

## **We are Going to Lose**

We know we are going to lose. We see them on the opposite sideline, twice our size, twice our number. Their kit is emblazoned with sponsorship logos. Their Coaches wear international tournament badges. They have medics who travel with them, tapping sachets of electrolytes into matching bottles lined up in branded caddies. We stretch, we watch, we wonder if we can at least score on them. Just once.

New players fidget from game day nerves, this being their first game feels almost cruel. We know what's coming. We can't describe it to them and if we could what would it do to help? They've worked so hard, put in so many hours, given everything their minds and bodies can give to be ready. Coaches pat shoulders and murmur words of encouragement. Our borrowed jerseys fit awkwardly over our tense shoulders.

This is our ground. The stands behind us filled with the people who we leave behind every weekend to practice for half the day and recover for the rest. Those who pick up the slack as we spend hours watching footage, learning our positions, targeting muscle groups and movement drills at the gym. This is our ground and we will not go down lightly.

Striped figures walk into the middle of the field. We hear the rumble and shouts from the stands. We hear our teammates, standing strong beside us with deep anchoring breaths. Our hands join together by our sides. We walk out together. We walk out with pride.