

Testing Times - Day 4

OK, could all managers please report to the beer tent immediately!

Crackle...crackle...buzz...

I'm sorry, please cancel that last message...could all managers please report to the control tent as soon as possible.

There was a huge scrum as five hundred managers converged on the organisers' tent to find out the details of the knockout stages.

'Well, we made it through on goal difference', shouted one of the managers above the melee.

'Goal difference doesn't count in this tournament!', yelled another.

'Well, it says here that...!' added a third, waving the tournament rules in the air above his head.

'OK, OK, let's have a little calm please, gentlemen!' called the tournament organiser, 'and then I can explain the rules for progression to the quarter-finals!'

The throng of people slowly quietened down.

'Now, as you know, there were seventeen groups of eight teams. The winners of each group will be decided as follows. Please listen carefully.'

Several managers started talking again.

'I said, please, listen carefully!' implored the tournament organiser, 'this could get a little complicated'.

Two managers scratched their heads, then turned around and left.

'So, the winners of each group will go forward to a pre-quarter-final re-group stage to decide progression into the last eight. These will be matches of three minutes each way, and you have to take one player off at the end of each minute. All matches are six-a-side, so you can work out how many players you will need for the game – good luck!'

'That's outrageous!' screamed four managers all at once, 'we'll end up with only one player on the pitch!'

The organiser smiled to himself. 'That's right, one vs one! It's a new rule this year!'

He continued.

'For teams that came second in their group, based on the number of corners conceded, divided by the ratio of goals scored to goals against, you will be playing each other in a round-robin format, starting at 2.00 pm on pitch Z. Good luck!'

'What? How do we know we came second?'

‘Ah yes! So, it’s simple! You just work out how many corners you conceded in each match, then take your total number of goals, divide that by the number you let in, then take away the number you first thought of, OK?’

‘No, not OK’, said a burly manager, moving forward to the front of the group, his rules booklet held out in front of him like a sword as he cut through the throng.

‘Well, I would have thought it would be obvious’, said the organiser, ‘if you do that sum, then take the first letter of your team name, you can see which teams will progress’.

This further detail of the qualification process gave the burly manager pause for thought. He scratched again. Several others looked at each other, puzzled.

‘Just to repeat, corners, goals, and alphabet!’ The organiser looked very pleased with himself.

‘The way I see this, if your team has a name that starts with a letter high up in the alphabet, then you get through’, queried one of the other coaches.

‘That’s right, we had to sort it out somehow!’ The organiser beamed with pride at his innovative approach.

‘So, we’ve played five matches, and just because our team is called the Zebras, we’re going...’

‘Nice kit, black and white stripes’, interrupted the official, ‘now, shall we move on?’

Another group of coaches left the tent, mostly managers of teams like ‘The X-rays’, and ‘Y-R-We Here?’

‘Any questions?’ smiled the organiser.

‘Yes, how are the winners going to be decided after the quarter-finals?’ piped up someone from the back.

‘Ah, I’m glad you asked that! Well, we here at Ripoff Rangers would like to thank you all for taking part in our...’

‘Just tell us, will you!’

‘Yes...absolutely... the final will be won by...the team that...’

‘Oh get on with it!’

‘Yes...the final will be won by...Ripoff...sorry... the final will be won by the team beginning with R...sorry...by the team with best goal difference. In the event of a draw, the match will be decided by a game of ‘Paper, Scissors, Stone’. Thank you!’ The man sunk down out of sight, and crawled out of the back of the tent to a waiting car.

Thanks to the ingenuity of Alec, they had finally escaped from the Library and made their way over to

the tournament. It seemed like hundreds of teams had entered, and everyone was completely confused. After Mr Andrews had returned from the managers' tent, scratching his head and wondering how a team with a name like Lancaster Road could ever progress, Jaz had sat for a while in the sunshine shielding the screen of his laptop from the glare.

'OK, according to this, there is no doubt that...' he tapped some more, '...we've made it through...and we will be playing against...' tap tap tap '...FC', tap tap tap '...Barcelona!'

Freddy looked across at his star player.

Michael smiled...wryly*.

* slightly humorously, knowingly. Dryly.