

Carry On Camping – Day 4

‘Boring! Boring! Boring!’ sang the Derby Road parents.

‘You don’t know what you’re doing!’ sang the Lancaster Road parents.

‘You’re not fit to wear the shirt!’ sang one of the Derby Road parents to one of the Derby Road players, who was clearly unfit, and whose shirt definitely didn’t fit.

‘Pull your socks up!’ sang Hardy’s Dad to Hardy, whose socks had slid to a mushy mess round his ankles.

Mr Andrews looked on and scratched – as usual. His head mostly, as he tried to decide what to do.

As you can probably imagine, the Derby Road game was not going well.

Back in early 2007 they had had two games against the same opposition, and had won 2-1 and 3-0, so they had expected an easy victory against a meagre opponent.

But you can’t be too optimistic. You can’t just come into a game with one training session and hope to play to your best ability. You can’t believe that the opposition have not got better. You cannot not think that too many ‘nots’ are going to not confuse anyone who’s not reading this stuff?

No! Stop! You’re tying me in knots!

They were not playing well. And the real reason was a combination of things. Lack of training, certainly. Over-confidence, definitely.

And Mr Andrews’s crazy plan to take them on a minibus tour of Springhurst, absolutely.

Wil had staggered out of the bus as they finally arrived at the ground, his face a mixture of grey and green, his legs wobbly with the juddering, shuddering ride they had just had. Michael, normally one of the quietest of the team, had been even quieter.

They had started the match slowly, and got slower. Although Derby Road had not scored, the Lancaster Road players were slower to the ball, and were going to lose unless Mr Andrews could do something to inspire them.

At half-time, Mr Andrews stopped his scratching and marched over to the team, who had collapsed on the ground near the penalty area.

‘Get up you lot!’ he screamed.

Freddy was shocked. Their little old coach actually seemed angry. I’m sure coaches aren’t supposed to

yell at their team, he thought to himself.

‘I said get up!’ continued Mr Andrews, ‘you don’t deserve to rest! You haven’t done anything! You!...’, he yelled at Hardy, ‘nothing! And you..!’ facing Wil, ‘zilch!’ He put his face, now incandescent with anger, close to Michael, ‘YOU – Nil!’. Going round the other players, he shouted, ‘You – zip, you – zero, you – nada, you – nought, and finally you, my own grand-daughter, I can’t believe it...’, (he drew a deep breath), ‘YOU – Nil, nada, nothing, zip, zilch, zero, nul points! NOTHING!’

‘OK, we haven’t played well, but what are we going to do about it?’ said Michael in his quiet calm way. They all looked at Mr Andrews, who paused for a long time, his little face looking sad, as if a dream was slipping away from him.

‘There’s only one thing for it’, he said calmly, ‘an old technique I remember from the old days. When men were men. When girls were...girls. And when a good cold shower never hurt anyone’.

With that he spun round, grabbed the team water bottles from the carrier behind him and began spraying water at the team. Driven on by anger and frustration, his bony fingers squeezed against the bottles as water flew around him, his players scattering in all directions as the icy cold water fired them into action. Freddy, water seeping right down the front of his shirt, pulled his soggy team around him.

‘Right, come on, we can do this. Remember last year – get going!’

Inevitably, the second half was a different story. With Freddy and Wil controlling the midfield, all it needed were some typical skills from Michael to see them home. The final score was 2-0 but it could have been more.

The best moment had been when Michael, faced by three defenders, had dummied a pass across to Clara, but had in fact flicked the ball between the two main defenders, run to the left of one of them, picked up the ball the other side, and then nutmegged the third before running straight on goal, giving the goalkeeper ‘the eyes’, and sidefooting it home. The crowd had cheered with a combination of relief and excitement.

And by the end, the crowd had put their earlier disappointments behind them, and a low chorus of ‘One Michaely Michael, there’s only one Michaely Michael!’ had echoed round the ground as they celebrated victory with more water-spraying, this time at their inspirational and unorthodox coach!

‘See y’ all tomorrow!’ said Freddy as they departed after the game, ‘and don’t forget, bring a sleeping bag, a torch, and...something to defend yourself with!’
