



THE KINGS ACADEMY
TEXAS TOUR 2011 - HOUSTON LEG

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THE KINGS ACADEMY TEXAS TOUR 2011

HOUSTON LEG – SOCCER DIARY

(Diary entries may be slightly fabricated. No offense intended)



Day 1 - Monday April 11, 2011: First practice session with Sports Quest

3.00 – 4.15 pm - The Kings boys arrived at Bear Creek Park (field 4) buzzing with excitement and full of energy. Shirts were quickly removed and skin immediately started to sizzle. After a very brief “kick around” inside the penalty area (2 minutes), one player comments that he’s exhausted already and needs to sit down. Should be a good first practice session!

After brief introductions, the stage is set for keep-away – Texas style. An 8v8 possession activity takes place inside a 40x40 yard grid with a giant/Jumbo soccer ball! Several players actually believe this to be the size of the game ball for their upcoming fixtures. Some boys look on in disgust at the oversized object being pinged around the grid (“I thought this was meant to be a serious practice?”), while others giggled uncontrollably (most notably Coach Stewart) as the Jumbo wreaked its havoc for the first 5 minutes of practice. Then it was down to the nitty gritty – coming to terms with the heat/humidity and getting touches on a regular soccer ball.



The juggling exercises proved to be no problem for most players, with a few managing to make double figures. Again, Coach Stewart was in the thick of things, mesmerizing the group with his silky first touch, not to mention his brand new footwear.



Clearly he’d been practicing since his last visit 2 years ago. “Three...Four...Five keep-ups...Yes. I did it! I beat my old score of 3 from 2009. All the hard work in my back yard has finally paid off.” Nice work Coach!



The passing and moving drills were carried out with little difficulty, and the shooting exercises were executed with power but were wayward to say the least. That was until Coach Rhodes stepped onto the scene. Proving yet again that “you never lose it”, Coach drilled a stray rolling ball into the top corner from 30 yards with the sweet right foot that makes him a sporting icon back in “Boro. “That’s how to do it boys,” he smirked, as he strutted back to the shade in his “Champions League Star Studded shirt” and sporty Kapri shorts and custom designed footwear (all pictured.) Meanwhile, Coach Stewart was again giving his all, hitting the ball cleanly once out of every 15 shots, yet still unable to hit a barn door.



Clearly struggling to come to terms with the heat and humidity, the cross bar challenge was embarrassing. The physical act of striking the ball 50 yards from the center circle to the goal was just too much to ask. Balls barely made it into the box, least of all get off the ground. Some landed over the sidelines; others in the parking lot. By this time, even the incentive of receiving a monumental award for hitting the bar failed to motivate. The boys were falling like flies, much to the amusement of Coach Wiecek who had seized



control of the video camera at the first opportunity. The last thing the lads wanted to do was run for the prize, so of course, this became part of the agenda.

A simple sprint to the far side of the pitch and back. Winner takes all. After a few false starts, they were off, but try as they might, speed had evaporated in the soaring Houston temperatures. That is, for everyone except Adam Robinson. Stretching every sinew and mustering up every ounce of courage, this “flying winger” sprinted across the finish line in a record breaking 2 minutes and 20 seconds, gleefully accepting the applause and subsequent reward of the highly coveted boot bag. Meanwhile, the two “chuckle brothers” who had feigned injury before the sprint, stood patrolling the water station, drinking the last few dregs and enjoying their well earned rest!



4.15-4.25 Devotional and prayer – God’s perspective of time

(a) Man’s time on earth is limited and passes by VERY QUICKLY!

Our glory will fade. When Manchester United win their nineteenth EPL title this year, it will one day be forgotten.

Kinda like the glory years of “Boro and Newcastle which are obviously long gone! Whatever we achieve in life cannot be taken into eternity with us.

“All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of the Lord stands forever.” – **1 Peter 1:24-25**

(b) God’s Word stands the test of time. It never changes. It is consistent. It is true for all people, for all places and for all times.

