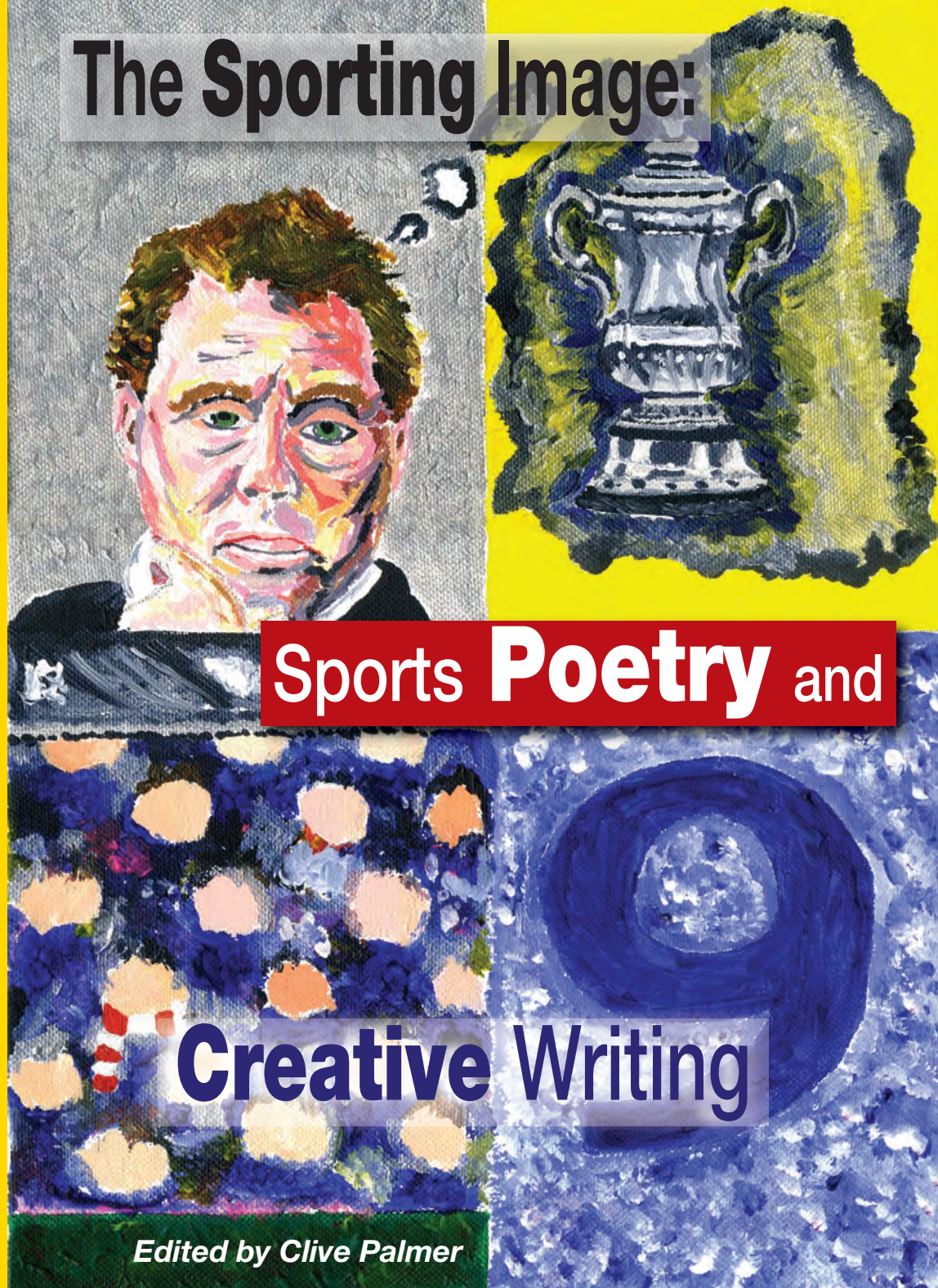


This book is a collection of sports related poetry and creative writing which stemmed from a university module called The Sporting Image. Following a poetry writing workshop to help students structure their ideas and poetry writing skills an engaging degree of self-expression about sporting concepts seems to have emerged which we are proud to showcase within these pages. Many sports are featured including boxing, cricket, football and gymnastics and many issues tackled such as teamwork, comradeship, cheating, beauty and ugliness in sport. Consequently this is a varied compilation which we hope the reader will find as enjoyable to read or even perform, as we have had in producing it.



The Sporting Image:

THE SPORTING IMAGE: SPORTS POETRY AND CREATIVE WRITING



Sports **Poetry** and

Creative Writing

EDITED BY CLIVE PALMER

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The Sporting Image:
Sports Poetry and Creative Writing

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In particular, thanks are due in no small measure to Iain Adams and Helen Atkinson for entertaining my poetry book idea as a “pedagogical feature” within the Sporting Image module at the University of Central Lancashire. I also wish to thank John Lindley for his support and advice and not least for his poetry workshop which was the inspiration for many students to write about sport in such a creative way. Through his guidance students have found structure, challenge and enjoyment in formulating and expressing their ideas through poetry.

In conceiving this book I wished to incorporate some examples of extended prose in sport. I am pleased to include invited contributions from Mr Mouse *aka* Billy Wilson from Tough Guy™ for his poetic tale of sport and charity and Paul Hall for his short story of coaching duties during an international gymnastics competition. I am also most grateful to Samuel Van Gelder and Joshua Evans for their artwork which is featured on the front and back covers of this book.

A debt of thanks is also owed to Pat Scoffins and Maura Singleton for their careful typing of the manuscript and the Research Informed Teaching Team within the Faculty of Management for supporting the project towards publication.

Finally, I wish to thank all the students from the Sporting Image module for contributing to this book and for being willing to share their work and thoughts with others. I thank them also for their patience in tolerating my editorial interferences which I have tried to keep to a minimum.

Clive Palmer

Foreword

“I don't like the way the evidence is building up” laughs Leonard Cohen towards the end of a 1965 documentary on the Canadian poet in his pre-singer/songwriter days. Having been described earlier in the film's commentary as coming from a “well to do Jewish family, dedicated to the clothing business” and of receiving an annual allowance of \$750 a year, Cohen remarks ruefully, “All I have to do now is tell you that I was good in sports and I've completely ruined the cliché of the poet forever”.

You can see his point. Sports journalists aside, of course, we don't generally expect our writers to show much interest in anything more physically demanding than typing, book launches and trips to the stationers. Find out that a prodigiously gifted writer of prose, gags and screenplays, such as Woody Allen, (an artist further pigeon-holed by the handicap of scholarly nerdy look) was a pretty useful football, baseball and basketball player at school, and we have trouble reconciling the disparate artistic and athletic gifts. With poets, that strange breed of isolationists locked away (if only in others' imagination) in that proverbial lonely garret, the dichotomy is even more defined.

Well, if poetry and the subject of sport represent two never-to-be-wed loves, then clearly no-one told Ted Hughes when he was composing his moving sad/funny poem *Football*; no-one told John Betjeman, who wrote breathlessly and delightfully of his longing for his strapping tennis opponent, Miss Joan Hunter Dunn; no-one told one-time boxer, Vernon Scannell, who memorably employed the 'noble art' as an extended metaphor for poetic technique in his piece *Mastering the Craft*. It seems too that nobody thought to tell Ted Smith-Orr who managed to edit an entire anthology entitled *Football; Pure Poetry* without having too much trouble finding enough poets (myself included) to fill it.

As a consequence, I was more interested and intrigued than nervous and bemused when I received Clive Palmer's request that I run a poetry workshop for students at University of Central Lancashire who were engaged in a Sports Studies course. I felt from the start that the idea was an exciting one and, more importantly, that the outcome would be successful. How successful, of course, I had no way of knowing. What I *do* remember

from my afternoon at the university was launching a barrage of writing activities at the students, many of whom could barely remember ever having written a poem in their lives, with the intention of stimulating individual and original responses. I was met, gratifyingly, with an enthusiasm that I could hardly have realistically anticipated. The poems that came out of that session ranged in subject matter from an icy airstrip in Germany in 1958 to multi-racialism in sport; a trend far-reaching enough to allow us to credibly accept it as part of the changing world that led to the election of a black American president.

Were some of the students resultant efforts raw? Of course. Good poetry is rarely created instantly. In the hands and heads of so many unused to the craft, even a degree of redrafting cannot entirely disguise a certain technical inexperience in the writing. Nevertheless, these poems – at times personal, at times universal – were wonderfully passionate and engaging. It was a real pleasure for me to work with the group. I'm sure it will be a pleasure too for those who read their work.

John Lindley

Introduction

Pedagogical poetry: 'new' degrees of freedom to explore and express ideas about sporting life

The contents of this book have developed from an opportunity within a university module to write about sport in a creative way in the form of sport's poetry. The Sporting Image module at the University of Central Lancashire encourages students to consider some aesthetic dimensions of sport and focused upon poetry as a useful exercise in this direction. Through a process starting with a poetry writing workshop run for us by John Lindley, a professional poet based in Cheshire, and subsequent personal reflections on their creative work the students were asked to write their own poem as an appendix to their assignment. This publication is an attempt to showcase the creative work produced from this teaching initiative.

In making this request of students there were a number of 'constructive' questions from them along the lines of; will my poem be marked? how much is my poem worth? if I write a bad poem will it affect my mark for the assignment? do I really have to write a poem? These questions about the value of poetry as a percentage mark in their assignments spurred the teaching team on to consider what the *pedagogical value* of creative writing was in sport. We considered this to be great on a number of fronts, not least; the shared experience of writing, the shared experience of performance, new-found freedom in writing style (on a Sports Studies course), experimenting with language to communicate a message succinctly and, importantly, enjoying the writing experience. These seemed to be worthwhile outcomes from a learning experience at any level. However, in our endeavour to educate final year students we also wished to promote a sense of critical understanding about aesthetic representation in sport, a pride in writing that might be shared publically and some ability in students to start making their own informed judgements about the quality of aesthetic products, related to sport, which are in the public domain. How would a student know whether they had written a "good" poem or a "poor" one, unless we taught them sufficiently to at least begin to make their own critical decisions about content, structure, themes, forms and composition? From a position of knowledge one may be able to offer a sensible reasoned comment – i.e. not a guess. This became the pedagogical underpinning for our mission into poetry within the Sporting Image module.

