

17) TWTD Issue 71, Mar 2004: "Raydon take on local rugby team"

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Monday, 15 March 2004

Football fertility expert Dr Malcolm Baggio has impregnated the Raydon womb with his test-tube full of news-sperm and, nine months on, here he is fresh from the maternity ward with a bouncing bundle of ramblings

In order to mark the euphoria of the England rugby team's historic World Cup victory, Raydon Athletic agreed to play Raydon Harlequins Rugby Team in a charity match to raise money for Aches, Gripes and Niggles Research. None of the Athletic team had ever played rugby before but Chairman Lionel Stubbs once played rugby touch at primary school and he led the squad in a 15 minute training session on the morning of the match. Due to the lack of rugby balls, they trained using footballs and just imagined they were rugby balls.

The Harlequins are regarded as one of the best rugby teams in Suffolk having won their league for the last twelve seasons. However, an optimistic Roland Peters said before the game, "My lads are a tough bunch and, although none of them have ever previously played a match of rugby, I think we're physically and mentally strong enough to beat this bunch of half-brained, freakish neanderthals."

In the early stages, the footballers struggled to get to grips with the fact that were not allowed to pass the ball forward and they found themselves 24-0 down after 15 minutes.

They started to show signs of recovery with George Mnunga particularly catching the eye. Mnunga, who used to be on the fringes of the Nigerian olympic gymnastics youth B standby team before he was deemed too hefty at 16-stone, used some of his classy moves to outwit his opponents. He received the ball from a line out and set off on a penetrative run into the Harlequins half, dodging and outpacing opponents as he went for the try. As he approached the line, with two Harlequins players at an aggregate weight of fifty stone stampeding towards him, he sprung high into the air, somersaulted over his opponents and landed on his feet before diving over the line. Dougie McManahammond, who had never previously seen a rugby ball in real life, let alone kick one duly notched the conversion with cumbersome ease.

The Raydon comeback continued in the final seconds of the half with Jack Crankleshank completely miskicking the ball deep in his own half and inadvertently hoofing the ball 80 yards and through the posts for his first ever drop goal. Half time: 24-11

After a particularly rousing half-time team talk from manager Roland Peters in which he swore no less than 143 times and shouted so much that he burst his larynx for the third time in his managerial career, the Athletic players returned to the pitch extremely fired up and ready for a scrap.

However Harlequins sailed to an easy 42-11 victory.

Despite the defeat, Raydon were able to take a lot of positives from the rugby game into the following week's league match at home to fellow title hopefuls Spartak Diss. Due to a striker shortage with Dave Mackinackie and George Mnunga both suffering from a touch of the plague, Roland Peters signed Brazilian striker Pele Hooper on a months loan from Coddenham Hotspur a couple of days before the game. Hooper was initially named as a substitute but Dougie McManahammond was ruled out late in the day after accidentally slicing the top of a mole off whilst shaving on the morning of the game. He had been unable to stop the bleeding despite physio Lionel Stubbs' instructions to stand on his head whilst pressuring the wound with a piece of tissue paper. Peter's duly named Hooper in the starting line up in place of McManahammond, where he partnered Saul Quan.

Before game Peters, who had been fitted with a temporary electronic voice box told me, "This guy is one of the most gifted local footballers I have ever seen in 25 years. He's quick, he's got two good feet, he can shoot, he can take players on. How he's not playing at a higher level I'll never know. I can't believe that Coddenham are willing to loan him to us." Peters was cut short by his electronic voice box battery running out and he disappeared to the dressing room deliver his team talk in silence, hoping that the players could lip read.

The first half did not go to plan. After just 2 minutes Mal Chipaway conceded a free kick right on the edge of his own box, the referee harshly adjudging that he had tripped an opposing striker at knee level which caused the player to be rushed to hospital with blood pouring from a deep gash.

