

SANTA MEETS HIS MATCH – time to count the puns.



It was that season again. Santa still hadn't recovered from the efforts of the previous year. It was all very well for people to praise the great heroes and heroines of the past, such as Joan of Arc and Richard the Lionheart, but what did they know of the cold? Joan had led her troops on a fine March day and Richard had invaded Cyprus in June, a little different from the Arctic Circle in the middle of winter, reflected Santa. Still, the job had to be done, and Santa knew that any failure on his part would mean disappointment across the globe.

Yes, Santa knew how important and unique his job was. How could football supporters' compare children's disappointment with their own, when their leading forward's beautifully executed 'swan dive' failed to charm VAR into believing that their team should be awarded a penalty. Who were swans anyway? As nothing compared with the industrious labourers known as 'Santa's reindeer', and that was a fact. So, Santa loaded up his sleigh, with the help of his elves, before assembling Rudolph, Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner and Blitzen, ready for arduous journey.

They first arrived at Aberdeen in what felt like a heat-wave in comparison with what they had been used to. It had been a year since Santa had ventured down a chimney and his initial effort resulted in a covering of soot, which meant that he had to employ the dry cleaning implements he had brought along for the purpose. Still, he would get Europe done in no time, with only five more continents after that. Antarctica could be ignored as the penguins of the South Pole had refused to recognise his existence, due to the rivalry between the two Ends of the Earth. Yes, to have to visit a sixth continent would have been the straw that broke.... Still enough talk of camels. They were spoilt creatures after all, basking in the heat of the sun all day.

'If you want to know what a really tough life is like, you need to leave to sunshine of places like Dubai and come and live in the north of Sweden!'

thought Santa. But why was he in such a bad mood this year? Rumour had it that, somewhere on Planet Earth, there were two imposters, usurping his role.

Having sped around Scotland and the North of England, Santa arrived in Watford, the home of the Hornets and Watford Football Club's representative, a male red fallow deer, or hart. He had always interested Santa's reindeer, with the exception of Rudolph, the only male amongst the group. One of Santa's traditional duties before setting out was to repeat to Prancer and company, that it was not acceptable to address the Watford representative deer, by saying, 'You've got such a sweet, sweet *hart*, my *deer*', by way of flirting with him. There wasn't time for such nonsense! Anyway, it just caused heated exchanges between the competing reindeer, although, come to think of it, they could do with some heat!

Now is the time to reveal the cause of Santa's moodiness.

He had always prided himself on being the only 'giver of gifts' at this time of year. But his role in Watford had been usurped. As his sleigh turned into Church Road, he spied some lights in the Quaker Meeting House. *Quaking* with rage and indignation, Santa spied a would-be Santa imposter by the name of Helen Nicell, adorned in her finery, seated beside her fellow imposter, Ian Welland.

There they were, the two of them, bold as brass, preparing for the distribution of presents among the assembled throng, who appeared not to realise they would be duped into thanking the two 'Santas' with enthusiasm and laughter. Determined to show them up for what they were, Santa burst into the room.

'It's time for you two charlatans to go!' he yelled, as the crowd looked round in awe.

That was the cue for, Ian, one of the two Clauses, to stand up.

'This is a writing group!' he retorted. 'We only recognise a clause as being part of a sentence. And if you want to hear another pun, get this - my name's Welland, but my friends prefer to call me 'Well 'Ard', so if you take my advice you'll get out of 'ere now!'

With that, Santa, realising he had met his match, ordered his reindeer to remove themselves, *en route* to their journey towards the next chimney, as the two Watford Writers Santas chuckled to themselves, safe in the knowledge that Santa had been 'sleighed', perhaps not for the first time. They then proceeded to distribute the presents. 'Time to unwrap,' announced Helen Claus. 'Sounds exciting' thought Rudolph.