

Friendly War

By

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First Half

Here I am, Sir Skido (Kisco to friends) of the flabby lower lip fame, an extremely capable electrician and electric generator for hire quasi-magnate. I furiously fan myself with the now crumpled match programme at the liberty stadium, Ibadan . Trying in vain to generate some "local breeze" around my sweaty neck. See my trouble! That nice cloud, that heavenly umbrella, drifted away leaving us naked to the scorching, brain baking sun.

Thank God, the uncomplaining match programme also doubles up as an umbrella. Sadly "local breeze" ceases. I feel guilty being here. We (the Ajegunle branch of the Lagos Association of electric generator owners, L.A.E.G.O) hired a luxurious (Ekene Dili Chukwu) bus from Iddo terminus for this match.

Early this morning as I draped myself in my green white green replica kit, original Nike for that matter, and began to pack my trumpet, Shekere, whistle and Gangan (talking drum), that wife of mine began to abuse me.

She claimed I hadn't given her "chop money" for the week .I know you don't believe her. Ah –ah, even the neighbors comment on how much fresher she looks while I continue to lose weight. Then next minute I was accused of throwing good money away in the name of patriotism. In fact she said I was a tribalist who only got on with his countrymen on match days. All this at the top of her voice. As the watching crowd increased so did her strength.

With tears in her eyes she told of how the children dress in rags while their father patrols from one stadium to another. To save face I emptied my pockets for her and could only shake my head as she promptly stuffed the cash into her brassiere. But did the abuse stop?

I wish. Do you know I was almost left behind by the bus at Iddo? Were it that I held the money for tickets in my capacity as the Vice president and acting treasurer of our association they would surely have hit the Lagos-Ibadan express way without yours' truly.

You need to have witnessed the relief on their faces when I arrived. Some even hailed me wildly by my other nickname "Ajegunle jejune !" I felt so proud. Anyway back to the present. Guilt is a bad thing, a big weight on the soul. But sha, kick-off will cure all problems.

By the way sef, way should I feel guilty eh? Ah-ah, I don't smoke, drink or womanize. Am I not entitled to some pleasure in this life? Wetin? After all, I wore torn clothes till the ripe old age of seventeen and even the socks I have on presently have holes. And did you know there are many advantages in kids having well ventilated clothes in a hot country?

Please spare me those looks. If the children and their mother are not satisfied with how I can afford to clothe them, too bad!

Ah, kick -off is imminent. Now don't repeat this to anyone but I hear the referee on duty tonight has a certain reputation and to add alligator pepper to pepper- soup, if you get my meaning, rumour has it that someone slipped a brown envelope under his hotel room door last night. They even went as

far as saying he charges in Dollars. Ten for Yellows, twenty for Reds, forty for penalties and sixty for a watertight offside trap. It's only a friendly so who cares? Let me not tell a lie, I care well well.

The Nigerian Super Eagles versus the Ghanaian Black stars is like the clash of two elephants and as we say in our village, it is the ground that suffers when juggernauts collide. The rivalry extends back a few years.

Sorry to bring up the dead at this point but my late father use to say 'he who sees fight and picks race shall live to fight tomorrow'. I didn't believe it at the time being young and ignorant but his words came back to haunt me in this very stadium today.

As I queued for the tickets, the Ghanaian supporter in front of me, clad in his "Yellow fever" replica kit, was arguing heatedly with the stadium attendant about something to do with money when he suddenly spun round and said to me "brotha, if it is one fifty Naira to da pound and eight thousand Cedis to the pound, how much my gate fee in Cedis?

First I Was Dumbfounded.

I broke out in a sweat. In fact I nearly soil my underwear! I broke out in tears remembering all those times I played truant during mathematics classes at school. I am now useless in mental arithmetic as a result. My father's face flashed before my mind's eye wearing that "I told you so" expression of his. I wailed even louder.

"Leave this craze man out of this matter Ojare, and for the last time we accept only Naira and hard currency!" shouted the stadium attendant before sucking his teeth and slamming the shutters down heavily with all the force he could muster.

Na wa. But come to think of it, this term "hard currency" sef, don't you think it presumptuous? Is the Naira soft or water water like my mother in law's eba, eh? (Please don't tell my wife I said that. I wan live long). Or is the Cedis gelatinous?

