

Getting shirty Colombian style by Stuart Fuller

One area where my work life and footballing life collides is that of commercial and brand protection rights. The world of counterfeit football shirts is a global issue for every club, with manufacturers forced to increase their production costs every year to make their products harder to counterfeit, which in turn drives the retail cost up. The clubs are the ones who have to bear the brunt of the criticism, yet if we didn't have a counterfeiting issue, prices would (probably) fall. On the flip side, counterfeiting only takes place because of the high cost of the original. It is one of those classic catch 22 situations.

Whilst many clubs will employ brand protection strategies, using both online and offline detection to combat the sale of fake shirts, there is one club that last season had the world of counterfeit shirts to thank for being able to take the field in a league match in Colombia.

Independiente Santa Fe, considered one of the most important and historic teams in Colombia, with 8 national championships to their name, most recently in 2014 as well as being the Superliga Colombiana champions in 2015. It's fair to say that they are a household name in Colombia. But reputation counts for nothing if your kit man forgets to pack your kit for an away game.

That's what happened when they travelled to the town of Tunja to play Boyacá Chicó. On arriving at the Estadio de La Independencia the kitman realised he had packed the wrong shirts meaning there was a clash of kits. Rather sportingly, Boyacá Chicó refused to play in their away strip or even lend it to Independiente. Forced with the prospect of the game being cancelled and a heavy fine being levied, club officials ran to the local street market and bought counterfeit shirts, costing around \$5 before adding the names and numbers to the back in a marker pen. Whilst it wasn't the most professional of looks, the shirts had the correct sponsor and league logos on, meaning that they escaped any fines.

Santa Fe spokesman Pablo Garcia admitted to a certain added satisfaction at the 2-0 victory his club went on to inflict on their intransigent rivals. "We're happy because Chicó wouldn't help resolve the problem and tried to gain an advantage in the situation," he said.

The incident certainly changed the opinion of what value counterfeit football shirts could bring to the game in Colombia, although whether Boyacá Chicó feel the same way is probably a mute point. It's hard to see the same situation happening here in England although you never know.