Chipaway, still fired up from his rugby experience, argued with the ref about the decision and the ref responded by moving the kick forward 10 yards as punishment. Chipaway foolishly reacted again, using expletives and obscenities that were so offensive that some watching females were reduced to tears. The ref again picked the ball up and walked forwards ten yards which took him over the goal line. He placed the ball over the line and in a controversial and somewhat incorrect interpretation of the rulebook, awarded a goal to Diss, crediting himself as the scorer. Chipaway was also shown a yellow card, and was so intent on confronting the referee again that he had to be physically restrained by his fellow players, the Diss players, their manager, 26 spectators and the winch of a neighbouring farmer's tractor.

Raydon struggled to get their game together in the first half and they fell further behind just before the break after Jack Crankleshank blatantly tickled an opponent under the arms as he ran into the box. Crankleshank argued that the tickling was unintentional but the referee was not interested and the resultant penalty was duly converted.

At half time the enraged Roland Peters, who had managed to recharge his voice box from his car battery, turned up the volume control and let rip with a barrage of electronic abuse. His fury was such that his voice box overheated and sparks began to fly from his mouth. After a loud bang the voice box gave out all together and a silent Peters had to scribble down a few choice words for captain Jack Crankleshank to pass on to the other players.

In the second half Raydon finally got their act together with Pele Hooper starting to display the ability that Peters had raved about. Firstly Hooper got them back into the game with a wonderful solo close range tap-in following a goal mouth scramble straight off the training ground.

Hooper continued to display skills that had many of the crowd literally drooling in astonishment. Indeed, Elaine Funtingdale had to hand out napkins to some of the more dribblesome spectators. His skills led to Raydon's equaliser as he burst down the left flank beating two players twice and one other player before beating the first two players for a third time and then beating a fourth and fifth player and then beating the third player again and then playing the ball into the path of Les Candlestick who's shot was deflected wide off a defender. Mansley Kilkorkey tapped hope the resultant corner.

Raydon took the lead with a move they had picked up from their rugby experience. Saul Quan floated in a corner from the left, which looked as though it was far too high. However, Crankleshank, Mnunga and Diffydale all grabbed Mal Chipaway round the waist and lifted him off the ground, using the same technique as with a line out in rugby. Chipaway, who was just beyond the far post, headed the ball downwards towards goal from about 10 foot off the ground. The ball rocketed into the back of the net to make it 3-2.

As Raydon looked to be heading to victory, a momentary lapse of concentration at the back gifted Diss an equaliser as Derek Diffydale back heeled a left wing cross into the top corner of his own net from 25 yards.

Raydon continued to dominate though and in the final minute, Pele Hooper found himself clean through on goal after a typically probing run. However, as he shaped to shoot, he suddenly collapsed to the ground allowing the Diss keeper to simply pick the ball up. There was great concern amongst both sets of players as Hooper lay motionless on the pitch, appearing to have suffered a heart attack or something similar. Physio Lionel Stubbs quickly attended to Hooper but, although he was breathing, Stubbs was unable to rouse him, despite pouring a bucket of water over his head and holding some makeshift smelling salts in the form of a bottle of Tipp-Ex under his nose. Hooper was stretchered off and the final whistle was blown seconds later with the result 3-3.

Despite the frustration at letting two points slip away, the only concern after the game was for the welfare of Hooper who remained unconscious at pitch side. An ambulance arrived but just as paramedics were about to treat him, Hooper suddenly let out an almighty snore, jolted and woke up stretching and yawning. Hooper asked Roland Peters, "Did we win?"

In the ensuing discussion / scuffle it emerged that Hooper suffers from narcolepsy, the condition which causes sufferers to fall asleep involuntarily. Hooper admitted that the reason he hadn't been able to build a career as a professional footballer was due to the condition. He went on to explain a nightmare trial match with Manchester City in which he fell asleep as he ran up to take a penalty in the last minute with the score 1-1. His head nudged the ball about 6 inches forward as he fell and the opposing keeper rushed out to smother the ball. Roland Peters showed no sympathy for Hooper, swinging a punch at him in furious anger. However, as he brought his fist back, Hooper fell to the ground asleep again and Peters's fist instead went through a window. He had to be rushed to hospital for emergency surgery to reattach two of his fingers.

Hooper's loan spell was terminated after the game.