So what is it that makes Pound sterling and Dollars strong like Iroko for bush eh? For the amount of suffer I endure to obtain this Naira, I put it to you that in my own books o, Naira is the strongest currency of all. (Everyone with the one wey concern am).

This Naira sef, who name am. And who attended the naming ceremony? Who broke the Kola? Was it the oldest man in Nigeria? I think not. My guess would be some big man tanked up with Odeku at the scrabble table took the G and E out of NIGERIA and the rest was history.

First Anyway We Must Move On

The beautiful cloud is back and "local breeze" has recommenced. Ah-ah, you think they call us football fans for nothing? The huge digital score board has began to apologise for the game being one hour behind. Suddenly, suddenly, a huge Mexican wave hits. It's amplitude varies as it flows from arm to arm. Riding on the wave is a rumor from the dressing room, which also mutates as it travels from ear through brain to ear through brain. Well, the grapevine whispered that our team or should I say our boys are refusing to exit the air- conditioned dressing rooms because the sun is too hot!

Mark you, there is no Caucasian in the team. Them all black, them fully insured by God against dangerous sun rays irrespective of the leak in the ozone layer. More rumors. Now there is a full-blown quarrel in progress.

The foreign-based players have refused the local players from partaking in the sharing of their sun tan lotion. My patience is being stretched O! My temperament is now that of one famished. I have endured transport costs and added to that, loss of earnings as my two electric generators lie dormant in the shed, and these guys, being paid to play, are grumbling about heat. No be here them born them? But haba! Some people sabi to borrow-borrow o! Why can't the local players buy their own sun tan lotion eh?

First What Is This I See. Ah !

One of our defenders is jogging to the microphone set up on the field just in front of the presidential box. He strokes his hair he runs. He goes on to announce an apology for the delay which was due to (you guessed right) "circumstances beyond our control". He then offers to read us poetry, which I must confess was quite good. He received a standing ovation at the end. The poem was entitled Liberty and the last stanza went like this (but don't quote me).

*Liberty for you
Liberty for me
Liberty to know how many voted
Without the boxes being pinched
Liberty to know how many we are
Without the census being rigged.*

After his prolonged bow he slipped on a headpiece and spread both arms like the statue of Liberty. Na wa! When he finally left for the dressing rooms the crowd grew restless. Soon they were singing a bastardised version of one of John Lennon's songs.

*'All we are saying
Give us football'*

Finally The Teams Ran Out .

The thousands of white doves that should have been released as the footballers took to the pitch didn't materialize. Only three doves were released. A wave of rumor brought news that the secretary in charge of the Local organising committee (LOC) had embezzled the funds, then lied that a mystery bug called Ogunpa Virus had killed all the birds while in transit.

National anthems played, hands were shaken and the kick-off was upon us.

I cheered till my voice failed then shook my Shekere to nonsense before blowing my whistle with all my might. You would have thought I was being paid to do this. I looked round the vast arena and surveyed my comrades who all looked like happy ants reveling in the sugar coated cereal bowl of a giant. I began to see things in another perspective at that instant.

Let the truth be told, I am a football addict to the core. I looked to my side and my friend "show-boy" Shagasha was in tears. He is definitely more obsessed than yours' truly. Was it not show- boy who passed the litmus test in grand style? I tell you, at our last meeting there were only two seats left on the coach when in came thirty late- comers all purporting to be bonafide Super Eagles supporters.

By the powers vested in me as the honorable V.P of the association I lined up the said thirty in a single file at right angles to the assembly and shouted "right turn". They all obeyed resulting in their hungry faces all looking into the assembly who by now were completely bewildered.

I announced that the true supporters would be revealed today today. I noticed Bro' Jimoh whisper to a friend he was sure I intended to march them to the taps outside and separate the men from the boys 'Gideon style' as written in the holy scriptures. You should have seen the look on their faces as I crept behind each of the thirty and whispered into their ears looking for a reaction and then moved on.

To the first I said "Roger Milla", nothing happened. I moved on. "Roberto Baggio" I whispered to the fourteenth man. Nothing. I shook my head. Then I changed to "Denmark". Nothing. By the time I got to show-boy I had reverted to "Roberto Baggio". On hearing the name show-boy take body stone ground in a most dramatic faint. I tipped my soft drink up his nostrils as he lay comatose on his back and he was promptly revived. He jumped up wailing. "Give me Visa and ticket o! To Italy o! Make I go cut that ponytail, his secret source of power o! He had taken leave of his senses.

