

I kick therefore I am

Geoff Andrews recounts the story of PFFC and recalls some of its most colourful events and characters.

It started in October 1994, following a trip to a premiership match: I was at Mark Perryman's house and we were talking over the details of a tedious 1-1 draw between his Tottenham and my QPR. Both veterans of Britain's newly defunct and tiny communist party, we were looking for new political causes, and an alternative to the corporate domination of football appealed. In the wake of Italia '90, football took on a new appeal to the intellectual classes and designer Marxism seemed an idea of its time. By Christmas, the first 'philosophy football' T-shirt was on sale, expertly designed by Hugh Tisdale, another leftie, with the words of the Algerian-French existentialist Albert Camus emblazoned on a green goalkeeper's shirt: 'All that I know most surely about morality and obligation I owe to football'.

Perryman and Tisdale have since sold thousands of shirts with quotes from Camus to Wittgenstein. Getting a real team off the ground, however, was a different prospect.

First fixture

In February 1995, Philosophy Football FC took the field for the first time, against VSO

at Battersea Park, south London. Our ageing team was a motley crew of left-wing activists and assorted girlfriends' relatives, dressed in the only two shirts currently in circulation. I was in goal wearing Camus, while the ten outfield players lined up in identical shirts dedicated to Bill Shankly's wisdom on the relationship between socialism and football. Unfortunately they all had the number 4 on the back, an interesting dilemma for the opposition as they marked up at corners, while confusing for the referee looking to assert control. In the event, the opposition needn't have worried. Within minutes of kicking off, one of our intellectuals pulled a calf muscle and was never to return. In the circumstances a 4-0 defeat was a credible result.

My first problem as manager was clear. Being politically correct was fine for post-match discussions on postmodernism but less useful in dealing with tricky wingers and inswinging corners. We needed to find people who could actually play as well. Luckily, Gareth Smyth, my co-organiser in the early years in the Musical Association League, used to run the African National Congress exiles team and we were soon able to combine the silky skills of African

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Editorial

Philosophy Football FC plays with words on its shirts. Many of its members – whether regulars, casuals or veterans – write for a living. It is therefore appropriate that we have a written vehicle for the club. This newsletter, though it comes with professional design standards, has been cobbled together at the kitchen table. It is, in that regard, amateur, in the best sense of the word. The Latin root of the word 'amateur' means 'lover'. Love, of course, requires commitment and, if PFFC is to thrive, then the club will require a great deal of commitment: on the pitch, of course, but also commitment to the tours and the varied cultural events organised by PFFC. This newsletter records various tales of past commitment. Hopefully new tales are set to be written.

Player Profile: Raj Chada

Owen Mather offers a snapshot of a legendary PFFC player, now out of retirement.



ORIGINAL and dynamic midfielder who joined in December 1999, shortly before we entered the Grafton Millennium League.

DESERVEDLY collected the 2000/01 Players' Player of the Year Award, a season in which PFFC finished a creditable third after a strong finish to the season. Raj was ever-present, equally adept in midfield or as a cultured centre-half. Scored 4 league goals.

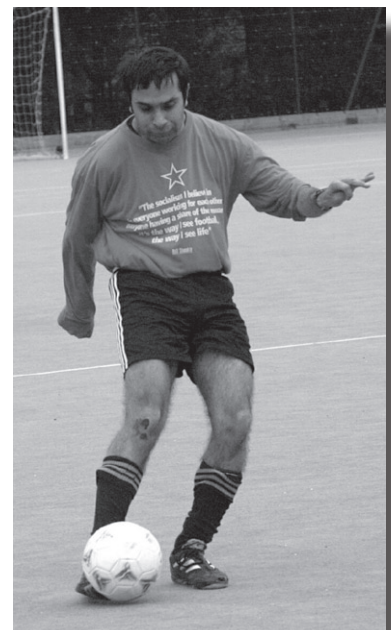
KEY member of the 2001/02 championship-winning side, playing in 10 league games and scoring 3 vital goals.

CLLR Chada was elected in May 2002, later rising to the lofty position of Leader of Camden Council.

