



Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> August 2018



## Southend 2 - Brentford 4



Grandad was holding court. Surrounding him was a dodgy looking jury. Albert was their self-appointed spokesman but both Trigger and Boycie were making sure that their points were heard too. The accused? Don't be silly, with still twenty minute to go before kick-off there was no chance that Denzil would be on the scene. Our travelling boutique advertisement much prefers to be fashionably late. If nothing else, it provides him with an opportunity to bash the heads of other supporters with his 'man bag' as he makes his way to his seat!

So, in his absence, charges were being laid. He was well aware of them anyway as Grandad (The alleged victim) had been busy on social media seeking advice from the traffic wardens scourge, the learned Rodney Trotter. Although Rodders has received enough parking tickets to cover a wall, he has yet to pay a single fine. Instead he has so suffocated the various authorities with a deluge of letters; each one proclaiming his total innocence although a mountain of evidence points to the exact opposite that they have just eventually given up. Rumpel holds him in complete awe and now Grandad, having taken his corrupt council, was prosecuting the case against Denzil with some vigour.

The crime sheet presented to the totally biased jury members stated that, at some time during the proceedings at Plymouth, the plaintiff (Grandad) had submitted a verbal prediction score line to the accused. However subsequently, the said 100% correct prediction had been completely ignored when a league table, based upon a number of predictions submitted to the accused via his preferred method (Email), was being compiled. No small matter of 10 points being at stake.

Just as with his chief council vehicular legal situations, circumstantial evidence, to wit that in three or more seasons of making predictions, Grandad had never even got the result right let alone the score line, suggested that his case was extremely weak. But nevertheless he was pressing on with it. If Rodney had been advising Canute then, without any doubt at all, a king of England would have drowned!

Surrounding supporters, glued to their seats and mouths agape, listened on as the prosecution's case got hammered home again and again. Little note being taken by anybody of the close proximity of the match officials or indeed the Blues players who were all warming up near to where the kangaroo court proceedings were taken place. All attention being focused instead upon the faces of the jury. What would be their decision?

Albert's features were the most animated of the three. Disney have approached him on several occasions seeking a commercial agreement but as it would have had to be writing and thus have something to do with letters (A total mystery to him since the age of 30) little progress has ensued ! Boycie's though bore a thoughtful expression. But it was still a toss of a coin whether or not he was weighing up the evidence or simply wondering where Marlene had got to. This left Trigs, awake but still dreaming of food, looking for guidance from the other two. A dumb jury then then!

Grandad, stuck at the bottom of the league table (His habitual home for innumerable seasons) waited and waited. Ten points would see him soar up to heights he had never attained before and the pressure was clearly getting to him. Whilst his eyes switching from face to face, his feet shuffled restlessly from side to side. John Travolta in clogs.

Then, suddenly, and without any warning the court got adjourned. Boycie had spotted Mrs Green barging her way to her seat and, keen to prevent too many injuries, had rushed away to alert those who were in imminent danger of being trampled upon. Mike (Court reporter) and Albert followed in his wake, assuming that Trigger was behind them.

But no, our resident dormouse had found something in the match day programme to grab his attention (Possibly the list of directors) and so was totally frozen to the spot. Some minute later he attempted the ascent up to the Thunderbirds nest all on his own, only to get lost. Rather akin to Denzil, had he ever been in the forces and been armed with a map, his men would have followed him anywhere ... but only out of curiosity!

Our record in the league cup is almost as sad. It's been eight long years, dating back to almost when we thrashed the life out of Man Utd, since we last got through a round. Now facing top Championship opposition in Brentford, were we to be fated to just extending that timescale even further or, more hopefully, blowing it totally out of the water?

Chrissy P had made a small number of changes to the side that had battered Plymouth at the weekend. Hopper was being rested, giving an opportunity for Bristol City loanee McCoulsky to show us what he could do, whilst Mantom had made way in midfield for Klass for similar reasons. Turner's age being the telling point for Kyprianou to step into his boots in the centre of our defence. Brentford's manager on the other hand had made wholesale changes, replacing all 11 players!

Our first team then against their second. A sad, all too common, situation that has led to the competitions steady demise over the seasons. Whilst understandable, such tactics are to be lamented. When we ran Man Utd off the pitch and all the way back up the M6, their side included several internationals. But were we to play them today would that situation be repeated?

