

Taking to the Ice: One MIT Student's Goal to Play Hockey

by Sarah Goodman

Sasha Soane is a PhD student in the Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (EECS) Department. With no prior ice hockey experience, he signed up for the physical education course and fell in love. "I wanted a challenge," said Soane. "I did not know how to skate, so several years ago I laced up a pair of skates for the first time."

During his time at MIT, as both an undergraduate and graduate student, Soane has taken the class 10 times and now regularly plays on the EECS intramural team "Killer Volts", named after the kilovolt.

Entering Boston Bruin territory as an undergrad, Soane donned his Montreal Canadiens (or Habs as they are known to fans) jersey and took to Johnson Ice Rink twice a week with MIT PE. "I felt like a kid on the town pond in winter, wearing my Habs jersey and pretending to be Guy Lafleur or Maurice Richard as I rocketed about the ice."

But the skills of Guy Lafleur and spirit of Maurice Richard did not immediately come to Soane. Becoming comfortable on the ice took patience and practice. Soane compared the dedication required to learn the game to the drive he uses to excel in academics. He estimated it took 100 hours of ice time before even picking up a hockey stick. "At first it was frustrating," he recalled. "I would gingerly grip the boards and slip around the rink, jealously watching the other skaters gracefully fly past me."

The support and lightheartedness of MIT PE instructors, Chad Martinovich and Dave Hunter, helped Soane hone his ice skills and embrace physical activity in a way he had never experienced in his younger years. "I found that above all it is the disarming atmosphere created by the friendly coaches at MIT that makes sports at this school so approachable." Soane continued, "I was never athletic as a child, so PE was something I did not enjoy growing up, but at MIT, I never felt scrutinized or discouraged."

It is that warmth and camaraderie that prompted Soane to pursue intramural participation. While developing his skills he formed relationships that have an untouchable uniqueness from developing under teamwork. Soane encapsulated that sentiment as an "instantaneous look and a beaming smile as we both glide back to the bench and our teammates start to cheer and pound the boards" following a pass and slap shot on goal.

Soane described Martinovich and Hunter as "life coaches" and recalled his experience with MIT PE fondly. "Knowing that I had the PE class scheduled made my weeks go by happier. MIT PE gave me access to people who offered advice I don't find in a research lab - basic advice about life. They remind me that there is more than the interior of a lonely lab."

Now Soane has a community of friends through ice hockey, and while acknowledging that sports are a time commitment, says skating boosts his productivity simply because it makes him happier.

Now with six years of his PhD work under his belt and 10 PE classes later Soane balances his academic and athletic pursuits - grinding away in the lab and gliding over the ice.

"Now it's purely fun."