

11) TWTD Issue 65, Dec 2002: "Team-building trip to Albania"

Contributed by Daniel Harvey And James Powell
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Malcom Baggio has successfully trawled the deep Raydon ocean and has come back to the soccer shore with a net of fresh Ramblings to serve up for fervent football fanatics.

After a disappointing start to the season, Raydon manager Roland Peters and Chairman Lionel Stubbs decided to take the squad for a four day morale building trip to Albania. Raydon picked up just nine points from the first 14 games of the season, despite having more or less the same group of players who achieved success over the last two seasons.

There has been much unrest in the Raydon camp with striker Dougie McManahammond coming under fire from disgruntled fans for his lack-lustre performances and lack of goals. An emotional McManahammond opened his heart in a special 4-page pull out in the Raydon Bugle in which he revealed his inner torment. Using phrases like, 'tortured soul,' 'relentless heartache', 'deepest woe' and 'blackest hour' he spoke of his anguish in a way that moved even those who didn't give a shit.

The trip was subsidised the multi-millionaire Stubbs himself, who made his fortune in rawl plugs. Stubbs was due to meet a rawl plug client in Sarand, Southern Albania and was taking his private jet over there anyway so the additional cost was minimal.

As well as an opportunity for the players to spend time together and bond, the trip would also enable them to pit their wits against foreign opposition. A friendly match against Sarand Rovers was set to be the focal point of the trip.

Fourteen players were on the plane that left Luton airport on Monday 7th October for the twenty-nine hour journey to Albania. The reason for the extended journey was that Stubbs had a meeting with a plastics merchant at Sierra Leone airport prior to the meeting in Albania. The players were particularly aggrieved when they were informed of the massive detour just after take off, especially as there was no food or drink on board except two yams.

When the party arrived at Sierra Leone airport after a 12 hour flight, Stubbs left the plane to meet the plastics merchant only to return ten minutes later announcing that he had got his dates mixed up and was due to meet him the following week.

At this stage the party would have arrived in Albania within 22 hours of leaving Luton. However, Raydon's hot-tempered defender Jack Crankleshank was so angry at Stubbs mistake that he swung a punch at his chairman. Stubbs ducked and Crankleshank's fist shattered one of the plane's windows. This added a further four hours to the journey time as a local glazier was called to install a new window. Roland Peters calmed everyone down and some of the players gnawed at the withering remains of the yams. Once the window was repaired, the party was all ready to leave and the pilot had gained clearance from air traffic control to take off. However, he suddenly needed to open his bowels and they missed their slot. The next slot was three hours later.

The party eventually arrived in Albania and boarded a mini-bus for the 12 hour drive to the town where they would be camping in the grounds of an old power station and playing the friendly.

Serious question marks were raised about the scheduling of the trip when the team finally arrived at their destination. With several members of the Raydon party in the preliminary stages of malnutrition and others suffering from severe exhaustion, they pulled up to their camping area to find the players of Sarand Rovers fully kitted out and warming up energetically on the adjacent football pitch. Lionel Stubbs glanced at his watch and realised that it was 30 minutes until

the kick-off of Raydon's friendly match. The Raydon players stumbled out of the minibus and sauntered into the changing shack in a sorry, dischevelled state. Stubbs himself was in comparatively good shape as he had been sneakily nibbling at various foodstuffs which he had craftily stashed about his person before the journey had started.

With Roland Peters himself sweating profusely and appearing to be suffering from eerie hallucinations it was apparent that he was in no fit state to manage the team for this encounter. The players used what energy they had left to make it clear to Stubbs that they were physically incapable of playing the match. Stubbs left the changing shack and approached his opposite number Aleksander Skenderbeg to explain the situation. However, Skenderbeg only knew two English words - 'plinth' and 'gnaw' - which hindered Stubbs, who himself only knew the Albanian for 'soot', 'dick-head', and 'higgledy-piggledy.' Fortunately, one of the spectators at the game spoke fluent English and Stubbs was able to convey the predicament to Skenderbeg. However, Skenderbeg was clearly unhappy with the idea of cancelling the game. Via the spectator he told Stubbs that the game had attracted a great deal of interest from unscrupulous bookmakers and a very large amount of money was resting on the game. He went on to explain in no uncertain terms that a lot of very wealthy businessmen had money riding on Raydon winning the game and unless they were victorious he could not guarantee their post-match safety. He gestured towards two heavily armed thugs standing beside the pitch sipping tea and eating raspberries.

