



ROBERT O'SHEA'S FANTASY FOOTBALL

DAY 10

WHEN I alight from the bus in Sagres, several middle-aged women accost me at the stop with cries of 'room, room'.

I will not be staying overnight so I wave them away.

They scatter in various directions to go about their business until the next bus arrives.

The sun has disappeared behind some darkening clouds and I sense the end of the world is near.

I must hire a bike to get there though, because the bus doesn't run on Sunday.

Cabo St Vicente is six miles west of Sagres. It is the most Southwesterly point of Europe and was considered the edge of the earth by Europeans a few centuries back.

As I pedal my way out of town I discover the bike I ride is an automatic, changing gears at its own leisure.

I struggle with them until the inevitable happens: the chain comes off.

I haven't been on a bike in a long time and the only thing I remember about fixing it is that I must first turn it upside down.

This done, I wrestle with the chain for a while, catch my fingers a few times and cover my hands in oil.

Once up on the saddle again I begin to make progress towards the cape, even if it is at a steady three metres per second due to a headwind.

The force of the breeze from the Atlantic is incredible and the long road in front of me has an uphill gradient too.

The only comfort is that on the way back all I will have to do is hold on to the handlebars.

A lighthouse stands at the end of the cape and a few stalls and vans sit either side of the road before it.

I drop my bike and walk around the grounds of the lighthouse.

A small wall is the wisest place to stop and for a couple of minutes I am crowned Most Southwesterly Person in Europe.

All kinds of things go through your mind as you look out on the water and listen to the waves crash beneath you, like how there is no one more Southwesterly than you, etc.

As I turn back I get the temptation to do a Forrest Gump and head for Vladivostok.

Some Russians pass me as I pick up my bike. I ask them, "Vladivostok. Eta nidalyiko? (Is it far?)" They give a good laugh and I'm pleased to have cracked a joke in Russian.

In fact, everyone around the cape seems in good humour.

At the van I pull up to for a beer and to watch the first half of Germany-Latvia, the people address me in Portuguese and point at me and my bike and smile. They seem to be congratulating me on my cycle.

It is only when I get back to a bathroom in Sagres and wash the bike oil from my face that I realise what was so amusing.

Day eleven

AT Faro bus station a man wanders up to me looking for money for a ticket to Villa Real.

After I give it to him, Chris and John tell me they donated some change towards this same trip last week.



Greek players celebrate in front of their supporters at the end of the Euro 2004 Group A soccer match between Greece and Russia at the Algarve Stadium in Faro. Picture: AP

Bikes, bones and beggars

I don't mind giving money to bums, but I wish they'd vary their lies from time to time.

If a gentleman in tattered clothes sat on the ground with his hand out and asked for euro for a glass of whiskey I'd be quicker to give it to him than if he asked for a cup of tea.

Chris is a buddy from Perth in Australia. The last time we met I missed my plane home from Tokyo.

The night before my flight we were on a karaoke date with two Japanese girls whom we met in the early hours after the World Cup final in Yokohama (because Chris and I struggled with Japanese and the girls, with English, we could only communicate through karaoke).

That night turned into morning quickly and one of the problems with escorting girls home in Tokyo is that a taxi ride can take up to an hour because it is the biggest damn-assed city in the world.

And our taxi drove off while we were saying goodnight and left us stranded.

Luckily, Japanese people are so polite that at Air Japan they felt it was their fault that I was hungover and late and they put me straight on the next flight.

Tonight I will sleep on the guys' hotel room floor to save a few bucks.

Chris and John also like bee-yah, so later on I probably won't mind where I sleep.

John's parents are from Sicily and he is over supporting Italy.

There are even fewer Russians around Faro today, so it is up to me in my CCCP jersey to pose for photographs with Greeks and put on a Russian accent so not to disappoint them.

But when we get to the stadium we see that there are thousands of Russians inside again.

I don't know where they go before and afterwards. Has Roman hired coaches for all of them to be ferried from stadium to yacht? It's a night for Dmitris. Dmitri Kirichenko gets Russia off to flyer in the third minute and Dmitri Bulykin makes it two in the 17th. Dmitrios Papadopoulos pulls one back for the Greeks just before the break and it looks like it might set up a good second half.

Unfortunately, it doesn't live up to the frenzy of the first, but news ripples through the crowd that Portugal have scored and everyone is happy.

Russia win, and Greece and Portugal go through. The whole excitement takes a bit of deflating when we discover that the bus drivers are all at home celebrating the Portugal win and that we are stranded with thousands of others at the stadium.

And for once it is a cold night on the Algarve. One bus seems to be doing the trip to Faro and back and we don't see the city until midnight.

The traffic is slightly chaotic too, with drivers stuck in the jam getting out to dance on the road.

I think Spain have been unlucky, but tonight, I am wise enough to keep my mouth shut.

Day Twelve

I LEAVE the lads in the hotel to get the early bus to Lisbon.

I have an hour to spare so I visit the Capela do Ossos, the Chapel of the Bones. The chapel is found at the back of a very beautiful church in the centre of Faro.

I have never seen a skull bare of skin before; here there are 1245 of them, only missing the jawbones, jammed among femurs.

They belonged to the monks buried in the cemetery outside.

I rub a skull and think of the thousand times this man must have wiped sweat from his brow. "Stop here and think of the faith that will befall you," says the sign.

As I walk back to the bus station my thoughts are firmly on mortality.

As I watch people push to get on buses I say to myself, 'What's the rush? We're all going to die.' Somebody approaches me and I recognise the face.

"Excuse me, but I lose my wallet. I was wondering if might you have a euro so I can get a bus home to Lagos."

I press a coin in his palm, my faith in humanity restored.

Robert is an Echo Sports journalist who followed Russia in Euro 2004