

HLA BU  RUTEN

FLYBUSSE



Northern



At Rosenborg, league titles are like buses. You wait for years and then 12 come in rapid succession. Coach Ola By Rise waits for No13 and, right, the mug from mum

The coach edits poetry, the director uses Latin and the players do Johnny Depp impressions. Rosenborg is, Paul Simpson finds, a very unusual football club

On the edge of Rosenborg coach Ola By Rise's impressively tidy desk is a mug bearing the inscription: 'Some people think football is a matter of life and death. I assure them it's much more serious than that'.

I ask him about it. "Oh that," he says with a laugh. "My mother bought me it as a kind of joke - she was worried about the pressure I would be under taking this job..."

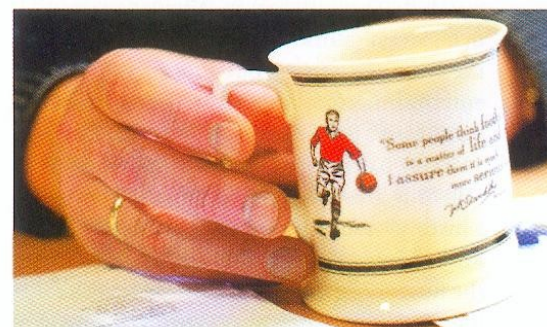
It's not clear if Bill Shankly, who coined the aphorism, was entirely serious, but does Rosenborg's new coach believe it? "Oh no, family life, love, happiness, they're important. But of all the unimportant things, football is the most important." The 43-year-old By Rise has many other 'unimportant' things in his life. He has written many children's books and, with his old boss Nils Arne Eggen, edited a bestselling anthology of verse called *Poetry In The Dressing Room*. He turns to inspect his bookshelves for a copy. Finding none left, he explains the book's rationale: "We put notes to the poems. To a poem about the death of King Olav in battle, we put a note saying Olav hadn't prepared for his away fixture." The joke probably loses something in translation.

By Rise has his own away fixture, against Benfica in the UEFA Cup, to prepare for. As deputy, under Eggen and then Åge Hareide (who left to become Norway's national coach in December), By Rise has helped steer Rosenborg to eight league titles, but now he is in charge. Can he fill the role as surely as he once filled Rosenborg's goal?

He is, I suggest, in an unenviable position in many ways. Rosenborg have won 12 titles in a row. His old boss Eggen (as pivotal to Rosenborg's rise as Shankly was to Liverpool's) still consults at the club. And the media is on the alert for any signs the mighty Rosenborg machine might be faltering.

JED LEICESTER

Lights



“Everything you say is right,” By Rise admits. “Before I took this job, I imagined the worst thing that could happen and asked: could I survive that? I decided I could. I can do other things, the club will recover. In some ways, moving to this desk is a very small change and in others it’s the biggest change you can imagine.”

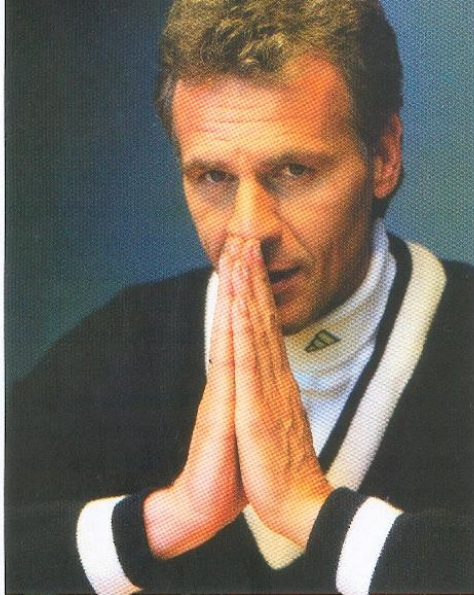
What he asks of his players, he says, is simple. “The fans, the club, the coaches, the team-mates don’t demand that a player succeeds, we just demand he tries. Football has too many people who behave like stars but don’t play like stars. If a player wants to be bigger than the team, he can go and be bigger than someone else’s team. Not to give 100 per cent...” He pauses, his voice suddenly quiet yet hard, “I won’t tolerate that.”