“All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.”

– **Psalms 119:160**

(c) May we use every day, every experience in a God honoring way for His glory

“Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” – **Psalms 90:12**



(c) May it be said of us as it was said of Apelles – That we are found...

“Tested and approved in Christ.” – **Romans 16:10**

4.30 pm – Depart

After the devotional, the Kings boys dragged themselves back to the buses to bask in the air conditioning, no doubt wondering what on earth they had got themselves into! Tomorrow, first game against Texas United FC. Will they be ready, or will the USA once again prove to be a thorn in their side...?



Day 2 - Tuesday April 12, 2011: First game versus Texas United FC coached by Deepak Lumba 6.15 pm – Kickoff

A day after their gentle introduction to soccer in Texas, the Kings boys were ready for their first real test in a match situation. Kicking off at 6.15 pm on a rock solid, dusty Bear Creek pitch, the game against Texas United FC (TUFC) promised much, and for sure, the crowd was not disappointed! Pre-game photos occupied 10 nervous minutes, with the Kings lads duly establishing themselves as “heart throbs” from across the pond. Indeed, the Ball Kids for the night (under 12 girls “Dynamite”), wasted no time in attaching themselves to teen idol and Justin Bieber lookalike, Andy Squires (pictured with his new friends).



After a vigorous warm-up conducted by Coach Stewart (pictured demonstrating his new push-up technique), all was set for the much awaited encounter. Sadly, Coach Stewart was to miss the first 10 minutes of the game due to heat exhaustion and cramps. Early challenges were fierce from both teams, although composure on the ball was not of the highest quality. Nonetheless, it was clear that both teams were “up for it”, and as the half progressed, Kings central midfielders started to “boss” the game, slowing play down at just the right times and playing penetrating passes in behind the TUFC back line with alarming regularity. With chances few and far between, wide man and proven goalscorer, Adam Robinson squandered a golden opportunity after 26 minutes, somehow managing to miss from 3 yards out. Sighs of relief all round from TUFC, and as Robinson trudged away in frustration and embarrassment, he could no doubt feel the icy glares from the ever increasingly agitated Kings Coaches.



And yet, as if to ease the pain of a fellow competitor, TUFC were guilty themselves of turning an impossible miss into nightmare blooper. With the Kings goalkeeper (James Byrne) going walk-about on the stroke of half time, TUFC forward Andre Escorcía's lob drifted agonizingly over the bar to a chorus of groans from his teammates as well as from the sidelines.



Half time score: TUFC 0 Kings Academy 0.

The second half was once again full of passion, and having gone through the sparring process, both teams now added considerable quality to their 100% effort. The crowd was absolutely getting their money's worth (free admission), and as the game ebbed back and forth, the superb match officials, Mike Sohmer (referee) and Assistant Referees, Mark Fournier and Chandler Devine, kept proceedings flowing with magnificent calls and terrific understanding and interpretation of the laws of the game. A case in point was Mr. Sohmer's diversion of criticism leveled against him after a so called dubious call against the Kings boys. “This is my house!” came his retort, effectively putting out a potential wild fire with such astute and timely words of wisdom. No question, anxiety was rising, and with 10 minutes remaining, TUFC playmaker Josh Senovsky was left reeling on the ground as Kings hard-man and stylish midfielder, (Connor Busby) dove recklessly into an 80-20 challenge, rightly earning a yellow card and a ticking off from the ref. By now, the vuvuzela volume had been turned up to a maximum, and although sickening to the ears, the droning noise served only to add to the spice, the atmosphere and the international flavor of this hotly contested and highly charged meeting between England and the USA.



And then...it happened. In the dying minutes of the game, Kings dynamic forward, Tony Jones, had the chance of a lifetime to attain hero status. A rare mistake at the heart of the TUFC defense left Jones with just the keeper to beat. Advancing quickly off his line, the TUFC keeper could only watch in agony as the ball sailed over his head and into the empty net. Jones wheeled off towards his jubilant teammates, kissed the Kings badge on his shirt, and spent the rest of the evening signing autographs and conducting TV interviews...

