



We thought it was all over



Keen to see England play Germany in a charity football match, Jeremy King spends a day with **TAO Productions** and agency **Toast Events**, discovering how to create a high-profile event while keeping celebrities and footballers happy

10.30am With a tangible feeling of excitement still hanging in the air following Reading FC's promotion to football's top table, the Madejski Stadium makes an ideal venue for England v Germany: The Legends. The brainchild of Toast Events managing director Lester Holcombe, the match aims to raise funds for the British Red Cross and The Bobby Moore Fund for Cancer Research. It will feature celebrities and football legends from England taking on a team of German actors and ex-footballers.

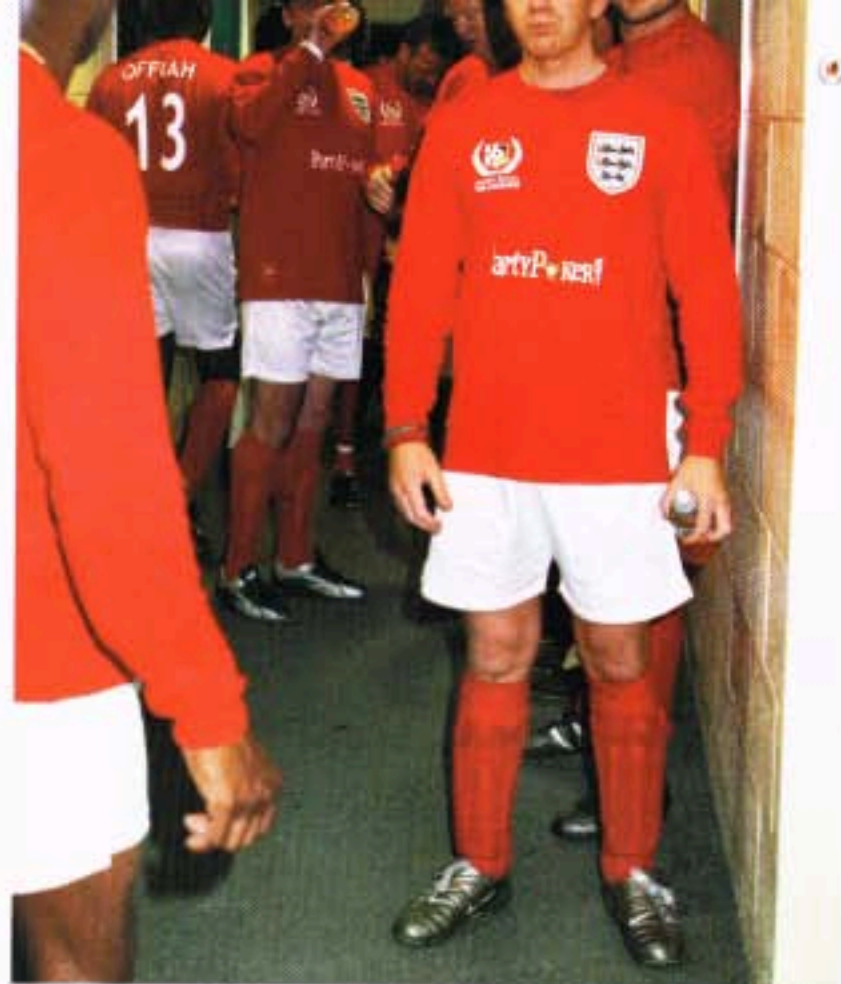
11.30am **TAO Productions** managing director Andy Cotton has been busy dealing with requests from the players and overseeing the running of the event with Holcombe. For Cotton it is one of the most challenging events he has been involved with. "We were just going to be responsible for the national anthems at the start of the game, the post-match dinner and auction," he says, "but the role expanded and this morning I took further control."

12.00pm While passes and programmes for players' families and friends are sorted out, Cotton is on the phone to the German goalkeeper Bodo Illgner, changing his flight five or six times at the player's request. "It got to the point where I said if he doesn't let in a few goals tonight I'll send him on a plane back to Zambia, and not his home of Alicante," chuckles Cotton. Right after this, *Eastenders* actor Nigel Harman calls to ask for extra tickets for tonight's event.

12.30pm As Cotton chats to **TAO** medical manager Kevin Hitchens, a call goes out on the walkie-talkie that a German player has forgotten his football boots. While Cotton deals with this, Hitchens explains how for the next 48 hours he is responsible for the players' health, and reveals that many of them have asked for advice on twinges and stretches.

1.00pm As the players go out onto the pitch for a training session, Cotton and Holcombe check everything is going to plan and chat with the players.

1.30pm While the teams train, AP Security begins to plan its operations for the day. The company has been briefed with ensuring that the players get to and from the stadium without any hassles. AP business development manager John Phillips is heading up the operation, and for the next 60 minutes he and Cotton walk around the entire stadium checking all the security procedures are in place.



Top left Andy Cotton, the king of multi-tasking, has his hands full keeping everything on track **Top centre** Things get frantic in front of the goalmouth **Above** Guests relax during the post-match dinner and auction, held in aid of charity **Above** Actor Max Beasley gets himself "in the zone" before the game

2.30pm Buses arrive to take the players back to their hotel for a press conference while Cotton has ongoing discussions with one of the German players, who is unhappy with some aspects of the event. "The English boys have been brilliant all day but some of the German lads have posed a few problems," admits Cotton.

3.30pm Staying calm under pressure, Cotton receives news that Paul Gascoigne and his entourage have arrived at the ground, while attempting to cater for the German player's latest gripe about his transport back to the hotel. He then heads to the stadium's Princess Suite, where tonight's dinner will be held, to meet classical band G4 and discuss the English national anthem they will be singing tonight.

4.00pm Cotton insists G4 carry out a full rehearsal and heads pitchside to get the sound levels right. Also on the pitch, radio and television presenter Colin Murray is doing a feature on the event, but Cotton persuades him to pause while the rehearsal takes place.

5.00pm Back in the Princess Suite Cotton is ensuring the dinner area is set up correctly, while Holcombe looks after the players who are back at the stadium preparing for the big match. "We started asking players about 15 months ago whether they would like to play," explains Holcombe. "We wanted to make sure we had different players to the ones we normally roll out for these events, which is why we went for the likes of Richard Ashcroft, Matt Le Tissier and Paul Merson. As you can imagine it's a long process because you have to deal with agents and managers, and some of them wanted fees to play."

5.15pm Cotton makes sure the car he sent to pick up celebrity player and eccentric MP Boris Johnson is on its way back to the stadium.

7.00pm As 24,000 fans begin to arrive, Cotton and Holcombe ensure the production is in place and that the players, now in the changing rooms, are happy.

8.00pm The game kicks off and the pair prowl the touchline, ready to intervene if anything goes wrong. But apart from a dodgy tackle from Johnson the game is played in the right spirit, with Germany victorious.

10.30pm After the players have changed and enjoyed a drink at the bar, Cotton ushers everyone into the dining suite for the auction. This allows him his first spare five minutes, which he uses to change into a suit.

12.30am Despite the dinner finishing and the event coming to a close, Cotton's work is not done. He has to make some last-minute changes to most of the German players' flights because they want to stay and get drunk. "Fortunately we have an emergency number I can phone to rearrange the flights," reveals Cotton. "And to be fair, the airlines have been amazing, helping us out at every turn."

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