As a result of creating this opportunity the boundaries of academic “correctness” as the students may have seen, it were momentarily relaxed or more appropriately, re-aligned; who could say their poem was wrong? how could it have value? who would judge it and how could it be ‘assessed’? It couldn’t be criticised for poor referencing and credit and praise appeared to be on offer from peers and staff alike for *just* “having a go” and sharing the work. Because of these considerations the concept of evaluation of this written task may have shifted positively to allow some self expression in writing about sporting life which may otherwise be constrained or denied in “normal” academic work from undergraduate students.

The student’s questions indicated that at the start there was a degree of self-consciousness about engaging with this kind of writing which they may not have done since they were at school and so, in some cases may have considered it to be a child-like task. The writing workshop from John Lindley gave direction and degrees of freedom to start writing poetry helping the students to develop structure and form in their creative work. From this relatively small beginning there was sufficient knowledge, writing practice and confidence for students to make some judgements about “how good” their or other’s poetry was. This book represents a more complete overview of their efforts shared amongst the student body of which I think they should be justly proud.

With my pedagogical hat on, I am aware that students can be their own harshest critics and I would remind them that “every criticism may be a form of autobiography”, that is, if a criticism is made it may be a reflection of the critic’s knowledge – wider reading and more writing may be the solution here! This premise provides an ideal opportunity to invite the reader to appreciate the contents as being the early works of novice poets and perhaps to direct attention to the references listed in the guided bibliography below. These selected references and accompanying notes and descriptions are intended to help students to further develop some basic reasoning for their comments about “quality” and to broaden the possibilities for creative writing in sport from them.

My initial ideas for this book were always more than it being ‘simply’ a collection of sports related poetry. It would have a significant purpose in teaching not only to underpin the Sporting Image module but would also have some relevance to qualitative researchers in sport. Consequently, this book may be an initial guide for some, or an inspiration for others to develop research ideas or serve as an example of possibilities through an extension of the sporting-poem towards that of sporting-biography. To

develop this concept there are two invited tales of sporting life included within the book that could be seen as a creative narrative in sport which is a useful technique of writing in some qualitative research. The first, *Financial Security* by Billy Wilson maintains an obvious poetic form with repetition of phrasing and short “stanzas”; it is clearly not a short story but more of a poetic account which summarises “developments” for Mr Mouse over a twenty five year period. The second, *Casualski* by Paul Hall, is a short story, another true account in sport which uses rich description and quotes from people at the scene to provide an insight to a tense and stressful situation which spanned only a few days. Each may serve as an inspiration at many different levels and I am pleased to be able to feature them here.

Equally, the majority of students’ poems are also biographical in nature telling of true experiences and feelings about sport. This may help to qualify the importance of poetry and creative writing in sport beyond that of being a brief task in the middle of a module at university. Rather, that the topics engaged with and the manner in which it has been written and performed and presented by the students and the invited authors, may actually be central to our efforts to teach about sport and philosophise about the sporting experience as a whole in Higher Education.

Guided Bibliography

Harper, G. (Ed.) (2006) *Teaching creative writing*. Continuum, London.

This is an edited book with an interesting selection of chapters which may be particularly relevant to developing writing skills across a range of study areas. For example, in addition to the chapter on Poetry there are chapters on Creative Non-fiction and Research in Creative Writing which would be useful reference for qualitative researchers who are describing “the lived experience”.

Hockey, J. and Collinson, J.A. (2005) Autoethnography – self indulgence or rigorous methodology? (pp. 187-202) In, McNamee, M. (Ed.) *Philosophy and the sciences of sport, critical perspectives on research methods*. Routledge, London.

An excellent chapter for the qualitative researcher. As a method, Autoethnography acknowledges the position of the researcher as being central to the research process and differs from biography because of its application of field research methods, data analysis and methodological standpoint. Its relation to poetry and creative writing may be that ethnographers researching their own experiences (autoethnographers) seek to communicate the immediacy, physicality and emotionality of an experience. An interesting debate is highlighted about assessment criteria of ethnographic writing within sports research (pp.195-7) promoting for example, the aesthetic, the authentic, the believable and the credible as qualitative criteria compared to that taken up by positivistic traditions such as reliability, provability and validity. An

interesting supplementary paper on the topic of poetry and ethnography which helps to establish further the importance of poetry as a medium for understanding sport's dialog. Tedlock's work (and others) may help to bolster the reasoning and justification for exploring/including creative writing as a valid avenue of socio-cultural research in sport. See: Tedlock, D. (2008) Poetry and ethnography, a dialogical approach. *Anthropology Humanism*, 24, 2 155-167.

Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1994) *Qualitative data analysis, an expanded sourcesbook*. Sage Publications, Thousand oaks, California.

An extensive book on qualitative data analysis which contains a brief and useful explanation (see page 110) on how extensive interview notes were reduced to a poem but without loss of richness that the notes described. This was achieved partly through the story-telling content of the poem but also through the poetic devices such as repetition, off-rhyme, meter and pauses to tell something of the narrative/life-situation. The use of pictograms (see Strachan, J. and Terry, R. (2000) below) might also be a useful technique in this regard – the shapes of words on the page could be structured to bring about an experience of reading or performing the poetry that may be a closer reflection of the real-life situation than perhaps might be experienced by reading a plain reductive note. Miles and Huberman claim that because the data was condensed into a poetic form it forbids superficial attention by the analyst (reader) and that the data set and the person it came from have to be treated seriously because a poem is something that may be “engaged with at a deeper level”.

Singleton, J. and Luckhurst, M. (Eds.) (2000) *The creative writing handbook, techniques for new writers* (second edition). Palgrave, Hampshire, UK.

An edited book with some excellent chapters to stimulate and guide the thoughts of writers. A chapter entitled Words Words Words explores meaning and interpretation of phrasing and provides some useful exercises to become more creative within our written language. The Writing Self focuses upon the experiences of the writer as being central to the writing process and adds useful dimensions to what could become aspects of ethnographic research. Their final chapter on Editing and Rewriting would also be helpful to those who wish to communicate clearly their ideas in a written form.

Skelton, R. (1971) *The practice of poetry*. Heinemann, Educational Books, Ltd., London.

A poetry writing text which explains structure in various forms of poetry. A large section on the re-working and editing of poems is particularly useful which graphically traces how the author has developed their work towards a finished product which they may be satisfied with. A very useful and practical insight.

Strachan, J. and Terry, R. (2000) *Poetry*. Edinburgh University Press.

An interesting book which complements the texts above by explaining some aesthetic forms of poetic verse as well as providing advice about the performance aspects of poetry reading. The Shape of Poetry explores various options for the poet to layout their printed text, e.g. pictograms as a dimension for the presentation of

poems on the page. A chapter on Comparisons and Associations including the use of metaphors and similes and The Words of Poetry helpfully guide the writer to construct a poem that is well balanced and coherent. Chapters on The Sound of Poetry, and Metre and Rhythm are also helpful for stylistic character of poetic verse which may help the writer towards a more confident verbal performance of their creative work.

Sparkes, A. (2002) *Telling Tales in Sport and Physical Activity: A Qualitative Journey*. Human Kinetics Europe Ltd, UK.

The aim of this book is to challenge the tried and tested writing styles employed by qualitative researchers of sport and physical activity. The author breaks disciplinary boundaries to move the field into new territory by encouraging qualitative researchers to think of themselves as storytellers, not just scientists. He uses traditional and contemporary styles of writing as examples to introduce the idea that storytelling in different genres will contribute to the understanding and acceptance of sport and physical activity (Amazon UK product description, 2009).

A United Manchester City

The colours stretched red and blue
this is how we remember you
that cold night in fifty eight
lays aside the things we hate
a length of silence to honour those
who died the night the runway froze.

Leah Berry

(Beckham) Hatred and Emotion

Fans wait impatiently for their heroes to appear,
players emerge to fill hopes and dreams,

whistle blows and the crowd,
overpowers the play with their chant,

tackles form, sliding and colliding
every touch is invaluable,

with fear of defeat at mistimed feet,
the key player is fouled,

his reaction is grim along with his actions,
off he goes leaving fans bitter and resentful,

penalties are well within sight now,
England's journey has come to a bitter end.

David Elwood

The Cup

Jump in the car, head still spinning,
shouldn't have had those extra few beers,
the game kicks off, we're dreaming of winning,
come five o'clock it'll be nothing but cheers.

Half time comes and we're one nil down,
no need to worry, the big one comes on,
towards the end and we're wearing a frown,
two nil final score and the cup run is gone.

Nick Houldsworth

A Game of Three Halves

A soaring coliseum where gladiators collide,
a theatre of mud where mundane misery rules supreme,
could this rainbow be tribes at war?
No, no, just overgrown beings,
in a futile pursuit of happiness,
that will never come.

Ten workers toil for an artist to paint a masterpiece,
eleven mercenaries take out their target,
what does it matter?
This could be Liverpool or Rome,
for this season at least,
this is their home.

A flash of magic, a herd battering.
when the crowd roars, it sings,
it says this is our religion,
these are our people, our army
and our artist with a ball,
its football, bloody hell.

Robert Hendry

Then and Now

Softness and grace
is what you wanted to see
in a woman
with dignity.

Feminine values
with strength and power
are things that men
now have to devour.

Female pioneers
make progress slow
in their attempts
to change the status quo.

Equality in sports
is evident world wide
as women and men
compete side by side.