At least that's how it played out in his mind over and over again in his dreams. Sadly, the "goal" never happened, as the previously mauled Josh Senovsky summoned up every ounce of energy to race 50 yards to hoof the ball off the line and away from danger. "I don't consider myself a hero," said Senovsky after the game. "I'm just patriotic. I have a love for my country and a bond with my team that goes beyond any personal accolades and recognition. Sure, I was brilliant tonight, but that's just what I do and who I am." Profound words indeed from the TUFC starlet. Meanwhile, Jones was left licking his wounds, no doubt wishing he was playing cards or board games with his family, or even prancing around on the badminton court back home in "Boro (see Jones's Player Profile for more information on his special interests).



And so, off to penalty kicks we go. Could it get more dramatic than this? Would there be more twists and turns to the drama? The answer...a resounding YES! USA stepped up first and made no mistake, Matty Nelson calmly slotting home and punching the air in delight. TUFC stalwart defender, Ravi Lumba scored with ease, but following this success, USA gasped in disbelief as Aaron Evers blazed his shot into a different post-code (the ball was never found). The next players both scored for their respective countries (Karl Young for England and Cameron Ross for USA). England goalkeeper Declan Toves then saved England's third spot kick with his cat-like reflexes, bringing the scores level at 3-3.

Snooker expert John Myers somehow managed to find the only bump inside the penalty area to divert the ball over the diving USA keeper to give England a 4-3 advantage. Up stepped Senovsky for USA and blasted the ball high into the corner. Four to four. England's final penalty kick was taken by Adam Robinson, (who really dislikes beans, Tuna and mayonnaise, according to his "Player Profile"). Under intense pressure, Robinson neatly side-footed the ball sweetly with his left foot past the goalkeeper's flailing right hand. Great goal! With the shoot-out scores now reading 4-3 in favor of England, USA knew they had to score their final kick or suffer the agony of defeat in such heartbreaking circumstances. Up stepped USA's final kicker (who will remain anonymous but pictured nonetheless) who drove the ball firmly towards the top corner of the net. The ever impressive England goalkeeper, Declan Toves sprang like a tiger and somehow managed to claw the ball onto the post, which then rolled across the goal-line and onto the other post. A hefty wind threatened to carry the ball over the line, until Toves scrambled back onto his feet, and again dove full length to finger tip the ball away from the goal. What a save! What a finish. And what a fabrication of what actually happened! Still, it makes good reading, and will no doubt become folk lore back in "Boro in the weeks, months and years to come!



As Toves was mobbed by his marauding teammates, it brought to conclusion a magnificent spectacle between 2 outstanding, well coached and entertaining teams. As the saying goes, "the game was the winner" and through tears of joy and absolute delight, Coach Rhodes hugged everyone he could get his arms around, perhaps wondering if this latest triumph might be the catalyst for a managerial/coaching career at his beloved hometown of Middlesbrough. Only time will tell, but once again, he and his coaching staff earned their stripes on a night of thrills and spills on the hallowed turf of Bear Creek Park, USA! Final score: England 0 USA 0. England win 4-3 on penalties.



Day 3 – Wednesday April 13, 2011: Second practice session with Sports Quest

3.15-4.30 pm – The Kings players disembarked the buses with slightly less of a spring in their step than the previous 2 days. “Must be taking its toll, all this heat, humidity, training and games”, I said casually to Coach Stewart. “Not really,” he replied. “It’s more of the burgers, fries and gallons of coke we’ve just ravished at ‘Whataburger!’” Stewart, desperately holding onto his mammoth ‘Whataburger’ mug as if his life depended on it, confessed that it might not be long before his lunch made a re-appearance! Most of the boys seemed to share the same sentiment.

