



# FC United of Bhopal kicks off

THE NAMES OF STEVE TORPEY, Dave Chadwick & Karl Marginson will soon be inspiring kids in the poorest districts of Bhopal as well as young football enthusiasts across the north west of England.

Steve, Dave and Karl are striker, full back (captain) and manager of F.C. United of Manchester, which after a dream debut season, is being feted as the most exciting club in England. Formed only last July by Manchester United fans disillusioned by their club's hostile takeover by a US tycoon, F.C. United regularly draws bigger crowds than teams in the F.A. League, eight full divisions above them and is already the 88th biggest club in the country.

The club's remarkable success, on and off the field (it has just been

crowned champion of its league) is the appeal of an afternoon out for the family watching live football in a genuinely friendly atmosphere and a rejection of the 'greed culture' that bedevils the 'beautiful game'.

The club is keen to become fully involved with the local community, ploughing energy into projects that benefit disadvantaged youngsters.

What then is the connection with kids in distant Bhopal?

Just this, that a founder-member of F.C. United happened also to be a founder-member of the Bhopal Medical Appeal and felt the two had much in common. Both are self-help initiatives by ordinary people who said, 'We refuse to accept this, if no one else is going to do something about it, we will do it ourselves.'

The Bhopal Medical Appeal thus became F.C. United's first main club sponsor, using the club's matchday programmes to tell a whole new audience about Bhopal. Supporters responded with collections of cash and kit. Outfits for two complete



teams were collected by the charity KitAid and are bound for Bhopal where a new club has been formed to give children from gas-affected areas the chance to play, have fun and learn how to be part of a team.

F.C. United of Bhopal will be run by Mohsin Sultan, who as a baby was severely exposed to Carbide's gases. The story of how his mother Aziza (a health worker at our Sambhavna clinic) fled carrying Mohsin, has been told in an earlier issue of 777. Find it at <http://www.bhopal.org/aziza.html>.

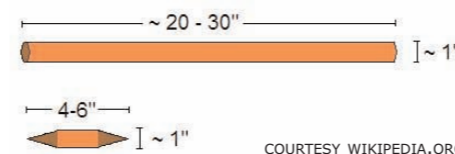
Mohsin already organises a team of kids from his community, who have the use of a stadium standing, bizarrely, in the middle of a shanty town whose water is poisoned by Union Carbide's factory. People were forcibly settled in this place by state politicians who built the stadium as a pointless gesture to allay criticism.

F.C. United of Bhopal will give it the purpose it has hitherto lacked.

Says Mohsin, 'We are very excited about the new club. We'll welcome boys and girls from the poorest areas where there are no facilities for play. We'll practice football and hockey, as well as traditional village sports like gulli-danda and kabbadi.'

F.C. United of Manchester plans to continue its support by finding funds to train coaches in Bhopal. If this happens, it won't be long before the Bhopal club also begins to storm its way up the local leagues.

## Gulli-danda



This traditional village sport was also known in 18th century Britain where it was called Tip-Cat. It is played by using the longer danda to strike the tapered gulli, sending it spiralling up then whacking it as far as possible – distances measured in danda lengths.



## A club is born

Children in a Bhopal basti play football on waste ground. Areas near the factory are contaminated with toxic chemicals dumped in huge open air 'solar ponds' by Union Carbide over many years. The ponds were lined with black plastic no thicker than dustbin liner. They leaked poisons into the ground water and wells.



The young are excited about the prospect of playing games in proper teams. Everyone still wants to be David Beckham, but all the buzz is about the great new Manchester team.



On April 22 at F.C. United of Manchester's last home game of the season (the day they were crowned champions), Derek Williams of KitAid collected kit donated by club supporters. Enough to equip two teams will soon be on its way to Bhopal.



Meanwhile, the new club F.C. United of Bhopal has already found a solid core in the team organised by Mohsin Sultan of young players from gas-affected neighbourhoods. At present the lads must provide their own kit, which not all are able to do.



This open air-stadium was built as a political gesture and stands empty near Atal Ayub Nagar. Mohsin, himself gas-affected as an infant, lives in the settlement, and plans to use the stadium to stage the future home matches of F.C. United of Bhopal.