I nodded at the assembly and they understood. Show-boy had just secured his seat on the coach. The next positive test was Otango. As soon as I uttered "Den.." he cried bitterly. He couldn't even wait for me to say "mark", the yeye obsessive vulcanizer. All this football madness sef.

I once heard a strange explanation for it all. My friend said (please don't quote me o!) that bottle fed kids grow up to play Rugby while breast fed ones ended up liking soccer. He went on to say it was due to a Freudian bush trap or something. I must add that this friend in question was actually quoting a sports psychologist he was driving between the Sheraton hotel, Ikeja and the National stadium in Suru-lere. You know how taxi drivers are. Eavesdropping without license then jumping to wrong conclusions. We now call the guy Sigmund Fraud.

The game starts well. The referee soon shows his true colours. Every Ghanaian attack is off side, even the Nigerian supporters screamed "Ojoro" in disgust. The game drags on till out of nowhere one of our diminutive left sided defenders players blasted in a goal.

The ball seemed to glide in slow motion through the Ibadan air, beating the hapless goalkeeper till its flight was abruptly cut short by the net, which exploded, into a thousand ripples.

The crowd went mental. The goal scorer who had looked lethargic since kick-off was rejuvenated. All smiles, he ran with outstretched hands, like a light air craft about to take off from the run way of enjoyment, to the left corner flag which he encircled in a weird "honey bee" kind of dance.

His team mates rushed to him in merriment, pretended to study his leg work with quizzical expressions on their faces before hunching their shoulders in a "wetin concern me" gesture and joining in the celebratory jig.

When the goal scorer had had his fill he darted off suddenly along the touchline before breaking into an extravagant cart wheel followed by a somersault. I must confess that at this point I forgot all my problems for e bi like say my brain was squeezing rations of honey into my blood stream making every nerve cell in my body tingle. True to God, any mosquito wey bite me now will die of happiness.

The stadium was in a state of Milliki as the unhappy Ghanaians kicked off. They all looked sluggish and despondent as if their stomachs had been forcibly pumped full of Kenkey and hot gas.

Talking of food is making me hungry. All my comrades stopped to eat at Akobo-Ojuirin but I didn't partake. I was still vexing with my wife. The name of the eating joint sef was funny. Ghana-Nigeria. My comrades tanked up with Tombo, turkey pepper soup, bushmeat and various other edibles but anger no gree man chop. My one consolation is that even though I was hungry, I was happy.

From out of thin air a dog materialized on the pitch running wildly towards the ball. The crowd cheered. One man claimed to recognize the dog. It was Junior Bingo from Bodija area. Another said "see the legs. I bet it will taste good in Okra soup" We hushed the silly "hot dog eater" down. "Your head is not correct. How can you eat man's best friend eh? You cannibal!" I screamed. The man just laughed and picked his teeth with a piece of folded paper he had torn off his match programme.

I tell you, no one could catch the dog. It out maneuvered everyone much to our enjoyment. Our foreign coach was forced to make a substitution and on came a winger as short and as fast as a Lamborghini. It proved an inspired substitution for he was soon making grounds on the dog. Just as he was about to catch the dog there came a booming foreign sounding voice on the public address system. "Beware of Rabies!" Oh the silly football agent.

You know the problem with these people? They treat the players like investments. Does he not know that the player concerned has been pursuing and capturing dogs with his bare hands since the day of his birth? Anyway the game goes on. Suddenly our mouths drop as a one on one situation develops between our goalie and the striker they call Ghanaba (son of Ghana), the true born centre forward. We breathe a sigh of relief as he blasts the ball high into the stands. The usual happens.

The Ghanaian supporters either hold their heads in their hands or bite their index fingers in frustration. As for Ghanaba the trueborn centre forward, he turns round and spits. (How revolting). Then he begins to scratch his groin in the full view of the television cameras. I tell you, he scratched so hard I began to suspect a five billion Cedis scratch card lay hidden in his shorts. The referee ran across and showed him a yellow card for dangerous scratching much to the delight of the home fans. Ah-ah, has Ghanaba got no shame? How could he miss that golden opportunity by such a large margin? All he has to do is practice shooting the ball all week ke.

As for me, I make no such mistakes at work o. Touch the wrong wires and electrocution is the reward. You won't even get a chance to spit in disgust let alone scratch.

