



**Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> August 2018**



### **Southend 2 - Bradford City 0**



Doubtless the owner of the mobile in question thought that only he and his mate could see the 'top shelf' action taking place upon its screen. If so, he was sadly mistaken as also 'taking in the view' were a number of people in the aisles behind them, including several ladies. Whoops!

Ubiquitous though these devices undoubtedly now are, perhaps it would have been best had they remained simply phones. Adding cameras, games etc. no doubt improved their sales appeal but people are now prisoners to them. Denzil for example can barely go 10 seconds without whipping his out of his pocket and anxiously scrolling through a list of messages, each one a version of 'Ooooo, look at me, I can take a selfie!' just in case he's missed something important. Like a Southend goal!!

Boycie is almost as bad. However it does have to be said that in his favour his interest in his pocket imprisoning device is generally restricted to just football related topics. So, whilst at halftime he will be eagerly seeking out other scores, groaning if Col Poo are winning, laughing if they are not, it's before the game that this virtual old lag becomes more useful. Because it is then that he will relay to all and sundry news of the team. Getting a clear run at it if Albert is busy elsewhere, otherwise a much interrupted one!

Albert is an avid admirer of Gary Lineker and has always had a hankering to be a football talking head (Suppose two out of three ain't bad!). Therefore, as his sibling utters a player's name, so a not very condensed commentary upon that player's ability, position, likelihood of scoring gets loudly broadcast by radio Albert. Small wonder then that Trigger opt to takes shelter within his programme.

Size they say isn't everything, certainly given the level of interest that had been taken in the tiny little images being unwittingly shared by the persons a few rows in front of us. But sometimes proportions do have a role to play. Take chocolate bars for example, whilst their wrappings have remained the same, the contents have shrunk almost to the point that take just one bite and they are gone. An attribute that, as Trigger discovered to his cost, also relates to mobile phones.

When eventually the string between his two tin cans broke, he decided that the time had come for him to purchase one of these new-fangled portable telephone boxes. Quite what he was going to use all those window panes for though he didn't know. Accordingly he was much relieved when Rodney informed him that nowadays there was only one. In addition, thinking that he could recognise an expert when he saw one, Trigs then asked Rodder's to help him buy one.

So, together they happily went in and out of every phone shop in the high street, leaving behind them a trail of very confused sales assistants who just couldn't get a handle on just what sort of device they expected to buy for under a fiver. Indeed it was more than a somewhat puzzling even though, getting towards the end of a very long day, Trigs was prepared to invest another 50p in the project, especially as the 'Pay as you Go' schemes looked rather attractive.

But, with Rodney acting as his financial advisor such a plan was doomed. Trigger had more chance of teaching a whale to fly than ever getting that scheme of the ground! But, eventually, hidden away inside a backstreet charity shop, they discovered a phone that met their prime directive. It was also extremely small. So minuscule in fact that a few weeks later Trigger had to invest a considerable sum in a pair of glasses just so he

could see the damn thing. Watching him painfully construct a text message on the device, which is shorter than most people's middle finger, is though both amusing and entertaining!

Attributes that this particular game shared to the full. Amusing in that their red haired number 9 gave vent to his temper every time he lost the ball. Throwing a number of tantrum fits, he looked just like Albert, granddaddy dancing in front of a rerun of Top of the Pops, as he reeled about, waving his limbs in each and every direction. All the time complaining madly to either the referee or linesman depending upon who was nearest. It was worth paying the price of a ticket just to see his performance alone.

But what made it really worthwhile purchasing one was our performance. Chrissy Powell might not have rated it all that highly afterwards, but compared to the dour, unappetising, fare that Brown used to serve up, it was a visual feast for the eyes. Whilst not quite one touch football (Some of our players control of the ball isn't quite up to that mark, yet) it was nevertheless fast flowing football that was way beyond Bradford's capability to cope with.

So, once again this term, the match statistics are either something for you to smile at, or grimace at; us having 21 shots to their mere 5. Which sounds impressive, until another look reveals that only eight of them were actually on target. Nich gud!

But replay the game through a slightly different filter, and the picture changes. We barnstormed them right from kick off, pressing them so deep that they had 'defenders' a plenty around their box. Accordingly, when we did take a pop at goal, we were either under very close scrutiny or could barely see it through the piles of Bradford shirts that were in the way. Accordingly it could be said with some justification that we were architects of our own problem.

When teams are forced to back paddle as much as our pressing game makes them do, we then face a sea of opposition players that has formed a moat around their goal. Is it any wonder then that some of our attacks flounder upon such highly populated shallows?

That said our crossing of the ball does need a tad more work done upon it. We engineered good positions upon a number of occasions only for the final ball to nearly always unerringly head straight for their first man. Disappointing, because at long, long last, we are getting players into the box to take advantage of such situations. Indeed, our two goals proving exactly that point, both coming from close range headers in the second half.

However during the first period, as the minutes passed and the score line remained balanced, so Bradford began to recover from their shellshock. Yes, their goal had been under almost continuous attack but, other than an effort that was correctly ruled out for offside, nothing untoward had occurred. Perhaps then it was going to be their day, just like Doncaster's in very similar circumstances.

Equally disturbing was the fact that they had two ex-Blues playing for them. Wright and 'Likkle legs' Payne. Previous inhabitants of our dressing room have a tendency to return to haunt us; scoring goals almost seemingly at will. However, certainly on this evidence, Payne has failed to make the progress, in terms of both his career and playing ability that was expected of him. Accordingly whilst he buzzed around midfield in his familiar manner it was, thankfully, to very little effect. Equally Wright, although one of their better players, fell far short of either of his Blues replacements, Dieng and Mantom, performances. Each of them being both strong contenders for 'Man of the Match'.

