

## ***The story of Kenny Sansom, Chertsey Town and the day a Spanish La Liga side thought they were playing Chelsea - From the pen of Andy Ollerenshaw***

Even through the snowy picture distortion on the aged VHS video tape, Kenny Sansom's defensive calmness shone through. Taking a long ball under control deep in his own penalty area with a sublime first touch, he coolly drops his shoulder to embarrass an on-rushing forward with his next. His third touch and the ball is ushered away safely to a midfield team mate. The home crowd in the La Liga stadium applause; these are knowledgeable Spanish *aficionados* who recognise football talent when they see it.

This however is no Arsenal European encounter. The date is 7<sup>th</sup> June 1994; the TV footage isn't of the best quality yet there is no doubting that Sansom is sporting an unfamiliar blue and white striped shirt. Less obvious to the casual observer is that these colours belong to Chertsey Town, a small club from Surrey plying their trade in the lower levels of English non-league football. Towards the end of his career, after stints with Newcastle, QPR and Coventry, Sansom spent a short 35 game spell at Chertsey.

Appearing between November 1993 and May 1994, many at Chertsey assert there is no coincidence that this was one of their club's most successful periods.



Chertsey skipper Kenny Sansom (left) before the kick off in the brand new Compostela Stadium.  
players of direct route eye football will be in their element, and those who like to play football like Wales and Straker and ourselves will be under pressure to follow suit. I am also excited that it will mean a lot more social status, and with that more

### **Town finish with a Spanish fiesta**



The Spanish hosts to Chertsey Town that day were Sociadade Deportiva Compostela; an end of season meeting instrumented by the English club's chairman (David Rayner) through his friendship with Compostela's *El Presidente* (Jose Maria Caneda). Compostela were celebrating a promotion to La Liga from the Segunda División, for the first time in their history, and would go on to compete in the top level for four seasons. Chertsey Town were also basking in the glow of

promotion, albeit on a more modest scale, having secured a berth in Isthmian League Division One. Here were two most unlikely and mismatched opponents. This was clearly an end of season warm-down for Compostela yet for Chertsey Town it meant so much more. Following a remarkable season that included promotion from Isthmian League Division Two (along with Aldershot), League Cup and Associate Member Cup triumphs and a Charity Shield victory over Stevenage Borough, this game signified a crowning point in the club's

history. Stories of the trip over to the Galicia region of North West Spain are still recounted today with a dewy-eyed fondness that does nothing to mask the pride felt within the club.

A month earlier Sansom's former North London employers had lifted the European Cup Winners' Cup with a 1-0 win over Parma in Copenhagen. Sansom, battling with the gambling and alcohol addictions that blighted the end of his playing days, may have been surprised to find himself back in Europe this late in his career; this time on Spanish soil and against La Liga opposition. Although the experience was not new for Sansom, for the Chertsey players, officials and the small band of travelling fans, this was something akin to fairytale. But there is also a twist to the story; if the popular tales are to be believed, the majority of the 6,000 Spanish crowd that day were equally surprised to see a team called Chertsey take to the pitch.



The story told is that, on this warm summer evening, the Spanish locals arriving at the newly built Estadio San Lázaro had come to see their promoted heroes test themselves against English Premier League Chelsea. Not the star-spangled Chelsea we know today, but still a big attraction that had a month earlier played in the English FA Cup Final. So if the gathered *Galicians* were expecting to see Glen Hoddle, Tony Cascarino and Dennis Wise, they would have been disappointed. On show instead were the likes of Chertsey's Lee Harvey, Adrian Blake and Josh Price. A good football club tale, shrouded by the mists of time, may have questionable provenance; the best stories improve with age. In this case however it is fair to say that some at Compestela were perhaps expecting somewhat superior opposition. Chris Gay, club secretary at Chertsey explains:

*“Our opponents, Compostela may not have been totally aware of our status but they were aware that we were not Chelsea. Our respective chairmen knew each other which is where the connection arose. However, many others [at Compostela] probably did not clock the difference and were expecting Chelsea. It was not in the interest for either club to shine a light on the confused!”*

Chertsey Town certainly made the most of the occasion. The game, which was covered live by *Television de Galicia* and reported extensively in the Spanish press, ended 3-1 to the hosts. Despite the obvious gulf in ability between the two teams, Chertsey Town, with Sansom playing the *libero* role, put on a credible display. As it turned out, this was to be Sansom's last appearance for the Surrey club; he would have an even shorter spell with Slough Town before finally hanging up his boots. Compostela would go on that season to play the likes of Real Madrid and Barcelona, for Chertsey Town it would be Ruislip Manor and Barking.

Following the game - and the exceptional hospitality afforded to *los ingleses* - the Chertsey Town chairman Rayner described the trip as an “amazing experience...we could not have been better received and entertained”. Rayner held high hopes of returning the compliment reporting that “their president has suggested that he might bring his team over to England for a return match”. It goes without saying that Cherstey Town are still waiting.