As the game progressed I began to question the sanity of my fellow Super Eagles supporters. One wore a bowler hat on which he stuck a battery-operated fan. Na wa! The fan showed no sign of slowing down despite being on for two hours so far. Around the fan he stuck six tiny black and white leather balls. But you should have seen Otango. He shaved his head completely and was stripped to the waist, his entire body covered in green and white green paint. I tell you, we might visit Aro psychiatric hospital on our way home, who knows?

My attention is back on the field of play as our favorite midfielder is experiencing a sudden rush of blood. He begins to perform gravity defying jiggery, pokery with the ball. The Ghanaians looked on as if hypnotized. This was Afro-Disney, the pinnacle of visual entertainment.

Leg movements came in flashes and the ball responded. It looked like Ajasco cum disco cum Ikwokirikwo dance without the music. But I tell you, we could all see the music. Then he trapped the ball with his foot on it's North Pole and thus began to perform what we call ye-ye rolling. Why you look me so? Don't you know ye-ye rolling? You simply roll the ball along leisurely with a bit of attitude then feign a change in direction to confuse the opponents (who by now might have been reduced to the status of a mere spectator) and make them look ye-ye or foolish as some might say.

It worked. Three Ghanaians tackled simultaneously, kicking each other in the process. From our midfielder, a pass that was as precise as an e-mail reached the feet of one of our strikers. From where I'm sitting that striker looked the tallest man in the stadium! He was in the penalty box and set to pull the trigger when I saw my right leg reflexly shoot out in a wild kick into the back of the seat in front. Oh the pain! Why did I do such a stupid thing? Surely by now I should have realised I was a spectator not a player.

Anyway, with only the keeper to beat he collapses in a heap, clutching his calf muscle. The crowd sighed. Many said it was 'muscle pull' but the referee ran across angrily and awarded a penalty. The stadium was in shock. The honest striker tried to convince the referee that he hadn't been fouled only to earn himself a yellow card. Our players refused to take the penalty kick.

The referee beckoned to the bench and they refused to respond. He then ran to the microphone and announced over the public address system that any Nigerian could take the kick so long as he had his International Passport on him as proof of identity.

The bench and coaching staff of both teams shook their head in disgust. Everyone booed. After all it was only a friendly ke. Suddenly a loud cry could be heard from the presidential box. The voice of a well-seasoned sycophant and boot licker. "I will score for Nigeria o!"

An over weight official in white flowing robes ran down the steps that led to the pitch. He had strange footprints on his back. Whisper, whisper, the grapevine says it's the effect of a thousand kickbacks! Na wa. The ministry of "chop" man keen on impressing his president over did it. He panted as he brought out his green well-travelled passport for the referee's inspection. Satisfied with what he saw the referee blew his whistle.

The 'big man' removed his cap, took seven steps back and began his run-up to the ball. The crowd jeered. A strange gust of wind blew across Ibadan. Next minute the 'big man' fell. The medical crew promptly ferried him away and soon afterwards in the eye of a Mexican wave I heard he had sprained his potbelly. The referee insisted the penalty kick still be taken. The tricky situation was solved by our goalkeeper who raced across the pitch to send the ball into orbit. He eyed the referee with contempt before acknowledging the Ghanaian hands held out in appreciation of the most supreme gesture of sportsmanship ever seen in Africa.

The whole stadium applauded our goalkeeper. By now the referee, who had had enough blew for half time.

Half Time

My bladder rejoiced as I hurried off to the toilets. But come see show !I passed a couple involved in a "domestic" which people around said started like play-like play. At first they were arguing on how well the Falcons (Nigeria's female soccer team) might do in a friendly against the Super Eagles.

"These boys are gentlemen so they will do what we men do everyday and that is let the woman win" said the husband. For no obvious reason that statement vex the woman well well. The husband as usual didn't notice and began to entertain his new-found audience with more. "Perhaps the result will depend on exactly what the Falcons are wearing at the time" he now said.

Unfortunately I couldn't wait for the wife's reply, as nature's call became too strong.

At the toilet's entrance I received the shock of my life. "By Jove !" I screamed. A spillage almost occurred in my pants, for lying there at the entrance of the nice refurbished toilets that stank of antiseptic was a corpse marinating in a pool of blood. He was prone and held fast to a spanner in one hand and a toilet seat in the armpit on the other side.