Nonetheless, amidst a few groans and much whining, practice got under way with gentle touches on the ball, followed by stretching and individual juggling. Next came passive defending, as players were asked to approach a teammate with the ball and fake right/left as late as possible. Of course, this presented a perfect opportunity for Coach Stewart to whack into as many boys as possible in the 30 second exercise, sending several sprawling in agony, much to his amusement. Thankfully, Coach was eventually reprimanded and punished for the physical abuse he’d inflicted on so many unsuspecting and innocent young men (pictured and jeered by one of his victims).

The “passing and moving exercises” which followed, aroused the competitive instincts of the group, and with fitness rearing its ugly head for the losers, the tempo increased dramatically. Good stuff, as the effects of the slap up meal at “Whataburger” was finally beginning to wear off.

Shooting on goal once again resembled a firework display, with the aim seemingly being to kick the ball over the goal as far and as often as possible, thus earning a gentle stroll to retrieve the wayward missile.

Next, the one versus one situations encouraged players to earn “bragging rights” against their opponent, with “creativity in possession” being the major focus.

Finally, the soccer session ended with a Speed Kick Competition. Each player was given the opportunity to drive the ball into an empty net from 10 yards out, and then have their speed recorded by Sports Quest’s multi-million dollar sports radar gun. Speeds varied from 15 miles per hour (Coach Stewart) to over 60 miles per hour. Alas, several boys failed to record a score when their ball sailed over the unattended goal and off into the wilderness. As the finalists stepped up, it was obvious that friendships had now gone out of the window. Everyone wanted to win. After all, a marvelous gift awaited the victor.

After 2 shots per player, goalkeeper Declan Tows surprised many with a magnificent winning speed kick of 75 miles an hour! What a strike. What an athlete. What a story to tell his grandkids. And yet, in a rare display of camaraderie and sportsmanship, Declan graciously handed his “trophy” (Kappa bag) to his closest competitor, Aaron Eyre, a man who had pushed Declan all the way but had just fallen short at the last hurdle. Said Eyre afterwards, “Although I’ve never really had much time for Declan, I’ve seen him in a whole new light today. He’s got guts, character and compassion for his fellow man. From now on, my aim in life is to be just like him. I’m stunned and delighted all at the same time. I don’t know whether to laugh or cry. One thing’s for certain though, Declan is a “Hall of Famer in my book”.

Yes...A perfect end to a perfect day on the soccer field!



4.30-4.45 Devotional and prayer – What is faith?

1. What comes to mind when you think of the word “faith?”
-Trust
2. **What do you put your faith in (trust) on a daily basis?**
-Airplane, chairs, speed gun, water cooler, sun block, currency etc.
3. **Have you ever put your faith in something that has let you down?**
-Car, lottery ticket, ice, etc.
4. **Have you ever put your faith in someone who has let you down?**
-‘Boro manager, Newcastle manager, England manager, friend, girlfriend, parent, coach, teacher, self etc.
5. **Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:7, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” What does this mean?**
-He didn’t relinquish his faith in spite of all that had happened to him in life
-He kept proclaiming the faith



6. **Paul’s outlook on life is clear from Philippians 1:21 “For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”**
-If he lives, he’ll live for Jesus and share his faith
-Paul’s life is one of dependency; one of trust in Jesus Christ
-If he dies, Paul knows he will be rewarded with a heavenly dwelling and eternal life



7. **So what is the faith that caused Paul to be “on fire” for Christ?**
He’d personally met Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. He turned from persecutor of Christians to a proclaimer of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Thus:

(a) He fully understood grace

-There is nothing we can do to earn God’s favor. Salvation is a free gift available to all mankind “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” **(Ephesians 2:8-9)**

(b) He fully understood what it means to please God, “Without faith, it is impossible to please God” **(Hebrews 11:6)**

8. **Personal testimony of how I came to faith in Jesus Christ, invitation to commitment, and distribution of Gideon Bibles**

(a) Family background (non Christian/non church going)

(b) Personal perceptions

-I was a good person

-I could stand before God on my own merit

-Christians are weak (no fun, can’t compete, list of rules to follow etc.)

