

DEVON ROWCLIFFE



WHO ATE ALL
THE SQUID?

FOOTBALL ADVENTURES
IN SOUTH KOREA

WHO ATE ALL
THE SQUID?

FOOTBALL ADVENTURES
IN SOUTH KOREA

DEVON ROWCLIFFE



CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	7
Busan Icons Squad List	8
Introduction – Chief Executive Chokeholds	9
1. Stadium Moats and Cracked Skulls	14
2. The Silly Bowing Dance (or, Don't Forget to Shake Your Muffler)	19
3. Rocket Launchers and 12-Lane Motorways (or, You Can't See Me!)	28
4. Sober Supporters and Player Punch-Ups	39
5. Supporters Have Kit, But Players Don't	49
6. Alcohol – No; Stolen Military Flares – Yes	57
7. Sleep-Deprived and Without a Toilet	67
8. Could You Switch Off the Floodlights? The Air Force is Cross	79
9. Plagues of Locusts and Flashy Foreigners	87
10. Democracy Protesters Support the Military Team	95
11. Death By Electric Fan (or, Don't Forget to Smear Red Bean Paste on Your Door)	105
12. Football? On a Saturday?!? Ridiculous!	115
13. Friday Naiveté (or, Build, Build, Build)	123
14. <i>Colgó los Guayos</i> (Hang Up the Football Boots)	132
15. We'll Show Those Neo-Colonialist Bastards	143
16. The Confrontation (or, Even Manchester United Took Time to Build)	148
17. Cureton's Debut (or, Busan's Treble of Embarrassment)	162
18. The British Revolution	171

19. Squad Squabbles and Empty World Cup Stadiums	181
20. Airing Dirty Laundry in the Newspapers	191
21. Best Mates with Local Derby Rivals	204
22. Dog Injures Player (or, Pregnancies Aplenty)	215
23. Big Bugs and Bodyguards (or, Uninterested Club Owners)	225
24. Divorces and Drubbings	237
25. Greener Pastures and Manitoba Dreamin'	243
26. Food Poisoning and a 335kph Breeze	249
27. Baseball Riots, Vanishing Nepalese and Furious Chickens	259
28. Smashing Chairs and Perilous Buses	266
29. Football Hooligans and Picnicking Families	274
30. Match Fixing and Farewell Letters	281
31. Season of Sorrow	289
Epilogue	300
Sources	317

INTRODUCTION

CHIEF EXECUTIVE
CHOKEHOLDS

돌다리도 두드려 보고 건너라
– *Look before you leap*
(literally, ‘even a stone bridge should be tested by
banging on it before crossing’)

‘WHO IS your boss? *Who is your boss?!?*’

Scottish football manager Ian Porterfield, in the dressing room for half-time, is pinned up against the wall. The club’s CEO shouts as he punches Porterfield’s arms and squeezes the Scot’s throat.

The team is losing 1-0 at home. The CEO is enraged.

‘What are you going on about? I just want to do my job,’ responds Porterfield as he gasps for air. He attempts to wriggle free from the CEO’s grasp.

After five additional minutes of this physical and verbal barrage, the CEO releases Porterfield from the wall and swings open the dressing room door. The playing squad enters for their half-time team talk, likely unaware of the assault that has just transpired.

After a brief motivation session from a flustered Porterfield, the players saunter back out to the stadium tunnel for the second half. As the last player exits, the CEO slams the dressing room door shut again. He turns back toward Porterfield, then lunges at him.

‘Who do you think you are?’ barks the CEO, as he resumes his grip around Porterfield’s neck, pushing the Scot down on to the team’s massage table.

‘I am Ian Porterfield.’

‘Oh, do you think you are tough?’ asks the CEO. ‘Is it because you are white that you think you can talk to us that way?’

After several further minutes of the altercation, the CEO finally releases Porterfield.

‘You had better get out of Ghana because you and I cannot work together,’ says the CEO. ‘I won’t pay your salary so why don’t you just fuck off!’

‘I want to go out and win the game for the boys and the supporters,’ says Porterfield.

‘Why do you want to go out there?’ asks the exasperated CEO, as if to suggest Porterfield shouldn’t bother returning to the pitch for the second half.

‘I just want to do my job,’ says Porterfield.