Who then are the winners, the clubs, or the fans that have paid good money to watch someone else youth team. Did someway say CheckaTrade trophy!

The game started brightly ... for Brentford! It soon becoming only too apparent that the gulf between the Championship and League 1 is getting bigger. TV money is making such a difference to our entire league structure that it is in real danger of becoming unsupportable. For example, look at the parachute payments fighting for space within the Sunderland vaults. A championship side last term but, like us, a league one outfit this. A level playing field though it is not. Surely a situation that is not at all healthy for football in this country? However, if Rodney could be just be persuaded to prize open the doors to his underground secret hording places ....

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the situation, we were in imminent danger of being overrun. Just as we had done to Plymouth at the weekend, now was being done to us, as Brentford players flooded up field; a swarm of red and black striped shirts hunting down every loose ball. If Oxley was looking forward to another quiet day in the office then he had been badly advised. Instead he was called upon to make a series of fine saves throughout the 90 minutes of this rather one sided affair. If we had been 2 – 0- down within as many minutes, few could have complained. Brentford's second team were simply blowing us away!

Gradually though, just as the rainstorms in the far South West had gradually abated, so did the storm of bees. Life was still proving difficult for us but at least our ambitions of crossing the halfway line didn't look totally laughable anymore. Indeed, McCoulsky was beginning to reveal that he had more than a hint of speed about him whilst both Kyprianou and Klass were beginning to make their presence felt too.

We were still though trying to persuade a cat to get into a cat box. Brentford brushing aside each and every attempt of ours to corner them inside their own area. They just looked a good deal faster, both in terms of getting to the ball and also speed of thought. Whilst we steadily lost possession every time we failed to trap a ball neatly, they quickly recovered; implementing plan 'B' and then 'C' if required, without any apparent shift in gears. Chrissy has openly expressed his admiration of the whole Brentford set up and if this is how he envisages our future, bring it on!

How we almost made it through to halftime without conceding no one knows. Oxley brought off some good saves, his defence worked extremely hard and our midfield battled away to maintain a foothold in the game. But it was just like watching Mike's resolve dissolve away when faced with a dessert menu. The thought was there, as so too, to a degree, was the will, but when it came to actual action!

Even so, when Brentford did eventually score the goal that everyone had seen coming from hours, there was more than a hint of offside about it. But linesman, sorry Assistant Referee's, do what they do (Any idea what that actually is?) and apparently expecting them to accurately count the number of defenders and match that up against the number of attackers, all inside a split second, is waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay beyond their limited capabilities. Suppose we should be thankful that they are able, just about, to hold their flags the right way up!

Two games running now we have been on the wrong end of a linesman's call. However on this occasion it was just a case of the inevitable occurring. So whilst damage had been incurred, we could hardly claim it was unexpected. But still!

Halftime was spent in the usual manner. Albert and Denzil racing each other to perform their devotions whilst Trigger simply stared after them for a moment before slamming another sandwich into his mouth. Boycie though just played with his palm jewellery. An activity that was prevalent around us. Where once there was conversation and comment about the preceding 45 minutes, now there is just the glow of screens accompanied by the unedifying sight of gliding fingers. Still, over in the East Stand the choice would have been between counting your fingers and checking the number of cockles left on your plate. Either way, they would have got it wrong 😊

Cup ties are supposed to be one guy armed with a sling against some geezer who ordered his boots in terms of mammoth's hoof sizes. So far though, our take on this one had been more like the adoring gazes that Denzil gives to the window dressings in Miss Selfridges than a blood and guts encounter. We were paying them far too much respect and that had to change. Fortunately Chrissy felt the same and had so instructed his team accordingly.

Now it was us doing the attacking whilst Brentford rocked on their heels. Slight exaggeration, they were still comfortable enough to have been listening to the Carpenters rather than Bill Haley, but at least Al Green wasn't on the play list anymore. And so we huffed and we puffed but alas to little effect. Mention has been made about our poor crossing ability in previous reports and the story was pretty much the same again here.

It didn't seem to matter which Blue shirt had the ball, Coker, Demetriou, McLaughlin, Robinson or later Kightly, as for each one of them, hitting the first man seemed to be the name of the game. Very disappointing. What though wasn't was the promise of McCoulsky who as well as being fast also looked useful in the air. The prospect of him and Hopper leading the line is a mouth-watering one. That is not to say that Cox wasn't working hard. Indeed he was. But too far back and to too little effect. Either the call has to be made that he is now just an additional midfielder, or, sadly, he must instead warm the bench.