(c) I was eventually told the truth from a friend, but didn’t accept it for a few years. Instead...

-I watched his life closely and saw it changed by Christ

-I saw my life passing by without meaning, purpose and significance

(d) I asked Jesus Christ to be my Personal Savior at age 24 (October 20, 1991) in Texas!

(e) My life changed for eternity, and yours can too. Trust Jesus Christ today!

-Admit your sin. Believe in Jesus Christ to forgive your sin. He paid for all sin (past, present and future) by dying on the cross. Commit your life to Him by asking Him into your heart (through prayer) as Lord and Personal Savior.



And then...Be ready for the adventure of a lifetime!

Day 4 - Thursday April 14, 2011: Second game versus Texas United FC Houston Pumas coached by Oscar German and Bob Cox

6.15 pm – Kickoff

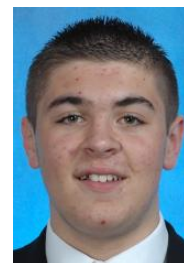
And so here we are. The fourth and final soccer event in Houston. What's that the boys were told at Monday's first training session? Oh yes. How time flies! Just like life, what we prepare for, strive for, earn and accomplish is "here today and gone tomorrow." Maybe that's why at the end of his illustrious life, King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, boiled everything down to one thing – *"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."* (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Tonight's game promises to be a cracker. Good crowd. Lively opposition. Big hearts and once again, top officiating from one of FIFA's most highly respected officials. Hold on to your seats Houston...we're ready for lift-off!

With preliminaries over (photos, handshakes, exchange of gifts by Captains, autographs, interviews and a loud, vigorous warm-up), the Kings boys set about their work with steely determination. Tackles were flying in from all angles, and the speed of play was immense. The first chance of the game fell to the one man wrecking machine, Aaron Eyre, whose "hulk like" physique earns him immediate respect (and attention) from opposing defenders. But there's more than sheer muscle and brute strength to Eyre. He holds the ball up well and packs an incredibly powerful punch (usually off the ball when the ref's not looking!) Eyre set off as if Fabio Capello was in the stands, chasing, hustling, scrapping

for every ball. In the very first minute of the game, Eyre pounced on a through pass and unleashed a rocket from 3 yards out, only to see the Pumas goalkeeper finger tip the ball onto the crossbar for a corner. Just two minutes later, Pumas hit back themselves after Kings goalkeeper Declan Toves stepped 10 yards outside of his box before punting, clearly losing his bearings. It was a rare error from the usually reliable Toves, who apparently is still making the transition from spectacles to contact lenses (see before and after pictures). The eagle eyed referee spotted the infringement, but Toves's remarkable organizational skills ensured the wall did its job, with the ensuing free kick blazing wide of the far post.

While Kings dominated proceedings, Pumas always looked dangerous on the break, and in the thirteenth minute, disaster struck. Marauding down the right wing, hurdling several heavy challenges and crossing with pin point accuracy, the Pumas wide man picked out his center forward who gratefully accepted the gift to head home with ease. Chants of "Ole – Ole – Ole – Ole" were soon drowned out however, as the officials stepped in to rule the goal offside. Camera replays were later to show just how good a decision this was. With the aid of modern technology, the forward was adjudged to be 1.5 inches offside, proving yet again to players, coaches and spectators that they were in the presence of a referee at the very top of his game.



Seventeen minutes in, and Kings had the crowd on their feet once again, this time from a superbly struck volley following good work down the right. Pumas goalkeeper Eric Pacheko pulled off another world class save to keep his team level. Meanwhile, "Wee Man" James Wilde was causing all sorts of problems with his wizardry down the left, completely bamboozling his fullback and quickly becoming a fan favorite with his tantalizing footwork.