The Scot’s team perform a second-half comeback, scoring twice and winning the Ghana Premier League match. After brief celebrations, Porterfield strides toward the club’s VIP area, where the CEO usually watches the games. But before Porterfield arrives, the CEO has already launched into a tirade against the Scot’s wife, Glenda, yelling, ‘You should both just leave Ghana! And you should watch your backs until you go, because I am a powerful man and you don’t know who you are messing with.’

The above are highlights from Ian Porterfield’s account of his alleged treatment at Ghanaian football club Kumasi Asante Kotoko. Porterfield would attempt to sue the club and its management for wrongful dismissal, breach of contract, assault and battery, as well as uttering threats, before ultimately settling out of court.

Mere weeks after leaving Ghana, the former Chelsea manager would accept his next international assignment: taking charge of struggling South Korean club football giants Busan I’cons. South Korea had a reputation among international football journeymen as a reliable country that paid on time, respected contracts and rarely screwed people around. After several ‘eventful’ football management stints around the globe, Porterfield looked forward to the stability and predictability of leading a club in North East Asia, his first job in the region.

* * *

Had I chosen the worst time in decades to travel to South Korea?

Events looked tumultuous as I boarded a Korean Air flight, destined for a season of football in the Hermit Kingdom. The United States of America had begun its foolhardy invasion of Iraq the day prior to my departure, causing unease for those still brave enough to venture on to an international aircraft. The mood in the airport was noticeably sombre.

North Korea's usual cacophony of threats to bomb their enemy *du jour* into oblivion, which I had always dismissed nonchalantly in the past, suddenly took on an entirely new relevance – my new home in Busan would be within missile range of the Dear Leader's pariah country.

South Korea had just been ravaged by a vicious subway fire that melted carriages – as well as the unfortunate passengers encaged within.

Anti-American sentiment had swollen into months of street protests across South Korea – and although I wasn't from the USA, it wouldn't be difficult to be misidentified as an American by agitated locals.

And the World Health Organization had just declared the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) virus – centred in East Asia – a 'worldwide health threat' and issued an emergency travel advisory.

But like any self-respecting youngster, I ignored adversity. I boarded the aircraft and welcomed the adventures ahead – no matter how eventful they threatened to become.

My first impressions of Korea took place aboard the flight, prior to actually stepping foot in the country. Having previously only been subjected to airlines from Western nations, I wasn't expecting to be enamoured by the journey. But to my surprise, I was impressed by the exceptional standard of service and mesmerised by what was then the pinnacle of technology for an in-flight experience. Being familiar with squinting at small, overhead airplane televisions that either displayed flickering movies (when they weren't on the blink) or hung switched off as if passively participating in industrial action, I was captivated by massive plasma screens mounted throughout the aircraft that beckoned my attention like prominent pieces of artwork.

And then came the movies. I am perhaps resorting to exaggeration, drawing upon memories tainted by over-excitement as

they solidified in my mind, but witnessing high-definition plasma screens in action for the first time – in an aeroplane, of all places – was surreal. Aware that South Korea was at the forefront of technological innovation, I thought that if this was the experience on a Korean plane, enthralling adventures must abound inside the actual country. I wasn't usually one to get excited by material things, yet there I was, enchanted like a small child, pondering what other surprises awaited.

A prospect even more exciting than futuristic television sets was the local football scene I was about to immerse myself in. As a football-mad youngster, I planned to spend an entire season following my local South Korean club to all of their K League matches, home and away.

But why South Korea? A surprising destination for someone enamoured with football, you might remark?

Surely not. The country had been one of Asia's dominant football powers for decades, and its K League was the continent's first professional domestic competition. South Korea also co-hosted the 2002 World Cup less than a year prior to my arrival, the country now bejewelled with state-of-the-art World Cup stadiums. Football fans from around the world remarked about the passion that Koreans displayed during the country's matches. Even FIFA president Sepp Blatter was delighted, remarking in 2003: 'The future of football is Asia.' The country I was travelling to was no footballing backwater.

With visions of an Asian football Mecca and a high-tech utopia dancing through my imagination, my flight neared South Korea. After a brief connecting flight to Busan, my year-long adventure was about to begin.

Also arriving in South Korea around the same time was one Ian Porterfield, still revered by Sunderland fans for scoring the goal that won the club the 1973 FA Cup. He had toiled as a football manager for almost a quarter of a century by this point, but his most dramatic highs and lows were all experienced during his recent decade working abroad. These varied from an honorary national freedom award and a visit by a country's president, through to employment under the Mugabes as well as alleged assault and threats from a club chairman.

