

= Aleksandar ?uri? =

Aleksandar ?uri? (Serbian Cyrillic : ?????????? ????? ; born 12 August 1970) is a former Bosnian @-@ born Singapore international footballer of Serbian descent . He is currently a fitness coach for S.League club Tampines Rovers . He was noted for being a prolific striker with strong physical presence . His professional approach to his fitness and a disciplined lifestyle contributed to extending a career spanning over three decades .

?uri? was junior kayaking champion of Yugoslavia when he was 15 and was ranked 8th in the world at 17 . He represented Bosnia and Herzegovina in the C @-@ 1 500m canoeing event the 1992 Summer Olympics . After the Olympics , he returned to Hungary to resume his football career . In 1999 , he signed for Tanjong Pagar United in the S.League where he was converted to a striker for the first time in his career . He won trophies with subsequent clubs Home United , Geylang United , Singapore Armed Forces and Tampines Rovers . He won eight league titles and three Singapore Cups in 16 seasons , amassing three Player of the Year and four top scorer awards on the way to becoming the league 's all @-@ time top scorer .

At international level , he debuted for Singapore at the age of 37 years in 2007 . He became the first foreign @-@ born player to start a match as captain in May 2008 . He was in the Singapore squad for the AFF Championship in 2008 , 2010 and 2012 , the latter of which Singapore won . He retired from international football in December 2012 with a record of 24 goals in 53 matches .

In 2013 , he assumed his new duties as full @-@ time fitness coach at his club Tampines Rovers . He retired from his playing career at the age of 44 in November 2014 .

= = Early life = =

Aleksandar ?uri? was born in Lipac on the outskirts of Doboj , in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia . The childhood supporter of Red Star Belgrade spent his formative years in the youth teams of his hometown club FK Sloga Doboj as a goalkeeper and later , as a midfielder . He also took up kayaking at the age of 12 on the advice of the doctor treating his growth disorder of the chest . He became junior kayaking champion of Yugoslavia when he was 15 and by age 17 , he was ranked 8th in the world .

?uri? was drafted into the Yugoslav People 's Army (JNA) at the age of 17 , and became an officer during his service . With the impending Bosnian War , his father wanted either him or his brother to leave the country in order to preserve the family line . He was instructed to leave his hometown as he was younger and a sportsman . ?uri? recalls : " My father fought in this war , my brother for almost five years and my mother was killed in 1993 by the Muslim army . They bombed our village and it hit my home directly . A really big bomb and my mother died instantly [...] So many people like me lost mothers and fathers in this bloody civil war but for me I hold no grudges . I don ' t look at race , I look at people by their hearts and here in Singapore I adopted a Muslim child . " With just 300 Deutsche Marks on him , ?uri? left for Serbia where he played football in the second division for one season and then Sweden , where he trained with AIK Solna and was offered refugee status which he rejected . The breakup of Yugoslavia left him stranded in Hungary without a recognised passport . He wandered through the cafes and restaurants of Szeged before a family offered him accommodation and a trial at local club Szeged LC in the second tier of the Hungarian football league .

= = = 1992 Summer Olympics = = =

In 1992 , ?uri? received an invitation from the newly formed Bosnian Olympic Committee to compete for Bosnia and Herzegovina in the C @-@ 1 500 m canoeing event at the 1992 Summer Olympics in Barcelona . Despite not having trained for two years and the ongoing conflict between the Serbs and the Bosniaks , he accepted the request as he ultimately decided he was first and foremost a sportsman . As the Bosnian Olympic Committee could not afford to pay for his travel , he had to hitch @-@ hike his way over 1 @,@ 500 kilometres (930 mi) to Barcelona . With only a

letter from the Olympic Committee and no valid passport , he managed to get a truck ride to the Austrian border but was initially refused passage by a disbelieving immigration officer who thought he was a refugee seeking asylum . After convincing them of his credentials with a phone call to the Olympic Committee , the border guards helped him persuade someone to take him half @-@ way to Slovenia , where he managed to get another ride to the airport and flew to Barcelona . A two @-@ day trek later , he made it to the Summer Olympics where he was one of Bosnia 's ten debuting competitors . He had to borrow equipment from the Italian and Spanish teams to complete in the event and was eliminated in the repechages . After the Olympics , he resumed his football career with Szeged LC .

