

## NEWSPAPER CLIPPING

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**DAVIN ARUL**  
Associate Editor, Food  
03-7967 1245  
star2@thestar.com.my

**ANN MARIE CHANDY**  
Senior Editor, Features  
03-7967 1290  
star2@thestar.com.my

**PAUL YEO**  
Senior Editor, Health  
03-7967 1689  
starhealth@thestar.com.my

**JULIE WONG**  
Senior Editor, Food  
03-7967 1690  
star2@thestar.com.my

**TAN CHENG LI**  
Editor, Environment  
03-7967 1285  
star2green@thestar.com.my

**IYV SOON**  
Senior Editor, Family & Woman  
03-7967 1325  
star2@thestar.com.my

**GORDON KHO**  
Editor, Entertainment  
03-7967 1292  
entertainment@thestar.com.my

**DZIREENA MAHADZIR**  
Editor, Fashion & Beauty  
03-7967 1693  
star2@thestar.com.my

**IAN YEE**  
Editor, PAGE  
03-7967 1726  
alltherage@thestar.com.my

**MADHAVAN M.**  
Editor, Technology  
03-7967 1262  
byts@thestar.com.my

ADVERTISING:  
03-7966 8388

star2.com  
@star2dotcom

@star2dotcom

Customer Service:  
1300 88 7827

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By ANGELIN YEOH  
entertainment@thestar.com.my

WHEN Chiu Keng Guan set out to make *OlaBola*, he wanted to cast football players to star in the leading roles.

"It's easier to teach football players how to act. It's harder to teach actors how to play football," Chiu said.

Set in the 1980, *OlaBola* looks into the trials and tribulation of the national football team. It's a fictional film inspired by true events.

Back as a secondary school student, Chiu saw a documentary about how the Malaysian football team qualified for the Olympic Games in 1980. However, the team eventually did not participate as Malaysia boycotted host country Russia over the Soviet War in Afghanistan.

"I was so sad because the team featured in the documentary tried so hard. As I grew older, I learned that it's life. We have to move on," the 44-year-old filmmaker said.

The production team for *OlaBola* held a nationwide casting call and audition to find new talent to play the three leading roles - Ahmad Ali the striker, Muthu the goalkeeper and Chow Kok Keong aka Tauke the team captain.

Hundreds turned up for the audition and eventually engineering student Saran Kumar was cast as Muthu while Kajang-based quantity surveyor got the part for Ali. Rounding up the main cast is model-actor JC Chee as Tauke.

During an interview at Menara Star in Petaling Jaya, Selangor, the trio recalled how their audition process went.

"I got a scene where I have to cry. I

# All for One

Chiu Keng Guan brings raw talent together for *OlaBola*.

couldn't do it. I knew nothing about acting. But Chiu told me to keep going and eventually, I got it," said 22-year-old Saran who auditioned after he was encouraged by his mother.

Lugman came prepared with Shahrukh Khan-inspired acting tips. The night before, a nervous Lugman googled "how to become an actor" and got lessons from watching videos featuring the famed Bollywood actor.

"I decided to copy his eyebrow movements. Then during the audition, Chiu asked if I was not feeling well because I kept moving my eyebrows. Later, he advised to just be myself," 24-year-old Lugman recalled.

For Chee, *OlaBola* was a chance for him to work with his idol Chiu. Unlike Lugman and Saran who actively play football, Chee said he hasn't kicked a ball in years.

"One of the auditions was held on the football field and I was nervous when I saw how well the other guys played. So I tried to do everything in slow motion. I even stood at the goalpost and hid there," Perlis-born Chee recalled.

When the producer told him that he needed to improve on his football skills, Chee thought he had

blown his chance.

"But they called me and said I got the part!" he said.

Chiu also cast Bront Palarae as Rahman the sports commentator and Marianne Tan as a TV producer.

## Setting a goal

Since making his directorial debut in 2010, Chiu's films have consistently made a lot of money at the local box-office.

Lion dance drama *WooHoo!* (2010) collected RM4.2mil while *The Great Day* (2011) made RM6.5mil. Then came his record-breaking feat - *The Journey* became the highest-grossing Malaysian movie in 2014 when it earned RM17.37mil in box-office receipts.

So, it begs the question, does Chiu feel the pressure to deliver another box-office hit with *OlaBola*?

"No, my focus is always on making a great movie," he said confidently.

With *OlaBola*, Chiu wanted to make an emotional sports movie that would keep the audience engaged. "I

learned that in order to make a sports movie that would touch the audience, the buildup is very important.

"You can't let the audience figure out what is going to happen next. They have to keep guessing," he explained.

Chiu also wanted to make sure that his cast could deliver believable performances.

So, the director made sure the actors underwent training sessions on the football field and took acting classes with trainers from Taiwan to prepare for their roles.

Chiu went the extra mile to help his cast get into character. He enlisted legendary football player and former captain of the Malaysian team Datuk Soh Chin Aun to be a consultant for the movie. He also roped in former national goalkeeper Wong Kam Fook to train Saran for his role.

"During rehearsals, I told everyone to give me their 100% and I wanted that same commitment during the shoot," Chiu said.

Even as the shoot took place in sweltering heat at Stadium Merdeka, Kuala Lumpur, the cast had no complaints.

"I remember telling the guys to put on sunblock!" offered Chee, who has flawless skin.

*OlaBola* is also the first Malaysian feature film to be shot with Dolby Atmos sound technology. Audience can expect an immersive cinematic experience in selected GSC cinemas.



1 Chiu was inspired to make *OlaBola* after watching a documentary about the national football team and their journey to the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow, Russia.

2 Chee's character Tauke is the team captain. He has a temper on the field that has earned him a few red cards.

3 Saran plays Muthu, the goalkeeper, who works hard and takes care of his family.

41 play Ahmad Ali, the star player. There is a lot of pressure on him to score goals for the team," says Lugman of his character.

— Photos: Astro Shaw



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"We have sound of the crowd cheering and singing. I want the audience to feel like they are in the stadium cheering on the national football team," Chiu said.

#### Perfect pitch

Chiu did not make *OlaBola* with the intention to change the local football scene.

"It's not about whether our football scene is good or bad. This movie is for all Malaysians. To me, it's the support that's lacking. Maybe we need to do something about that first."

Lugman hopes that with the film, the audience will come to realise the importance of brotherhood.

"I really believe this film will inspire our country," he said.

Overall, Chiu is proud of the performance of his multi-racial cast.

"Lugman, JC and Saran did well. We showed a rough cut of the movie to some filmmakers in Taiwan and they said to me, 'Your new actors have done good!' Even the trainers were impressed with them," he said, clearly beaming with pride.

After *OlaBola*, Chiu is determined to continue to pursue acting while Lugman and Saran are unsure.

"I have to focus on my studies first," said Saran who is pursuing a degree at Universiti Tenaga Nasional in Bangi, Selangor.

As for Chiu, he hopes to take a break ... for a bit. "Then maybe start work on a comedy film," he teased. You can never keep a good man down.

*OlaBola* opens at cinemas nationwide today. For GSC showtimes, turn to P17.



The team behind *OlaBola* travelled extensively across Malaysia to achieve scenic shots like this. — Astro Shaw



Graphic: ADELIN NGUI/The Star