It was By Rise’s job, under Eggen, to listen to the players. Eggen shouted – to inspire or rebuke – but By Rise can shout too. His deputy coach Per Joar Hansen, who played on the wing when By Rise was in goal, recalls with a smile, “He was always shouting, he had quite a temper.” When I say he must have changed, Hansen smiles again. “Oh, not so much.” By Rise says of Hansen, “He was a mazy dribbler – he could take on two or three men in a telephone box and come out with the ball. You just never knew quite when he was going to provide the cross.”

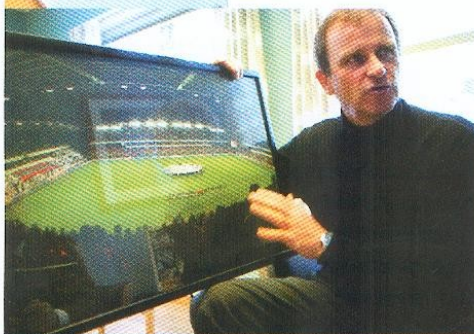
A winger and a goalkeeper – hardly your usual coaching team. By Rise laughs. “Nils Arne said to me, ‘I can’t remember a single goalkeeper who became a great coach,’ and I said, ‘And I can’t think of another left back who became a great coach’. But what does a player’s career tell us? Nils Arne Eggen was a left back who liked to belt the ball up the pitch, yet his sides played attacking football. The Professor [Egil Olsen] was a mazy winger who never gave the ball away but preferred defensive organisation and discipline.”

Eggen and Egil ‘Drillo’ (the nickname refers to his dribbling runs as a player) Olsen aren’t just the two most famous football coaches in Norway, they personify two entirely different footballing philosophies. “Go into any home in Norway and ask them and they’ll tell you there are two ways to play football: the Drillo way and the Rosenborg way,” says By Rise. “They’ll say you can play the Drillo way in the short term to win games but they like to watch the Rosenborg way. We needed the defensive organisation and determination the Professor gave us, but attacking, entertaining, football – it’s written in our club statutes, it’s gospel for us. As Nils Arne says: ‘Nobody pays to see a team destroy a match.’”

To fully grasp Rosenborg’s football gospel a history lesson might be appropriate. Rosenborg was founded in 1917 by locals in the Rosenborg district of Trondheim. The founders called their club Odd, in tribute to



Fan, now sporting director, Rune Bratseth, above. The bestselling club CD, left. Admin director Nils Skutle, below, recalls the first UEFA Champions League tie in the new stadium, against Inter