With less than 10 minutes until kick-off, Lionel Stubbs hastily found a nearby refreshments kiosk and bought large quantities of the Albanian equivalent of Lucozade, with the idea of forcing it down the players' throats. However when he returned to the changing shack he found the players slumped on the floor having passed out through sheer exhaustion. The only member of the group still conscious was Roland Peters who was curled up in a ball in the corner rocking backwards and forwards and mumbling incoherently.

Stubbs began to panic as he peered outside to see the opposing players and referee in position for the start of the match. A large crowd of spectators had gathered in the small stadium and were beginning to get restless. The two armed thugs were walking menacingly towards the changing shack to check on the whereabouts of the Raydon team. Stubbs needed to rouse Peters from his loony state, so with no running water in the shack, he emptied the contents of a slop bucket over his head.

Peters came round and staggered to his feet, wiping excrement and urine out of his face with his sleeve. Stubbs quickly explained the situation to Peters and gestured towards the armed men who were now within seconds of reaching the changing shack. Stubbs quickly rummaged through the kit-bag and produced two cans of Deep Heat. He gave one to Stubbs and they both positioned themselves either side of the door as the thugs entered holding revolvers and shouting in Albanian. Although Stubbs and Peters could obviously not understand what they were saying, Stubbs did notice that 'higgledy-piggledy' and 'dick head' were among with words uttered.

As soon as the thugs came in, Stubbs and Peters unleashed a relentless spray of deep heat into their eyes. The thugs screamed in agony and fell to the ground dropping their guns. As they tried to rouse the players, Stubbs, who is Raydon's Physio as well as the Chairman, explained that he once unsuccessfully used Deep Heat as treatment for a player's conjunctivitis which is why he knew it would be an effective weapon.

Some of the Raydon players had been awoken by the commotion and Stubbs and Peters woke up the rest. The thugs were writhing around clutching their faces. Stubbs and Peters grabbed their revolvers and glanced out of the shack to see a large group of men walking towards them to investigate the whereabouts of the two thugs. Stubbs pulled one of the thugs to his feet, kicked the door open and stood in the doorway, pointing the gun at the thug's left ear lobe. The group of men stopped suddenly and backed off as Peters ushered the players out of the shack and into the minibus. Aleksander Skenderbeg emerged from the crowd, cackling in Albanian and gesturing wildly. Stubbs pointed the gun at Skenderbeg to try and curb his approach but accidentally pulled the trigger and shot him in the knee.

As Skenderbeg fell to the ground shrieking in pain, a panic-stricken Stubbs, who had no intention of shooting anyone, blushed and dropped the gun. Unfortunately as the gun hit the ground it went off again and the stray bullet hit

Skenderbeg in the other knee. By this time Peters had started the minibus and was slowly heading out of the exit, honking the horn. Stubbs turned and sprinted towards the accelerating minibus.

Raydon players Mansley Kilkorkey and Dougie McMannahammond opened the back doors and prepared to help Stubbs on board. As the minibus reached 15mph Stubbs was running just behind it. Kilkorkey and McMannahammond grabbed his legs and he fell backwards. For fifty metres Stubbs was dragged along on his back along the rough and rocky road as the minibus came under machine gun fire from irate Albanians. With bullets missing Stubbs's head by a matter of millimetres, they eventually managed to hoist him aboard and pull the back doors closed. Peters accelerated away from the scene and to safety.

After an overnight stay in a seedy bed and breakfast and a disappointing meal of poached yams, which some members of the party refused to eat despite their delapidated state, they begun the long journey back to the airport. Lionel Stubbs was suffering from a minor cracking of the back following his van ordeal and was in no fit state to meet up with his rawl plug client.

Since returning to England, the Raydon players have gone 5 matches unbeaten scoring 19 goals without reply. The upturn in fortune was sparked by an off-the-cuff remark from Lionel Stubbs that the team embark on more morale boosting trips in the future should they be struggling.

Injury news: Good news - Jack Funtingdale has finally awoken from his three week coma brought about by his allergy to yams. He expects to be back playing once he's off the baby food, off the critical list and been able to rebuild his leg muscles. Keep drinking the Lucozade Jack!