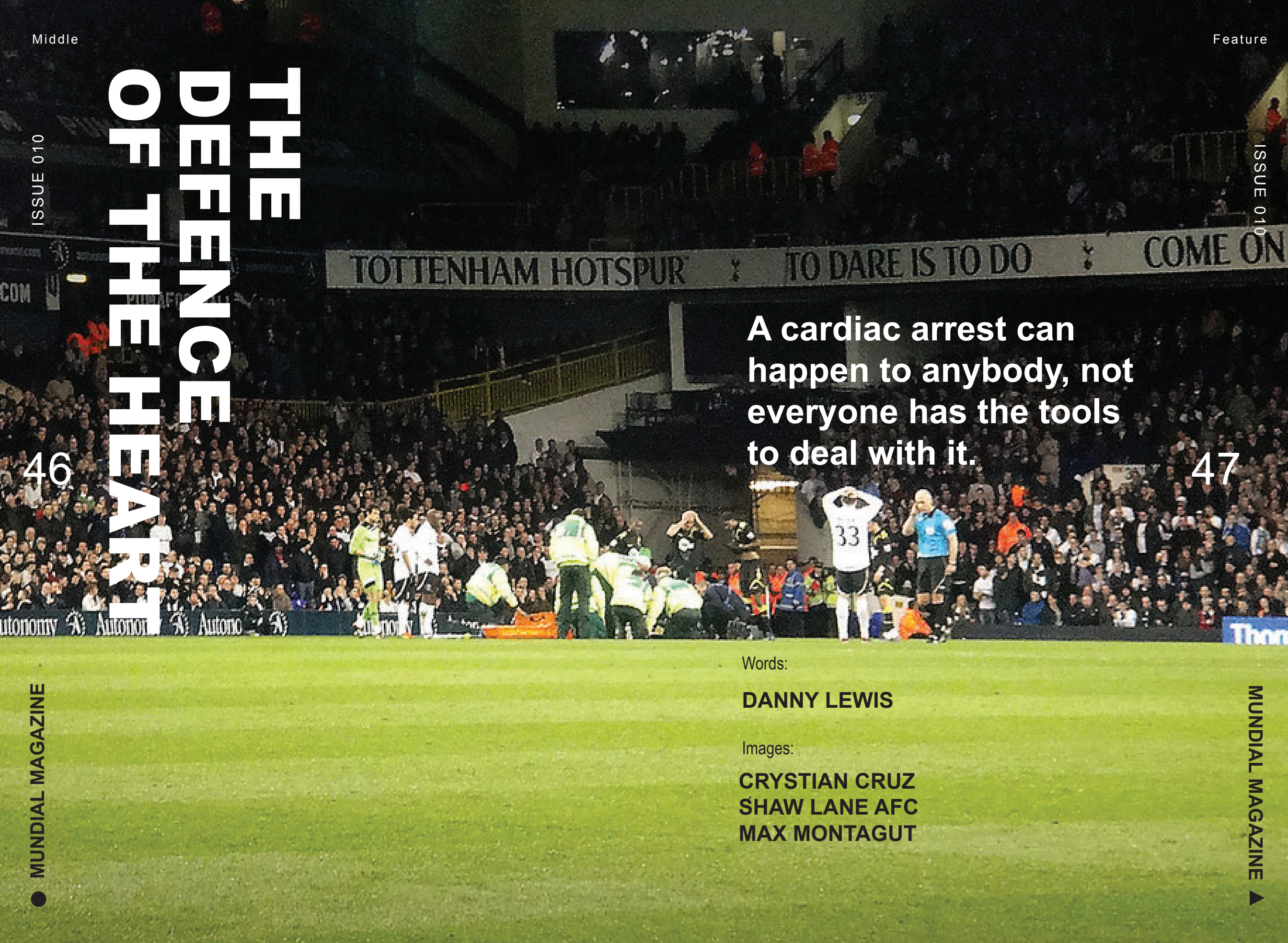


THE DEFENCE OF THE HEART



A cardiac arrest can happen to anybody, not everyone has the tools to deal with it.

Words:

DANNY LEWIS

Images:

**CRYSTIAN CRUZ
SHAW LANE AFC
MAX MONTAGUT**

White Hart Lane was momentarily silenced on Saturday 17th March 2012 during an FA Cup tie between Tottenham Hotspur and Bolton Wanderers. The crowd watched on helplessly as Fabrice Muamba suffered a heart attack due to a condition that was later diagnosed as hypertrophic cardiomyopathy.

The person who first treated Muamba, was the Bolton Wanderers physio Andy Mitchell. He knew something was seriously wrong as soon as he saw the central midfielder fall: "He's gone down in the middle of the pitch, there's nobody near him. He's gone down when the ball is many metres away and fallen in a very strange fashion.

"He's not fallen like he's twisted an ankle or twisted a knee. He's gone down with his head and shoulders really collapsing and leaning down and all of this is a really bizarre way to fall to the ground.