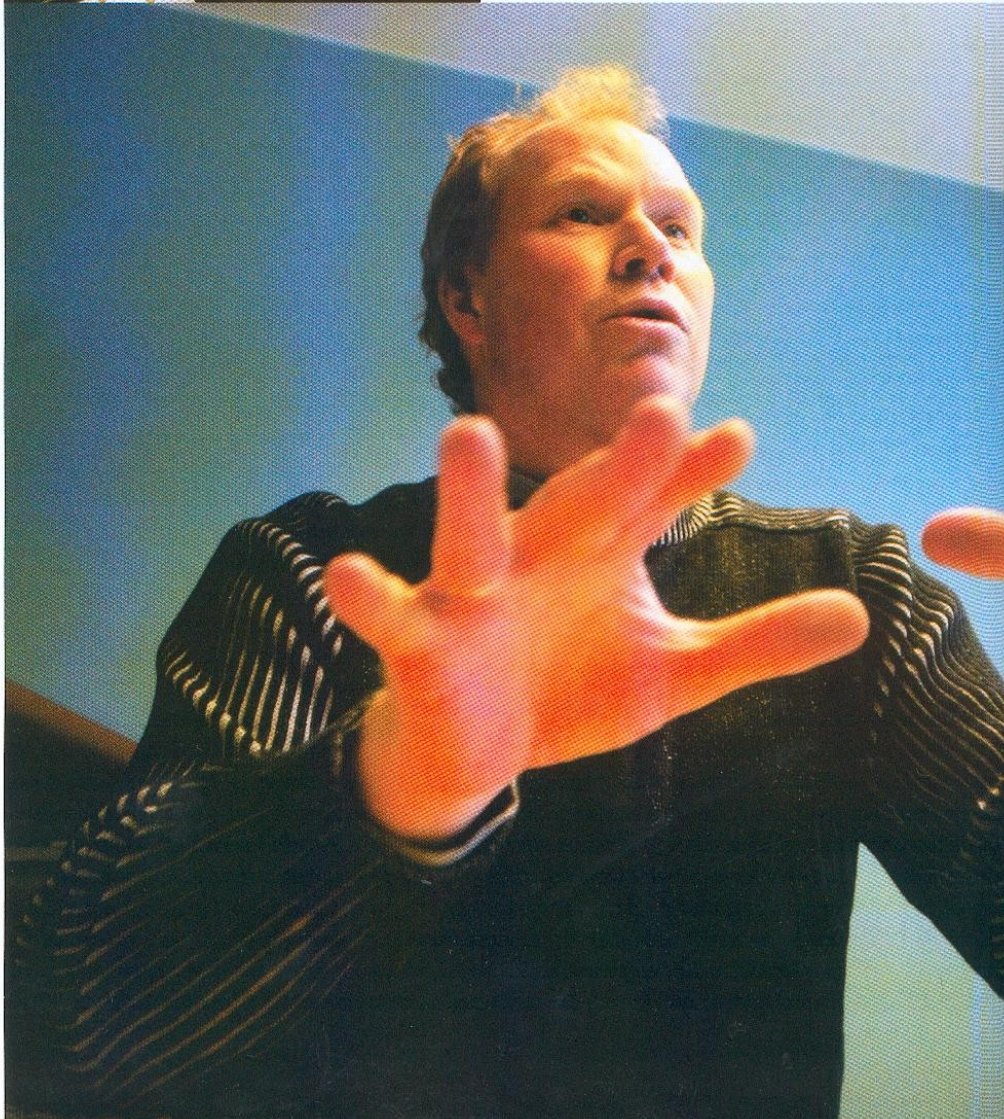


a team that had won four Norwegian Cup finals in a row from 1903 to 1906, and adopted Odd’s black and white strip, as if they hoped some of the success would rub off on them. But the club changed its name to Rosenborg later, under orders from the Norwegian FA.

In 1960, in one of those coincidences that sounds like the wheeze of a hack Hollywood screenwriter, Rosenborg beat Odd to lift their first trophy, the Norwegian Cup. At left back in that winning team was Nils Arne Eggen. More trophies followed, notably a first league title in 1967 – thanks, in part, to the prowess of Odd Iversen (father of Steffen) who bagged 158 goals in 222 league games. But in 1976/77, the club was relegated. Promotion at the first go was a matter of survival. Eggen, returning, took the club back up, with the then 17-year-old By Rise claiming his place in goal.

By Rise is almost painfully honest about how hard he found first-team football. “If there was a hole in the ground I could have hidden in like a mole, I would have. I remember the insecurity – you knew you were not good enough. It was like being thrown into the sea without knowing if you could swim. But I was lucky. I played three games while the number one was out and was out of the team before my form dropped. One thing I had in my favour was that I worked.”

He’s being modest – he would have won



more than 25 Norwegian caps if it hadn't been for Erik Thorstvedt. Southampton nearly signed By Rise in 1989 and he holds the all-time record for appearances in the Norwegian league (346 between 1977 and 1995).

