



It's crazy costume time at the Football Club as participants including Vikram (above, left) and Eli as well as the father-son team (right) of Simon and James Barton, three, give their full support to fund-raising for Operation Santa Claus. Photos: David Wong



Squash games deliver best showing in 6 years of fund-raising

HK\$1.1 million raised in a riot of colour and costumes

Lana Lam
It was a day of frenzied action at the Football Club yesterday when squash players decked out in fancy dress hotfooted it across the courts to raise HK\$1.1 million for charity.

The 12th Wing Ding charity contest brought more than 100 squash players to the Happy Valley venue for a seven-hour fund-raiser that ended with an auction and raffle draw.

The squash tournament is one of the most colourful events during Operation Santa Claus, an annual charity appeal organised by the *South China Morning Post* and RTHK. This year, Operation Santa Claus hopes to raise HK\$12 million for 16 Hong Kong-based groups that help the city's most needy.

The Wing Ding tournament has been part of Operation Santa Claus for six years and has collected more than HK\$1.6 million for the campaign. The more than HK\$500,000 raised last year was a record.

Event organiser Tim Everest said the target this year was HK\$1 million. By last night, the event had raised HK\$1.1 million.

"It's absolutely awesome. I'm a



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natural pessimist but I like a nice surprise," Everest said. "It's a community effort and I'm thrilled that we broke through the target."

The event saw 14 teams of 10 players battle it out for points, each grade playing non-stop for 40 minutes, with a horn blasting every three minutes to signal the start of a new game on a new court. Players raced from court to court, gulping down cups of water during breaks; for some, beer was the preferred drink.

Standard squash sportswear took a backseat as contestants turned up in the spirit of the fund-raiser, showing off fishnet stockings, Superman costumes, firemen's uniforms, full-

length chicken suits and sailor outfits. One group of men came dressed as Japanese geisha, complete with thigh-high pink robes, fake breasts and neon-pink wigs with pigtails.

Rajesh Mirapuri and Shivan Hemani, both dressed up as Superman representing the United States Recreation Club team, were enjoying their second Wing Ding tournament.

"It's hot playing in a costume but it's just great to see everyone let go and have fun and it's all for a good cause," Mirapuri said. "It's also a great way to be remembered in a fun way," he said, referring to Yuen Kam-wing, a physically handicapped man who worked at the Admiralty squash centre during the 1980s and 90s, and who the event is named after. Yuen died in 1998, aged 33, because of complications related to his illness.

Julian Haggles, a long-time Wing Ding player and squash fanatic, said he loved the chance to dress up – he was speaking through the chicken headpiece that formed part of his full-length attire. "Our target this year was the best costume, not the points. We're happy to score highly on the entertainment value."

Darren Chan Sheung-chung, project officer with the Direction Association for the Handicapped – one of this year's beneficiaries – witnessed some of the crazy antics and colourful costumes. "It looks crazy but it's very funny. They are very kind and I feel so warm today," he said after meeting some of the players. Chan became wheelchair-bound after a mainhand traffic accident in 2000. He spent six months in hospital and lost all mobility in his legs and fingers. His spinal cord was also severely damaged.

Born in Fujian (福建) province, he studied in Hong Kong and was a mechanical engineer before the accident. Coping with life as a tetraplegic, someone who has lost partial or total use of his limbs and torso, was very hard at first and he spent several years in depression, he said.

"Since I got a job, I've changed," he said, having joined the association two years ago. "Before that, I had only the government disability allowance, I was so sad during that period."

Chan benefitted directly from Operation Santa Claus in 2005 when money raised from the appeal helped the association provide extended care for the newly handicapped.



While contestants have a good time, a girl (right) passes a collection box around to play her part for charity.

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