

Something's rotten in the state of Denmark by Stuart Fuller

Thirty years after I left school, I can still remember my English Literature, and in particular the tale of Hamlet. Shakespeare's play, based in Helsingor on the northern tip of Jutland in Denmark, is more of a series of one-liners to me now rather than a gripping storyline but in the last few weeks one particular line has summarised the state of the Danish national team.

"Something's rotten in the state of Denmark"

I was first alerted to the story of the internal troubles by my good friend Ben, who has lived in Copenhagen for a decade and still plays at a fairly decent level. He sent me a message, which at first I assumed was a joke, saying that he could get a call up for the national side for their game against Slovakia.

He was stretching the truth – I mean when would a 30-something, 10 years past his prime, holding midfielder get a shot at five minutes in the Danish Superliga, let alone an international cap. But there was some merit in his story. Due to an ongoing dispute between the International squad, who had only just returned from a fairly decent FIFA World Cup campaign in Russia, and the Danish Football Association, the DBU, over issues ranging from bonuses, expenses and who should be preparing their pre-match meatballs, the players and management had effectively gone on strike.

Faced with the humiliation and potential harsh sanctions from the world governing bodies, the DBU were forced to spread their net far and wide to find a squad to head to Trnava. The third and fourth tier in Danish football is made up of amateur clubs, many without facilities such as floodlights, yet all of a sudden they started getting interest in their squads of players, virtually off of whom had full-time jobs. The DBU turned to former Arsenal Midfielder, John Jensen, who had been without a job in football since leaving lower league Fremad-Amager over a year ago, to manage the team.

I'm sure that players not completely unaware of the full situation will have thought their call up, perhaps by text or WhatsApp in today's Social Media society, was some kind of joke, but a full squad of part-time players assembled at Kastrup Airport before heading to Slovakia. The media had a field day, some laughing at the decision, others heralding the players as saviours of national pride. The Slovaks weren't impressed, reducing the price of tickets for the game in Trnava to just €1.

Many fans, and the DBU, probably watched the game with their hands over their eyes, expecting the worst, but in the end a 3-0 defeat wasn't anywhere near as bad as it could have been.

A few days later, faced with humiliation on both sides of the table, a truce was called, and the regular squad players beat Wales 2-0 in the Nations League. Who knows what the future will hold for the situation, but perhaps Ben's dream of an international cap before his 40th birthday may not be completely out of the question.