

Local Takraw player in POWERade commercial

Several Minnesota Takraw players traveled to Santa Monica, California in late April to tryout for the Powerade foot-volleyball commercial casting call. The six players included brothers Pheng and Ti Vang, teammate Loui Tiengthong, Randy Dix of Maryland, Kevin Miller from Semi-Valley, and Doua Chang from Fresno.

The players have competed in several national and international takraw tournaments over the years and have gained such status in the sport that all of the travel expenses were paid for by Powerade, a sport soft-drink product made by Coca Cola. Harvest Films, a commercial filming company in Santa Monica, was hired to shoot the commercial. During an earlier audition, they were not able to find players that were able to execute a professional roll-spike or a bicycle kick for the commercial. Harvest sent out the call for players, and received a referral through email from one of a Puerto Rican takraw player who knew of the Minnesota players from the King's Cup Competition in Thailand, and from the Puerto Rico 2000 Extreme Games.

Pheng Vang sent Harvest a copy of a their team highlight video tape and and received a call saying the filmmakers were interested in having players audition.

Even though Vang's team is well known in takraw circles everywhere, he said that the team is "very excited about this kind of opportunity for our takraw players to make a big scene on nationwide TV."

At the audition, Vang said there were also Brazilian foot-volleyball players who were great at using their chest with receiving the ball. Foot-volleyball is played similar to beach volleyball except for a

no-hands rule while using the same regulation size of court and net, (higher than the five foot height net and a smaller court in takraw). Foot-volleyball is a very popular professional sport in Brazil.

It was a tough audition for our takraw players since many of the team do not have soccer skills, except for Vang, who plays for Twinstars, a popular Hmong soccer team in Minnesota.

"Even with my soccer skill, it is still tough to play foot-volleyball in the sand for the first time," said Vang. "The hardest thing is controlling the ball in the air and our takraw guys are having a hard time of controlling because of the heavy soccer ball and especially playing in the sand too in which we are not use to playing.

One player, Loui Tiengthong, was able to impress the filmmakers with his high-flying roll spike and bicycle kicks. He was chosen for one of the commercial roles to provide some high flying action. Vang said that Loui, who still in his early 20's is certainly the best roll spike within Minnesota and possibly all American takraw players.

This was the first time the team organized since representing the U.S. at the 2001 Canadian Sepak Takraw Open Championship last year by beating Japan in the Final in Edmonton, Canada to capture the title.

"This is truly a great start for takraw players here in Minnesota to get an opportunity like this one and to promote the sport for the future," said Vang. "It is also a wonderful experience for all of us to see how a commercial was made."

This commercial will be out during the summer. For more information regarding takraw around the world, email Pheng at Mntakraw@aol.com.



Top: Hanging on a wire high in the air for the last shot. Left: Loui with the big roll-spike during the shooting. Below Right: Pheng, second to right, with the Powerade cast characters and Loui on first left.

