



**...one fine day in May**

*It was a night those present will remember for a long time. Fans travelled from near and far for the official opening of Broadhurst Park on that balmy Friday evening of May 29th. Benfica's small army of vocal followers played their part in a magnificent atmosphere, while Ukranian Red Yury 'Yura' Veretenko made possibly the longest journey to be there. FC fan Yura and Benfica supporter Nuno Fernandes talk to FCUM Review about that special night*

**AFTER planning his trip months in advance, Yura was a happy man when he boarded his flight en route to Manchester, and was delighted to experience the momentous occasion. The 27-year-old from Chernivtsy, who runs the magnificent website [www.fcunited.ru/en](http://www.fcunited.ru/en), takes up his story**

WHEN my journey to England in November 2011 drew to a close, I briefly talked with Andy Walsh. At the end of this short dialogue, he said "Hope to see you soon" and I answered, "In Moston". Three and a half years later, my dream came true as I travelled to England for the Broadhurst Park opening.

The journey started several months before, when I asked the FC office to send me an invitation. I collected documents and went to Kiev to apply for my British Visa. When I want a Visa, I have to travel halfway across Ukraine to Kiev.

It takes a lot of time, money and effort to get a British visa, so I decided to make the most of this trip. I planned to visit London, Manchester, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Belfast. I arrived in London on Friday, May 22nd, and spent the weekend there before travelling to Manchester by bus on May 25th.

I still had several days before the game, so

I enjoyed my time in Manchester: visited the museum of football, Old Trafford, met lovely FC people and even fans from Germany who had visited for the official opening.

I had plenty of free time, so one day I took the bus and went to Moston to explore the area. It was very easy to get there and find the stadium. I walked around, took a lot of pictures, noticed several cars with FC scarves inside and window stickers. Matchday started with a trip to Stockport to 'Swampy's favourite pub', The Magnet.

When I entered the pub, I saw two TV crews who were filming everything. For some reason, they even filmed my talk with a lady who I was surprised to discover was the former FC striker Ben Deegan's mum! I recalled how I celebrated 'that' penalty save, running from my sofa to the computer whilst listening to FCUM Radio, and that I have her son's autograph on my computer desk. I was surprised to hear that, even now when Ben plays for Ashton, she still prefers to visit FC games!

We travelled to the ground on an open-top bus. It was windy, to say at least, and we had to be aware of low-hanging trees, but the TV crews continued filming! They had an interview with me, but I was a bit nervous and couldn't find the right English words to express my thoughts, so I probably won't be on television.

Of course, I expected that opening game against Benfica would be exciting, but it was much more fun than I expected. I was like a little kid in a sweet shop. The stadium is great. It is actually better than it looks on videos and photos on the internet. Also, I was surprised to see that my “FC United Russia Ukraine” flag, that I bought in 2009, is still present at FC games. It looks shabby but I am happy that it still modestly hangs near corner flag.

I met and had brief talks with Swampy, Margy, Andy Walsh, Nick Platt, Craig Lindfield, Tom Greaves, Mike Norton and “Mad” Frank. Tom and Mike both signed my Benfica ticket, so I asked them: who will be the first to reach 100 goals for FC? Tom answered that he will do it and Mike said “I will try”. It was a real surprise, that Norton recognised me after we’d had a brief talk at training back in 2011. He said: “Oh, you are here too!” I answered: “Everybody is here today!”

When I talked to Swampy, he showed me the starting line-ups and I saw a Russian name – Vitaliy Lystsov. So, after the game in the bar I asked Benfica player which one is Vitaliy? He pointed to the tall Ivan-Drago-looking guy. He was surprised to hear Russian “privet” (“hello”) and we had a brief talk. I wished him good luck in his career and he said that it is a pleasure to hear some Russian language. I left Broadhurst Park to catch the last bus to Shudehill,

from where I travelled to Glasgow.

It was my first time in Scotland and I enjoyed every minute, talking with local people. The accent is so funny; sometimes I couldn’t help laughing. For me, it was like the whole country was talking like Alex Ferguson! In Glasgow I visited the Scottish Cup final between Falkirk and Inverness. So I saw ex-FC player Danny Williams winning the cup! He was subbed on two minutes before the winning goal.

After two days I moved to Edinburgh and I have to say, this is probably the most beautiful city I ever visited. I enjoyed every minute there and had three great days in the Scottish capital.

I spent only a day in Belfast but was almost stuck there for at least a week without any money left. I didn’t realise that George Best and International airports are different places - so I almost went to the wrong airport! I was lucky that bus to George Best Airport hadn’t arrived on

time and I went to the help desk, where woman asked me which airport I needed. Only then I realised that Belfast has two airports.

I was late for my plane but was lucky again: the flight was delayed for one hour. So I successfully arrived home, travelling around 36 hours via Belfast-London-Kiev-Lviv and finally home to Chernivtsy. And that was by far the best trip I’ve ever been on!



*NUNO FERNANDES was born in Lisbon and has been a Benfica supporter for over 25 years. Now living in London, he travelled to Moston with a number of friends by car.*

“It was a pleasure for me to be in your stadium for the first match. All the guys were great and I really felt at home. I’ve been in a lot of cities throughout the world and never felt so welcome, chatting with new people with the same mentality as mine. Football

shouldn’t be a business.

“Your stadium is gorgeous, especially because you built it yourselves, and the pub next to the ground (The Miners) is perfect. Great people and atmosphere.”

When asked if he and his friends will return, Nuno replied: “It’s a promise! We speak a lot about that day. Everybody enjoyed the night and the FC United fans very much, so we are planning on going to Manchester again, but this time to support FC!”