

A return to splendour

Owen, 2 June 2008

Saturday 31 May 2008

Morning

Early breakfast at 9am with nutritional details being provided by Fil via those in the know at Real Madrid, lots of food needed to sustain us for the marathon football event that lay ahead. Fruit yoghurts, cereal and 'Swiss porridge'. Team meeting called in room 402 with Ally running through the signals for corner kicks, the upshot being that under no circumstances should Clarkey enter the penalty area and attempt to head the ball. Meeting over the team goes it separate ways to gather drinks (water, fresh fruit juices, Red Bull and in Rico's case the interestingly branded 'Pympjuice', which was rather apt considering the area we were residing in). Met outside the 'Old Gregory Pub' for the number 31 bus to Gasometerbrucke. Said 'pub' was a sleazy strip club not out of place in the heart of Soho and the flea pit across the road offered lascivious customers the chance to log onto something called 'Geoffnet' to get their kicks. We had no idea what this was but some of us took it as a lucky omen, not so sure the Gaffer saw it like that. Set off to the pitches.

Afternoon

After disembarking from the 31 bus and over a large motorway-type bridge the pitches came into view so did an enormous Victorian style gasometer like the one directly behind Oval cricket ground in Kennington. Even those who had only the slightest grasp of German weren't surprised considering the name of the bus stop. Earlier in the trip Cornish Al and Clarkey had delighted in the ease of translation. "Wasser is water" said Al, "piece of cake" claimed Clarkey although they were later confounded by the menu in the Swiss restaurant we visited that night. The Berner Rosti went down a treat, just ask the Cornishman! Was this the venue that would herald another Philosophy Football FC European triumph?...

Erm,...no it wasn't.

Playing two halves of 20 minutes we started our campaign off against FC Levante Wibi. We had previously made the Swiss roll in Bra in September '07 with a 1-0 win and going further back to May 2005 at Maida Vale with a resounding 4-0 win. It wasn't to be this time around with the locals out for revenge. PFFC started well enough with close efforts from Ally and Cornish and Kieran going close with a header from Richard's legendary deadly long throw. We even put them under sufficient pressure that their centre half was forced to clear another Philosophy cross by heading against his own crossbar. Unconventional to say the least. In hindsight a number of players were convinced that had one of these chances registered then it would have been a different result even a different tournament for us. However, in a similar fashion to the end of our league season we conceded from a free kick and then panicked and we chasing the game which left us vulnerable at the back and the Swiss struck again to make it 2-0 by full time. An honourable mention must go to our host, Stefan who missed a great chance shooting just wide to make it three. The Gaffer reckons he just couldn't bring himself to inflict more pain on his old club.

FSV Fijnaart from Holland were beaten 5-0 by the Balon Mundial in the opening game so this was a must win for PFFC if we wanted valuable points on the board. After Ally had received

a plethora of gifts including a full 'cannonball' Edam cheese we went about the task of gaining 3 points by laying siege to the Dutch goal with Clarke and Owen going close and Kieran seeing his effort touched onto the crossbar by the keeper. We played some of our better football of the day but in typical English fashion in Europe we got hit by the 'sucker punch' when a low cross across our six yard box cannoned in off Joe. He had no chance as he had an oncoming striker looming over his shoulder. PFFC tried to rouse themselves with Filippo leading the charge from centre-half, we had at least a dozen corners which saw even keeper Matt enter the fray in the last minute, Jimmy Glass style. Lost 1-0, we couldn't make the breakthrough, the Dutch although much older and carrying more weight than ourselves played a wily passing game that made us do all the running with little reward.

Balón Mundial AC of Turin needed just one more win to secure the tournament with the Swiss contingent on the sidelines praying for a miracle and hoping the Philosophy boys could do them a favour and hand them the cup. We fought particularly well in the first half despite creating little. Ally and Damo did sterling work fending off a powerful Italian forward line. However, by the second half we were collectively shattered and got overrun 3-0 down before Clarke grabbed our first goal of the tournament to arguably the loudest cheers of the day (Suspicions abound that there was a blatant foul on an Italian defender in the run up to the goal). We finished the game at 4-1 to the eventual winners and Ally gallantly went up to collect our 4th place European Cup-style trophy to another loud cheer. Filippo suggested that we stage some kind of madcap incident (a streak was suggested!) to snatch the limelight for PFFC but the legs were too far gone for any of those shenanigans.

Evening

We boarded the bus back to our hotel in the company of 'Swiss Andy' – a reminder of the trip in July 2000 – Gaffer said we should have signed him before we kicked off and if memory serves me correctly he scored a well directed header against the Dutch. Tired and extremely hungry we assembled at Restaurant Tessinerkeller home of Levante for a feast. It didn't quite go according to plan as the sheer numbers of European footballers made life difficult for the bar staff, waiters and the kitchen, rumours were circulating that the chicken had run out. The wait was tempered by chips in a glass and eventually a man in an Aston Villa shirt (asked later if, like our chairman, he was a fan he looked puzzled and said he "just liked the colours") presented us with the tucker which was polished off with the minimum of fuss. We did dominate another competition that day though, Stefan's quiz. Clarke and Kieran scored a creditable 12 out of 19 to become joint winners and they shared the spoils of 'Kickduku' a football themed number cruncher endorsed by big Alan Hansen no less. It's always important to learn something on tour and I now know that Dutch Disease is an economic concept that explains the problem of the relationship between exploitation of natural resources and a decline in the manufacturing sector, that the Democratic Republic of Congo won the 1968 African Nations Cup and Massiel of Spain won Eurovision in that year. Cornish Al recited a wonderfully humorous poem exploring the Socialist credentials of certain members of the club which may have been lost on the Swiss and we received a lament from the Swiss about the difficulties and pleasures of growing old and playing the game we all love.

Later that evening the Gaffer, Ally, Kieran and Owen visited Cabaret Voltaire, a Dadaesque inspired arthole featuring a fully skinned black and white cat pinned above a fireplace. We saw one of the Swiss contingent perform a magnificent set of Tim Buckley covers wearing a sparkly pair of silver winkle pickers. Fantastic. We were later joined by Matt, Rico and Andy who inexplicably took over an hour to find us. The journey allegedly involved an impromptu whistle stop tour of Zurich and an irate taxi driver. After winding our way back to the Hotel

Rothaus we hatched a plan to secure 'one more for the road' but the bars were closing, legs were aching and we knew that it was time to quit while we were ahead.