

OUR DOCTOR ON



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FOR most people, meeting football's biggest stars is a pipe dream.

But for Dr Michael Soon, it's part of his job.

The 36-year-old orthopaedic surgeon is part of the sports medicine team at Alexandra Hospital, where he has been working for the past 10 years.

Seven months ago, he headed to Spain, Barcelona, for his one-year advanced overseas training.

He is now understudy to one of the top sports surgeons in Europe, Ramon Cugat, who is also the team surgeon for FC Barcelona.

As they say, there are perks to the job.

Dr Soon has managed to treat some of the most famous footballers in the Barcelona region.

The most memorable, however, was his meeting with Samuel Eto'o, one of Barcelona's quick-silver strikers.

It wasn't entirely pleasant.

Said Dr Soon: "I think it was in February. Eto'o came to the clinic demanding that he be cleared to play in the following Barcelona fixture against Osasuna.

"He had yet to fully recover from a knee injury. At the same time, Ronaldinho was out with an ankle problem. That made Eto'o even more desperate to play to help Barcelona.

'SO ANGRY'

"He was so angry that we had to give him the green light, he was shouting at us.

"But there was nothing we could do, so Dr Cugat told him that it was impossible. Eto'o stormed out of the clinic."

Eto'o did not listen, though, and defied medical orders to play for a few minutes of the match the following day.

Dr Soon recalled that he did not look comfortable on the ball, a result of his lack of fitness.

Something dramatic happened after the game.

Said Dr Soon: "It was that night after the match when he refused to come to the substitute's bench to play against Racing Santander and ended up quarrelling with coach Frank Rijkaard."

"He felt that he hadn't had enough time to do his warm-up and didn't want to risk aggravating an injury."

CALL IN LA LIGA

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y 'hi' when we see each
han Eto'o, he also treated
ous players.
was Xavi Hernandez, a
and Spain player.
ere was also Luis Garcia, a
celona player who flew in
pool to seek medical
from Dr Cugat after injuring
e ligament.
han Cryuff, former
coach and Dutch great,
ne medical team for his
2.
Soon: "His session is
ite fast, taking about 15
Dr Cugat always says that
urgery takes him 15 minutes,
ring questions from his wife
n the phone takes him half

FAN OF EPL

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e followed the fortunes of
nd Real Madrid, the two
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t: "I prefer Barcelona even
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adrid may have the bigger
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he way Frank Rijkaard
he team. He is so steady
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oose to learn from Dr Cugat
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all's rich and famous.
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patients he treated were
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have a common physical
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ed Dr Soon: "Most of my
chose to go to the US or
wanted to go to a football
ple in Spain are crazy
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are some similarities
paniards and Singaporeans.
ildly bow-legged, so I feel
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(Samuel) Eto'o came to the clinic, demanding that he be cleared to play in the following Barcelona fixture against Osasuna. He had yet to fully recover from his knee injury.... he was so angry that we did not give him the green light, he was shouting at us. Eto'o stormed out of the clinic.

- Dr Michael Soon, describing a run-in with Samuel Eto'o (below) at Dr Ramon Cugat's clinic



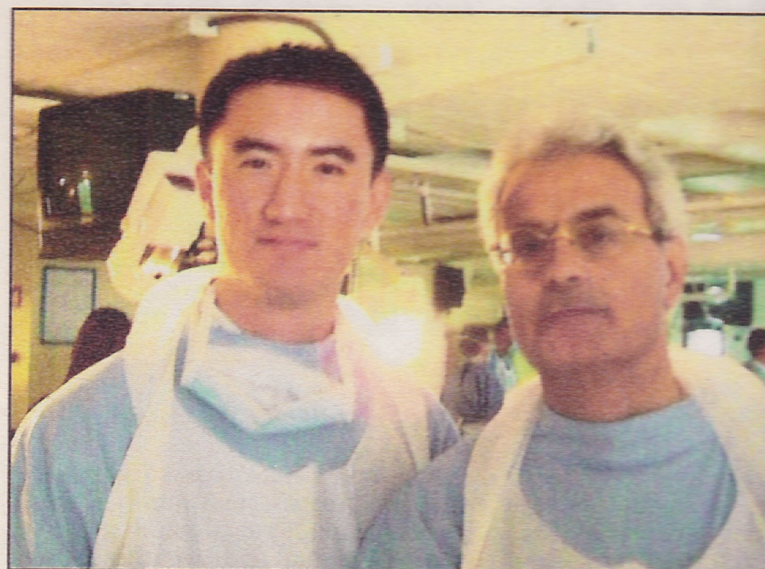
Barcelona, so he can speak some basic Spanish.

He doesn't even get homesick.

The presence of his two-year-old son, Russell, and wife June, who quit her events management job to join him, played a big part in helping him settle down quickly.

He spends most of his weekends with his family, although he has also been to the Nou Camp to watch some matches.

Dr Soon said: "I have watched Barca play three times so far - against Celta Vigo, Espanyol and Mallorca, all



RUBBING SHOULDERS WITH VIPS:

(Above) Dr Soon with Barcelona FC's official surgeon, Dr Ramon Cugat, who counts Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich among his VIP patients. (Right) One for the picture book with Barca playmaker Xavi Hernandez.



Spanish doctor in demand

DR RAMON Cugat is so renowned for his skills with a scalpel that VVIPs fly in especially to seek treatment.

One such example is Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, who went to see the doctor last month.

Dr Michael Soon said: "His bodyguards, all looking tall and

"It wasn't as exciting as you might think. It was just a clean-up of his old-age

Players from Mallorca and even Argentina's B have also made their way to Cugat's clinic.

Does it give Dr Soon any pressure when he knows he's treating such famous players? Apparently not.