Daniel Smith

Gambling for the Good Life

A poem inspired by 'Going to the Match' a painting by L.S. Lowry

Please, Please, Please can I play football?
it will help me become big, strong and tall
it will be happening in the centre of town
in the stadium that gets a big crowd.

I need to finish early on a Saturday though,
but will this mean I have to go?
I know that you are really the boss,
deep down, I don't give a toss.

My health is way more important,
that's if you want me to work hard,
plus you will get all your money back,
for betting if I get a red card.

Now that I don't work Saturdays I can play,
only if I do obey,
why don't you come along and see,
this could be your goldmine key.

Kirsty Monahan

A Golden Era

The heroes came off the field of battle,
against their bitter enemies of old,
three lions roaring proudly on their chests,
precious victory was theirs at last.

They lifted the golden Jules Rimet trophy,
rejoicing with the massed crowds around them,
Moore, a king of kings rose proudest of them all,
carried upon the shoulders of his troops.

Legends had been made this golden summer's day,
Hurst had made history by scoring three,
Peters, Charlton, Stiles and Ball worked like Trojans,
a breached defence was repaired in the end.

This golden generation will be remembered forever,
in a lifetime and an age,
people will say 'I was there' that great day,
when football finally, came home.

James Hedley

The Battlefield I Chose

Walking onto the battlefield I chose
a sense of accomplishment and belief within
in the dark I have waited
but now is my time
I'll walk into the light and be feared
I'll be recognised and not defeated.

Eddie Garbutt

Muhammad Ali

They say he's unbeatable
a one of a kind
he's cocky and confident
a challenge hard to find.

Most famous fighter of all time
without a doubt
no opponent too big
it's a total knock out.

He floats like a butterfly
he stings like a bee
the greatest of all time
it's Muhammad Ali.

Sarah Lambert

Changing a Nation with a Ball and a Hoop

From pickup games at the local court,
where every game is passionately fought,
with a will to win that can't be taught,
in this glorious game that's more than a sport.

To the arena battles of the NBA elite,
with giant frames and golden feet,
where the passion's the same but the talent is glorious,
as they sparkle and strive to emerge victorious.

Most of the stars that dominate this game,
are African-American's who lay their claim,
to equality and respect that their talent preserves,
and recognition as role-models their example deserves.

These stars show their talent on hardwood floor,
something white America could never ignore,
night after night they receive the adulation,
of a multi-national, multi-racial, multi-colour nation.

Yet away from the court they so often give back,
proud to make a difference and proud to be black,
charity foundations that many players have started,
will change the world even when they've departed.

People celebrate a black president's election,
providing fresh hope for a change of direction,
just don't forget the players who've fought for so long,
to change the perception that they don't belong.

Since that day in nineteen fifty when they were allowed to play,
African-American stars have paved the way,
for change in a nation of racial divide,
this game gave them freedom that society denied.

Basketball allowed them to do it with pride.

Rael Mason

Born Free or Are We?

I watch the hand move as I count the seconds,
the countdown agonizingly slow,
it reaches the hour and my freedom beckons,
I've finished work, now I must go.

Across the land people are freed,
mundane day jobs can now just wait,
free to love my beloved sport,
free to love football, I can't wait.....

John Collins

The Deafening Silence

Finally I can see the start,
months of blood, sweat and tears,
forcing body and mind through the barrier of pain,
surely I can win this race?

Fifty-one kilometres I believe,
I don't know right now,
I don't care right now,
surely I can win this race?

What if my dreams drown in the water?
Focus.
As lonely as the wind on this, a still day,
surely I can win this race?

I stare into the emptiness that awaits me,
not altering my gaze for a split second,
it's my race, it's my time,
surely I can win this race?

Deafening silence surrounds the start,
I take a deep breath and steer my head down,
close my eyes.
I can win this race.

Rikin Suchak

They Were Part of the US Sprinting Team

The Olympics is the stage to unite all nations,
on that summer night the world paid attention,
with their dreams of Olympic gold,
and great stories waiting to be told.

The short steps to the podium seem like a mile,
stand up, be strong and protest in style,
in unity with my fellow country men,
together as one, like the world's strongest man.

Standing on the podium with Bronze and Gold,
standing in silence, in the political cold,
now will the rest of America stand up?
the time has come for their great moment.

The point is made; Smith and Carlos have spoken,
they protest with honour they protest with deviance,
the left-hand, the right-hand, the black shocks and the beads,
these brave men are united, with silent bowed heads.

From when they were boys in a field to the crowd's great roar,
were they ever free to excite a public more?
they stood up for what they believed in,
these political sprinters were socially sporting.

Damian Burke

I'm Champion, I am.

In just a few seconds
it's my time to shine,
I've come this far
it has to be mine.

I can see the end in sight
but I don't know where I am,
am I first, am I last?
this is going to be one hell of a fight.

I've made it to the end
all I hear are screams,
it takes a while for it all to sink in,
I'm champion, I am.

Ashleigh Todd-Ellis

The Battle of Boxing

Two men enter the ring, ready for the head to head,
spectators cheer and scream their names,
the battle they endure could leave one dead,
the other, lonely, could just be left with fame.

They dance around the ring waiting to attack,
women look on in fear,
once the bell rings there is no looking back,
men in the crowd just swill their beer.

Tired and weary, no friend or foe,
faces battered and bruised,
who will land that knockout blow?
the struggle almost diffused.

It seems just a game to me or you,
their struggle to succeed,
but as with life there is much to pursue,
from the spoils of other men's greed.

Damien Harland

Our Club

It can make you laugh, it can make you cry,
but we love it and can't say why,
we travel in armies to do battle with others,
hoping our stars can surprise and stun us.

Kiss the badge on our shirts as the game starts,
hoping for victory from the bottom of our hearts,
let them know that they are away,
losing's not an option on any given day.

This is our club and very proud we are,
it's been a long old road to get this far,
the taste of victory is so very sweet,
so we sing out our hearts and rise to our feet.

Another hard week but now we're here,
the only place where I have no fear,
this is my church where my soul is complete,
this is the real me when I'm sat in my seat.

James Bromfield

A Bright Red Ball

One man with a ball, two men each with a bat,
lots of men in white and lots of watching and waiting,
finally, the missile is bowled with an intake of breath,
a bright red ball is hurtling through the air.

Amongst this field of 'pure' white,
the bright red ball could be the aggressor,
and the men with bats are the guards,
of a delicate wooden castle.

It is a game of long pauses,
followed by explosive pockets of action,
where men no longer watch and wait,
but walk and run and throw themselves through the air.

If the castle is demolished the guardsmen will walk,
with their heads down and bats irrelevant,
the other men will smile and celebrate,
until the realisation dawns, that it is their turn.

To face the bright red ball.

Josh Allen

It's The Winning That Counts

It's not the winning that counts,
it's the taking part, goes the saying,
but I know that's not really true,
for the winners there's pride, glory and joy,
for the losers there's nothing exciting or new,
it's the winning that counts.

Josh Allen

Black and White Army

A mass of individuals together as one
the traffic stops for the surge of the crowd
floodlights shining out, drawing us on
our combined voices will sing out loud
BLACK AND WHITE ARMY!

Our cathedral awaits
the gates open wide
the heroes we worship
will play for us with pride
BLACK AND WHITE ARMY!

Our champions stand tall
the battle lines drawn
a sea of colour
uniform well worn
BLACK AND WHITE ARMY!

The whistle will soon blow
the fight will begin
united as one
only one team can win
BLACK AND WHITE ARMY!

Tim Corby

Overtime

I stand at the line,
waiting for the sound,
to make me a hero or villain,
to all who surround.

The whistle blows,
my sweat drips down,
the horsemen are coming,
I can't falter now.

The target seems so small,
help from the guiding light,
is what I pray for now,
as the ball is in flight.

In limbo for eternity,
waiting for it to land,
as it soars and then floats,
my heart pounding, silence from the fans.

The ball rolls around the hoop,
the faithful, bountiful in the stand,
as the ball has trickled in,
I wait to ascend.

Christopher Bunclark

Famously Obscure

The sacrifice of the participant and the spectator,
so similar and yet so different to the extreme,
obsession fuels their passion for their craft,
yet one is envious of the other,
jealous of the ability and the bravery,
willing to stand out from the crowd.

Philip James Wright

Who?

Who is the world's greatest, to ever rock the ring?

Ali.

Who fought for the people, stood tall and ignored the spin?

Ali.

Who floated like a butterfly and stung like a bee?

Ali.

My hero, my inspiration,

who?

Muhammad Ali.

Stephanie Bedford

The Gentlemen in White

The ball is held in the hand, bright red,
“HOWZATT” at least six or seven people said.

Each English gentleman stands pure and white,
four along the floor, a hard hit six goes out of sight.

The castle is guarded by an armoured soldier,
the fate of one man decided by one far older.

Men roared at his sign of one crooked finger,
one man turned, his disappointment lingered.

A sport surrounded by history and tradition,
a game so simple and played by the nation.

The end is near, the scores are close,
both teams so close to the winning post.

The two set off in relay fashion,
the win is theirs thanks to their passion.

They will go through it all the same time next week,
unless it rains and the weather is bleak.

Tom Binns

Precious Football

Watched by millions and idolised
these heroes for the masses provide
images of amusement, talent and skill
matches of determination and personal will,
keen and able, young or old
they are irreplaceable
until sold.

Nicholas Lester

Home from Home

The time had come to fly the nest,
moving city without the rest,
before I left there was one thing to do,
go and watch my favourite team in blue.

With the rivalry intense and the banter flying,
the enemy arrived which meant friendships dying,
for the 90 minutes you're red or blue,
to abstain is dangerous if you care for you.

As the crowds gathered at the ground,
the 'school of science' was filled with sound,
whether it's nerves, excitement or fear,
the way we feel we're glad to be here.

With bragging rights up for grabs,
opinions biased by groups of lads,
the players arrive to the Goodison Roar,
urging our heroes in blue to score.

