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Old school kicks

There's still a sign that reads 'Crossing' at the 23 bus stop on the north side of Schaerbeek's Parc Josaphat, but until recently, rumours had it that this might soon be the only reminder of a glorious part of Brussels' sporting heritage. Schaerbeek's once majestic Crossing Stadium, for years crumbling and disused, seemed destined to rot into the ground as the debate about what to do with it stretched across years.

Entering the Crossing stadium, the pessimistic rumours were soon forgotten as home side FV Kosova beat Kappelle-Op-Den-Bos to a 2-0 victory, moving up to fifth place in the 2nd Provincial league. Kosova shares Crossing with RC Schaerbeek, a 3rd Provincial league team. The atmosphere in the supporters' bar below the dilapidated stadium had the warmth of a family reunion, with long-lost sons stepping in one after the other, refreshing beer awaiting them on arrival.

The contrast to this familial warmth couldn't have been bigger when we snuck into the abandoned stadium above. It's forbidden territory

for visitors; the building has been closed off for over a decade amid fears that the roof and stands might collapse. Showers and dressing rooms gather dust, and the terraces are dark beneath the severely decayed concrete roof.

"Would you believe that I've seen Bob Dylan play here? Right here, in our stadium," an enthusiastic football fan exclaimed, back at the bar. It's true; in June 1984 Dylan chose the then-charming venue for his Brussels concert during a European tour alongside Carlos Santana.

Crossing has seen many legendary derbies; loyal supporters still remember the day Anderlecht beat Schaerbeek with a devastating 6-1, and how the scoreboard didn't have a number six. The club put up a five with a one next to it. When the footballing force of Crossing Molenbeek and Royal Cercle du Sportif Schaerbeek merged, the club stood its ground in the first division for four years in the early 70s as Royal Crossing Club de Schaerbeek.

The club was so renowned for the passion of its supporters that national television RTBF chose to broadcast its first live colour football match from Crossing. Filled to the brim, some 15,000 supporters watched Schaerbeek crush Standard Liège with a devastating 3-1 victory. Until this day the legend stands that the local

team was unbeatable on its own turf. The team's strength at home was equalled by their weakness on unfamiliar grounds; Schaerbeek has only ever won one away match.

After four glamorous years in first division, the tide changed. In 1973 the club was relegated to second division. There was one more legendary moment before the glory days faded for good. A packed stadium watched the team battle Standard Liège a final time for the title. After a nerve-breaking 90 minutes, the team was defeated with a close 0-1. After that, Crossing's home team slid year after year, ending up in the Provincial league, where the team fused with Elewijt in 1983 and continued under the name of Royal Crossing Elewijt.

FC Kosova currently count over 400 members and RC Schaerbeek over 600; with the latest rumours suggesting that the state has finally committed to start refurbishment in 2010, it seems the future of football is at last assured in the 1030 commune. Some folks even have their fingers crossed that one day they'll get to watch another rock concert in the shadow of the Josaphat trees. (AD)