

# SO CLOSE YET SO FAR

St Patrick's equalise with late goal – only to lose in penalty shoot-out

BY HO SHAO HSIEN

ARMED with vuvuzelas and hoisting the school colours proudly, a 300-strong crowd from St Patrick's School turned up at the Co-Curricular Activities Branch at Evans Road to cheer on their team in the B Division boys' football final.

What made the occasion more momentous was that it was St Patrick's first final in the division in 22 years.

But there was to be no fairy-tale ending for them despite holding their more illustrious opponents and defending cham-

pions from the Singapore Sports School to a 3-3 draw after extra time. They lost the penalty shoot-out 5-6.

Despite not having a star-studded line-up, St Patrick's dominated possession in the opening exchanges. They drew first blood as early as the fourth minute. St Patrick's skipper Basil Teo picked out forward Dharvin Hiranand Mirpuri with an inch-perfect pass.

Dharvin then shrugged off the attention of two Sports School defenders before firing a shot past the despairing Khairul Karim Zulhanif to put his side in the lead.

But parity was restored within the next minute as Sports School's Tajeli Selamat scored after capitalising on a loose ball on the edge of the penalty area.

Dharvin underlined his credentials as the most valuable player after combining



St Patrick's Daniel Chai (centre) trying to score with an overhead kick despite the close attention of Shannon Stephen (left) and Jasvinder Singh. ST PHOTO: NURIA LING

with Basil again.

Once more, it was Basil's defence-splitting pass that allowed Dharvin to run into

the Sports School's penalty area and bury his shot into the bottom left corner to put St Patrick's in front.

But their joy was short-lived. In the 30th minute, Sports School skipper Shannon Stephen headed home from a corner to put his side on level terms at 2-2.

After the break, Sports School came out with all guns blazing as they went 3-2 up. Muhd Nurullah's cross from the left flank found Tan Daniel Farhan who had the simple task of tapping the ball in.

Still, St Patrick's refused to surrender. With two minutes left in regulation time, they found the equaliser to raise their title hopes. Dharvin knocked down the ball following a throw-in and Jeremy Louis Koh capitalised on some sloppy defending to beat the goalkeeper.

But St Patrick's visions of victory faded when they were edged out in the shoot-out.

Said St Patrick's football master Irfan Ismail: "Despite the defeat, I have to applaud the boys for showing an indomitable spirit and the hunger to win the title after falling short in the semi-finals in 2007 and 2009."

According to Irfan, training will continue tomorrow for the Secondary 3 students as they strive to reach the elusive goal of becoming B division champions next year.

Said Varatha Rajan, general manager of Sports School's football team: "It was a pity that we could not win in regulation time owing to the poor pitch condition."

shaoh@sph.com.sg