With the atmosphere building and the old lady rocking,
anything but a win would be too shocking,
blind faith in our heroes we place our trust,
or our love for a week will be discussed.

So the time had come to fly the nest,
moving city without the rest,
thoughts of the blues will be there every day,
Goodison Park, I won't stray away.

Anthony Raftery

Football Day Out

Grab my scarf and head for the car,
going to see the best team by far,
the mighty Preston playing the scum,
it's a family affair, my brothers and my mum.

Listening to an interview with Nugent the skipper,
he's been my hero since I was a nipper,
we're bottom of the league but I don't care,
the refs robbed us twice, football's not fair.

I get to the ground and stick on a bet,
who will be first to put the ball in the net?
We go 1 nil down, I thought we might,
here come the nutters to start one more fight.

My mates joining in, he's lost his kids and his wife,
but these lads don't care, because FOOTBALL IS LIFE!!

Antony Pearse

Fanta- spursdom

I will always be Tottenham no matter how hard I try,
changing now would be living a lie.

Every week we flock to White Hart Lane,
the temple of experience, for victory or pain.

I sit in the stand with my Dad and my brother,
cheering on my team like no other.

From Sinton to Ginola, Berbatov to Postiga,
Spurs shape my day, in a very big way.

Now play up Arry and keep us up,
or go one better and win us the cup!

Samuel Van Gelder

Action Reaction

Every throw is a highlight
every pass from left to right
every organised defence that stands tight
that's what the fans want all day and all night.

Even though you have only your hands to play
it's one of the fastest sports they say
nobody will keep the ball all day
just watch the open display.

Now the ball is passed on wide
the striker breaks through but is punched aside
bruised from the fight he will heal in time
he is a striker and has nowhere to hide.

Kristian Sommer

Going to War

Two old foes,
three times they met,
a battle to represent,
the colour of their skin.

The white man's puppet,
Frazier was dubbed by Ali,
unpatriotic, Draft dodger,
was he?

Or were they both,
just two great champs,
exploited by motives,
and political camps.

To see who buckled first,
from the authority exerted,
these two powerful puppets,
were suspended and hurting.

Dean McAfee

Class of '99

Who remembers '99?
the year we marched in to Spain,
that Wednesday in May, I woke impatiently,
wishing I could fast forward to the game.

Six hours of school felt like torture,
so I said a prayer to heal my wounds,
from the classroom of Hell, to the field of Heaven,
is where my heroes would take centre stage.

with just seconds remaining on the referee's watch,
Beckham sailed the ball into the penalty box,
Sheringham jumped high to head the ball,
then time froze during Solskjaer's touch – a goal.

The final whistle and victory was ours,
for they say it was written in the stars.
that Thursday I woke a European champion,
ready to face Hell, once again.

Emmanuel Edet (Jnr)

A Red Goliath

A red goliath,
it's might unrivalled,
opponents come and leave disheartened,
before it they crumble.

It stands erect,
proud, strong, powerful,
relentless it attacks,
until the final whistle comes.

Its legend remains,
until this day,
it lives forever,
down Anfield way.

A tide of red,
a horde of passion,
the proud past,
and a golden future.

A collective heartbeat,
with a racing pulse,
voices calm the nerves,
it shall rejoice.

90 minutes end,
the goliath can now sleep,
to fight another night,
fame is at their feet.

Joe Rimmer

Testing, Testing.

I see them coming across the D,
their white jackets flashing as they stride forward,
I know they're coming for me,
I've done nothing wrong, please just let me be.

My heart is racing as they hand me the bottle,
they order me to do the deed,
results are back in 10 days,
please say they haven't caught me.

Kim Blythe

The Match

Saturday arrives after a long hard week,
the routine starts around ten,
out of bed and brush your teeth,
it's match day once again.

The stadium is on the horizon,
the smell of onion drifts up your nose,
supporters in their thousands,
isn't this where everyone goes?

Through the turnstile, up the stairs,
and into your regular seat,
familiar, warm and comfortable,
after you've had something to eat.

The announcer shouts out the eleven,
Alves, Tuncay – great,
anticipation is building,
everyone is on their feet.

Sometimes it's good,
sometimes it's bad,
but the outcome doesn't really matter,
win, lose or draw I'm glad.

For what matters is supporting that team in red 'n' white,
showing up in the wind and rain,
they may not be the best, but for sure,
I wouldn't follow any of the rest.

Luke Raine

Is This the End?

The sponsors tell us what to buy and why we should care,
premier league players model in their underwear,
they get into your brain, buy the watch and play the game,
the branding and the merchandise, it's all about the name.

Come sign for us, you get a car it's brand-new and it's flash,
but the players only care if it's that plus a house and cash,
grounds across the country are all starting to look the same,
all seated and no atmosphere, not all teams give you fame.

But spare a thought for Yeovil or Notts County,
tickets aren't expensive, virtually for free,
their grounds half empty, we hope this isn't the trend,
otherwise for lower league football, could this be the end?

Francesca Mayes

The Gift of Football

Together we go,
every other Saturday,
thousands join us.

Together we go,
just me and him,
a pint in the pub.

Together we go,
the football we enjoy,
a connection we make.

Together we go,
young and old,
Burnley Football Club.

Together we go.

Sam Marsden

Same Old, Same Old

Walking to the ground, scarves, shirts, cheers.
In the distance the lights, fans, chants.
The obligatory pre match meal, pie, peas, gravy.
Through the turnstile, the ticket, the stub, the squeeze.
Meeting with friends, fans, family.
Looking onto the hallowed turf, the aura, green grass, red seats.
It gets closer to three, nervousness, anxiousness, hope.
Kick off arrives, shouts screams, cries.
The wonderful winning goal, joy, jubilation, elation.
The whistle, Half Time, relive, discussion, options.
The equaliser, disappointment, anger, encouragement.
The whistle again Full Time, inquiries, debates, arguments.
Walking home rushing, pushing, jostling.
In the distance the same old sea of red, the same old fans, the same old,
routine.

Craig Cayton

Saturday Best

I don't remember the exact date,
on our way to a meeting with the neighbours,
around 12.00 we start acquiring courage,
in the place we know best.

Before kick-off we meet,
with lowered inhibitions we greet,
toasting the visitors,
in the way we know best.

Before we know it we've missed the game,
doesn't matter though,
we defended our colours until we drew claret,
we always give it our best,

Afterwards we ponder the question,
was it all worth it?
the collective reply, 'course it was,
it's the thing we do best.

Michael Lee

The Ball is My Shepherd

The ball is my shepherd, that I follow,
it guides me to great glory,
as I rise to head it home.

My divine strike, it doth restore the lead,
salvation be my goal,
for this in the ball I have great creed.

Through the darkness, the ball be my light,
forty-five minutes on a desert pitch,
versus evil I will fight.

They send in the cross, what be my fate?
dead and buried the result,
but I will rise again, one day.

Aled Bryon

Divided We Stand

A culture is in mayhem, a city is in mayhem,
we know what the problems are, so let's fight them,
there have been damages to the Scottish game,
the people have spoken, Gazza is to blame.

A nation is in turmoil, a city is in turmoil,
followers make it home; others make the soil,
children dying on the streets of Glasgow,
bigotry is to blame, let Gazza show.

A country is divided, a city is divided,
so many deaths, with sectarianism they collided,
something must happen, there must be changes,
Catholics and Protestants, fighting down the ages.

People are in chaos, a city is in chaos,
if we do not change our ways, God Save Us,
there is a future, there still is hope,
but how will Scotland cope?

Michael Hagan

A Long Road to Equality

McEnroe outspoken,
said the Williams girls weren't great,
Donald Trump offered a million,
to watch them seal Mac's fate.

But the battle of the sexes,
was not to be repeated,
Johnny Mac refused to play,
held fear of being defeated.

Bobby Riggs had no such fear,
he challenged King to a duel,
she brushed the old man aside in three,
and made him look a fool.

That battle back in '73,
was theatre over sport,
a show put on for the world to see,
and Bobby came up short.

But women still got little praise,
despite King's efforts best,
chauvinism rife, prize insufficient,
the women still oppressed.

The years passed by and still no equality,
the women's game looked fraught,
Wimbledon didn't want to share,
the men could not be caught.

The 80's brought a bombshell,
that society did not want dropped,
Billie Jean and Martina sprung,
and hopes of equality flopped.

Then finally, a break from tradition,
as the year 2007 came,
Wimbledon agreed to pay equal,
a first for the women's game.

So a battle of sorts concluded,
the pay issue brought to a head,
but Patriarchy reigns still,
sporting prejudice far from dead.

Jamie Renton

Peter the Great

Two teams from the north travel down to Croke Park,
the media awaits them to bite and to bark,
to slate them and tell them that they are not worthy,
but it falls on deaf ears as both teams are sturdy.

The pressure they face is what they expect,
they wish for acceptance and to gain respect,
by the time it's over it's what they've achieved,
and by Peter's face you can tell he's relieved.

The battle of Britain is now in the past,
the respect they gained it came quite fast,
the power has shifted on up to Tyrone,
accepted down south and no longer alone.

He's now commonly known as 'Peter the Great',
the man who was responsible for Tyrone's fate,
now long retired but good endings exist,
his picture remains to remind us of this.

Cormac has gone but we will remember,
that one fine day on the 1st of September,
he helped his team to lifting the Sam Maguire,
now he's gone off to somewhere much higher.

Eamon Cullen

One Moment of Madness

A great French talent who lit up the game,
but his act of violence was he to blame?
Provoked and abused by one silly fan,
the picture will tell you it got to the man.

Without even thinking he reacted so quick,
his response was to attack and throw a kick,
the incident that happened was over so fast,
but will never be forgotten or put in the past.

Football's reputation will never be the same,
what Eric did it brought much shame,
the media frenzied, he had let down his side,
the images were screened, world wide.

A footballing genius with his career in a toss,
to ban him from playing would have been a loss,
a great player remembered by an act of kung Fu,
innocent or guilty it's up to you?