Would Porterfield prove a success in North East Asian football? Did he possess the skills – and the favourable circumstances beyond

his control – to dramatically improve a slumbering Korean football club? Would this job end in Porterfield once again being declared a national hero, or would he repeat the humiliation of being tossed out on his ear in just a matter of months?

CHAPTER 1

STADIUM MOATS AND
CRACKED SKULLS

SOUTH KOREA VS. COLOMBIA
INTERNATIONAL FRIENDLY
SATURDAY, 29 MARCH 2003
BUSAN ASIAD WORLD CUP STADIUM

'The [Korean World Cup] stadiums are like none I've ever seen. I think there must have been some strong competition nationally between Korea and Japan to make the best facilities because they are very well designed.'

– Lamar Hunt, American soccer philanthropist

WHY DID I choose to live in Busan?

The majority of Western expats in South Korea opt to reside in or around Seoul, the country's capital. As the most developed region of Korea, Greater Seoul is the most cosmopolitan and offers the best employment, public transport and entertainment.

What tourist brochures cleverly fail to mention is that the Seoul Capital Area is jammed full of people, and lots of them – 26 million, or half of South Korea's total population, making it the fifth most populated urban area in the world. Other impressive features of Seoul include its sea of concrete, plentiful air pollution and meagre green space.

Weighing the options, I decided to give South Korea's capital a miss in favour of Busan, a city later known by Westerners thanks mostly to the 2016 zombie thriller movie *Train to Busan*. As the country's second most populous city, Busan contains a mere third the people of Seoul, is situated adjacent to the Pacific Ocean, boasts several mountains that make for great hiking or a quick escape when urban life becomes overwhelming, and enjoys a relatively temperate climate – more akin to the UK's moderate weather than Seoul's frozen winters.

Busan's location on the Korean peninsula offers additional advantages over Seoul. The south-eastern city is farther away from the Gobi Desert, where the infamous 'Asian dust storms' originate each spring before sweeping across the continent and causing people to develop sandpaper-like mucus. Busan is also more distant from the factories that dot China's east coast, the primary source of fine particulate matter that plagues North East Asian air quality. And whereas Seoul is a mere 50km from the North Korean border, Busan is a much more comforting 350 clicks away from the nuclear-armed pariah regime.

For Scottish football manager Ian Porterfield, Busan represented an opportunity to resurrect his career. Other than initial success in charge of Trinidad and Tobago's national team that ultimately proved short-lived, Porterfield's four jobs prior to Busan each ended in disappointment, either on or off the field – and in some cases, both. Yet he clung to fond memories of achievements from earlier in his managerial career, including one instance he was declared a national hero. Busan I'cons represented an opportunity to repeat such heroics: to depart a completed managerial gig loved rather than loathed.

After recent assignments fraught with interfering and impatient bosses, or beset by petty politics beyond his control, Porterfield was excited to sign a three-year contract as manager of Busan. Although there is always an element of uncertainty in joining a new club, he was impressed by Busan's chairman and felt assured rather than apprehensive. The K League had an air of security and safety compared to other settings Porterfield recently toiled in. The Scot was keen to begin work.

* * *

Barely a week after settling in Busan, an opportunity arose to attend some football: South Korea versus Colombia in an international friendly. Admittedly it wasn't the most glamorous of fixtures, but it was a chance to watch recent World Cup semi-finalists South Korea – and their ardent supporters who had become the envy of the footballing world – take on a decent South American side in a newly built stadium. This would also mark the first national team match in Busan since the well-attended World Cup, ensuring a large and enthusiastic crowd.

Like many new football grounds in the UK, Busan Asiad World Cup Stadium seemed to be located in the middle of nowhere. After negotiating a circuitous public transport route that involved two subways and a bus – because building a sporting venue near the subway or vice versa would be far too logical – I eventually arrived at the massive pantheon, nestled into the eastern base of Baekyang Mountain. With one of the largest capacities among Korea's new stadiums, Asiad had hosted three group-stage matches during the 2002 World Cup. Most prominent was South Korea's initial game of the tournament, which doubled as their first-ever win at a World Cup: a historic 2-0 victory over Poland. Asiad also served as the centrepiece of the 2002 Asian Games, which unfortunately necessitated a colossal running track between the pitch and the stands. Oh well, who needs atmosphere at a football venue?