Another player with his name in the frame for that honour was Turner; a rock in our defence that Bradford crashed up against again and again, never winning the battle. Nodding subtle headers left and right, he was not only breaking up attacks, but often beginning the launch of one of ours. His salad days may be a little way behind him now but the way that he is playing suggests that he is nevertheless still enjoying his game to the full. As so were we!

Oxley's position as captain though is a more awkward berth. Not, it must be said, because he lacks any of the required attributes. It's just more of a question of how well he can exercise them from such a rear guard position. Especially as often he was seen to leave his goal to advance well up field to confer with a player.

Great, just what you would want to see a captain taking time to do. But at the risk of leaving our net totally undefended?

Be careful to whisper it, less either Mike or Boycie hear you, but sometimes referees require a smidgeon or two of helpful advice. Now an outfield player has plenty of opportunities to come to the referee's assistance in such times, but a goalkeeper? Perhaps then it's just as well that the Thunderbird Match Official Appreciation Society is often in such good voice!

Something for Chrissy to consider then. But, in the here and now, something else was requiring his more immediate attention. Apart from improving our crosses, we also need to convert chances to goals upon a far better ratio. During halftime, in amongst the clinking of mobile initiated chains and leg irons, many voices could be heard expressing concerns that another 'Donny' was on the horizon. In much the same manner as Brentford had ruled the pitch against us; we had so done to Bradford. However the Bee's had entered halftime a goal to the good whereas we had left the pitch with still a big fat zilch to our names.

Surely Bradford could not be such easy meat in the second period. Even Farley's rusks harden given enough time. And, tasty as had been the experience of watching us munch away at their soft centre, indigestion of the worse kind was very likely to happen if we just continued on playing about with our food. Just as with Albert every morning when he forts up his mouth with nashers that have been soaking by his cot overnight, the time had more than arrived for us to sink our teeth in!

Which we duly did. Our first goal arriving just seven minutes into the new period as a lovely, pin point cross, from Kightly was met by the powerful head of Hopper; the ball flying into the South bank net to send Roots Hall all a 'roar. Our cheers and celebration being a rich mixture of joy and relief. For the first time this season we had taken the lead in a game. Now to see if we could hold onto it for longer than the nanosecond that it had taken for Brentford to regain their advantage following our equaliser in midweek.

Turner saw to that! Marshalling our defence such that Bradford could barely enter our half before being seen to be ignominiously retreating again at a rate of knots. Their number 9 complained of course. He had been looking forward to a day at the seaside and perhaps taking a swim. But every time a tide of yellow and orange striped shirts approached towards where he had established his diving board, so it ebbed away just as fast. A bloke couldn't even hunt for cockles. Perhaps had he simply gone and sat in the East Stand .....

Four minutes later and our lead was doubled. This time it was a cross by Coker, a player who appears to be well on the way back to rediscovering his golden form, which was met by a goal bound header. Only it was the bonce of Cox, rather than Hopper, that caused hurt to our visitors on this occasion. An event that not only brought great excitement to him but also to the delighted home supporters. At last our great play was meeting with its due reward.

The same player might have made it three soon afterwards but had to turn away in disappointment as his lobbed ball rebounded off the crossbar before being hoofed to safety. Indeed, a score line with us four, possibly five, goals ahead would not have been unrealistic by this point in the game. Although their manager had made three substitutions in an attempt to level the playing field, he had been unsuccessful. Accordingly the game just continued going in one direction, and it wasn't theirs!

400 or so away supporters travelling down the M1 would ordinarily be viewed as a decent number. However we had taken just as many, a far greater distance down to Plymouth and, as a percentage of home attendances, they should really have brought closer to 1,500. There again, their tickets weren't being subsidised to the extent that they enjoy at Valley Parade. So perhaps that explained, rather more than the score line or our almost total dominance of the game, their restless silence. In fact many began making the journey home just as soon as Cox had scored!

The disease ManUnitedsixtyminuteapproachefth is obviously then just as big a problem as has been feared. Its fatal to atmospheres and what the players of the affected teams must be thinking as they watch their rats abandon ship can hardly be along the lines of 'Hey lads, we can get back into this!'. Of course it would be nice to say that we weren't infected, but many a time our 'fans' have behaved just as badly. Sign of the times unfortunately.

Still, we weren't worried about any home desertions as more blues goals were clearly on the cards. Alas then that wavered ones, bearing players numbers as changes were made to both sides, broke up the game such that it became as disorganised as one of Denzil's scripts. We still attacked of course, Robinson, one our subs, even having a couple of good goal scoring opportunities, but the final whistle nevertheless blew with us just those two goals to our name.

Still a win is a win and three lovely looking points have been added to our seasons tally. Chrissy didn't think that we had played quite as well in previous games but still got a result. Something that really is the name of the game and hopefully more points will be heading in our direction following the next two games, both away from home.

However neither Luton nor Bristol Rovers are happy hunting grounds for us. Lousy food, poor views and, usually, evil weather, all combining with atrociously home biased refereeing to keep us at a disadvantage. We though have some momentum to our game now and we also have better players than before. So, given the choice between attending some hip poppy event, complete with 'E' list groups, being hosted inside someone's back garden and travelling aboard the luxurious sky cruiser Thunderbird II to watch the Blues. What would be your decision?

One, very sad, desperate to hang in with the kids, Thunderbird has made his. But, if you do feel the need to cut some shapes Denzil, do please remember that a cookie cutter is not required!!

Come on you Blues!!