Stephen Donnelly

An Alien's First Wimbledon

Acknowledgement to a godly presence,
as the gladiators head for battle.

A lofty emperor barks orders,
and demands quiet from the crowd.

The soldier strikes the orb hard at his enemy,
but cheers meet every failure to strike.

The gladiators refuel with great relief,
but their emperor returns them to their fruitless toil.

Their peaceful battle nears no end,
back and forth does not look like progress to me.

Duels punctured by a mesh divide,
and a shriek from an unearthly presence.

Moans and gasps as the crowd seek blood,
there's sweat and tears and roars of passion.

A winner emerges and salutes his foe,
the loser retreats to accept his fate.

But mercy is given and the cheers are loud,
these gladiators have earned their lives, say the crowd.

Andrew Holt

Eric the King

Eric Cantona rose to fame,
as he wonderfully graced the English game,
with his leadership, skill, flair and finesse,
he led Man United back to their best.

He was hailed by the fans as Eric the King,
though they did not know what lay within,
inside this man behind the brilliance and grace,
was something deeper, a lunacy, a rage.

On the 25th January 1995,
Cantona revealed what lay inside.
in a moment of madness he lashed out at a fan,
the consequence faced was a nine month ban.

Nine months later Cantona was back,
leading the line in United's attack,
he reached the pinnacle of his football dynasty,
a United legend, leaving behind him a legacy.

Kevin McAlynn

No Time Like the Present.

One hour to go,
by far the worst time,
the clock moving so slow,
my thoughts no where to go.

Working the pads,
not really hitting,
hearing the coach,
not really listening,
just let me out,
just let me at him.

The time has come for me to fight,
hoping my dreams are made tonight.

Finally, I get the nod.

Heart racing, stomach churning, head focused,
fist jabbing, music blasting, head focused.

Looking back it's blank,
from the dressing room to the ring,
no feelings, no vision, just one sound,
I hear from the back "Do it for Brighthouse"
God, I really didn't need that!

Head guard on,
mouth guard in,
enough talking,
enough training.
It's time.
It's time for business.

We get to the middle,
I've never seen this guy before,
an inch or two smaller,
4 kilo's heavier,
fat bastard, he's there for the taking.

I'm ready, I'm definitely ready.

First bell goes,
ding ding,
no sound like that,
no feeling like that.

Much of the first round a baffling blur,
I took one though, I took one hard,
a short sharp stab, to startle, to target.

Sweat and blood merge as one,
he thinks he's got me; he's chomping at the bit,
I saw that round out, don't really know how.

Am I ready? I think I'm ready.

Round two goes by,
again, not much is clear.

To the corner at the bell,
I've lost both rounds,
he's bigger, he's stronger,
I can't knock this guy out.

"Do it for Brighthouse"
I hear once more,
fuck this, Come on Jonny, it's now or never.

I'm ready for this; I've got to be ready.

All guns blazing, gung ho!!
getting the hands back up proved far too slow,
BOOM!!! right above the eye,
a river of red flowing at lighting pace,
my eye's stinging like I've been hit with mace.

I tell them I'm fine,
it falls on deaf ears,
over my head it flies,
angelic and innocent, pure white,
the towel, I'm done!

Weirdly, I now feel the pain.

Eye throbbing, nose killing, head punished,

hands stinging, torso aching, head punished.

Takes my record to 0 and 2,
lessons learned, decisions left to rue.

Next time I will be ready, I will definitely be ready.

Jonathan Adamson

Heroes

I am a footballer and I am a hero,
a wealth of values just waiting to be made...

Striker, midfielder or defender,
a new day and yet another agenda.

My on-field exploits send witnesses to fever,
put me on par with the over achiever.

Family, nightclub, extra hours on the field,
no segment of existence remains unpeeled.

My extra curricular activities screened just like a soap,
both strengths and flaws sourced as figments of hope.

Mind, spirit and a familiar face,
no grudges held to the next in my place.

My contemporary image has the whole world won,
step aside to a successor for their time in the sun.

Moral, exemplary and rebel without a cause,
every characteristic provides the keys to new doors.

My existence defined by an alien being,
forever reliant on some blinking and some seeing.

I am a footballer and I am a hero,
a wealth of values just waiting to be made...

Tom Hyde

Artistic Gymnastics

It is an art which cannot be drawn, or painted,
without using a brush, an image is created.

They glide, gracefully across the floor,
as critical eyes watch in amazement.

Carefully crafted, each move brings points,
awesome power, make the audience feel human.

Bones broken, muscles ripped, or even a tear,
they risk their life; our deception for their art.

Neil Randell

My Dream, My Memory

Can a gymnast dream of glory at the age of six?
Such a blur, a new sport is being embraced.

Visions of the apparatus and the tiny people that use them,
how do they craft their bodies in such a way I ask?

My turn, I give it a go,
my heart beating faster, what if I fail.

To a butterfly in the wilderness,
it appears so effortless.

Forward rolls turn into a forward Arabian,
as time seems to be the real teacher.

Sore muscles, black eyes and bruises are the norm,
“...how do you expect to achieve anything if you don't push yourself?”

One competition followed another,
each creating new ambitions for me and my mother,

my companion for each event,
supporting in both the red and blue corner.

Medals produced trophies, soon I was the talk of the town,
local paper would cause a smile rather than a frown,

but each day made its new punishment,
my body shouting for a rest,

secondary school came,
and not too soon,

by the age of twelve, gymnastics became something of the past,
something to reflect on,

now it lives in only my mind,
this is my greatest memory.

Neil Randell

Final Whistle

Football is the game of kings
football is the game that brings
people together from all walks of life
who share the highs and who share the strife.

Fans pay their money so they belong
and sing and chant their team songs
but some of these songs show little respect
to certain minorities we need to protect.

Whether the issues are gender or race
football's now longing for a fresh face
to combat the hooligans who go for the beer
they don't support football, just fear.

Football was seen to enrich body and mind
now it is viewed as a way to unwind
and let the stresses of daily life go
for ninety minutes, until the whistle is blown.

Treve Whitford

Aretians RFC

The air is greasy thick with the smell of menthol,
the tape helps define the wrinkles on their forehead.

Time spent in the club bar seems to have swallowed the belly buttons of
many,
but you could not tell from their faces.

For one day a week they are warriors, sergeants of the second Battalion
Aretians RFC.

Suddenly the first of the rallying cries is sounded,
Oggy, Oggy, Oggy, Oi, Oi, Oi,

An adrenaline charge ripples through the air and blasts the face of the
young,
boy in the corner, nestled next to his dad clutching the water bottle rack.

Let's go A's, comes the call and a heard of giants exit the dressing room
and stomp towards the field.

As both teams steadily ascend the hill towards the pitch the opposing
gladiators shake hands.

The captain addresses the referee,
good afternoon Sir.

The monsters with green teeth huddle for one last issuing cry,
A's A's A's bellows across the pitch, the game begins.

The teams collide, a crashing of bones,
a floundering of bodies.

The little boy watches nervously, excitedly,
his stern faced father a battering ram through the opposition defence.

The game wears on,
the pace is taking its toll, the old Battalion begins to flag,
they are losing their discipline and deviating in order to win.

“Hands on the floor ref” cries the opposing number ten,
“no way” says my father sending him crashing to the floor, with a single
blow.

A penalty is given.
A stern warning handed out.

The opposing team decides to go for goal,
if they convert it they win,
the players remain silent,
he’s against the wind,
the ball arrows slowly, but drifts to the right,
Arentian’s victorious, they put up a fight.

A tunnel of handshakes to conclude,
as the players exit from the trenches.

“Well played Dad” I say to my father,
“thanks son, what do you want for tea?” replies the panting old banker.

Benjamin Pellant

Pre- Party From Across the Pond

Wow!
A fantastically awesome rush.

As I park up my car people are jubilant,
eating and drinking together in the same conformist dictatorship like a
uniform.

I look around and see people exchanging crumpled pieces of paper
for headwear or scarfs.

Everybody's moving,
I hear a cry from a far,
GAME TIME!

I sheepishly follow the crowd, towards
a magnificent piece of architecture and engineering.

I conform and wait in line before a single 'beep' confirms my eligibility
and I enter the stadium.

I'm in my seat,
no I'm not.
I'm standing!

Is this a serious sporting event?
Or a party?

Suddenly the party intensifies
120,000 drunk, full-up, party animals
go crazy making excited and expectant sounds.

I'm slowly making the transformation,
from rational harmless human being,
to harmless, happy, conformist troop.

Our team bursts out of the tunnel,
we go wild!
now the real party starts.

Richard English

Accidental... Honest?

A Canadian forward, an English centre-half
a sly elbow just for a laugh
the crumbled individual, down holding his face
Iain Hume of Barnsley, had been put in his place.

A usual type of challenge
seen on a pitch day to day
Chris Morgan's dirty elbow
meant Hume could no longer play.

Just a yellow card for Morgan
which seemed lenient for the act
a fractured skull for Hume
such was the brutal impact.

Emergency treatment for the forward
and a huge scar across his head
Hume wants to get back playing
but at the moment, he's lucky not to be dead.

Andrew Cottrell

The Men's 50m Butterfly, Heat 2

Lined up, with military precision,
Lane, by lane, by lane, by lane, by lane.
Crouched, tensed, waiting,
your head trapped in a cage of
black rubber and plastic,
mind and feet on a knife's edge,
a bomb ready to
EXPLODE.

And they are away...
flying through the air,
pointed, elegant, powerful,
only for an instant.

Air turns to water, inch by inch,
still holding the frame. Solid.
And for a split second,
peace.

Silently moving through the clear,
dark trees underneath reach into the blue,
but I'm trapped,
lined in, only forwards.
My chest burns, and my lungs burst at the seams
as they scream for air.

And, as quickly again, the race starts
here.

