



Bongo Drumming Ghouls and Dancing Monks

Here in Angola and all around the world, the violence against the Togo Football Federation has cast a dark shadow over the African Cup of Nations 2010. Naturally, PUMA Football has been deeply saddened by the incident and sends its warmest wishes to those who were involved. The tournament continues and we hope that better days lie ahead.

On Saturday, PUMA Football attended the opening ceremony and tournament's first game between the host nation and Mali in the capital city of Luanda. The experience was unforgettable. Acrobats, fireworks and raucous rhythms dazzled and delighted the 40,000 strong crowd, but in terms of spectacle nothing quite matched the brilliantly insane fans.

All around the concourse of the Cidade Universitaria Stadium, hordes of excited Angolan fans wearing Afro wigs in their team colours of red, black and yellow created an atmosphere we've never found anywhere else. Nor are we likely to. More like a bizarre African Glastonbury than a football match, we encountered a troupe of bongo drumming ghouls, some dancing monks and weirdest of all, three creatures known as mascaras tchokwe who wore all in one woollen body stockings that covered them not just head to toe, but over their faces too. In 30 degrees of blistering heat. As we said: weird.

Once we found our seats, the game was equally unpredictable. Four goals up with just 20 minutes gone, the jubilant crowd couldn't quite believe the start Angola had made to the tournament. Nothing could stop them now and drunk on success the fans chanted for a fifth. Nothing could stop them now. Right?

But then the Malians scored a scruffy goal and as time ticked away confidence drained from Angola into the away side like sand through an egg timer. Mali striker Fredi Kanoute popped up to bag a second and then four minutes of injury time were announced. When Mali scored their third, the young Angolan girl standing in front of PUMA Football began reading aloud from a prayer book in desperation... but her prayers were to go unanswered and Mali scored a horribly inevitable equalizer.

The praying teenager collapsed to the floor... Flavio, Angola's hat-trick hero burst into tears. This was not the start the host nation had dreamt of but still the African Cup of Nations 2010 has only just begun. There will be plenty more twists and turns before the final whistle on January 31st and that's probably the only thing about this fantastically unpredictable tournament you can be sure of.