

sports star

Being a goalkeeper is tough, but this South Island School student tells **Lauren James** how he keeps moving forward, even under stress

The next time your mum tells you to turn off the match, remember Alric Lam's words. The 13-year-old goalkeeper for the Arsenal Soccer School team says: "Watching football can inspire you as a person. Football teaches you how to face the ups and downs and how to get back up."

Thanks to football, Alric can take a beating on the pitch, but he tells *Young Post*, he wasn't always so tough.

"My parents said I was too fragile, and had to grow stronger to keep myself safe, so they encouraged me to play sports," says Alric. "I tried many sports, but became addicted to football. It's a hobby, not a chore."

Part of reason Alric loves the

sport so much is because you never know what will happen next.

"The results are unpredictable," he says. "For example, Chelsea won the league ... even when they were under pressure of being relegated, which was very inspiring and exciting."

Being a goalie comes with a different set of responsibilities to most players on the pitch. Alric is the final line of defence between an opponent's boot and the huge goal net behind him. When a ball comes flying, the pressure is on to spring, swat, and dive to stop it going in - at all costs.

"If you let the ball go past you, it leads straight to a goal and people will start blaming you that you let it in," Alric says.

"I make mistakes - everyone



Alric keeps his eye on the ball, no matter how much pressure he's under

Kickin' it with Alric Lam

does - but the important thing is how to get back up and perform better for the rest of the game. The challenge is to keep moving forward under high stress and still be able to consistently perform at the optimal state."

Alric's confidence in his own ability was boosted when he beat 200 other footballers for the most valuable player award at the Nike 5 Cup tournament in April.

"It was a surprise to everyone because normally this award does not go to the goalkeeper," he explains. "But I did save two crucial penalty shots."

During the tournament, Alric went to bed early each night to make sure he could focus and play his best for Arsenal. His team was taking on other big names in local football: Yuen Long, Sun International,

Hong Kong Rangers, Chelsea FC and Kitchee Sports Club.

"The biggest threat was the semi-final against Chelsea, because they had most of the possession," Alric remembers. "Fortunately, they only hit the post and crossbar, and didn't score during the game. When it came to the penalties, my coach gave me some advice, which I used to make a penalty save."

Arsenal triumphed with four wins and penalty shootouts, including a nail-biting final against Kitchee A. Both teams scored during the game, but Arsenal pulled away at the last moment in the penalties, winning 2-1 and scoring a historic victory for the club.

"Winning the competition was a surprise, even though we got to the semi-finals last year. I guess I underestimated the team and myself," says Alric. "We are better than we thought. However, the victory made me neither relaxed nor arrogant, and we'll keep putting in a 100 per cent effort in practice and games."

Being part of a team means having respect for other players and valuing their contributions, and Alric credits his teammates with the sweeping Nike Cup success. "None of this would be achievable if I didn't have the love and support of all my best teammates and coaches. They

put in a tremendous amount of time and effort on the team, and to each and every one of us."

For Alric, team captain Adriel Chan is both star player and role model. "He was the one who led the team to victory. He is always the hardest working and the most useful player on the pitch," he says.

I make mistakes - everyone does - but it's important to get back up and perform better

"He defends, he attacks, he passes, he scores and he never complains. This is the type of player every team wants. I think he is totally out of our league or even the world already. He's too perfect! This is why he is surely the star player of the team."

But Alric is a rising star in his own right, and hopes he can take his talents all the way to the top.

"My ultimate goal is to become a professional football player," he says. "If I was ever given a chance to turn pro, I will definitely give it my all to make it happen. It has been my dream since I first played football, and I would not let the chance just slip away."

Bench notes

What song/movie title best describes you when you're playing your sport?

Not Afraid by Eminem. The lyrics always make me feel strong and powerful even when we're losing. The song makes me feel like I always have a fire in my heart to turn the game around and not let anything get past me. This is very important for a keeper because if you're scared, it gives the other team confidence to score. You must be fierce in your heart to win, and this song gives me that mentality.

You can have any superpower you choose for 24 hours. What do you choose and how do you use this power?

Lightning speed, so I can tackle/intercept any player who tries to shoot or pass without them seeing me.

If you could have an unlimited supply of anything, what would it be and why?

Money, so I can buy my own football team and be a professional. P.S. I could also buy cars. I love cars.

10 years in the future, you are a famous athlete. What company are you a spokesperson for, and what product do you promote?

I would like to be a spokesperson for Nike and the product would be a football. I believe that football can make people happy, and I would like to share this happiness with others.



Alric Lam, the most valuable player of the Nike Cup tournament. Photos: Ken Lum