

Comics v Critics Football match Sunday 14 August 2011

Comedian Mark Watson and critic Peter Geoghegan – team captains for the annual “Comics v Critics” football match at the Edinburgh Festival – today started talking up their teams’ chances in Sunday’s big match.

The game kicks off on Sunday 14 August at 2pm on The Meadows. Spectators are very welcome at the free event.

Mark Watson is joined on the comedians’ team by comics Daniel Sloss, Jimeoin, Carl Donnelly, Paul Sinha, Keith Farnan, Eric Lampeart, Joel Dommett, Tom Rosenthal, Humphrey Kerr, Iain Stirling, Joe Bor, Kai Humphries, Mark Nelson, Mark Smith, Matt Richardson, Nathan Caton, Rob Beckett, Steve Hall and Chris Martin.

Last year the comedians’ side, captained by Rob Rouse, beat the critics 3-2 in a thrilling 90 minutes of football. With the critics looking to avenge last year’s defeat, the annual game may well live up to its billing as “such a grudge match they had to get Amnesty International to referee”.

As he accepted the captain’s armband, Mark vowed to lead the comedians to another win in this year’s game, organised by Amnesty International and Fest magazine. Mark Watson said:

“Captaining any football team is the realisation of a boyhood dream for me. The responsibility is quite terrifying.

“Rob Rouse whipped up the comedians into an adrenalin-fuelled frenzy last year and I’ll be looking to keep that up. We’re not going down on my watch.”

Fest’s Peter Geoghegan, captain of the critics team, said:

“It’s the biggest grudge match of the year, pure and simple.

Man United vs. Liverpool, Real Madrid vs. Barcelona, Rocky against the big Russian bloke, they all pale in comparison to Sunday's game.

"With our fearless challenges, never-say-die attitude and skilful teamwork we're going to show those workshy comics how the beautiful game should be played. If that fails? We'll revert to Plan B: bite their ankles till they cry 'Mummy!'"

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.

Amnesty has always focused on the Edinburgh festival as the ideal place to promote free speech and campaign for those whose rights are denied. This year Amnesty is campaigning for the "UAE 5", 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, now set for the end of September. Amnesty campaigners will be out on the streets in Edinburgh asking people to get involved.

The 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 – 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. None of the men are known to have advocated any violence or change of government.