

# OUR DOCTOR ON



Gary Lim  
npsports@sph.com.sg

**F**OR most people, meeting football's biggest stars is a pipe dream.

But for Dr Michael Soon, it's part of his job.

The 36-year-old orthopaedic surgeon is part of the sports team at Alexandra Hospital, where he has been working for the past 10 years.

Seven months ago, he headed to Spain, Barcelona, for his one-year advanced overseas training.

He is now understudy to one of the top sports surgeons in Europe, Ramon Cugat, who is also the head surgeon for FC Barcelona.

As they say, there are perks to the job.

Dr Soon has managed to operate on some of the most famous footballers in the Barcelona region.

The most memorable, however, was his meeting with Samuel Eto'o, one of Barcelona's quick-silver strikers.

It wasn't entirely pleasant.

Said Dr Soon: "I think it was in February. Eto'o came to the clinic demanding that he be cleared to play in the following Barcelona fixture against Osasuna.

"He had yet to fully recover from a knee injury. At the same time, Ronaldinho was out with another problem. That made Eto'o even more desperate to play to help Barcelona.

## 'SO ANGRY'

"He was so angry that we had to give him the green light, he was shouting at us.

"But there was nothing we could do, so Dr Cugat told him that it was impossible. Eto'o stormed out of the clinic."

Eto'o did not listen, though. He defied medical orders to play for a few minutes of the match the following day.

Dr Soon recalled that he did not look comfortable on the ball during the game because of his lack of fitness.

Something dramatic happened during the game after that.

Said Dr Soon: "It was that day during the match when he refused to come onto the substitute's bench to play against Racing Santander and ended up quarrelling with coach Frank Rijkaard."

"He felt that he hadn't had enough time to do his warm-up and didn't want to risk aggravating an injury."

# CALL IN LA LIGA

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y 'hi' when we see each

han Eto'o, he also treated  
ous players.

was Xavi Hernandez, a  
and Spain player.

ere was also Luis Garcia, a  
rcelona player who flew in  
pool to seek medical  
from Dr Cugat after injuring  
e ligament.

han Cryuff, former  
coach and Dutch great,  
ne medical team for his

Soon: "His session is  
ite fast, taking about 15  
Dr Cugat always says that  
urgery takes him 15 minutes,  
ring questions from his wife  
n the phone takes him half

## FAN OF EPL

h the Singaporean doctor is  
n of the English Premier  
e followed the fortunes of  
nd Real Madrid, the two  
bs in La Liga even when he  
gapore.

"I prefer Barcelona even  
me here, because I feel that  
football that is more

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he way Frank Rijkaard  
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patients he treated were  
m playing football.

aining 30 percent were  
o got injured from playing  
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have a common physical  
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ed Dr Soon: "Most of my  
chose to go to the US or  
wanted to go to a football  
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are some similarities  
paniards and Singaporeans.  
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ore applicable and relevant  
ome to Spain.

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**(Samuel) Eto'o came to the clinic, demanding that he be cleared to**

**play in the following Barcelona fixture against Osasuna. He had yet to fully recover from his knee injury....**

**he was so angry that we did not give him the green light, he was shouting at us. Eto'o stormed out of the clinic.**

- Dr Michael Soon, describing a run-in with Samuel Eto'o (below) at Dr Ramon Cugat's clinic



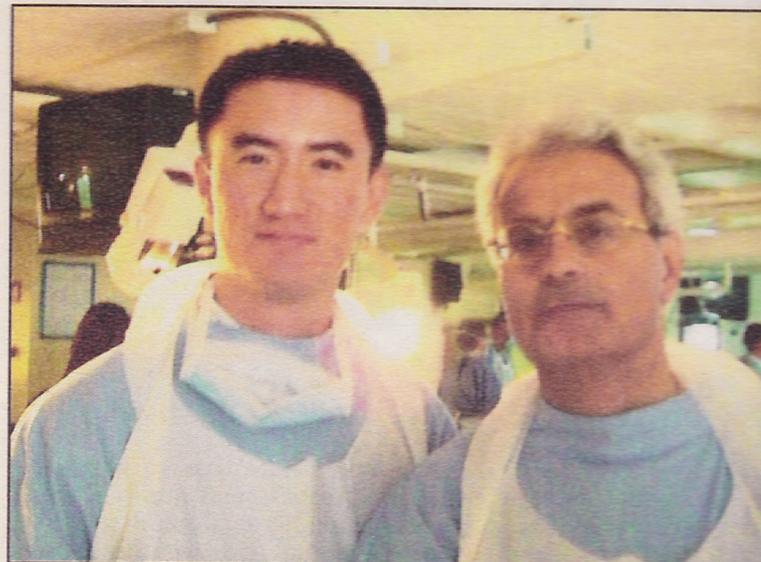
Barcelona, so he can speak some basic Spanish.

He doesn't even get homesick.

The presence of his two-year-old son, Russell, and wife June, who quit her events management job to join him, played a big part in helping him settle down quickly.

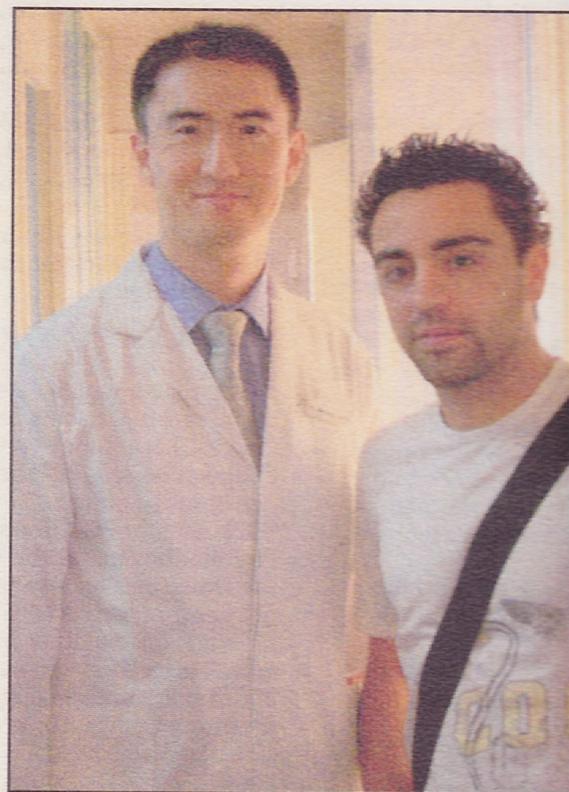
He spends most of his weekends with his family, although he has also been to the Nou Camp to watch some matches.

Dr Soon said: "I have watched Barca play three times so far - against Celta Vigo, Espanyol and Mallorca, all



## RUBBING SHOULDERS WITH VIPS:

(Above) Dr Soon with Barcelona FC's official surgeon, Dr Ramon Cugat, who counts Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich among his VIP patients. (Right) One for the picture book with Barca playmaker Xavi Hernandez.



## Spanish doctor in demand

DR RAMON Cugat is so renowned for his skills with a scalpel that VVIPs fly in especially to seek treatment.

One such example is Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, who went to see to doctor last month.

Dr Michael Soon said: "His bodyguards, all looking tall and

"It wasn't as exciting, might think. It was just clean-up of his old-age

Players from Mallorca and even Argentina's B have also made their way to Cugat's clinic.

Does it give Dr Soon pressure when he knows treating such famous patients? Apparently not.