



EUROPE 2023



4 months | 6 countries | 8 house swaps | 10 journey legs

No Sweat

Imagine walking into a large freezer to willingly play a game of walking football. Now imagine playing 6 games (25min each game) in close succession over a day. Although our close knit Ozzie group were expecting it to be “cool” in Wales in December no-one imaged such a ridiculously low extreme. Even the Swedes complained. The additional layers of clothing we did don did little to stop our bodies from shaking. And having long breaks between games heightened our concern about picking up injuries.

And so the tournament kicked off at 8.30am. Despite playing reasonably well both teams did not fare as well as planned. The strong physicality of opposition teams was very obvious. The 50s, in particular, faced very stiff, sometimes nasty, opposition. There were lots of infringement bookings but our players pleaded with the referees to show more red cards and stamp out rough play.

The opposition teams we faced have been practising together for at least 6 months. And it showed. They were well drilled and played at a highly competitive level - more than any of us would have imagined. We were able to mix it generally with snappy field play for long sessions but the difference was that they were lethal in their goal shooting - and we also missed many opportunities. You have to score to win and you have to stop shots from going in - very difficult. We kept changing our systems to cope with the onslaught and even opted for greater man-on-man marking but with limited success. It is true that we kept improving as the day progressed but unfortunately our opposition did as well. And worse, we sustained some bad injuries which put us even more behind the eight ball.

But there was one game which the 70s will remember forever. Redemption. We were crunched by Wales in our first game 5-1 but had their measure in our reverse meeting and played inspiring football winning 2-0 - with lots of confidence and flair. In the end the Welsh team were reduced to a rabble, arguing angrily with each other. Unfortunately we were not able to follow up that win. But hey, that's football! Maybe next year!!



The WINTER Nations Cup

After the final warm up game against a Welsh contingent on the Friday (the 70s drew 1-1) it was then on to the big event on the Saturday - the Winter Nations Cup. We have never been so cold in our lives!! Estimated -3c degrees effectively on an outside field covered in “plastic”. Sig ended up wearing a hat, scarf and gloves on the field and was still freezing. It is the first time I have ever seen him not care if he played or not! The reception/ kiosk area down one end of the complex was slightly warmer but not enough.

Anyway, we made it through the day with regular injections of hot chocolate and heavy coats. The competition itself involved 45s, 50s, 60s, 65s and 70s games. There was also a separate women's comp. The 70s had six games. They played Wales, England and Sweden twice each. It was quite well organised and generally ran to time with a welcoming ceremony at half time with all the pomp of team march past and national anthems. The friendliness of fellow team members and partners and competitors alike was outstanding. We SWAGS (Senior Wives and Girlfriends) got along fantastically. I really think that Debbie, Ellen, Jo, and Fran and myself formed genuine friendships.

The 70s played in the last slot of the competition by which time it was dark and the “plastic” roof started to drip with condensation! We were all supposed to transfer to another building and attend a formal dinner and presentation night. No Australian stayed — not very politic really but we were so bitterly cold and, some by that stage, were carrying injuries. We abandoned the idea of waiting for the 11 o'clock bus to take us back to our accommodation and instead joined together and ordered numerous taxis to return us to our awaiting hotel room hot showers. Most of us then went to the nearby Novotel and had a very joyous meal together. Despite the freezing conditions of today, the 10 days we have had together has been very enjoyable and successful. Originally I had vacillated about staying for this part of the trip but am very glad that I did. Sig got to coach and play for Australia, the first ever Walking Football 70s team, and be part of a first win by an Australian walking football international side.





Top left to right: Derek, Alan.
Bottom left to right: Jo, Ellen, Joe, Peter, Siggy, Peter, Ken, John, Fran.



Top left to right: Key, Ian, Sonya, Joe, Vince, Steve, Bryan, Wayne, Ritchie, Oz, Gary
Bottom left to right: Stew, Mark, Ken, Derek, Peter, John, Alan, Sad Sack Siggy