Approaching Asiad, its gargantuan size was hypnotising. The venue was more than 300m long, with three expansive walkways to feed people into the stadium. The structure's base was a mass of drab concrete, capped with a luminously white membrane surface similar to the Mound Stand roof at Lord's Cricket Ground in London.

Walking inside Asiad, the expansive concourse teemed with vendors. Some sold food, while others hawked gaudy merchandise emblazoned with the ubiquitous 'Be The Reds!' slogan made famous during the recent World Cup. Disappointing the salespeople who hoped to make a quick buck unloading World Cup leftovers on to an unsuspecting foreigner, I made my way through to the heart of the stadium. Emerging from the dark tunnel, I was struck by a cacophony of bright colours. The stadium seats, rather than being painted the colours of the home football club, were instead coated with a garish assortment of brilliant hues. I eventually recognised a pattern: waves of neon yellow and royal blue, with sprinkles of

other colours – turquoise, red, pink, orange and green, in seemingly random order – filling the gaps. All right then.

Fixing my gaze downward, I couldn't help but marvel at the flawless grass pitch that anchored the stadium. The dark emerald surface looked more like an immaculate billiards table than a living organism. Encasing the pitch was a maroon running track, covered with white lines to demarcate lanes for athletics competitions. Surrounding the track was yet another buffer: an un-utilised space covered with lime-green artificial turf. And if that wasn't enough, there was a third layer that separated the pitch from the stands: the infamous moat.

When I hear the term 'moat', my mind summons images of flooded ditches protecting castles from hordes of unruly invaders. I wasn't aware these devices served a functional role in football as well.

The Koreans and Japanese, soon after winning hosting rights for the 2002 World Cup, quickly shifted their focus to how to keep barbarian visitors from finding their way on to stadium pitches and causing a nuisance during matches. The Korean organisers had undoubtedly watched footage from the 1970s and 1980s of English hooligans marauding their way through stadium terraces – as well as each other's skulls – and were terrified about such scenes being replicated on North East Asian soil. Never mind that such footage was 20 to 30 years old, and that all-seater English stadiums by now catered primarily to families and the wealthy; surely violence must be embedded within the genetic make-up of the English football fan. The Korean planners were determined to prevent any fan disturbance lest they risk embarrassment in view of the entire world.

And so football stadium moats, alarmingly reminiscent of alligator pits, were imported into North East Asia and incorporated into most of the new World Cup venues. Moats had been in place for decades in grounds across South America and select parts of Europe, but would never pass modern health and safety muster in the UK. Just ask Scotsman Jack Elliot, who fell head-first into the moat at the Jeonju World Cup Stadium during a 2002 World Cup group-stage match between Portugal and Poland. His minor tumble resulted in a broken skull, severe bleeding of the brain and a nice little cat-nap in the form of a coma.

There I was, amid a crowd of 45,000 announced as 60,000 in the 55,000-capacity Busan Asiad World Cup Stadium. I looked forlornly down towards the moats, wondering how many other skulls would be figuratively – and perhaps literally – cracked during the 2003 K League season to come.

The match begins. South Korea field a strong side similar to the one that competed in the World Cup, flaunting numerous big names. They're spurred on by deafeningly loud home fans, almost entirely clad in red, who repetitively serenade the players with the familiar chants of '*Dae-Han-Min-Guk*' ('Republic of Korea'), and '*Oh, Pilseung Korea*' ('Korea must win'). Unfortunately the crowd atmosphere is the only aspect of interest, as the match turns out to be a languid 0-0 draw. Neither the Korean nor Colombian players, dragged away from their glamorous European clubs to contest this unimportant friendly, can be bothered to muster their full effort lest they risk injury. But despite the uninspiring game, I leave satisfied, having been to a new World Cup stadium and witnessed a large football crowd in full voice. I return home buzzing and with ears ringing as if I had attended a rock concert.

With this enjoyable but meaningless international friendly out of the way, I was eager to watch some competitive club football. The wait would be short, as I would attend my first Busan I'cons Football Club match the very next afternoon.

The 2003 K League season awaited. Would the experience measure up to the passion and atmosphere produced at South Korea's national team games?

Tomorrow would also mark Ian Porterfield's first home match in charge of Busan I'cons. With this latent giant of a club moving to a state-of-the-art World Cup stadium, constructing a new clubhouse and hiring a foreign manager with an impressive CV, Busan supporters expected a rapid resurrection in the months ahead.