A uniformed man bearing a face like thunder chewed Kola behind closed lips as he stood in an "at ease" position. "Wetin happen?" I ventured. He swung round at me like a lion about to pounce and true to God, the sight of his most interesting rifle pointed at me opened the floodgates. My life flashed across my very eyes as I unconsciously irrigated my underwear.

Fear na bad thing o. Ha! God forbid! Let no poet deceive you o, the gun is in fact mightier than the pen! (Before you criticize my lack of courage, come and walk a few years in my shoes within the boundaries of this great country and we shall see).

"My orders were to shoot to kill anyone leaving these toilets with anything they hadn't brought in" the army man said calmly, showing me his dangling uvula and half masticated Kola in the process. "Deposits only but no withdrawals" he added, laughing at his sense of humor. He expanded his chest like he was about to address the whole first and second mechanized divisions without the use of a microphone and began talking. "The recent spate of armed robberies and vandalism has spiraled out of control sir and we must deal with it, fire for fire and blow for blow. As a civilized society, we must respect public property" .I nodded to everything he said o! After all, the gun was now pointed at me. Nature called again and I side- stepped the corpse eyeing his blood soaked green white green top (of course not original Nike like mine) and I must confess I almost fainted. I haven't been in contact with dead bodies that much, apart from three funerals I have attended and one road accident I witnessed.

Now stationed in front of the urinals my trembling hands struggled with the zip. I paced myself with gentle breathing exercises and was soon relaxed. Next problem was I couldn't get my bush taxi to move. "Please turn on the taps for me sir" I asked of the army man .The sound of running water did the trick.

Suddenly some policemen arrived on the scene. "At last!" I exclaimed in my mind thinking that justice will be served on the trigger happy toilet guard. The murderer narrated his account of events to the policemen, of how he caught the "useless thief" trying to strike as he had done many times before. "How many bullets you use?" they asked. "One" replied the proud guard. They all took turns in patting him on the back for the good riddance and saving the tax payers' money through his judicious use of bullets, before unleashing ferocious kicks on the corpse.

Who says Nigeria hasn't got abundant talent in soccer. I tell you, these policemen were born to kick football but mistakenly ended up in the police force. (I like that word Force. Not police gentle or police persuasion but na police force, chei!) Next minute we were alone. "Isn't your brand of justice too severe, if anything, why not shoot the legs?" I ventured. He eyed me wickedly and screamed "the thief na your broda!" Oh no sir!" I replied.

"Anyway I was just obeying orders", he said nonchalantly.

How original. Every soldier says that. "I suppose you think that lame excuse will hold water in court" I asked seeing he was smiling a bit. "Sir, not just water but plenty of Naira and kobo" (I couldn't understand so I just laughed). "Now you mentioned it." I said as I washed my hands (under this miracle of flowing tap water) clear of misplaced drops of urine due to my fright "who invented the word Kobo". "Sir, I no know book but as Koboko na for poor man back and Kobo Kobo na for im pocket, I think say the later was derived from the former.

While we spoke more half time toilet users came and went without batting an eye lid at the corpse which they all side stepped with all the skills of Maradonna. Talk about turning a blind eye. I began to see my fellow men in a new light, for if they could pass a fresh corpse unperturbed then they must possess the wherewithal in their stony hearts to perpetrate the crime themselves. Yes o!

At the drop of a hat they could stab, lynch, torch or even poison their fellow men without the burdens of conscience. I was sad. Left alone with the guard, we chatted for a while before exchanging addresses. (Ah ah, why you look me so eh ? Tomorrow now, when he leads his own coup and becomes supreme commander he may give me contract to supply electric cables to the whole country, if you can't beat them register straight away!)

As he saw me off to the door I decided to tease. Before we reached the door proper I stopped while he took a few steps out of the toilet. "Ha! I caught you out. You inspired air in the toilets and went out the doors with it". The guard dey craze o! He just lifted the gun to his chest and shot himself.

There goes my army connections I thought to myself. As he lay there dying I asked him why he did it. "Only obeying orders sir" he said. And the man died. Now if I call him the Z word them go wan burn my house and throw Mama Skido from the first floor window eh. I slipped my hands into the guard's pockets and extracted the blood stained paper bearing my address with I promptly flushed down the toilet. I washed my hands a second time.

