

Charity Football Tournament

Market Road Sports Centre

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Writes Garry Garris

All the blood, sweat and tears shed in their weekly training sessions paid off as ActionAid FC finished third in the annual charity football tournament.

Having suffered a series defeat at the hands of Unicef, it was a much changed ActionAid team, that lined up for the tournament made up, of staff, staff partners, donors, and friends.

With roll on roll off subs, and a seven a side, five minutes each was format , playing duties were shared by *Fraser, Grad, Phillip, Andy (c), Jesse, Richard ~Pepe~, Paul, Quan, and Gus.*

With manager John Hunt having just read the autobiographies, of Frank McLintock, Kenny Sansom, and George Graham, there was a very Arsenal feel to ActionAid as they lined up in the Dusty Bin formation of 3-2-1.

ActionAid played to their strengths built around a solid defensive trio , marshalled superbly by Gradleigh Ruderham, the only outfield player to stay on the pitch through all of the group stages.

The pressing tactics worked effectively as after struggling early doors ActionAid beat CPRE one nil with a debut goal from Quan.

There were a few scares from ActionAid's new keeper. To misquote an old newspaper headline.. It looked like ActionAid had found a goalkeeper worse than McCann, as debutant Fraser Redpath, threw the ball repeatedly to the other team. Jesse Griffiths pointed out, tell him we're the team in yellow.



The second match pitted ActionAid against Marie Curie who had drawn their first match. As Marie Curie wore yellow ActionAid cobbled together a red change strip , comprising of

England away shirts, and red bibs.

The following combination raised a few smiles ;



The match flew by, but this time Redpath was the hero as he made a last gasp save to preserve the stalemate.

Next came Amnesty. This was expected to be the game which decided who finished second in the group, with last years winners WaterAid / Big Issue expected to win the group and looking impressive in their first match.

Buoyed on by a vociferous support, ActionAid took a two goal lead at half time, thanks to a virtuoso strike from Barcelona born ~Pepe~. The strike wouldn't have looked out of place in the Nou Camp.



The second goal came from Gus from the penalty spot.

ActionAid conceded a late goal, but the celebrations at the end from ActionAid were a sign they thought they had reached the semi finals for the second consecutive year.

Alas , there was to be a sting in the tale. With WaterAid/Big Issue only needing a draw against Marie Curie to send Marie Curie home, they fell down to a late winner.

This forced ActionAid to rethink its selection policy, and start with its strongest VII. A draw would be enough to take them through, and for the unthinkable to happen – to put WaterAid out.

WaterAid had slaughtered ActionAid in their last encounter, and fielded Krisana Pieper's boyfriend Oliver Germain, and tournament organiser Stel Kyriakou in their midst.

The match was a tense affair and ActionAid defended resolutely. When WABI found a way round the defence of ActionAid, Fraser Redpath, was

unbeatable between the sticks.

There were some hotly contested decisions made by the referee, and the new FA

To be honest ActionAid got the rub of the green and black plastic pitch, and most questionable decisions went that way. Andy John was not penalised for an illegal slide tackle. It was quite difficult to keep up with eccentric rule interpretations of the referees.

But as the final whistle blasted ActionAid were through. Having anticipated, being the tournaments whipping boys, a clash beckoned against old adversaries Unicef !

But before all that there was time for a breather, and a team picture.



Or was there, as the tournament was running behind schedule , ActionAid were forced to play their next match immediately, without time to refresh or

regroup. They were even threatened with expulsion for having their picture taken.

And so onto Unicef. It was another tight encounter with no quarter asked for, and no quarter given.

Clean shaven (especially for the tournament) Phil Sandys led ringerless Unicef to victory.

As is the nature of our encounters the goal was hotly disputed. Richard Turner entered the area, and

The ball was knocked back and rifled home past the despairing Phillip Arnold and Fraser Redpath could do nothing about it.



Neutral spectators on the touchline claim he was pushed and that it was very harsh.

Half time substitutes Richard Turner , and Paul Mills could not drag ActionAid back into the game, and

ActionAid were knocked out.

At this point Save the Children challenged ActionAid to a bronze medal play off.

This gave ActionAid the opportunity for revenge against a former victor, and the team included in their midst a heavily bandaged Michael Fuller, who used to grace the Sobel Centre with his football prowess.

Sadly, Michael is a shadow of his former footballing self. He looked more like Jason Lee, than Joe Cole, as he fell over, and mis-kicked the ball.

This was ActionAid's best performance despite being shy of Gus, and Quan, and robbed of the services of Gradleigh Ruderham who had to retire hurt under a heavy challenge.

The first goal came from a lay-off from Paul Mills who found Richard Turner who squeeze the ball into the bottom left hand corner.

The winner came from Paul Mills who broke loose and rifled the ball

past the Save the Children keeper.

Andy John was just about to shoot, and score his first goal in an ActionAid shirt, when the referee blew for time just as he was taking aim.

ActionAid's manager John Hunt said

“ I am proud of the lads, everyone of them. All that hard work of a Tuesday evening has paid off for them. Maybe we mucked about with ball too much in midfield, and had we been more clinical in front of goal we could have won the whole thing. Had Peter De Vena Franks, Tom Sharman, and Jim Lankshear been available we could have claimed the charity shield. Same time next year folks.

This tournament draws the curtain on ActionAid's weekly football sessions. Due to financial constraints, we have regrettably had to pull the plug on the weekly sessions. The recession has bitten us already.

We would like to wish the ActionAid Netball team the best of luck in the forthcoming Lindsay Burgess

Memorial Competition.
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