Finally, the deadlock was broken in the 26th minute, albeit against the run of play. Playmaking central defender, Chris Riley, a man with the elegance of Rio Ferdinand and the bravery of John Terry, was for once caught napping by a raking 40 yard cross-field pass from right to left. His misguided header fell squarely at the feet of the grateful Puma midfielder, who drove the ball with such ferocity that Towes had no time to react. This time, the “Ole – Ole – Ole – Ole’s” were justified, and for the first time, Kings looked rattled and dispirited. It would need a stirring half time talk from Coach Rhodes and his experienced sidekicks (Coach Stewart and Coach Wiecek) to turn things around.



At the interval: Kings Academy 0 TUFC Houston Pumas 1.

Whatever words of wisdom Coach Rhodes and his staff had for the boys, they were to prove inspirational. The team came out of the traps like men possessed, winning every challenge, questioning every (excellent) decision from the ref and fighting fearlessly to regain supremacy. One supporter who had overheard Coach Rhodes address his boys was amazed at the level of intensity he'd been able to draw from his players. “What did he say,” I enquired. “Wow man, it was powerful stuff. I mean, man, he kept saying things like, ‘We are Kings and we will not be beaten’. This is our time. This is our field. We own this town and this state and even this country, and no one will stand in our way. Be men of honor. Show courage. Live for this moment. And if necessary, die as men...out there, on the field...this is it men, let’s go...it’s our time!”

Incredible...motivational...brilliant. “Anything about tactics or how to break down the opposition?” I asked. “Dude. It was as if I was in the presence of Ian Holloway, Sir Alex Ferguson, Jose Mourinho and the great Gareth Southgate, all at the same time. He had his boys so charged up, they were like caged animals, clamoring to have another go at their prey.” “I don’t know anything about soccer, but I know a world class coach when I see (and hear) one. Coach Rhodes...Now there’s a guy I’d want to play for!”



“But anything about strategy, tactics, formations, exploiting opposition weaknesses?” I pressed. “It was ALL tactics man, tactics of the brain. He got inside their heads. Made them believe. Gave them back their pride. Challenged them. What more could he do? His wisdom is beyond belief. Infact, I ended up writing down a few of his quotes, just so that I could use them with my under 5 girls team next week when we play the Raiders in the Texas Cup Final. Wanna hear some?” “Sure,” I said, eager to learn from the best. “Okay, here’s one: ‘Hey Kings, let’s keep going. No one has ever drowned in sweat!’ And there’s more: ‘Boys...Look into my eyes when I say this...On this field, we’re somebody else’s guests – let’s get out there and play in a way that they’ll never forget we visited them!’ And he left them with this stirring gem just before they charged back onto the field, ready to take on the world: ‘Boys...The only place you can win a soccer game is on the field; the only place you can lose it is in your hearts. Do not surrender. Never, never, never, never give in!’”

With Coach Rhodes’s barrage of quotes still ringing in his ears, Aaron Eyre leveled the scores just 3 minutes after the re-start. And what a goal it was! Beating 2 players in his own half, jinking past a lunge in the center circle, flicking the ball onto his thigh just over the half way line before volleying home from all of 45 yards, Eyre unleashed a strike that drew gasps from players, spectators, coaches, match officials and opponents alike. The speeding bullet flew past the Pumas goalkeeper still on the rise, a real thunderbolt of a shot and one which earned Eyre a standing ovation from all of us privileged to witness the “wonder goal” (as Eyre later described it). And so...One to one...Game on! Tackles now took on even more bite and venom. The passion to win was written all over the Kings faces, and Coach Rhodes was at his motivational best on the sidelines. “C’mon lads. We can do this. The harder you work, the harder it



is to surrender.” Meanwhile, Ewan Crane had a go at Adam Robinson for not giving him the ball. Cue Coach Rhodes: “Hey Ewan. A winner never whines. Teamwork son. Teamwork. More of ‘we’ and less of thee” Priceless!

