

# And the winner is... The Critics!

Critics at the Edinburgh Festival yesterday beat the comedians' side 7-3 in the annual "Comics v Critics" football match on Edinburgh's Meadows, organised by Amnesty International and Fest magazine.

Goals came from The Edinburgh Evening News's Gary Flockhart, who scored a hat-trick; two from The Sun's Tommy Holgate; and one each for Fest magazine's Edd McCracken and Ben Judge. The comedians fought back hard with goals from Humphrey Ker, a 'wonder goal' from Chris Martin and one from Daniel Sloss – but their efforts weren't quite enough to overcome a well-organised critics' side.

With a trophy, cheap fizzy wine and chocolate medals at stake, the annual game lived up to its billing as "such a grudge match they had to get Amnesty International to referee".

Lifting the trophy, critics captain Peter Geoghegan said:-"We were always the better side on the day. My boys had trained harder, ran faster, kicked it further, and we'd put something in their half-time Lucozade.

Credit to the comedians – they played a good game. But we won and we can now lord it over them for a whole year. It's good that we had Amnesty here ensuring fair play or they might've turned nasty at the end."

Comedian Mark Watson, who captained the comedians' side, said:-"Losing to the critics is a bitter blow, to be honest. We thought our flair would carry us through. But we'll be back stronger next year and maybe we'll have to try bribing the ref with a donation to Amnesty."

Both teams played in shirts bearing the slogan “Free the UAE 5”, a reference to Amnesty International’s Edinburgh Festival campaign for five online activists detained in the United Arab Emirates and charged with “insulting officials” after calling for democracy and criticising the government.

Amnesty is asking people at the festival to text (SMS) the word “FREEDOM” followed by their name to 81222 to join a petition, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the “UAE 5”, which will be presented to the United Arab Emirates’ embassy in London ahead of their trial in September. Amnesty has always focused on the Edinburgh festival as the ideal place to promote free speech and campaign for those whose rights are denied. Its campaigners are out on the streets of Edinburgh throughout the festival asking people to get involved.

Amnesty International’s Steve Ballinger said:-“It was a great game and hopefully we helped ensure that nobody’s rights were abused during the match.

Amnesty has always had a natural affinity with journalists and artists because of our role protecting the right to freedom of expression, something they both rely on to do their jobs.

We’re here at the festival to promote that work and get people involved in our campaign to “Free the UAE 5”, five men in Abu Dhabi who’ve been thrown in jail after they asked for more democracy.”

The comedians team was captained by Mark Watson and featured: Tim Key, Daniel Sloss, Jimeoin, Carl Donnelly, Paul Sinha, Keith Farnan, Aiden Bishop, Eric Lampeart, Joel Dommett, Tom Rosenthal, Humphrey Ker, Joe Bor, Kai Humphries, Mark Smith, Matt Richardson, Nathan Caton, Rob Beckett, Steve Hall and Chris Martin.

The critics team included: Fest magazine's Peter Geoghegan (Captain), Julian Hall (Independent), Brian Logan and Michael Macleod (Guardian), Michael McClennan (STV), Malcolm Jack (Scotsman), Gary Flockhart (Evening News), Paul Fleckney (londonisfunny.com) and Evan Beswick, Edd McCracken, Lyle Brennan, Ben Judge and Joe Spurgeon from Fest magazine.

Last year the comedians' side, captained by Rob Rouse, beat the critics 3-2 in a thrilling 90 minutes of football.

Mark Watson is also appearing at Amnesty's famed Stand up For Freedom comedy show on 17 August at 9.30 pm at the EICC's Venue 150, together with Ed Byrne, Russell Kane (Fosters' Best Comedy winner 2010), Jenny Eclair, David O'Doherty, Holly Walsh, Kristen Schaal & Kurt Braunohler, Roisin Conaty (Foster's Best Newcomer 2010) and Michael Winslow, the "Man of 10,000 sound effects" star of the Police Academy films. The show will be compered by Scottish comedy favourite Fred MacAulay and Charlie Baker (winner of Let's Dance for Comic Relief 2011). Tickets are nearly sold out but a final 50 will be made available from [www.venue150.com](http://www.venue150.com).

Background

The "UAE 5" are five men – blogger and political commentator Ahmed Mansoor, lecturer Nasser bin Ghaith and online activists Fahad Salim Dalk, Ahmed Abdul Khaleq and Hassan Ali al-Khamis – who have been detained in the UAE's capital Abu Dhabi since April. In June they were charged under article 176 of the Penal Code, which makes it a crime to publicly insult the country's top officials. Their trial is scheduled for September. None of the men are known to have advocated any violence or change of government.