right and left back and in goal, as the tournament progressed so did Isaac, every game he seemed to find another gear and rise to the occasion, highlight of the tournament was winning an excellent ball at the back, controlling and setting Ollie off on a fast break for a goal.

Sam – Playing on the wings Sam would operate more as a wing back dribbling the ball from deep in defence into the attacking line single handedly sparking attacks. However, Sam's highlight of the tournament was when he dropped into centre back during the quarterfinal against Active SG and formed an almost impenetrable defensive wall with the left and right defenders.

Zac – The teams 1st choice keeper in the tournament, Zac put in an amazing effort and made some amazing saves. He was a real general at the back barking orders and making sure the team kept their shape. Highlight of the tournament was all of the amazing saves, especially in the final game.

Oliver – Party at the front and business at the back. Oliver would run riot when playing centre forward, scoring with ease when he was 1 on 1 with the keepers. He was pressing high keeping the opposition under pressure, he also played centre back in the last game and was excellent. Highlight of the tournament was scoring the equalizing goal in the second game to keep our finals hopes alive.

Riley – Backline Dynamo is the term that best describes Riley, working seamlessly with Isaac or Emmett on either side of the defence, he would effortlessly snuff out an opposition attack and spark our own attack with a quality ball to the midfield or wings. Highlight of the tournament was all of the spectacular defensive stops.

Arnold – Highly effective on the left side of the field he terrorised the left flank when playing on the wing. Arnold also dropped into the midfield when needed and helped to link the defence to attack. Highlight of the tournament was in the final game against Active SG springing the counter attacks.

Emmett – A pillar in defence of the team and a real trooper, battling a stomach bug all week Emmett was cool and composed under pressure, highlight of the tournament was cutting out the Active SG attack in the last game.

Lucas – Buzzing up and down the sideline Lucas was full of running, Lucas was always ready to spring into action. Highlight of the tournament was beating several players during our second last pool game and sparking the attack that lead to our first goal.