Others amongst our senior players though should look far more towards their laurels. Whilst the 'Kids' did everything expected of them, their supposed mentors just weren't at the races. Had they had of been, then we might have got more reward for the energy and enthusiasm that the yoofs were displaying. However, with Chrissy's soft words of wisdom echoing in their ears, first gear was occasionally now being crunched into second, and so our game began to improve.

Diplomacy is something that is usually acquired with age. Just ask Albert! However our latest import appears to have it in droves. Whilst it was clear to almost everybody inside the ground that he got the final nod to Robinson's shot/cross/rebound of the goalkeeper, he later denied that this was the case. Claiming instead that it was his teammates goal all the way. Possibly the fact that his second goal, a beautiful strike from distance that the keeper never even saw coming, was being spoken about with such considerable excitement helped. But, had he scored a third, would he have then denied himself a hat trick on his debut?

By this time though we were 3 – 1 down. A mixture of defensive mistakes and, another marker of the difference between their division and ours, the marksmanship of their forwards, contributing to our demise.

After the game, many pointed fingers at Oxley claiming that he had punched the ball straight to the strikers concerned. Well one, he had done well to make the save in the first place, and two, there were at least three home defenders between him and the forwards on every occasion. Didn't they have a certain role in proceedings?

Anyway, we had now pulled it back to 2 – 3 and with Brentford really rocking (Status Quo) an equaliser looked very much on the cards. And, drawing an ace, Klass nearly scored it for us. But alas, his header from the edge of the area agonisingly hit the bar rather than dropping just below it. Who knows what might have occurred had that one gone in?

Robinson then had a very decent opportunity to level the scores but, one on one; with just the keeper to beat he contrived to blast the ball wide of its target. Our shooting might well have gone up a notch since last term (Well, at least we are forcing saves to be made on occasions now) but just as in the case of our crossing, further time needs to be invested upon the training field with regard to this aspect of our game.

Pinball tables have a 'Tilt' mechanism. So whilst in the first half it had operated in favour of Brentford, now it was adding an edge to ours. Or so it seemed until suddenly, we were two goals adrift again as a blast from the edge of the area following another great save by Oxley found the net. The 400 or so away fans enjoyed it; just as with their previous three goals, making a brief spot of noise before falling silent again. But it did serve to also burst our bubble.

Extra time had, well at least for the last 15 minutes of the game, seemed a real possibility. However now, certainly given how many people were abandoning the sinking ship (Are we the "Manchester United" of the division again as was once claimed by Kevin Keegan when he played for Scunny), it was time for a nice cup of Ovaltine before going to bed.

Eight has turned into nine then. Perhaps those who were there to witness our last cup win in any meaningful cup competition (That means CheckATrade is well and truly kicked into touch) should get commemorative shirts or badges made up. Not specially labelled pint glasses though. Albert has severe problems with them. Usually after emptying four or five. Odd that.

The journey home was punctuated by the sight of two badgers running across West Road close to the Hamlet court junction (Where were they going?) and also the closure of the A127 beyond Rayleigh Weir. Portents of things to come or events past? It definitely appears that all roads leading towards Wembley are beyond our ability to navigate whilst, in the league, our first win is also eagerly anticipated. It's fortunate then that we won't come up against many teams with Brentford's undoubted ability again this season.

Even so, it would appear that it is the devils within ourselves that are our greatest challenge. Had we carried the play of our first half into the second against Doncaster, had we put away just one of the many opportunities we had to score at Plymouth, and had we but cast away our cloaks of awe in the first period of this, then our outlook would have been a tad or three brighter. Still, there is reason for hope and indeed, controlled expectation.

We are not going to walk this league, certain financial considerations mentioned earlier in the is august (sic) scroll weigh heavily against that possibility, but neither should we fear it. Other sides, just like ourselves, will also be already carrying injuries. But will they be of the calibre of Yearwood or with the promise of Lennon and Barrett? Somewhat doubtful. So, whilst a stroll up Wembley Way might have to be put on hold for a while longer, our ascent up the table is much closer to the horizon. Starting this very Saturday!

Come on you Blues!!