

BAGUETTE & BONTON # 4

THE GAME -PART ONE-



GAME ON!_

BONTON WAS RUNNING AS FAST AS HIS LEGS COULD CARRY HIM.



BUT DON'T WORRY!.. HE WASN'T BEING CHASED, NOR WAS HE CHASING ANYONE... HE WAS ONLY RUNNING AFTER THE SLIPPERY BALL THAT KEPT BOUNCING OUT OF HIS REACH ALL OVER THE FIELD!

IT WAS THE SNOUTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL. AS A SPORT, SNOUTBALL IS PLAYED LIKE SOCCER, EXCEPT THAT INSTEAD OF USING THEIR FEET, PLAYERS HIT THE BALL WITH THEIR HEADS AND SNOUTS. **BONTON** WAS ON THE FIELD FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS SPORTING CAREER. BECAUSE YOU SEE... HE WASN'T THAT GREAT A PLAYER... BUT HE CERTAINLY GAVE IT HIS ALL!

HE HAD STAYED ON THE BENCH AGAINST THE **NESTVILLE OSTRICHES**, HE HAD WATCHED HIS TEAMMATES BEAT THE **THORNLAND PORCUPINES** (THEY HAD NEEDED TO CHANGE THE BALL A DOZEN TIMES), AND HE HAD WATCHED IN ADMIRATION AND ENVY AS THEY

HAD PLAYED AN AMAZING GAME AGAINST THE **GREENFIELD BUFFALOES**. BUT ALWAYS FROM THE SIDELINES.

NOW, THE **BARKERSFIELD BLOODHOUNDS** WERE STRUGGLING TO PLAY IN LOWER NUMBERS BECAUSE THE CHAMPIONS OF THE PREVIOUS YEAR'S CHAMPIONSHIP WERE PLAYING VERY, VERY DIRTY. IN FACT, THE **CARRION CITY HYENAS** WERE WELL-KNOWN FOR THEIR FOUL PLAY. ALWAYS BEHIND THE REFEREE'S BACK, AND ALWAYS MEAN-SPIRITED.

HOW NOT TO PLAY



AROUND THE MIDWAY MARK OF THE SECOND HALF, THE **HYENAS** HAD BITTEN THE LEG OF THE **BLOODHOUNDS'** BEST FORWARD, **LUCKY**. THEN THEY'D GOTTEN ONE OF THE DEFENDERS EXPELLED WITH A

DIRTY TRICK.
FORTUNATELY, THE
BLOODHOUNDS' KEEPER,
BOBBY, KNOWN AS '**COPTER** FOR
THE SPEED WITH WHICH HIS EARS
MOVED, WAS LETTING NOTHING
THROUGH INTO HIS NET.
BUT THEN THERE WAS **SNEER**.

OH YES, THE **HYENAS'** FORWARD
WAS NONE OTHER THAN
THE FAMOUS... OR PERHAPS
INFAMOUS... **SNEER!**

THAT BULLY WAS ALWAYS
SCRATCHING, HITTING, TRIPPING
AND IN EVERY WAY HURTING ALL THE
BLOODHOUNDS. SO MANY OF
THEM HAD GOTTEN INJURED THAT
THE COACH HAD NO PLAYERS LEFT
TO SEND IN OTHER THAN BONTON!



OF COURSE, OUR FRIEND WAS
HAPPY TO BE ON THE FIELD, BUT
HE WOULD HAVE LIKED TO BE
THERE SURROUNDED BY HEALTHY
TEAMMATES, NOT AFTER A NEVER-
ENDING STRING OF INJURIES!

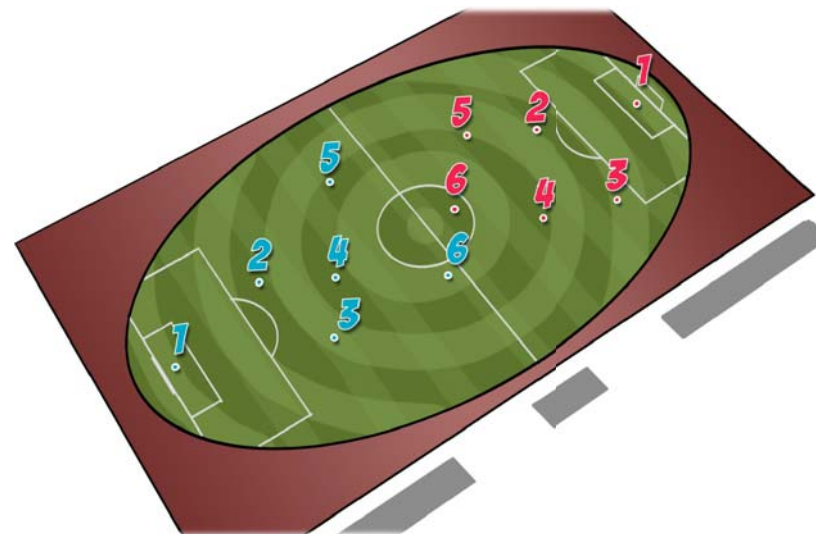
THE RULES OF THE GAME_

STILL, ABOUT HALFWAY THROUGH THE SECOND HALF, THE SCORE WAS TIED.