Eggen left, his immediate job done, came back for four seasons and was succeeded in 1983 by Tommy Cavanagh, Tommy Docherty's right-hand man at Manchester United, who holds the unfortunate honour of being the only coach in the club's 87-year history not to leave of his own volition. Rosenborg won the league in 1985 but By Rise says, "I remember the joy of winning it, after coming back from relegation, but we weren't that good a team."

Rune Bratseth, now the club's sporting director and a Rosenborg fan as a boy, was a key member of that side. "Eggen began to lay the basis for the footballing system here in 1988. It was a very different club in 1985." His own departure - to Werder Bremen in 1986 - said a lot about the state of the club then.

"The offer came in for me. I wasn't sure, my

wife was pregnant and I had a nice life, but my wife said we should go, or we would just stay in Trondheim the rest of our lives."

He won the European Cup-Winners' Cup with Werder Bremen in 1992, the first Norwegian to win a European trophy, earned the nickname 'the Moose' from Bremen fans who adored his tireless effort, hung up his boots in 1994 and, like many players who have left the club, returned to Rosenborg. As they say locally, "once a Trønder, always a Trønder".

Bratseth, who has the tanned looks and lithe physique of a prosperous ski instructor, says, "Since 1988, we play the same system, usually 4-3-3, always looking for the forward pass. And when Eggen came back in 1988, after winning the league in 1987 with Molde, he built the team around young players who learned this system. The long ball, used by the national team under Egil Olsen, was just a weapon. It helped make the national team competitive, but it isn't the Rosenborg way."

Rosenborg is now the best supported club

in Norway, an honour that in the 1970s would have gone to Manchester United or Liverpool. Success has changed supporters' expectations. The hardcore fans, the Kjernen, used to worry about relegation, now they say, "Never 1991 again" - that being the last year they failed to win the league. The club has won four league and cup doubles since 1992 but By Rise says it hasn't been as easy as it sounds, quoting another football cliché. "Football is a game between two teams and at the end the Germans win," he says erupting into laughter.

"Gary Lineker said that and we are the Germans here. We are masters of winning by the small margin. We frustrate teams, just keep on playing. In 2002, we were way behind SFK Lyn, but turned it around in one spell of five games. If you'd stopped those games after 85 minutes, we would have had just three or five points. At full time, we had all 15 points."

One of those games, against Lyn, swung the season. By now By Rise's hands are whirring as he becomes impassioned. "When it's near the end of the game, and players get tired, the team with the system usually beat the team who have to improvise their way to goal. Our players know if the ball's in a certain area, the player on the wing stays up while the player on the other wing comes in to fill the space.

"Against Lyn, with two minutes to go, our midfielder believed in a run nobody else in the stadium believed in. Our centre forward had been beaten for every ball in the air but the midfielder just played it up - maybe this time he'll win the ball. And he did. He flicked it into the net, the last touch of the game. We won 3-2, we'd been 2-1 down at 79 minutes.

"Lyn collapsed. They had been ten points clear and they finished third. We frustrate the opposition, maybe it's tight with four games to go, we defeat them, so they give up, and at the end of the season we're ten points clear and it looks like we've cruised."

He does not expect to cruise this season. "This is year zero. None of those trophies matters now. All I can say is I have the squad most capable of winning the league."

It's hard to know where Rosenborg's challenge will come from. Only local rivals Molde have recently run Rosenborg close two seasons in a row. Such opposition should emerge from the capital but, Nils Skutle, Rosenborg's director of administration, says, "Oslo has too many clubs, the fans are split."

A fierce Manchester United v Arsenal-style rivalry would help him reach his next target. "Last season we had gates of around 16,000, which isn't bad - there are around 250,000 people within an hour or two of the stadium. But with the new stadium, built with revenue from European competition, we want to reach 17-18,000. We have to seize the day, what's the Latin for that?"

"Carpe diem," I say.