= = Club career = =

= = = Australia = = =

An associate of ?uri? helped to arrange for a trial in Australia with Frank Arok , a retired Serbian footballer of Hungarian descent and former Australia coach . In 1994 , he moved to South Melbourne Hellas in the National Soccer League where he played as a defender . He also played for other Australian clubs such as Port Melbourne Sharks , Gippsland Falcons , Heidelberg United , West Adelaide and had a brief stint with Chinese side Locomotive Shanshan in 1997 .

In 1999 , ?uri? ' s club West Adelaide went bankrupt . He received offers from Hong Kong and Singapore but chose to move to the latter where he began his S.League career with Tanjong Pagar United . At this stage of his career , he had been playing on the left flank as a winger or left @-@ back . His coach Tohari Paijan converted the 6 ' 4 " player into a striker . He scored 11 goals in 16 league matches as the club finished third .

?uri? returned to Australia at the end of the season and obtained Australian citizenship in the hope of representing the Socceroos . He played for Sydney @-@ based Marconi Stallions , reverting to his left midfield position .

In June 2000 , ?uri? moved permanently to Singapore with Home United , playing as a striker again . He scored 11 goals in all competitions for his new club as he won the 2000 Singapore Cup in front of a 45 @, @ 000 crowd at the National Stadium . He was released by the club at the end of the season .

= = = Geylang United = = =

In 2001 , ?uri? signed on with Geylang United where he formed a strong understanding with forward Mohd Noor Ali , a partnership they would later replicate at Singapore Armed Forces and credit with creating " at least half of all my goals " . Geylang won their first S.League title in five years after defeating Jurong in the final matchday , with ?uri? scoring 37 goals that season . Geylang played Home United in the 2001 Singapore Cup final . Home United led 4 ? 0 at half @-@ time as ?uri? and playmaker Brian Bothwell came off with injuries . Defender Noh Rahman was withdrawn after injuring his knee ligament and Noor Ali was sent off as 9 @-@ men Geylang lost with a final score of 8 ? 0 . Despite coach Jang Jung stating in a post @-@ match interview that ?uri? would be leaving the club with seven other players , he signed a three @-@ year contract extension and went on to score 97 goals in 126 league games over four seasons . In 2003 , he joined an exclusive club of S.League players who had scored 100 domestic goals .

With the success of the 2002 FIFA World Cup in Japan and South Korea , the AFC revamped their continental competition by introducing the AFC Champions League and the AFC Cup . Geylang as 2001 S.League winners participated in the 2002 ? 03 AFC Champions League qualification . They were drawn against DPMM in the second round of the Eastern qualifying zone ; ?uri? scored once in the home leg and twice in the away leg as Geylang progressed 7 ? 0 on aggregate . They met Chinese Jia @-@ A League club Shanghai Shenhua in the final qualifying stage , exiting 5 ? 1 on aggregate with ?uri? scoring a goal in the second leg .

Geylang entered the inaugural AFC Cup as 2003 S.League runners up . ?uri? scored in both legs of the quarter @-@ finals as Geylang United knocked Perak out of the competition . He scored a total of five goals in the competition as Geylang made the semi @-@ finals , missing out on the finals with a 1 ? 0 defeat to Al @-@ Wahda in the second leg after a 1 ? 1 draw in the away leg .

