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**BIRD'S EYE VIEW**

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## Right here, in our own backyard

**OK**, I'll admit it. I nearly swore off football until the summer was over and the new season started. Yes, it's true - I'm not ashamed to say it. In the dying weeks of last season, at the closing of the **Champions League**, and the beginning of the transfer season, I was optimistic. Summer was coming, it would all be good, and I thought I could handle it. But, alas, the combination of overpaid and overhyped players demanding larger salaries, egotistical managers starting their headgames, and too many photo spreads of certain footballers in *Hello* and *OK* magazine had taken their toll on me. I had had enough.

Where are the players who are loyal to their club and supporters? Where are the players who won't be bought by a paycheque? Where are the managers who behave like gentleman? Most importantly, where, in all of the money, transfers, advertising, trips to the Far East, trips to North America, friendlies, photo shoots, etc., where did the beautiful game go?

I was so disillusioned.

### Better than expected

So is it any wonder that when **Sunderland AFC** rolled into town on one of their pre-season 'publicity' tours, I was rolling my eyes and feeling grouchy about it all?

Don't get me wrong - Sunderland, with **Mick McCarthy** at the helm, had a fantastic season last year. I was especially pleased that the manager, who was once told by Ireland's **Roy Keane** "you were a crap player, you are a crap manager," landed his team back into the **English Premiership** on a shoe string budget. With their new promotion prize of £20 million, Sunderland looked like **Chelsea** compared to our little **Vancouver Whitecaps FC**, and I thought we would get pasted.

Apparently, I was wrong.

In comparison to the **Stadium of Light**, the sell out crowd of almost 7,000 at **Swangard Stadium** must have looked strange to the visitors. And while there was a travelling contingent from the **Red and White Army**, they were greeted by the sounds and cheers of Vancouver and the **Blue Brigade**, all excited to see a Premiership team on the spin.

### Making up for what we lack

July 16, **Bob Lilley's** squad lived up to the billing. They played out of their shirts and played the newly-promoted Black Cats off the park. When the final whistle blew, it was Vancouver, not Sunderland, who emerged the victors.

Vancouver doesn't have a **Ronaldhino**, a **Thierry Henry**, a **Frank Lampard**, or **Andriy Shevchenko** in its squad. We don't have the glamour and riches that are synonymous with the European leagues, and heck, even in our small 5,000 seater stadium, we don't even have sell-out crowds that often. Our soccer sometimes looks stodgy and boring compared to the flair and style of other countries. I've even been to a match where the home crowd booed its team because the game was so bad.

On the flip side though, we have players who play in a traditionally non-soccer country because they love the game. We have fans that will show up in all kinds of weather because they want to support their team and they love the game. We have an administration that works hard to keep the dream of professional soccer alive in the city, stays active in the community and is producing some of the best soccer players in the country right now because they love the game. Those are the basics of the beautiful game.

Simple.

How did we ever get away from them?

### What game are you watching?

Don't believe me?

Fine, let's ask a **Man United** fan about **Malcolm Glazer's** takeover. Oh sure, there are the supporters who will be heart sick to know that their new owner is more interested in profit and less interested in the grand traditions of **Old Trafford**. Those supporters will continue to pay the exorbitant prices and chant "*Glory Glory Man United*" as their team toils away under the financial pressure heaped on them by their "soccer-loving" owner. We laughed at some of those supporters in their misery, poked fun at them, called them the new Leeds, and revelled in the idea that they are going to crash and burn.

Laugh at those trophy-hunting glory seekers all you want, but can you laugh at those members of **Supporters United** who stood by their principles, ripped up their season tickets, and decided to start their own club? Bottom division, low wages, no stars, no hype, no money, shitty stadium, stodgy style - what's so interesting about that? Everything. Those fans have gone back to the basics of the beautiful game. Kudos to them. I hope it all works out, but if it doesn't, look over here, we have exactly what you are looking for.

On a warm summer evening, to the sounds of happy supporters, my faith in the beautiful game was reaffirmed. It still exists and we don't have to go far to find it. It's right here in our own backyard. Who knew?



**WE GOT GAME:** A young Sunderland fan sits, stunned, doe-like, at Swangard, July 16, knowing all too well that her team is down by three, her parents have already fled the country, and Vancouver's #1 Fan sits only four rows down



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