"Attacking football is in our club statutes, it's our gospel. As Nils Arne says, 'Nobody pays to see a team destroy a match'"



Clockwise from left, Ola By Rise tries to seize the day; the Rosenborg stadium - built with profits from European competition - where the club aims for regular gates of up to 18,000; the manager's guitar always travels to the game



"That's it. *Carpe diem. Carpe diem.*" He says it loudly, obviously liking the sound of it. "This has been good for Trondheim – not just financially but it's given the city something to smile about. In the recession, a lot of factories closed here. They used to joke that you should never phone anyone in Trondheim because it would only make you depressed."

"We never want to be like this," he says, turning his nose up with his finger, "and we make sure our players behave appropriately. You can have a good life here and prepare for your next career – we've had lawyers, doctors, accountants in our squad, we feel it helps keep their feet on the ground. Our salaries aren't as great as in England but £150,000 a year and the chance to study may be better than £2million a year and wondering where it's all gone when you've stopped playing."

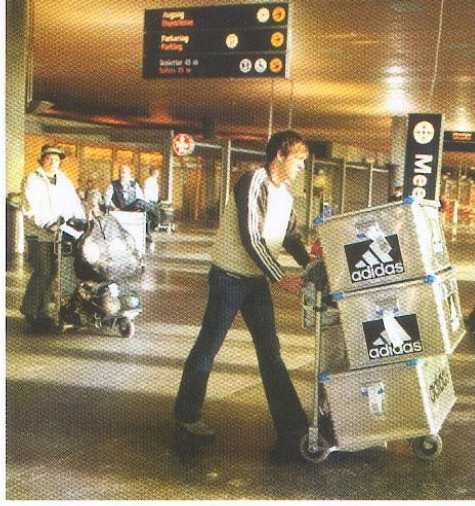
Rosenborg's squad is at the moment entirely Norwegian yet, astonishingly, the club don't have their own academy. Bratseth says, "We couldn't take 40 or 50 youngsters and stick them in an environment where it's football, football, football all the time, isolate them from family and friends, pick two of them when the time comes and just wave the rest goodbye." Instead, the club work with a local school and blood their youngsters by loaning them to smaller clubs where they can gain first-team experience.

Some clubs, especially in England, thrive on a fortress mentality. At Rosenborg, any fan can call in at the club house, pour a free coffee and marvel at the gold disc on the wall, awarded for sales of Rosenborg's CD of club anthems (randomly selected track titles: Rosenborg Boogie and Rosenborg Samba). "The secret of Rosenborg is that it has no secret," is how By Rise sums up this approach.

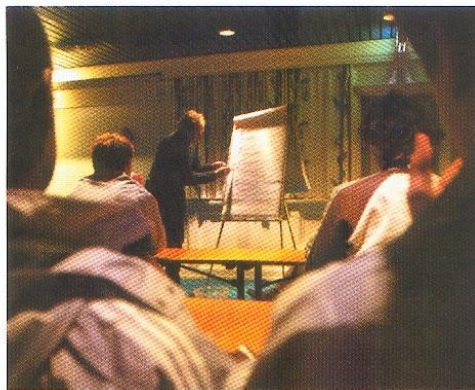
It's no secret that By Rise has three targets as coach: to win that 13th successive title, guide Rosenborg into the UEFA Champions League proper and gently rebuild the team.

The club competed in the Champions League for a record eight seasons in a row, but missed out last year, losing 1-0 on aggregate in the final qualifier to Deportivo La Coruña. The greatest result in Rosenborg's history could be beating Milan 2-1 in the San Siro in the 1996/97 Champions League to clinch a place in the last eight. "They only needed a draw," says By Rise, "and they couldn't believe they'd given it away. But Silvio Berlusconi was the perfect gentleman, congratulated us very politely." Was that his most satisfying game as player or coach? "Possibly. But, as a player, there's nothing like winning your first Norwegian Cup final."