= = = Singapore Armed Forces = = =

?uri? signed for Singapore Armed Forces in November 2004 . The Warriors won the league four times , achieving the S.League and Singapore Cup double in 2007 and 2008 as he finished league top @-@ scorer three times in 2007 , 2008 and 2009 . ?uri? scored 129 goals in 150 league appearances with the club . His prolific form was recognised with the S.League Player of the Year award in 2007 and 2008 . He scored his 200th domestic goal with a 5 @-@ minute hat @-@ trick over Liaoning Guangyuan on 9 July 2007 @.@ and broke Mirko Grabovac 's league record of 244 goals in local competitions with two goals in a 2 ? 2 draw with ex @-@ club Geylang United on his 38th birthday . The club also defeated Home United 5 ? 4 on penalties after a 1 ? 1 draw in regulation time in the 2008 Charity Shield .

In 2009 , Singapore Armed Forces became the first Singapore club to advance to the AFC Champions League after defeating PEA and PSMS Medan in the play @-@ offs . They were drawn against Kashima Antlers , Suwon Samsung Bluewings and Shanghai Shenghua for the group stage . ?uri? scored a goal in the match against Suwon Bluewings on 19 May 2009 . The club failed to make it to the next round , ending bottom of the group with five losses and a draw .

In September 2009 , ?uric agreed to join Sriwijaya of the Indonesian Super League for a reported US \$ 110 @,@ 000 a season contract . However , a month later , he told the press that he declined the offer in the end because Sriwijaya tried to change the terms of the contract which was mutually agreed upon .

= = = Tampines Rovers = = =

?uric 's relationship with Singapore Armed Forces had been damaged with his attempted transfer to Sriwijaya . Following their decision not to offer him a new contract , he signed for Tampines Rovers in 2010 . He scored 20 league goals in his first season there as the club finished in second place . He clinched three consecutive S.League titles with Tampines Rovers from 2011 to 2013 , and four Charity Shield honours from 2011 to 2014 . He became the first player to reach a milestone 300th goal on 27 September 2010 with two goals against Balestier Khalsa in the Singapore Cup . With 328 goals in 444 top division club appearances , ?uric was ranked by IFFHS as the world top scorer in July 2011 . He picked up his third Player of the Year award in 2012 and finished joint league top @-@ scorer with Moon Soon @-@ Ho in 2013 .

?uri? announced his decision to quit professional football at the end of the 2014 season , having been convinced by the club management to postpone his initial plans to retire at the end of 2012 . He started the season having scored a record 378 domestic goals . Tampines failed to reach the 2014 AFC Champions League after losing to South China at the first qualifying round . The club dropped into the 2014 AFC Cup accordingly , and was eventually eliminated in the group stage . He ended the season with eight goals in 35 appearances across all competitions as Tampines finished third in the league . ?uri? retired from his playing career after his final match in a 2 ? 1 loss to Brunei DPMM in the Singapore Cup third @-@ place play @-@ off match on 5 November 2014 .

= = International career = =

It took ?uri? three personal attempts before he received his Singaporean citizenship on 27 September 2007 as he was not on the Football Association of Singapore 's Foreign Sports Talent Scheme . Despite obtaining his Singapore passport for non @-@ footballing reasons , coach Radojko Avramovi? called him up to the Singapore national team on 1 November 2007 . He made his international debut at the age of 37 years and 89 days against Tajikistan in the first leg of the

second round of the 2010 World Cup qualifiers on 9 November , contributing with an immediate impact by scoring both goals in a 2 ? 0 victory . ?uri? started the match following injuries to attacking midfielder Shi Jiayi and striker Indra Shahdan Daud . The result coupled with a 1 ? 1 draw in the second leg meant that Singapore progressed to the third round of the Asian Qualifying Tournament for the first time , where they were drawn against Saudi Arabia , Lebanon and Uzbekistan . He continued his fine form on the international stage , scoring against Lebanon and Uzbekistan as Singapore finished third in Group 4 .

With the absence of regular captain Indra Sahdan and vice @-@ captain Lionel Lewis for the friendly against Bahrain on 28 May 2008 , ?uri? skippered Singapore for the first time , becoming the first ever foreign @-@ born player to start a game as captain .