As the game ebbed and flowed, chances were created at both ends, but it was Pumas who struck again in the seventh minute. A terrific forage down the left saw Kings struggling to defend the quick counter-attack. Individual brilliance from the Puma winger (Nate German), saw him dart seamlessly through a disjointed back line, glide into the penalty area and with sublime skill and composure, drill home from 15 yards, giving the Kings goalkeeper no chance. Another fabulous strike, and one possibly good enough to win the match. “That guy is a genius,” remarked a Puma spectator. For some reason this really irritated Coach Stewart, who hit back with his own retort, “ Hey Big Fella. Nobody in soccer should be called a genius. A genius is a guy like Norman Einstein”.



Time was quickly becoming the enemy of Kings Academy, yet the lads remained defiant; ever determined to prove their English supremacy.

Never shy of a challenge, “Wee Man” continued to put himself about, rustling a few feathers and defying his diminutive stature with marvelous feats of courage. Any yet his youthful exuberance was to prove his downfall. A Kamikaze type lunge (pictured below) left himself and his unfortunate opponent reeling in agony. As the medical team rushed onto the field, “Wee Man” was down for the count, revealing later that he didn’t remember where he was, who he was, or what he was even doing on a soccer field in Texas. The only words he could muster was yet another quote drilled into him by



Coach Rhodes from childhood:

“Wee Man...Real glory is being knocked to your knees and then coming back. That's real glory son. Never forget that”. After much pampering and babying, “Wee Man” recovered sufficiently to give a wry smile and say, “This is great. I can milk this forever. I’ll be a hero back home. I think I could go back and play right now, but since we’re losing, I’ll just let the boys struggle without me. Maybe then they’ll realize what a key figure I am on this team.”

In spite of the intensity of the game, the match referee (pictured cooling things down yet again) was always “Johnny on the spot”, wielding yellow cards and giving sensible verbal warnings to players who were on the verge of getting slightly frustrated. Indeed, it needed a top official to keep a lid on this highly charged encounter; the Kings boys desperately pleading their case that air-borne two-footed tackles were perfectly legal in England. With time running out, the ever impressive Adam Robinson saw his shot ricochet off the underside of the crossbar, while at the other end, Kings goalkeeper James Byrne pulled off a string of tremendous saves to keep his team in the hunt. A well taken free kick by Kings on 33 minutes whisked inches past the Pumas post, while the superb playmaker in midfield, Karl Young almost grabbed the equalizer for England with 4 minutes remaining.



Just one more order of business remained: A trademark crunching tackle in the final minute from the combative, creative and gifted Matty Nelson, whose yellow card likely represented a badge of honor to the England Captain.

And so game number 2 of the Texas Tour ended in defeat for England by a score-line of 2-1. But what a game it was. Non stop action. Full blooded challenges. Quality play on a difficult surface. Outstanding goals and goalkeeping. Intricate passing and stout, brave defending. Intelligent and sensible refereeing. It had everything.

As the old cliché goes, "Soccer came out tops today." And, speaking of old things, let's leave the final words to Coach Rhodes, a man for all occasions and one blessed with that rare ability to communicate with wisdom, tact and insight. Listen and learn from what he had to say to his disappointed troops at the end of the game:

Quote 1: "Boys, we didn't lose the game today; we just ran out of time."

Quote 2: "Lads, difficulties and defeats in life are intended to make us better, not bitter."

Quote 3: "Yes, we lost the game, but remember, things that hurt, instruct." And finally...

Quote 4: "Yes we were beaten by the Houston Pumas. We may've let ourselves down, disappointed our families, our school and even our country, but boys, while adversity may cause some men to break, it causes others to break records. Let's use this humiliation to build for the future. A brighter future. One where Kings Academy is once again recognized as a powerhouse in the world of soccer. Let's do it with TEAMWORK: The fuel that produces uncommon results in common people. On three...Kings. ONE...TWO...THREE...KINGS!!!! "