Rebuilding a successful team is one of the hardest jobs in football but Bratseth says the transfer market has made the job simpler, if not easier. "Not many clubs can afford big transfers, so we don't have to sell our good



Boxed off: the Rosenborg kit man and squad pick up their luggage at Oslo airport, above. By Rise gives his team talk ahead of the pre-season friendly against Fredrikstad, who have risen two divisions in two seasons, below



players when they reach 21 and replace them." Striker John Carew, who made such an impact at Valencia, spent a year at Rosenborg in 1998/99, after being signed from Vålerenga. Good business for the club – they made nearly £4m profit – but not necessarily for the team.

Apart from Carew and Bratseth, Rosenborg have exported the likes of Steffen Iversen, Bjørn Tore Kvarme, Øyvind Leonhardsen, Stig Inge Bjørnebye and Vidar Riseth (now back at the club – "once a Trønder"). Today, Rosenborg buy as often as they sell, a good example being the signing of 22-year-old winger Azar Karadas for £480,000.

Three of By Rise's most influential players – Roar Strand in midfield and Harald Brattbakk and Frode Johnsen upfront – are the wrong side of 30. By Rise's gut instinct is to ring the changes gradually, but football has a way of imposing a schedule of its own.

After the interview, By Rise sits in a bus stop for Jed, the photographer, and is accosted by a beggar. The coach strikes up a conversation, inspects his pockets for money and hands some over. Walking back to the club house, he says, "He has no home, and no money. I had some," and shrugs as if to say "Enough said."

The next morning, at about 10.30am, the Rosenborg squad filter through to the departure gate at Trondheim airport in their adidas tops and jeans. They are not herded,



chaperoned or shepherded. By Rise and his assistant Hansen arrive later. We are flying 40 minutes south to Oslo for a pre-season friendly against Fredrikstad. The opposition's story seems unusually pertinent, given By Rise's predicament. "They won everything in the 1950s and then their team broke up. They have just come up two divisions in two seasons – and they're managed by a friend of mine." The friend is Knut Torbjorn Eggen – the son of Nils Arne – who also played for Rosenborg alongside By Rise and Hansen.

Arriving at Oslo, one of the players jokes with the team's loud-hailer, but quietly so as not to offend other passengers waiting for their luggage. Seven steel adidas boxes, two bags of footballs and By Rise's guitar are collected. Soon we're speeding through the snow on the team bus. After an initial chirrup of mobiles and a discussion of classic pop tunes that starts with *Uptown Girl*, moves on to *Blame It On The Boogie* and ends with *Ain't No Mountain High Enough*, the players slip into

a kind of slumber. They finally wake when By Rise lets the driver turn on the radio to catch the world biathlon championships, an event Norway look well-placed to win.

At 2.50pm, we arrive at a Fredrikstad hotel for late lunch. Some of the support staff and players take their coffees to watch the biathlon on the hotel's big screen. Norway finish second, mainly because they can't shoot straight enough. The players then head to their rooms for a couple of hours before the 5pm team meeting. Hansen ducks off to the meeting room to draw a lot of flip charts.

The briefing, from By Rise and Hansen, is to the point, focusing on Rosenborg's own set-pieces and the threat posed by Fredrikstad's mobile, talented attack. After 20 minutes, it's over and the players rattle their knuckles on the top of the tables in anticipation. As we follow By Rise out he says: "I don't think it will be a boring game."

On the ten-minute coach ride to the ground, the players are singing and joking.

The wait is almost over. The sports arena, with its own indoor football pitch, is two-thirds full as we arrive. The players inspect the artificial surface. Defender Vidar Riseth doesn't look too chuffed as he plants a foot on the pitch and watches a puff of dust. "It will be good not to get injured," he says, frowning.

The same thought may have occurred to his team-mates because Rosenborg start sluggishly. Fredrikstad go ahead, but the visitors level in the 59th minute from a clever corner. The defenders and keeper are sucked to the near post as the ball floats long to Riseth in space to head home. Johnsen, on as a substitute, makes it 2-1.