The roar from the crowd told me the second half was imminent. Making my way back to my seat I passed the couple still arguing about the Falcons versus the Eagles. The woman was now abusing her mother-in-law. "Leave my mother out of this o!" the man threatened. For where? The woman was just warming up.

"Your mother should be captain of the Falcons as she sabi to dey fly fly for night! Stupid most valuable witch of the year woman" Come see laugh. The man just remained silent as the supporters around the woman began to chant "You don win, you don win. Falcons sef don win" Serves him right for coming to the game with his wife. Ye-ye woman lappa man.

Back in my seat I begin to fan my neck. I then notice two of my favorite players on the bench wearing dark sunglasses. Those around me started speculating. Them just dey show off. Na Apollo do them. No na conjunctivitis do them, on and on it went till the Mexican wave hit us, out of which came an unlikely story.

You see, dem say dat the foreign coach was unhappy at the way our boys were refusing to fall when their strong yams (leg muscles) were kicked in the penalty area. He reckoned we've lost out on at least four penalty kicks in our last six games. To correct this he decided to embark on a crash course in diving. And where better to learn than at an Ijaw waterside village where they built houses on stilts in the Niger Delta.

For two hours the players dived from the rooftops seemingly enjoying themselves by which time the coach was sure that any referee could easily be fooled by the now high standard of diving the players were exhibiting. Suddenly disaster struck. An under water oil pipe burst while some players had their eyes open in the water. Na wa! See di trouble this ye-ye coach has caused. What is wrong with Federal palace hotel or Ikoyi hotel swimming pools eh? If we loose this game there will be trouble for that coach o!

The game is now held up as the referee has disappeared.

To while away the time the Stadium Selector plays Felix Liberty 's Ngozi music. See show! See rockeez! Cheerleaders flooded the place and began to gyrate. Some players even joined in the dance. When we saw the referee running towards the centre circle and tucking in his shirt as he ran we knew our fun was over and we all booed. The rumor came saying the referee had been trapped behind a faulty lock in the toilet. The pretty cheerleaders received a standing ovation. They even received a presidential wave. Nice chap that president of ours. Not that I wish him bad or anything of the sort but I hope the countries' electric power problem continues.

Ah ah, so you judge me with you eyes eh? Don't you know my electric generator leasing business depends on power cuts? At this point in time I can't afford a drop in income. Can you?

Second Half

The game goes on. For kicks my friend four seats away decided to switch on his black transistor radio set. Good heavens! Has that commentator lapsed on his medication or what? I can't believe its the same match he is talking about. Chai! Talk about exaggeration!

The ball is passed to our Afro-Disney player and before he could make contact with the ball the radio-man shocked us all. "He beats one man, he beats two man, it is unbelievable. He beats three man ! He's in a dangerous position o! He will score o!" Yet all the player did was merely indulge in a spot of ye-ye rolling.

The poor fellows glued to their radio sets at home would be having palpitations by now. Serves them right for being too stingy to come to Liberty stadium to support the national team. The player in question who had now made his way into the box looked up at goal before unleashing a shot so off the mark the Ghanaian keeper didn't so much as move a single muscle. The ball however knocked out a nearby photographer.

The radio commentator was still on another planet. "He looks up. Will he? Yes he shoots! It's a goalllll! If football is art then we behold, Picasso! What a strike. Oh the panache of this player! What athleticism. Im mama born am well! Oh, sorry people at home that wasn't a goal. The Ghanaians have a goal kick".

If it wasn't for politeness, I would have smashed that black transistor to pieces. The radio set's owner had in fact had enough and switched it off. Peace at last.

The game soon began to induce boredom.

We passed Mexican Waves for amusement. Even the men of 'timber and calibre' in the presidential box stooped to our level and joined in. After all it was only a friendly and we led by a goal. The guy to my left who had tried so hard to be a Zeal Onyia on his trumpet since kick stopped playing and told me he thought the Ghanaians had fielded an extra two men for there appeared more "yellows" than "greens". We all counted and recounted, it was a false alarm. I grabbed his flask and unscrewed it like Sherlock Holmes. In his thermos was the answer to the two 'extra men'; Ogoro Diploplia. The chap behind me now said he could see ghosts flying above both goalposts. 'Mirage my brother. It is just an illusion', said an off duty physicist.

