

OUCH! We Met The Enemy



by Reg Green

Manchester City's win over Inter-Milan this past weekend to gain soccer's 'treble' reminded me of the day when I watched in despair as the English rugby team lost the latest in a series of games to the Welsh. That day, however, was when Wales were recovering from the shock in the previous season of having been thwarted of winning rugby's famed 'triple crown' by the weakest team in the contest. The bitterness of that defeat was still raw despite this latest win.

On the way home from the game a carload of us stopped at an upscale bar in London's West End where, it turned out, Welsh fans had taken possession, the regular customers having fled or had hidden under the tables.

Every Welshman thinks he can sing and the songs of fabled victories filled every crack and corner, the favorite being "Johnny Bach," the personification of Wales, always triumphant however daunting the opposition. The lyrics are less than

Oscar Hammersteinian but sung by a massed choir of drunks are undoubtedly rousing, starting with the downfall of the mighty Austrians.

“Who beat the Wallabies?”

Who beat the Wallabies?

Who ooo ooo beat the Wallawallabies?

Good old Johnny Bach.”

On and on it went. “Who beat the Springboks?” (South Africa) “Who beat the All-Blacks?” (the New Zealanders, named for their all-black outfits.) Then, finally, in a chorus fit to wake Francis Drake in his hammock, “Who Beat the Englishmen?” The song ended in thundering triumph and a profound silence followed.

Then a thin, reedy voice, that I recognized with horror was mine, broke the spell as it launched itself into unknown territory with a lonely version that began, “Who won the Triple Crown?” Next to me I heard my burly friend Ben Williams say, “Oh, Christ.”

But the voice trembled on, unstopably, to its destiny.

“Who won the Triple Crown?”

Who won the Triple Crown?

Who won the Triple Crown?

Not good old Johnny Bach.”

Another moment of silence followed, even more profound than the first.

Then the Welshmen were all over us, slapping our backs, roaring with laughter, yelling that it was an honor to have beaten us on the field – yet again – that day.

It really is true, though current politics suggests otherwise: you can fight a battle of great importance and still like your opponents.