John Crossley

Jackie

Walking out on to the field
a man stands above the rest
overcoming the barrier
which will show the rest.

The crowd is tense and uneasy
a stranger in their game
how could a black man
take part in their beautiful game.

The dodgers broke a trend
and gave him a chance
but the fans were less willing
shouting abusive chants.

The first step he took
an instant hero was born
the black community saw
a saviour to fight the civil war.

The first year he played
he won rookie of the year
showing his baseball skills
at Ebbett's playing field.

Now he's gone forever
but his legend still lives on
the number 42
reminds us where we're from.

Philip Wicinski

What is Art?

Art is the future, art is the past,
enabling collective memory, images that last,
what defines 'good art' is hard to say,
it may be personal and could change from day to day.

"This particular painting that you see",
"depicts sport,"
"football,"
"from a time in history".

It's a snapshot, a fragment in time,
post war northern England, footballers, smoking chimneys and railway line.
Affected by war and in industrial times,
their works team differentiated by the colour of their lines.

A race some may say,
nothing has changed, even today,
the politics, the issues the national unrest,
the English, the British, still globally the best.

The message is not that clear what he is trying to say,
But the resilient footballer he successfully portrays,
Art can say so much, there's no doubt about it,
The artist's intention? For you to enjoy it.

Zoe Horton

David and Goliath '86

The story of David and Goliath,
resumed in 86,
David was a springy athletic man,
Goliath was the beast between the sticks.

Neither figure clenched their fists,
or drew out a killing blade,
David just slapped the ball in the net,
and a cheating example was made.

Tariq Elrayes

Together

The Hallowed Turf, the diamond field,
one swing of a bat and their fate is sealed,
while many people stand and stare,
it is those involved who are laid to bare.
Their heart, their soul, their skills on show,
the good old baseball we have come to know,
for when you look past the skins disguise,
you see we are all same, behind those eyes.
One dream, one team, united in pride,
overcoming all obstacles, refusing to hide.

John Johnston

A Moment of Glory

Body on the line
all for the prize
weave my way to the front of the line
why do I do this?
why do I risk?
family, friends
peer through open fingers
barriers so close
claustrophobic in this fast moving box
Champagne and mobile phones stream past
forget that,
I focus,
my love
my passion
but I want to be free
told what to do, told what to say
finish the race
find the rubber the day's not over
might be too light
might get disqualified
smile for the cameras
will they find us out?
can it be hid?
all for a moment of glory.

Sadhbn O'Shea

Spectating

Spectators sit or stand and shout
while the young ones wonder
what all the fuss is about
forever longing to be part of the game
if I could join in would life ever be the same?
For me that chance will never come
my effort ended long ago
but I will never stop wishing that
I could have been part of the show.

Paul Ray

We Must Take a Stand

We must take a stand
we must do it now

with our heads bowed
but our message loud and proud

with our fists in the air
let the world know we care

from the cotton fields
to the track and field

from the shackles of race
to a 200 meter race

with our shoes off
and our socks pulled aloft

with the beads round our neck
and our message in check

from the OPHR
to the world afar

we must take a stand
we must do it now.

Sean Molyneux

Revision and Football

The day was coming to a close,
and revision was taking its toll,
the champion's league final about to start,
ready to steal the show.

Revision was no rival for the epic of the match,
as one goal, two goals, three, four, five, six,
revision was struggling to get in the mix.
The exam came and failure was its name,
was it worth it, this toll of revision?

Daniel Dill

Player's Talk

Rain and mud
with the occasional thud,
sweat pours from their heads
there's no time for a breather.

Great goal earlier, what a screamer
a two goal lead may be enough,
just hold it together at the back
and we'll get our season back on track.

I've never seen the stadium so full
there must be at least three hundred watching us,
they may be silent, that's a shame
let's give'em a reason to shout our name.

Oh no, blackout, a late tackle I'm down
really hurt that one, but...
no time for rolling around
I pick myself up from the slimey ground.

I'm in the box now seeking a third
on my head and I'll seal the points,
tremendous cross, I've got my third
final whistle and the crowd applaud.

We have to leave quick, the groundsman wants us out,
big kick off tomorrow, ... same fixture, but,
this time, instead of three hundred
it'll be thirty thousand.

Jamie King

Cassius

The flash of the cameras and the roar of the crowd,
in a world of his own, on top of the cloud,
but is this man the Greatest there has been?
Is he truly the best the world has ever seen?

A hero to millions for his in-ring skills,
his big money wins helped him pay the bills,
but his career was marred by conflict and adversity,
his titanic struggle against Governmental policy.

He had captured gold at the Olympics in Rome,
but was disillusioned with the antics at home,
an unjust war being fought on foreign soil,
and outrage at civil unrest brought to the boil.

So he refused to fight and defend his land,
for all his people who were dealt a rough hand,
as the World Champion his reign didn't last long,
because he "ain't got no quarrel with no Vietcong".

But boxing and politics shouldn't mix and Ali was a great,
though the purists and his opponents often met him with hate,
some couldn't stand him being arrogant and brash,
when he would taunt his opponent and talk his trash.

His in-ring skills though are not to be denied,
many succumbed to him no matter how hard they tried,
as the mighty Liston, Frazier and Foreman all fell,
Ali stood tall with his tales to tell.

If Ali could take on even the biggest opponents and win,
it's no wonder he would flash his signature grin,
and though some may sigh and say it's Sugar Ray,
for many, the Greatest is Cassius Clay.

Alastair Bunker

The Miracle of Istanbul

A city clings to the Mersey, defiantly clutching its history,
an iconic football club stands, representative,
torn by tragedy yet drenched in triumph,
a people's love, of labour, of love.

Alas, the plot is neglected!
a pool of passion, a club schooled in greatness,
yet languishing in the midst of mediocrity,
succumbing to the weight of legacy.

Decades pass and then, the chance to shine returns,
Istanbul's arena hosts the final battle,
a league of champions at its summit,
the audacious light of hope flickering, guiding.

Expectant armies descend across a wasteland,
to glimpse the spectacle that stands alone,
sound erupts, hailing folk on foreign fields,
the prize glistening in the light, its handles wide as if to bless.

Yet Milanese foes strike first, not once but thrice,
seemingly snuffing Scouse light, and with it hope?
The interval carves the cruel spectacle and its script,
tearful reflection and prayerful song exposed.

And then, with destiny prescribed,
an extreme excess of events unfolds,
a bullfighter's desire conducts revenge,
the captain leads, with head, and arms and heart.

A golden sky unveils the storms end,
the thrice swollen net now Italian territory,
hysteria yields only to realisation,
as six miraculous minutes define a season, an era, a dynasty.

The pendulum of momentum swings with finality,
the moment of truth ripples in red rhythm.
Promise and practice re-aligned through victory,
pain reversed, a response constructed from tradition.

The spoils held aloft, amidst panoramic pandemonium,
old big ears now deafened, retires to its home,
a quintet of victories permits ownership,
proudly defiant, the Liverbird perches aloft, singing: *Campioni d'Europa!*

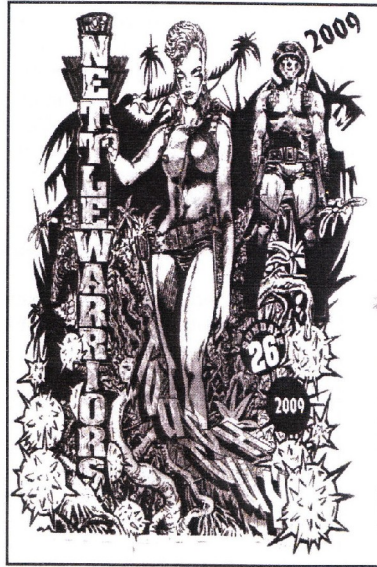
Joel Rookwood

Mr Mouse and the Tough Guy Challenge



**Guy Gorilla
Your Role Model**

2009 July 26th



2010 Jan 31st



**“In life, curiosity is your
strongest ally”**

Bruvva Toughigus

Financial Security

Reproduced with kind permission from Billy Wilson, aka...

Mr Mouse,
@ Tough Guy,
Mr Mouse Manor,
Valley of Beautiful Dreams,
WV6 7HB
www.toughguy.co.uk

For 23 years from 1976 to 1999 we did the hard, hard slog of every Friday or Saturday driving a collection of donkeys, ponies and small animals to town centres, to school fetes, to gymkhanas, to village days, to help poor areas of towns, to help the miners' children during the strikes of the 1970s.

Every Sunday opening of the sanctuary to the public charging a quid with a cup of tea and some home made scone for another quid, selling itsy-bitsy souvenirs.

It did not work for us, it worked for Redwings who actually came here in 1984 to learn, then in 1992 to teach us their ways, but still the necessary funds did not materialise.

What we did realise was that the massive input of our team of 14 permanents dedicated volunteers; Doreen, Nora, June, Jacqui, Leigh, Dawny, Kevin, Barbara, Ernie, Alan and Wilsons Celia, Verity, William and Billy plus volunteer part-timers needed to be better employed where a substantial income could be secured not only for the foreseeable future but in permanence.

Knowing that I had once possessed good communication skills in business which I gave up in 1981 to devote myself to good causes and the sanctuary.

Knowing that in 1977 I had a vision to change the world with bringing the family of man together to jog. Thus the horse sanctuary had started with funds which I raised by bringing Red Rum to town to kick start the plight of hundreds of sweet ponies travelling horrendous journeys to be eaten on the continent of Europe.

Knowing that in 1987 the Western Orbital Motorway Route was earmarked to chop right through our land and devastate the grazing land of 200 horses and ponies living at the sanctuary.

Knowing that to beat the motorway I used my commercial skills to build a business in the path of the motorway to ensure that adequate compensation would be paid.

Knowing that my skills at organising dozens of jogging events around this district and around England to fund my needs of income to fund the sanctuary.

Knowing that my presence was surely needed on the sanctuary leased lands (now Mr Mouse Manor) the family home to enable everything to grow into profit.

