

Let the Games Begin – Day 4

'Yes, take care tomorrow, you're playing against the mysterious... Hags United!'

It was a wet, windy and worrying sort of day. Eight nervous footballers. JoJogging up and down, stretching one way, stretching the other. Jumping on the spot.

Mr Andrews also looked nervous, but his instructions were clearer than usual.

'Just go out there and enjoy it. We lost one last week...so what? In football there is always another game just round the corner. Give it another go. Just do your best, and give a hundred percent effort'.

They gathered together in a little huddle and Freddy spoke,

'Don't look at them. Just play. We have some great players, we can do this. Remember the passing, the dribbling, and the shooting. Shoot from anywhere!'

'BANG!'. As he said the word *shoot* there was an enormous explosion of noise from the other end of the pitch where the Hags team were preparing in a similar huddle. Except up from the middle of their huddle rose a plume of greenish yellow smoke.

'I...I...I don't really like this...at all...', stammered Hardy, looking across at the group, who were now cackling madly as their coach (a fat lady wearing a dark cloak) waved her team onto the pitch.

The team itself was dressed in black baggy shirts and long flowing black trousers, which made them look rather ghostly, and produced a flapping sound when they ran.

But the half went well, as two goals from Michael, a volley from Alex, and a sliding stab home from Jaz put Lancaster Road four goals up. Freddy beamed happily from his midfield role as the team started enjoying themselves. Even the referee, formally dressed in black and white, was smiling at the quality of the football.

'C'mon United, keep playing like this, it's not over until the fat lady sings!', yelled Mr Andrews happily as another goal went in, this time volleyed from twenty metres by Clara, who jumped high in the air in delight.

Just then, the fat lady started singing.

The words of her song were indistinct. From where most of the Lancaster Road supporters were sitting, all they could hear were words like *'double'*, *'trouble'*, and *'toil'*, sung in the direction of the Hags girls, accompanied by several of the old ladies whirring their hands in a sort of stirring motion. As this was happening, the referee was involved in a heated debate with some of the Hags supporters. There was much shaking of fists, some raised voices, and a brief scuffle. The referee came back onto the pitch looking a bit ruffled, or at least a bit different.

This seemed to encourage the girls, who came out for the second half much more positively.

The second period started with Lancaster Road on the move once more, but several attacks were broken up by the re-invigorated Hags defence. The two central defenders seemed to have taken inspiration from the incessant chanting now coming from the touchline, and literally broke up the attacks, with Alex being sent flying by one scything tackle (naturally, he managed to do a double somersault and land on his feet), and Michael's progress being stopped by the other defender, who yelled '*mind yer dodgy knee, ha ha ha!*' before taking him out close to the Hags supporters, who cheered and hooted wildly.

One of the girls then set off on a long run down the left, and, bearing down on Hardy in goal, she appeared to throw something towards him. Some kind of purple powder. Before the defence could get there, Hardy let out the most enormous sneeze which almost shook him off his feet, and momentarily meant that he was unable to do anything about the shot heading towards his goal. In the end he flapped wildly at the ball to no avail. It was lodged in the back of the net. The Hags had got one back.

The next Lancaster Road attack saw Freddy running down the wing at high speed, ball close to his feet, looking for someone to pass to on the inside. As he was looking up, one of the Hags supporters stuck out her foot and sent him sprawling to the ground, with the ball bouncing harmlessly out of play for a throw-in. The supporter just looked up to the sky and whistled innocently.

The crowd turned to the referee in expectation of a free kick, at least. But the referee just screeched '*play on!*'. And laughed.

Two more goals followed, both of which were scored by the same Hags player. The first was when she was all alone in the penalty area, with only Hardy to beat, and she pointed to something in the sky. Hardy, who was already nervous about the whole game, looked up for a split second, only to find the ball in the back of the net. The second goal was when the same player was challenged by Hardy in the penalty area and dived blatantly over his outstretched hand. Once again the referee, looking rather pleased, pointed to the penalty spot, chuckling happily.

'Wouldn't see that in the Premiership!' shouted Mr Andrews in his usual naïve sort of way.

As full time approached, Lancaster Road managed to contain the game in middle of the park, and although the referee added six minutes on for non-existent injury time, they held on for a win. The two teams shook hands in the middle of the pitch, as assorted parents and friends ran over to congratulate them. Freddy couldn't help noticing how bony and cold the hands of the Hags girls felt.

After the celebrations died down, Wil and Freddy were walking slowly back to the changing rooms.

'Urghhh...'

'What did you say?' said Freddy, turning to Wil.

'I didn't say anything', Wil replied.

'Urghh...urghhhh!'

They walked over to the edge of the pitch, where the noise was coming from. When they got there, they couldn't believe what they saw.
