Rise of the soccer Divas

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DON'T ever let the women's soccer team from Singapore Management University (SMU) hear you say football is a man's game.

Every July, for the past three years, a group of 12 female SMU undergraduates have brought together girls between the ages of 15 and 25 from all over Singapore for a one-day football competition.

Founded in 2003 as a street soccer competition for girls only, Diva La Futbol — which means Queens Of Football in Spanish — is the result of a collaboration between Heartware Network, a non-profit youth outreach organisation, and the SMU women's soccer team. It has since evolved into a six-a-side field soccer tournament.

Mr Raymond Huang, 38, chairman of Heartware Network, said: "We wanted to grow this for the youths. From football, the girls can learn leadership, teamwork and discipline. Volunteers will also have the SMU ladies as mentors and female role models to look up to."

Sharon Tan, 23, a final-year SMU business management student and a member of the Diva La Futbol founding committee, is thrilled the event is becoming more popular.

"It's heartening to see the event grow. We have 43 teams this year, 10 more than last year. It's great to see women's soccer growing in popularity and more girls warming to the idea," she said.

Not content to remain an amateurish set-up, Diva La Futbol has also organised exhibition matches involving professional women's teams from Liverpool Women's Football Club, Chicago Eagles and the Singapore national squad.

Lee Li Wen, 21, a third-year business management student and president of the SMU soccer team, said: "The participants were so excited to meet the visiting teams. In between matches, they would kick about and pick up tips from the professionals in the football clinics."

Preparations for this year's competition, which ended on July 9, began last December.

"Other people hold jam and hop parties. Our freshmen are initiated into SMU life through organising Diva," said Li Wen.

And it doesn't end with the football competition. The SMU women's soccer team also organises free monthly clinics to help girls develop their football skills.

To find out more about Diva La Futbol, check out http://lafutbol.blogspot.com

The writer is a third-year business management student at Singapore Management University.