Knowing that I ceased my travellings, severed my ties with hundreds of jogging events and giving each one to local communities to continue for their village funds. (Some are still going each year with great forward funds supporting church groups and youth clubs).

Knowing all of this, I created Tough Guy™, an outrageous torturous jog through brambles, nettles, wild woodland and around the horses pastures and of course in the path of the motorway.

Knowing this, we also built a Rare Breed Farm Park to help attract visitors. Also the love of my life which was bringing my children up to learn the veterinary and grooming needs of ponies, donkeys, grazing sheep, pot belly pigs, and all the other smaller animals.

Knowing that I had created a dream which in my own childhood I had not enjoyed because of my drunken father, made me more determined to become champion of the children with Seldom Seen Fathers.

Knowing that this philosophy and fact were written into the constitution of the Horse Sanctuary at the very beginning because I could see that horses could Help Us Get the Kids off the Streets.

Knowing that in 1977 the Government stopped (shelved) the plans for the Western Orbital Route, I immediately applied for planning permission for a Cemetery Burial Ground in the path of the motorway where the animal loving supporters could make their lat will and testament that no motorway

could ever dig up their bones which had been devotedly buried to allow trees to grow on their remains to feed the birds and the field life. Also that their pets could be buried with them.

Knowing that planning permission was granted, three wonderful people are buried on the Beautiful Valley hillside. My mother, Miss Iris (Kelly) Potter and her beloved horse Tom, and Joan Halstead who was Matron at Biggin Hill in the 1939/45 war.

Knowing that I had secured the land, I now set about making up the ten years we had lost in planning the sanctuary to be free and away from the motorway.

There was no compensation from the Government so we had to start from scratch. Celia and I had mortgaged heavily and purchased 70 acres of land below the motorway path. My great friend Chris Brasher had donated £7000 to fence the land safe to let horses, donkeys and ponies to graze peacefully. With the family estates now out of the clutches of compulsory purchase pittance offered by the Government for motorway building, we took stock of our situation.

Knowing that the sanctuary could not afford the mortgage repayments of the land which in 1991/1997 recession was very difficult to maintain and the bank breathed heavily down our necks with menacing tones of selling us up.

Knowing all of these problems, Celia and Billy Wilson decided that we would turn Tough Guy™ into a world exclusive event so desired that the world would beat a path to our doorway. With this we tucked the mortgage under our belt.

We had to make the hardened heart decision that we would have to give up the fundraising activities of the Horse Sanctuary and concentrate on getting the competitors of Tough Guy™ to do the fundraising if we in turn built the event to be the Safest Most Dangerous Test of Mental and Physical Ordeals, in the world.

Knowing that my heart's desire was to donate that newly acquired land to the sanctuary so that it would be here for all times.

Suddenly 2008 has brought bank crisis and recession. Our plans have to be reviewed for an extra year or two.

Knowing all of this we still set out in 2009 to pledge that we will welcome more donkeys, ponies and horses to come and live in this wonderful peaceful valley of retirement for equines.

I have enjoyed every minute and give thanks that Horse has taught me great patience and love and enjoyment of simple pleasures.

Ever smiling,

Billy Wilson.

Hospitalisation Moscow Style CASUALSKI

28th May 2007. Botkin Hospital, Moscow.

Written through sheer boredom...

Unofficial Report by Head of Delegation:

Paul Hall

Our trip to Moscow for the Gymnastics Grand Prix took an unexpected turn for the worse when, on qualifications day, Daniel Keatings peeled from the bar on the swing immediately prior to his normal dismount. Heavy impact on his knees was followed by a sharp arching of his back to finish face down and static under the apparatus. I immediately feared a spinal injury and told Daniel to stay completely still as we waited for the medics to arrive.

First impressions of Russian emergency services were very good. Paramedics arrived within seconds and carried out a standard protocol of minimal movement and formal safety checks for the injured gymnast. After around 30 minutes Daniel was immobilised and expertly transferred onto a stretcher where I hoped that hospital checks would show nothing more than soft tissue injury. It was at this point that things started to go a little downhill. A waiting ambulance yielded a very excited driver who seemed keen to be part of the action. Once inside we began an amazing journey at breakneck (wasn't funny at the time) speed, sirens wailing to the nearest hospital. I must stress at this point that Moscow roads are not like you and I are used to and 60 miles per hour of weaving through potholes would have ensured a severe injury to Keatings had he been in any real danger. At this point I contacted mission control and spoke to the omnipresent Mr Green:

'Paul, I can't hear a word you're saying, there's a bloody ambulance siren wailing in the background.'

'That's because we're in it Steve'. The usual unflappable reply came:

'Everything ok?'

'At the moment yes but if we hit another pothole at 60 I'll need x rays as well as Dan.'

'Don't worry Paul I'm on the case'

Dan was comfortable and unsure as to what all the fuss was about. He had slight pain but felt able to walk, out of the question, of course, until all

danger was ruled out. Hindsight now tells me that an emergency ambulance drive through Moscow is a far more reliable test of Spinal Cord damage than any MRI scan; still moving on arrival and you should be back in the gym to complete your dismount.

We arrived at the Botkin hospital which I said to Andrei sounded like a bacterial infection, and our stay leads me to the conclusion that it was thus named after the discovery of numerous strains of Botkin virus on the patient wards. Laurel and Hardy unloaded Daniel, at one point tipping the trolley on two wheels and nearly dispatching him onto a flower bed. We take for granted easy access in GB but I can tell you that bumps, stairs, corners and kerbs made our path to ITU a treacherous one. Dan remained in high spirits despite the situation: 'It's like being at Alton Towers'. Yeah, right.

Andrei said we were lucky to go to ITU as we would be straight in and x rayed as a top priority. I made comparisons with the NHS and praised the efficiency of the medical service. ITU turned out to be a small room with 3 beds. On two of these beds were laid semi naked and very large men looking close to death. Daniel was slotted alongside and appeared rather nervous:

'Are those guys dead?'

'Don't be silly' I replied, checking the tiny infrequent chest movements that ensured they were clinging to life. I asked one of the cleaners when the doctor would arrive:

'I am the doctor- put him over there'. She looked like a russian version of a Carry On matron- Hatski Jacques we decided to call her. Andrei had to gown up and wear a face mask in order not to spread any unwanted germs. I suspect that there are not many unwanted germs known to man that didn't already exist in a room covered in broken tiles, bloody stains on broken tiles and used bandages piled in corners. I began to tell Daniel about field hospitals in the Crimean War but he was looking a little perturbed.

X rays followed. Not your usual stand in a room or behind a screen and beware radiation jobbies, this machine was wheeled up to the bed and everybody on the ward was effectively nuked. Five shots later and I swear that Andrei was positively glowing with health. Efficiency made up for lack of hygiene and a few minutes later the cleaner/doctor/radiologist returned with the photos to confirm that there were at least two compression fractures and they could not rule out any impingement of the spinal cord. It was difficult to convey that Daniel had had stress fractures the year before and that these might be old injuries, so Hatski decided to err on the side of caution and admit Daniel to a ward. Initial prognosis was for one month

supine, one month vertical, a couple of months in a corset, and then slow rehabilitation. My heart sank.

More tests followed. Blood was taken and a urine sample was asked for:

‘Dan do you need to pee?’

‘No, why?’

‘Because the nice lady needs a sample.’

‘But I can’t go.’

‘She says that she will take some anyway so please try.’

‘How?’

Andrei pleaded with the nurse in Russian. My limited understanding of the language recognized something along the lines of: ‘If he can’t pee I’ll have to insert a catheter and it will be quite painful.

‘She will do a small injection and take some but don’t worry it hardly hurts at all’ said Andrei, avoiding eye contact.

A few minutes and some high pitch screams later and Hatski emerged with a sadistic grin and a vial of yellow liquid. Another patient arrived, a car crash victim with a severely bruised face, battered body, and nowhere near conscious. He was placed a few feet from Dan while the nurse tended to other patients. At one point I thought about reminding the doctor that the bottle of coke that was sellotaped to the leg of the stretcher was close to overflowing with urine from one of the large men, but a nonchalant glance suggested he had other more pressing matters on his mind. Andrei called across from Dan’s bedside:

‘Paul, is that man dead?’

I looked at our poor car crash victim and saw that the tiny chest movements had disappeared and a nurse was busily disconnecting tubes and removing dressings. The very absence of relatives, friends, and the living gave this unit the feel of a morgue and Daniel was now ready to wheel himself back to normality. I called mission control:

‘Steve, somebody just died in the next bed to us and the doc thinks Dan needs at least 8 months to recover.’

‘Don’t panic, Paul. Tell the nurse I need to let John see those X rays, can she fax me?’

‘Steve, the technology of this building stretches to coke bottle catheters. If I ask her for a fax she may well think I’m offering a chance for a new relationship in the west.’

By now the deceased had been some twenty minutes stiff and two burly porters that could have been on day release from the local jail arrived with a knackered stretcher. At least we’ll be rid of him, I thought. But to my horror

they proceeded to load Daniel up ready for transportation to our ward for the night. Had it been the dead man I think they may have been a little more considerate with the corners. A few hundred metres later and we fetched up at ward 27e, one of many hundreds of featureless blocks that peppered the massive hospital complex. As we walked in a security guard pointed at our footwear and stated that we needed to wear plastic overshoes for hygiene purposes. I put them on, happy to assist with maintaining sanitation, and handed over twenty roubles in payment.