FEATURED in only two games when PFFC retained the championship in season 2002/03, mainly owing to injury

and an increasing political workload. Now on the comeback trail, having last played competitively on Sunday 27 April 2003 in a 6-1 defeat in Chiswick at the hands of Earl of Lonsdale, in the semi-finals of the league's cup competition.

DREAMS of becoming the next Labour MP in Reading West at the next election and longs to sport the red Shankly jersey once again and roll back the years.



Editor: Joe Boyle
Sub-editor: Goober Fox
Designer: Dr T Designs

players with the bulky labours of British centre halves. This was not to last as, during the early post-Apartheid years, South African dissidents returned to their homeland.

New recruits

To compensate, Gareth turned his attention to some of the rising stars of New Labour, which for some of us presented a philosophical challenge of a different sort. The current foreign secretary, allegedly a competent defender in his youth, was promised to me on several occasions, but never made it over the touchline. Tim Allan, another New Labour mover and shaker and close confidant of Peter Mandelson, did make the team, however. As arrogant on the field as he was in the Labour Party press conferences, his colleagues had more trouble than our opponents in getting the ball off him.

We continued to have little success, and my first trophy, awarded at the end of the 1995/96 season, was inscribed: 'Gone to the Dogs. Bottom of the League. Philosophy Football FC'. In the days before email, mobile phones and low-cost flights, being manager of a Sunday League team was a lonely business and a bit of a chore. Even for our interesting experiment, persuading players to leave their girlfriends in bed on Sunday mornings was a difficult task. The team was in danger of slipping into oblivion.

A taste of Italy

Things changed dramatically in the autumn of 2000, with the arrival of Filippo Ricci as *Gazetta dello Sport's* London correspondent. After being presented with one of our shirts as payment for an article in *When Saturday Comes* (which at that time shared an office with *Philosophy Football*), he soon found us. Filippo and I hit it off at once. As he was learning to adapt to the vagaries of British culture, I was doing the same in his home country, writing about Italy under Berlusconi.

Filippo's first contribution was definitively cultural. After going down a bit too easily in the opposition penalty area, he was chased Buster Keaton-style to the halfway line by irate and flabby defenders. The changes were even more significant off the pitch. The dressing room has never been the same since Filippo arrived. In place of the glorified beer mat most Sunday footballers use to dry themselves, we now had shower robes, flip flops and hair dryers to plug in. It took a bit longer for the austere handshake to be replaced by hugs and kisses, but Filippo instigated a cultural transformation in the ways of British football some while before Fabio Capello.

Our results began to improve. We now found that having philosophers in the football team need not be a burden. True, Rob Adams (known inevitably as 'Rob the Cat'), a jobbing actor and teacher, would quote Ibsen at advancing centre-forwards, but he also made some miraculous saves. Raj Chada, the youngest ever leader of Camden council until he was toppled on the back of Blair's unpopularity, proved to be more durable as a tough tackling midfielder than his New Labour predecessors and still turns out for us today. And Paul Kayley, as captain, introduced a philosophical Scouse pragmatism to the pitch, as well as new levels of physical fitness.

Our philosophy occasionally bemused opponents and officials. One of our players swears to this day that during an away match on Clapham Common, the referee painstakingly wrote 'J. Baudrillard' in his notebook, while Tom Callaghan, a founding member of the team, in an altercation with an opposing striker, was heard to utter the words: 'are you calling me a Kant?'

Cosmopolitan squad

Our 'philosophers' in the early years included journalists and

writers like Pete May and Nicholas Royle, Joe Boyle and Stefan Howald, but as we searched for the combination of artistic talent and regular commitment we began to recruit some notable musicians. After his debut as a tricky, skilful striker, our soft-spoken new recruit Solá politely turned down the post-match drink as he had to attend band practice. It was only at the next game, when several of his fans turned up, that we realised the new player leading the line was Solá Akingbolá, Jamiroquai's percussionist.

