

# Easton Cowboys Go West



"However else they may differ, a football team and a group of armed rebels have one thing in common, from the present point of view: that the real objectification of the action of each member lies in the movement of common objectification." - Jean-Paul Sartre.

At high noon in the mountains of Southeast Mexico the whistle blew for the start of the match. Wearing their now famous red bandanas, the local Zapatista team from the Autonomous Municipality of Francis Gomez walked onto the pitch, complete with tree stumps and small hills. They were all set for a showdown with the visiting team from Bristol, the Easton Cowboys. As the ball flew into the air a stray dog and a couple of horses which had wandered into the goal area fled in fear.

As the Zapatistas rose up in 1994, on the other side of the world the Easton Cowboys, a Bristol based amateur football team, were organising their first international tournament. Breaking down social and economic barriers and creating new friendships, the Cowboys went on to organise an autonomous world cup last year. Teams from the township of Soweto, Norway, Poland, Germany, France, Belgium and Ireland came together in a field in Dorset to play football. By this point, news of the Cowboys' exploits and their belief in 'freedom through foot-

ball' had spread to the mountains of Southeast Mexico, and they were officially invited to play a series of tournaments in Zapatista communities.

The Cowboys toured the conflict zone for ten days and played four tournaments in all, two in the Aguascaliente (centre of resistance) of Francis Gomez and Morelia and two in the smaller communities of Diez de April and Moises Gandhi. Overcoming the heat, altitude, constant army surveillance and ban on alcohol the Cowboys played 22 games and were



# OTHER ISLANDS

impressed, if not sometimes outplayed by the standard of football in the communities. Roger Wilson, Cowboy centre half said: “We had a great time and the football was excellent. These people have shown us what is possible when you get together with a vision for a better future.”

Throughout the tournaments the Cowboys lived and ate with their opponents, exchanged stories and on more than one occasion danced well into the night with their hosts. The arrival of an entire football team and assorted subs and friends in the autonomous zones was met with a great deal of excitement and some bemusement by the Zapatista communities. Some local teams had travelled for hours by foot through the jungle to reach the football pitches. A radio message from one Aguascaliente to another reported that the English team “were the whitest white people they had ever seen.”

The warmth of the experience was felt by everyone. Alfredo Jimenez, a team captain from Morelia

said: “We are very emotional and excited. This is the first time anyone from far away has come to play us and we hope this isn’t the last time football teams from other countries come here.”

The Zapatistas have always believed their struggle is part of an international resistance movement. Alfredo Jimenez added: “We rose up so that people everywhere would be united against oppression. Not just in Chiapas, not just in Mexico but all over the world. Our hopes for the future are that the excluded everywhere will get organised.”

As the Cowboys collected their thoughts and belongings for the long journey home, some were already making mental plans for a return. All were feeling that this was just the beginning of the Cowboys’ relationship with the Zapatista communities. ‘Jock of the Jungle’, Cowboy centre forward commented while untying his mosquito net, “never has the old saying that football breaks down barriers been so true.”



*The  
Zapatista  
team's  
rebel yell*

In one of the most bizarre football matches ever played, a team from the Zapatista National Liberation Army took on a team of veteran professionals in order to win popular support for their cause. The team from the EZLN—currently engaged in a war with the Mexican government—wore ski masks to protect their identities and avoid possible reprisals. Some of the rebels turned out in army boots. The match played at Mexico City’s Jesus Martinez Palillo Stadium was part of a recruitment drive by the Zapatistas.