It looks like being a textbook case of Rosenborg's mastery of small margins. But Fredrikstad equalise from a free-kick, taken as the referee is unsighted and the defenders are watching the official. The goal provokes an almighty row. One Rosenborg player is booked for protesting, another goes on backchatting to the ref long past the point when, in England, a red card might have emerged. It doesn't square with Skutle's talk of the players' impeccable professionalism, but it does show they care.

For eight minutes, a piqued Rosenborg spare no effort to snatch a winner, but run out of time. Hansen, mulling over the game later, isn't impressed. "We made them look good in the first half," he complains. "The second half was better. Still, at least we've got no injuries." His players, meanwhile, are being besieged for autographs by young Fredrikstad fans.

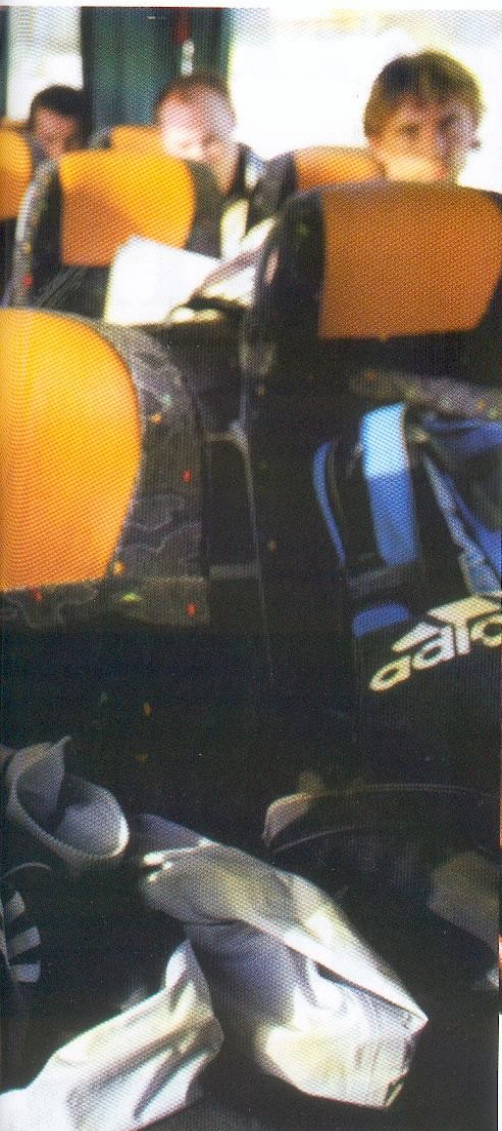
On the coach, pizza is handed around. There is a brief debate about the movie to be played on the drive back to Oslo. Midfielder Jan Gunnar Olli, whose swollen red foot sticks out into the gangway, wants *Pirates Of The Caribbean*. "I may be the worst pirate in the world but you have heard of me," he chuckles, in perfect imitation of Johnny Depp's intonation in the most famous line from the movie. When a Keanu Reeves thriller *Chain Reaction* is chosen, Olli turns to talk to Skutle.

After an hour, we pull up at a service station so Jed and I can get a cab. Olli shouts, "Chocolate!" as he spots the Esso On The Run sign. The thought has occurred to the other players as they slope off to the store like kids getting an unexpected break on a school trip. By Rise and Skutle come off the bus to say goodbye. By Rise is apologetic: "Sorry we saved our worst half of football for you."

"The second half was good though," I reply. "Better, but not the best."

Next morning the team fly off to La Manga for a friendly against Dynamo Kyiv while the Norwegian papers publish photos of By Rise, his expressions ranging from merely grim to furious, accompanied by a warning that the Benfica game is only 12 days away. You can see why his mum worries about the pressure.

The fans used to joke about relegation. Now they say, "Never 1991 again." That was the last year they didn't win the title



Clockwise from left, the Rosenborg players believe in five fruit portions a day; goalmouth action on the dusty artificial pitch of Fredrikstad's indoor stadium; Rosenborg's Vidar Riseth gets some hi-tech hero worship