From being spectacularly unsuccessful, we started to win silverware on a regular basis, winning the veterans' Grafton Millennium League two years running. On moving for a new midweek challenge to the London Football League, we also took the first division trophy in our first season and I was presented with the manager of the year award. The welcome, if unexpected, success on the pitch was only part of the story, however.

On tour

We also started to play regularly in international football tournaments for various causes, ranging from a celebration of the life of the Italian film director Pier Paolo Pasolini to commemoration of the International brigades in the Spanish Civil War. Over the course of 16 international friendlies and tournaments, we have played in some notable stadia, including Stadio Dei Marmi in Rome and Real Madrid's training ground. We have taken on *France Football* in Paris and one of the oldest Portuguese clubs in Lisbon. Our players have turned out on volcanic ash in Sicily and the plush meadows of the European Union in Brussels. We have encountered Dennis Skinner MP at the opera in Rome and Eusebio in his local bar in Lisbon, and former Italy international Gianni Rivera has 'kicked off' one of our matches.

The theme of the tours has been applying the local story behind the shirts (Camus, Pasolini, for example) to the contemporary global context of football. On tour, we have found that football is a unique way to bring people together as the basis of a new internationalism, or as a way of challenging injustice. They have also been about celebrating the simple pleasures of the beautiful game.

Over 130 players have passed through the club over the years and worn our unique shirts over this period. Some have been musicians, notably Ally Clow, who would go on to captain the team, and assorted guitarists and part-time DJs, who have enjoyed the semi-anarchic flavour of the team, the unusual sense of community and the critical engagement with the contemporary state of the beautiful game. We have been part of the London diaspora, drawing on a range of nationalities (with a particularly strong contingent of Italians fleeing Berlusconi). We have even had a player called Goober Fox, who now looks after our website. We now have a Legends team of former players and the current first XI is now captained by Owen Mather, one of our longest-serving players.

One of our early shirts recorded Eric Cantona's words at the brief press conference following his kung-fu kick at a spectator at Crystal Palace: 'When seagulls follow the trawler, it is because they think sardines will be thrown into the sea'. When the team appeared dressed in the Sardines T-shirt at the premiere of the film *Looking For Eric*, in which Cantona stars, the director Ken Loach described him as a 'philosopher-footballer'. This was the perfect cue for me to ask about his availability for the coming season. We did not get to the stage of discussing contracts, but if there are other promising philosopher-footballers out there, we would love to hear from you. A degree in philosophy is not essential. But it might help.

A team that eats together stays together

Food is integral to PFFC. No restaurant is more integral than Mesón Bilbao in Maida Vale, known as 'José's'. **Filippo Ricci** describes a well-established dining routine.

After a few 'training' dinners, we found a winning formula: everyone at the table ordered two plates from the menu; I supervised the fluency of the game (e.g. making sure we didn't end up with ten chorizo dishes and no squid) and corrected any mistakes in the order. Red rioja was always on the card, though exceptions (notably Owen) were accepted, and a select few could ask for beer. At the end of the meal, no one could escape the pacharan, though some were granted the 'hazelnut one'. Pacharan is a digestive liqueur made from fruit and anise; the 'hazelnut one' is a hazelnut digestif.

The food: obligatory were jamon serrano (cured ham), chorizo bus-turia (sausage in wine), patatas bravas (spiced potatoes), fried aubergines stuffed with chorizo, grilled squid, albondigas (meatballs), tortilla (omelette), boquerones (anchovies) and one plate of morcilla (Spanish black pudding). The other popular dishes were sardines, two varieties of chicken and mussels.

To finish, a single slice of hazelnut cake and 10 spoons. The cake was passed around like a sweet spliff.



Talking tactics: to pass or not tapas?

Fed up with big business dominating football??

If you play to a good standard and share the ethics of fair play and internationalism, then Philosophy Football FC is interested in hearing from you for Sunday matches in London (graftonmillenniumleague.leaguerepublic.com) and European tours.

Contact Geoff Andrews or Owen Mather for more details.