THE **BLOODHOUNDS** KEEPER'S SKILL HAD KEPT THE GAME LEVEL, SO THAT THE **HYENAS** COULDN'T TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEIR SHADY TACTICS.

NOW, HOWEVER, WITH SO FEW PLAYERS ON THE FIELD, THINGS LOOKED GRIM FOR THE **BLOODHOUNDS**.

SNOUTBALL HAD RULES: EACH TEAM HAD FIVE PLAYERS AND A KEEPER. THE FIELD WAS OVAL-SHAPED, AND EACH TEAM AIMED TO GET THE BALL, USING SNOUTS ONLY OF COURSE, INTO THE OTHER TEAM'S NET. ONLY THE KEEPER WAS ALLOWED



TO USE EARS OR OTHER PARTS OF THE BODY, AND BITING THE BALL WAS AGAINST THE RULES FOR EVERYONE.

PRETTY SIMPLE, RIGHT?

IT WAS A FUN GAME, PLAYED OUTDOORS OR INDOORS. THEN THERE WAS ALSO THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP, WHICH WAS A VERY BIG DEAL.

THERE, THE TEAMS HAD TWELVE PLAYERS EACH, AND THE FIELDS WERE MUCH BIGGER... LIKE **BARKERSFIELD STADIUM!** IT ALSO FEATURED FAMOUS CHAMPIONS LIKE **BARKHAM** AND **LAMBARK**, WHO WERE **BONTON'S** PERSONAL HEROES. **BONTON** HIMSELF, THOUGH, WAS A YOUNG PLAYER FROM A SCHOOL TEAM, AND DESPITE BEING IN A VERY STRONG TEAM... WELL, HE WASN'T REALLY SUCH A GREAT PLAYER.

THAT IS... HE RAN AND GAVE IT HIS ALL... HE SWEATED BUCKETS AND WORKED SO HARD THAT THE COACH HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO MAKE HIM A STARTING PLAYER. THE ONLY PROBLEM WAS THAT, WITH ALL THAT SAID, THE BALL SIMPLY DIDN'T GO WHERE HE WANTED IT TO. HIS SNOUT WAS STEADY, HE HIT THE

BALL STRAIGHT ON... AND THE BALL FLEW IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION! THE BALL SEEMED TO GO WILD EVERY TIME **BONTON** HIT IT.

DO YOU KNOW THE KIND OF CRAZY BALL THAT HOLDS A WEIGHT INSIDE TO MAKE IT BOUNCE IN UNEXPECTED DIRECTIONS?

WELL, WHEN **BONTON** HIT THE REGULAR SNOUTBALL, IT BEHAVED EXACTLY LIKE THAT! HE COULDN'T EVEN MANAGE TO SCORE A GOAL DURING PRACTICE WITH AN EMPTY NET. SO IT WASN'T THAT SURPRISING THAT HE HAD ALWAYS WATCHED THE OTHERS PLAY FROM HIS SEAT ON THE BENCH. YET THE COACH WAS CLEVER AND UNDERSTOOD THAT, IN THE END, SNOUTBALL WAS A GAME AND THE MOST IMPORTANT THING WAS FOR SCHOOLPLUPS TO ENJOY THEMSELVES.

HE MADE SURE TO PUT **BONTON** ON THE FIELD EVERY SO OFTEN DURING FRIENDLY GAMES, WHERE THE PUP COULD TAKE A FEW AIMLESS SHOTS AND COME BACK TO THE BENCH, VERY GRATEFUL TO HIS COACH. **BONTON** COULD THEN SIT HAPPILY ON THE BENCH DURING CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES, CHEERING ON HIS TEAMMATES WHO WOULD ONE DAY BECOME FAMOUS, AND ENJOY THEIR VICTORIES AS A GOOD TEAMMATE SHOULD, HE THOUGHT.

NOW, THOUGH, **BONTON** WAS ON THE FIELD, FOR THE FINAL GAME. AND HE CHASED AFTER THE BALL AS THOUGH HIS LIFE DEPENDED ON IT, TRYING TO STOP IT.

HERE IT WAS, HE'D FINALLY GOTTEN --!

BUT NO. SADLY, THE NUMBER FIVE ON THE OTHER TEAM HAD REACHED IT BEFORE HIM. STILL **BONTON** KEPT RUNNING! AND TRYING TO CATCH THAT BALL THAT KEPT SLIPPING AWAY FROM HIM. ALL OF A SUDDEN... YES! THERE IT WAS, HE HAD GOTTEN IT! HE HAD DONE IT... BUT...

(CONTINUE)