'Na lie. Mirage my foot. How are we sure people didn't fall to their deaths during the stadium's construction and have returned as Stadium ghosts?' said another. While we were all arguing the Ghanaians scored. The place went silent. I felt for my pulse to convince myself that my heart hadn't stopped.

It was Ghanaba, the true born centre forward that did the damage. We couldn't talk. Our trumpets were flooded with tears. Shekere stood motionless and the talking drums (gan gan) had picked up sign language. Osibisa's sunshine day was blasted from the public address speakers as Ghanaba was lifted shoulder high by his teammates.

A new story spread through the stadium as to why Ghanaba was called the true born centre forward. A most unlikely story it was but here it goes.

On the day of his birth his mother was said to have delivered him on a bed which stood on the Greenwich Meridian line in a maternity hospital in Tema, Ghana. When the head appeared down the line the midwife was said to have commented that if Ghanaba grew up to be a footballer he would

play centre forward. See my trouble eh! Now those words have come to hunt us for it was the head of Ghanaba on a cross from the right wing that has lead to this equalizer. Anyway, life goes on.

We didn't stay quiet for too long. The music resumed in full force as our team kicked off. We were inquisitive as to how the guy on the radio will take Ghanaian goal and were obliged by the radio set's owner. The commentator no longer spoke in English but wailed in his native tongue as if in much distress. An Ibibio man stepped up to interpret. We all stopped playing our instruments for the interpreter was conveying not just words but actions with emotions. 'My uncle told me not to gamble. Who told me to play Kalokalo with my house and car? I did not even tell my wife that I added her jewelry to my gamble. Nigerian strikers please score O! I beg O! Ghanaba don kill me O!' We all fell on each other laughing.

'How can that man bet on a friendly game eh?' I said aloud between fits of laughter. 'Possessed with the Las Vegas spirit' said brother Jimoh. Na wa!

Things soon settled and the game continued.

My thoughts returned to my bladder and from there to the two corpses in the lavatory. Would they have been cleared off? 'Life is cheap O!' I thought aloud.

One of my fellow supporters passed his groundnuts in my direction. Just before I could grab a handful that silly Otango let loose a flying spittle which landed on the nuts. Perhaps the others were by now too hungry to care. They all eat while I politely declined. And yes I didn't tell them of what I saw emanating from Otango's mouth. Them no get eye?

"How can you say life is cheap?" came a hoarse voice behind me, which I at once recognised and decided to ignore. The question was repeated once more but this time with a strong push to the back of my head. If not for his bulging biceps I would have gifted his ugly face with a dirty slap. How dare the motor park taut of a riff raff touch my head? I turned round sharply and smiled.

"Area father, for the Baba ke. Na you will dey look o. So is life not cheap?" I asked. "Not at all. The fakest player on that pitch is worth millions," said Area father. "A million Kobo?" I teased. He slapped me hard behind the head and asked "you dey craze?" . "Only joking Area father" I managed to say as a serious headache began to dance Atillogwu in my brain.

An off duty historian took the heat off me to my great relief. "I don't see why we should be bought and sold by capitalist football clubs. They may not brand the skin but they make human beings wear numbers just like slaves" He spoke so loudly that every one stopped singing just to watch his Adam's apple bob up and down.

Area father slapped him behind the neck with so much force he flew onto the heads of those sitting in front of him. "Sharup, you poor man! If you no like the buying and selling of human beings, you for stay your house" Area father said. The people in front of us in turn threw the lightweight on and on. He continued to float on a sea of heads till he ended on the pitch in need of medical care.

While the historian was in flight I saw one hand slip into his pocket to steal. The game continued and so did our singing. Soon I formed a small local disorganising committee (L.D.C) with those around me with only one aim. Stage a pitch invasion when we get the winner. (Ah ah, they didn't call me N.F.A (no future ambition) at school for nothing o. I am a born disorganizer.)

It ended a draw however.

As we trooped out of the stadium the selector played Osayemore Joseph's "Oba no dey go transfer". As we traveled back to Lagos, I thought deeply about that song. Indeed the king doesn't go on transfer but the football players do. They change kingdom at the drop of a hat making a lot of money in the process. In fact I reckoned that the players are the new royalties, for which Oba can ever boast of filling the Liberty stadium? The players are the new Obas'.

Area father slapped my head again. "Why do you look so morose? Is a draw not good enough for you?" I smiled through the pain and joined the singing as we drove to Lagos for although we didn't win, it was only a friendly.

The End