?uri? made the national team for the 2008 AFF Championship but was ruled out for the rest of the tournament after suffering a fibula injury in the opening match against Cambodia . Singapore lost to Vietnam in the semi @-@ finals .

He was called up to the Singapore squad for the 2010 AFF Championship . Singapore was held to a 1 ? 1 draw with Philippines in the opening match , with ?uri? scoring a goal . He scored the equaliser as Singapore came back from a goal down to defeat Myanmar 2 ? 1 in the next match . This was followed by a 1 ? 0 loss to co @-@ host Vietnam . Singapore exited the tournament at the group stage .

?uri? began the 2012 tournament as second @-@ choice forward but following an injury to midfielder Hariss Harun , he was recalled into the first eleven on the left flank . He scored the third goal in a 3 ? 0 win over defending champions Malaysia in the first match . With his goal against Malaysia , he became the oldest goalscorer in the history of the competition . Singapore lost 1 ? 0 to Indonesia three days later but defeated Laos 4 ? 3 in the final group stage match to advance to the next round on goal difference . They defeated Philippines 1 ? 0 on aggregate over two legs in the semi @-@ finals to advance to the finals . Singapore went on to defeat Thailand in the finals to become champions . ?uri? retired from international football with a record of 24 goals in 53 international appearances after the tournament .

= = = International = = =

International goals

= = Coaching career = =

?uri? stated his intention to remain involved in Singapore football in a coaching capacity as he nears completing his ' A ' coaching licence by the end of his playing career . He has been Tampines Rovers ' fitness coach since 2013 , a job he has held full @-@ time as he prepares to make the shift to backroom staff .

= = Personal life = =

?uri? 's father worked for the railways in between playing semi @-@ professional football . His mother was killed during an artillery attack on 9 August 1993 , three days before his birthday . His father died of cancer at the age of 62 in 2000 . ?uri? has an older brother named Milan .

?uri? met his wife Natasha in Melbourne in 1998 . They married in January 2000 . Their two children ? daughter Isabella Nina (born 2002) and son Alessandro Hugo (born 2004) ? were both born in Singapore .

?uri? lives in Holland Village , Singapore . As part of his rigorous fitness regime , he runs 15 km around his Johor Bahru neighbourhood every morning . He does not drink , smoke or do late nights . He avoids chilli and limits his intake of greasy food like prata and chicken rice , and keeps up with his fitness regime in the off @-@ season .

Outside of football , ?uri? has been involved in charity work . He has been volunteering at a children 's home for a decade . He adopted a son , Massimo Luca Monty when he was 7 days old from the

children 's home . In 2011 , he ran the half @-@ marathon race at the Standard Chartered Marathon alongside radio deejay Rod Monteiro and kinesiologist Dr Tan Swee Kheng to help raise S \$ 12 @,@ 000 for Sanctuary House , which provides foster care for children . In 2012 , ?uri? drove a taxi for 12 days to raise \$ 2 @,@ 657 for The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund . He and his three kids also painted plastic doves that were sold in aid of the Dover Park Hospice in September 2013 . He believes it is part of his " obligation to give something back to Singapore " . In December 2014 , ?uri? was appointed as the first ambassador for the Delta League , a football competition jointly organised by the National Crime Prevention Council and the Singapore Police Force to engage youth who are at risk of falling into delinquency .

= = Career statistics = =

As of 6 November 2014

The inaugural Singapore League Cup was held in 2007 .

Singapore Armed Forces withdrew from the 2007 Singapore League Cup due to prior pre @-@ season commitments .

The inaugural AFC Cup was held in 2004 .

The FAS withdrew their one allocated qualifying spot for the 2011 and 2012 AFC Champions League . Tampines Rovers entered the 2011 and 2012 AFC Cup instead .

References : S.League Singapore Cup Singapore League Cup AFC Champions League AFC Cup General

(-) indicates unavailable referenced data conforming to reliable sources guidelines .

= = Honours = =