



A Spot of Shopping with the Desert Foxes

It seems even millionaire footballers love a new pair of trainers. So when Pumafootball invited the Algerian team to visit the Puma store in Herzogenaurach – just around the corner from where they are training in preparation for the World Cup - the players leapt at the chance.

Nadir Belhadj was last seen trying on a very fetching white Algeria tracksuit (you'd think he'd have enough of those!), Karim Ziani was carrying a pile of T-shirts so big he could only just see over the top and 'Boogie' Bougherra was checking out a pair of cool new sneakers (Algeria green, naturally).

The trip was also the perfect opportunity for the players to say hello to some of their dedicated fans and sign some autographs. Children of all ages queued up to meet their heroes but it wasn't just the kids who were getting over excited – some adults were being big kids too.

Forty two year old restaurant owner Abdelaziz Kirin had insisted on dragging his wife 250km from their home in Frankfurt so that he could wish Les Ferencs the best of luck for South Africa. Dressed head to toe in Algeria green, he was clearly delighted to meet the players and even parked his car next to the training ground, doors wide open and stereo blasting, so they could enjoy some traditional Algerian music while coach Rabah Saadane put them through their paces.

It's not hard to see why everyone is so excited; it's been 24 years since Algeria last played in the World Cup. That experience was a little bit disappointing to say the least – the north African side lost two of their three group games, drew one and failed to progress to the second stage.

Four years earlier, the Desert Foxes had wowed the world by beating West Germany and looked set to progress to the knockout rounds until a slightly suspicious draw between the Germans and Austrians saw Algeria relegated to third place and therefore out the tournament.

This year in South Africa will only be Algeria's third ever World Cup and they are clearly buzzing at the prospect of showing the rest of the planet how good they can be. Drawn in Group C along with England, Slovenia and the USA, they believe they could for the first time progress to the second round.

A lot will rest on the shoulders of Greece based striker Rafik Djebbour to score the goals but he's relishing the opportunity to take on one of the tournament's favourites in Capello's England. "We have to be realistic – it's a big footballing nation but we're not afraid of anyone," he says. "We have to be ambitious because if you're not ambitious you miss your chance. We've seen in the past that many teams have caused a surprise so why not Algeria too?"

This week in training the coach is focusing the players on tactics but there's time for a bit of fun too. The Desert Foxes love to mess about - especially striker Abdelkader Ghezzal who cracks his teammates up by impersonating them all. The Algerians play hard too. Even during a game of keepy-uppy volley ball they're clearly all desperate to win. No one takes it more seriously though than playmaker Ziani though; he goes absolutely ballistic every time he suspects a rule infringement by his opponents. If this is how seriously Ziani takes his training then England, USA and Slovenia better watch out come the World Cup.