"So the fact that it's looking this serious, already my suspicions are very high before I've even got on to Fabrice. Then when I get on to him he is completely unresponsive and isn't communicating in any shape or form."

There was a defibrillator sent on to him within a minute and a half. In a study by the British Heart Foundation, it is shown that for every minute that a sufferer goes without CPR and a defibrillator, their chances of survival decreases by 7-10%, so the fact they got it onto Muamba so quickly was a big factor of why the then 23-year-old survived.

"One thing you lose track of is time, it was like it took five minutes to get on, but if someone had a heart attack in a hospital they wouldn't get the defibrillator on in a minute and a half."

If there isn't a defibrillator available then it really does reduce the chances of survival: "We're trained to do chest compressions, it's really important to get oxygen into the patient but they're actually secondary to getting the shock into them to try and get the heart restarting again.

"It's nearly impossible for someone to survive these kind of cardiac arrests

without a shock from a defibrillator.

"They cost £1,000 or even less now. What's the price of a life really, because these really are life saving machines."

Not all non league clubs have a defibrillator despite the FA providing them for clubs from Steps 1-7 of the National League system. However, it is vital all clubs have one as it doesn't just safeguard players. In 2014, a supporter of Margate FC had a cardiac arrest in the turnstiles prior to a friendly with Wolves.

Margate's football secretary Ryan Day was one of the club staff who helped him: "It was a very tense atmosphere because we had a gentleman laying effectively dead in our turnstiles.

"It was very much a scenario going round in your head of what happens if this gentleman dies on our grounds, in the football ground on the night of a game."

Despite those thoughts the club staff acted quickly: "It took about 30 seconds to get it [the defibrillator] from the club to the turnstiles where he was and that's what ultimately saved his life."

Margate have had tough times on the pitch, finishing bottom of the National League South this season, but that fan is thankful to just be watching his team: "He's a season ticket holder and thanks to those who knew how to use the defibrillators and used them properly he's had another three seasons of not so good football. He doesn't mind what the results are because he's just thankful that he's here."

However, even if a defibrillator gets to somebody quickly there is no guarantee that the patient will survive. This was the case for Shaw Lane AFC centre back Dan Wilkinson at the beginning of this season.

He was playing in an away match against Brighouse Town when he had a cardiac arrest. The home side had a defibrillator in the dugout and used it on him quickly but were unable to save him.

Shaw Lane's chairman, Craig Wood was there in the stand on the fateful day that it happened: "Our defence cleared the ball, it went back up field so your head turned to follow the ball. Everybody stepped up and I looked back and Dan was on the floor,



It's nearly impossible for someone to survive these kind of cardiac arrests without a shock from a defibrillator."

50

because I didn't see the actual moment he went down, I just thought he'd got a knock or something, but within a few seconds it became apparent that it was serious, he wasn't moving at all.

"You know it's something serious because everyone crowds round the player. Then the defibrillator went on as well. So yeah, you were just sitting there in shock watching it all unfold. Seconds felt like minutes and the minutes felt like hours. The severity was more apparent as the seconds ticked by."

Despite CPR being performed on him for 45-50 minutes on the pitch and treatment in hospital, Dan Wilkinson passed away as a result of the cardiac arrest.

The club have named their newly built stand after him. They also went on to do the double, winning the EvoStik Division One South title and Sheffield and Hampshire Senior Cup this season and dedicated it all to their fallen team mate: "It's all been about Dan. We've won the league and we've won the cup but next season it'll still be all about Dan and it will be as long as the club is in existence. He'll never be forgotten."

It was only discovered after his death

that Dan Wilkinson had the exact same heart condition that had caused Fabrice Muamba's cardiac arrest at White Hart Lane.

Using a defibrillator is a reactive response and Craig Wood feels that more emphasis should be put on screening to ensure that a cardiac arrest doesn't occur in the first place: "Basic screening can detect if there is an issue there, which would lead to further tests.

"It must be heart breaking telling a young lad that's playing football sorry we've screened you and there's an issue there and you won't be able to play football again. That must be heart breaking, but it saves a lot more heart break than having to tell the family that their son has died on the field when this could have been detected if the screening was made compulsory. It's expensive but what price can you put on a life?"

Andy Mitchell, who is now at Blackburn Rovers has called for more ownership when it comes to screening: "With all screening you need to have a plan A, B and C ready for if the scan shows something because sometimes if the scan does then the player will need further screening. Now, the club may not finance that so it's just deciding whose responsibility that is.

"Every two years it's done [at Blackburn Rovers] and then if we sign somebody, we can use the screening that's done from the other club, it's a simple procedure, but if we're not happy with it we'd get the screening done."

There is nothing like this available at non league clubs. Across football everything possible should be done to ensure the safety of players. Some footballers will be starting next season with a condition that could cause a cardiac arrest without having any knowledge of it or the means to deal with it when it occurs.

No player should cross the white line and not come back over it alive, which is why every single club needs to be given the tools to protect their players from any injury, including cardiac arrests. **M**

51