It turned out that our plastic overshoes were, by far, the cleanest items in the entire hospital as we proceeded, with trepidation to our room for the night. The floor was littered with broken tiles, decades of grime lay untouched and used swabs peppered the floor alongside syringes, dressings and unemptied bedpans. We passed a room with 6 beds cramped together. Of the occupants 3 were smoking in bed while the others had limbs propped at alarming angles with no curtains for privacy whatsoever. I was grateful to arrive in a single room where Dan was lifted onto a bed with a piece of metal for a mattress to ensure he stayed flat. I tried not to notice the bloodstains on the sheets, nor the mosquitoes that were feasting on endless supplies of food sources, and told our boy that he would be out very soon. A nurse brought in a bedpan and mumbled that we were too late for food so Andrei and I disappeared to a shop for some supplies. Thirty minutes later and Dan was gorging on crisps, chocolate and bread with sausage. Peeing was a challenge for our nervous patient but he managed to fill a pot with minimal movement. There was nothing more we could do and, at around midnight on the Friday we told Dan we would go and I'd return first thing in the morning.

'What if I need something?' Said Dan

'Use your buzzer to call the nurse' I replied.

We both soon realised the lack of a buzzer and simply grinned and hoped for the best.

'Be strong old bean, we'll get you out of this as soon as possible.' I tried to be positive. Keatings without a PSP, MP3, PS3 and TV for more than a few hours was an extremely difficult thing to contemplate but we had no choice: 'Maybe you can read a book?' I ventured. The puzzled look confirmed my suspicions and I left with some relief, mistakenly returning my plastic boots which I should have reused for the duration. We returned to the Hotel Cosmos at 1am and I curled into the fresh linen, sniffed the clean white sheets and thanked god for small mercies.

Day Two:

After a 1 hour journey involving 3 trains and a long walk I found myself back at Botkin, looking up at the dirty walls of ward 27E. If this is a hospital, I will never commit a crime in Russia. The mere thought that a prison could be of a lower standard formed a very effective deterrent in my mind. I purchased more plastic shoes for 20 roubles and resolved to be as positive as possible for Dan's sake.

'Morning, sleep well?' I breezed.

'When are we going?' came the reply. I knew this was going to be a tough day. Dan's spirits soon lifted when I unpacked the bag to reveal clean underpants, a toothbrush and paste, and, most importantly, his life support system in the shape of a PSP. Dan grinned, hooked up and drifted off into game-world.

There are approximately 3520 tiles on the corridor of Ward 27e. Of these, around 70 are broken or absent, which amounts to some 2 percent of the total. These and other games kept me occupied for the 12 hours of mindnumbing incarceration that many convicts endure with similar results. Fortunately, I had brought The Times from England and I killed the dead bits between tile counting by tackling the killer Sudoku while Dan took on the rest of the World at pro soccer. Breakfast arrived- a piece of stale bread with a wedge of cheese. I think the ward sister was also the cook and I couldn't help noticing the remnants of last night's feast were still on the cabinet by the bed, along with a full pot of pee. I vowed never to diss the NHS again. The toilet could not flush since the cistern had no lid and showed that there was no water in the tank, only a ball-cock languishing like a marooned whale. I saw no toilet paper and made a note to bring some if ever I was in this situation again. I needed to pee so, taking a deep breath, I shut the door and commenced the operation. The light was broken and, in pitch darkness I formed a mental picture and aimed at the pan. I'd have sat down girl style but there was, of course, no seat and I sensed things moving around that area. Relieved, I opened the door to find I was not the best of shots, which didn't really matter since there seemed to be a host of previous patients who had had similar experiences. I wrung out my trousers and went back to cheer Dan with the news that our insurance company who were, incidentally, brilliant, had sourced a medical clinic for an MRI scan and possible salvation.

We waited for 8 hours. At around 3 the nurse came round with dinner.

'What is it?' I asked in broken Russian.

'Cabbage Soup and meat cutlet Kiev style' came the pleasant reply.

'Could we possibly have a knife, fork, and spoon?' I ventured hesitantly.

'Nyet.' I had insulted her. It seemed you had to bring your own. Now drinking soup and eating macaroni is hard enough without cutlery, but when you have a spinal injury it becomes an insurmountable challenge. Fortunately the nurse had recognised our predicament and returned with the only utensil she could find- an 8 inch carving knife she had used for the bread. I thanked her graciously and tried a small piece of cutlet.

'Do you have this in England?' she asked pleasantly.

'Yes, but we call them fatballs and hang them on trees for our sparrows' I replied, hoping that her lack of language would prevent her from spitting in our breakfast for revenge. Dan had now beaten most of the world at pro football and was getting rsi of the index finger, and I was well on the way to completing my first ever Killer Sudoku.

At 5pm an ambulance arrived and we had another Alton Towers experience to the private medical clinic for our MRI. The new hospital was, thankfully, to western standards, and I relished the cleanliness and sanitation that we take for granted. Dan was whisked in for the scan and, despite my concerns about losing his life support system for over an hour he pulled through and the PSP benefited from a much needed charge. Results were ready immediately and an apathetic doctor tapped out a report, in Russian, based on the scan. My limited language got the gist that they seemed to be old fractures, stable, and with no oedema, so our hopes were immediately raised:

'Can you fax these across to our insurance company in England so we can go home?'

'Nyet.' No faxes possible at weekends. The ambulance driver was fortunately on our side and Dan was reloaded for a tour of Moscow sights with the facility to fax on Saturday. We soon found a company that could translate the report and send it to the medics in England to make an assessment on fitness to fly. I was jubilant, an end in sight and I convinced Dan that we were going back to 27e for a few minutes to wait for the agency to ring with some good news.

At about 10pm it was fairly set that Dan was staying for a second night. I plugged in the game, smiled thinly and vowed to return the next morning.

'What if I have to take a crap?' Dan's forehead was contorted and I sensed the time was near.

'Use the bedpan, old boy. Slide it underneath and knock one out, no questions asked.'

'What about toilet paper?' he implored.

I knew the answer would be another nyet so I left him a napkin from yesterday's restaurant and prayed that the food was keeping him solid.

'I'll be back. I promise.' His survival instinct took over and he went back to the task of beating Brazil in the World Cup. I returned to the comfort of a clean bed and the knowledge that Louis was fourth in the final. Later that evening I was hit by the shattering news that the insurance company, on reading the report, had decided to fly a British nurse out to assess the situation before returning with Daniel on a stretcher. The whole process would take around a week provided they could find a flight. I told the insurance that I would stay but they had to find an alternative hospital. It was with great relief that the next phone call was to say that they were securing a bed at the American Hospital- things were looking up.

Day 3

I arrived back at around 8am, purchased my plastic boots, exchanged a knowing glance with the security guard and tipped him another 20 roubles. For some reason all the patients have their injuries spray painted in vivid colours, either to remind the staff where it's hurting, or as some form of iodine antiseptic. Either way it led to the surreal spectacle of seeing semi clad adults wandering around with clumsy attempts at graffiti adorning their bodies. Dan seemed happy and pain free and, when I prised the PSP from his grasp, was delighted to hear about the imminent transfer to western hygiene. In two days nobody at all had been in to assess his condition or check his non existent notes. It was clear that the staff had neither the knowledge nor resources to deal with a spinal injury.

'Did you take a dump?'

Dan nodded and glanced at the soiled bedpan, still by the bed some twelve hours later, along with yesterday's remnants of dinner. He had been resourceful and used my copy of The Times when the napkin proved inadequate.

'Dan, you used my Killer Sudoku page and I hadn't finished it.'

'I was desperate, what could I do?' came the reply.

'Use the bloody business section that I left, that's what' I answered crossly. The urge to pick out the crumpled print and finish the final few numbers stayed just a few seconds before I resigned myself to the lost cause. I read the FTSE a few more times and scratched some more paint from the windowsill. At about midday the rest of the GB Team arrived to see Dan and say goodbye before their flight home that evening. They tried to make light of the fantastic banquet, Casino, Pole Dancing Club, and trip to Red Square but I think that Dan smelt a rat. The boys certainly did and the squalid conditions soon had them bidding a hasty farewell before heading back to the comforts of their own homes.

At last, at around 6pm another ambulance turned up and Dan was manhandled into the back, strapped to a bed and transported the 20 kilometres to the European Hospital. Now if some of the Russian potholes were to appear in British roads I'm sure they would have 4 or 5 cones around them with the backside of a labourer poking out the top as he tries to fill it in. We fell in at least 3 on the way to the European Hospital and I became sure that Daniel's back was fine when we started, but could easily be broken over the next few miles.

We arrived to a plush waiting room and were immediately escorted to a genial doctor who read the report and perused the scan. Within seconds he had reached his conclusion:

'Why are you here?'

'What do you mean?' I asked.

'This report shows no new injuries, all of the fractures are old, stable, and safe' he replied.

'You mean.....' I hesitated incredulously.

'Sit up please.' Dan sat up.

'Walk please'. Dan rose up Lazarus like and made his first steps in over 50 hours.

'You are fine. You can go'.

I could hardly contain my excitement and phoned mission control to action the next step. Amazingly, Steve was unobtainable, as was John Aldridge. I phoned the insurance company and got their medics to speak to this wonderful man who could make sense of the situation. Finally, after two days we got the all clear to fly. I looked at my watch. We had 90 minutes to make the scheduled flight that our teammates would be on. Gavin at Global Direct was happy for us to try but was still insisting on ambulance transfers in case of problems.

'Listen Gavin, It will be more comfortable to ride in a chieftain tank across a ploughed field than lay in a Russian Ambulance, believe me'. Gavin saw sense and relented. We jumped in a taxi and screamed off to Sheremetyevo where we met our Team, ecstatic to see us.

The final challenge was getting an upgrade to business class. Global Direct had sorted this with Aeroflot and, armed with a six figure reference number I approached the ticket desk:

'Nyet' came the now usual response.

'po chemoo' I replied haughtily.

'We have a reservation but I don't see the payment' replied the babooshka, sullen and glum. I removed the MRI scan. I pointed to the 3 fracture points

and stressed the need for the patient to be stretched out. She replied in rapid Russian - I think the response went something like:
'You can't fool me, dickhead. Those are old fractures, stable, and with no oedema. Now show us your money or bugger off.'

I turned on my heels and joined the queue for economy, just happy to be going home.

Paul Hall.
May 2007.