



### Inside the footballers' fishbowl

There are few things in life quite as terrifying as your first day at school. So when PUMAFootball got the chance to ride on the Angola team bus after the Black Antelopes drew 0-0 with Algeria and qualified for the quarter-finals of the Africa Cup of Nations, all those childhood memories of sweaty-palmed angst came flooding back.

As we climbed the stairs of the bus, nervously clutching our rucksack, PUMAFootball spotted a familiar face: Angola star and former Manchester United prodigy, Manucho. "Congratulations!" we offered enthusiastically, unable to shake the feeling we were the new boy and he was the coolest kid in school. "Con-grat-u-lashons," responded the giant striker lazily mocking us. OK, that wasn't quite the open-armed welcome we were hoping for.

Clearly the young forward was tired after the game so we stumbled through the gloom of the bus to see if we could find ourselves a seat. Trying desperately not to trip over one player's injured and ice-packed leg stuck out in the aisle, PUMAFootball plonked itself down into an empty seat and looked around for friendly faces. Pedro, the kitman, offered us a reassuring grin, skipper Kali gave us a friendly wink and then, with the coach's interior lit up by the flashing blue lights of the police convoy, the bus eased out of the stadium towards the team hotel.

How surreal it was to be on the inside of the footballers' fishbowl, for once looking out rather than struggling to peer in. PUMAFootball could see hundred of fans in the streets cheering the team on yet hermetically sealed behind bullet proof windows we could hear nothing but the coach stereo's calming samba rhythms. In the front of the bus, the manager Manuel Jose sat alone reading his newspaper, while behind us players laughed, joked and muttered on the phone to their loved ones.

The atmosphere was relaxed but this was certainly no party. Angola clearly doesn't see their role at the Africa Cup of Nations as merely hosts. They intend to win the competition. Next up they face Ghana on Sunday and a victory would see them reach the semi-finals of the tournament for the first time in history. Only then might the players be tempted to get as excited as their fans. Until that point, it's back to work for team Angola and it's back to walking for PUMAFootball.