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Season update

Andy Finnerly rounds up pre-season, Italy, the start of the new season and a date with Eric

Pre-season starts on 4 June at The Ritzy Cinema in Brixton with the London premiere of Ken Loach's *Looking For Eric*, starring Eric Cantona. Afterwards, the Gaffer asks Eric to compare freedom of expression under Alex Ferguson and Ken Loach. PFFC Chairman and *Philosophy Football* shirt designer Hugh Tisdale presents Eric with the Cantona shirt.

The best quote in the film, 'always trust your team mates', proves relevant in Brixton six weeks later, when PFFC enters a team in a charity 5-a-side tournament. Victory follows on one of the best days I've ever had playing for PFFC.

August arrives with a welcome return to José's and the start of pre-season training in Hyde and Regent's Parks. We welcome new midfielders Matt Prout and Francesco and Isaia Ricci, two of Filippo's cousins. We also re-sign Sola. Owen, Francesco and I play another charity tournament in Spitalfields Market. We fail to qualify for the final, but win 4, lose 3 and draw 2, only losing 1-0 to the eventual winners, who demolish a team of ex-Chelsea pros 5-1 in the final.

September sees the club's long-awaited return to Regent's Park for the first fixture back in the Grafton Millennium League. We play OK in parts, come back to 5-5 before losing 10-6. The tour to Italy is cancelled, but Ally and I meet the Gaffer in Bra for the Slow Food cheese festival. Molto molto bene!

More culture on 1 October at the Black Flash event at TUC HQ. Black Flash is a fascinating documentary from 2004 about the history of black players in the British game. Afterwards, Garth Crooks and Luther Blissett feature in a lively panel debate.

A picture tells a tale: Prague 2001

Jez Bray reflects on one of PFFC's earliest tours: a memorable, occasionally challenging trip to the Czech Republic

This photo was taken immediately before the Prague game in March 2001. Our opponents were far stronger than we were. Our performance wasn't helped by Ian having gone to hospital that morning with a neck injury; needing to draft in players from the embassy; and that fact that Owen, Goober and myself had enjoyed one or two pivos the night before. We were taught a footballing lesson!

Where are they now? (*Players in dark shirts, from the back left.*)



Geoff Andrews Still running the club, shuttling between London and Italy, ruffling Berlusconi's feathers and eating food slowly.

Unknown ringer

Christian Wolmar (in cap) Britain's leading transport journalist. Contributor to PFFC's forthcoming *Awkward Squad* book.

Unknown ringer

Jez Bray Plying my trade on the continent, working for the European Commission in Brussels.

Unknown ringer

Ian Coyne Sports journalist now back in Cheshire.

Richard Shepherd Appears for the Legends teams. Screenwriter and property magnate in north-west.

Ivor Gabor Retired. Influential professor of broadcast journalism.

Owen Mather – Club captain and stalwart; politics teacher in Harrow.

Cornish Al Still closely involved in the club, despite recently entering the realm of parenthood; barrister.

Stefan Howald Still making appearances for the Legends team, as well as playing for alternative Swiss team in Zürich; journalist.

May I recommend..?

In the first of a regular series, **Kofi Acheampong**, a schools support co-ordinator for FILMCLUB, recommends five films worth catching

I work in film and it is extremely hard to come up with an all-time favourite films list, but here are five that I really love:

M – Fritz Lang

The first time I saw this film I was in total shock, so ahead of its time it's ridiculous! A very difficult subject to tackle (child killer) but one done so expertly.

Guelwaar – Ousmane Sembene

A quite brilliant African murder mystery from the master of African cinema.

Shoot The Pianist – Francois Truffaut

Truffaut at his arrogant best, a sort of heist movie that waxes lyrical about love and relationships, starring the brilliant Charles Aznavour.

When We Were Kings – Leon Gast

Amazing music, overdose of charisma from Muhammed Ali and a real step into the madness of both Don King and the ruler of Zaire, President Mbotu, who was off his rocker.

The Beat That My Heart Skipped – Jacques Audiard

An almost 10/10 movie. Great story line about a petty thief who also leads a double life as a pianist and struggles to get away from his life of crime in order to realise his dream of becoming a great concert pianist. Ace film.