



**Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> August 2018**



## **Luton 2 - Southend 0**



Why do we do it? Just why do we do it? We know we are not going to get a result. We know that we will be herded into a barn and expected to sit in seats condemned as being too small even for infant school. We know that we will be watching the game inside a stadium that's been built by a 4 year old that's found a 3D puzzle to play with but no accompanying photo. We know that Kettle flips a coin whenever it comes to a decision and then always awards it in favour of the team we are playing against. So, tell me again, why do we do it?

Bright blue skies accompanied our departure from Tracy Island International. It was rather an ignominious take off though as both Rodney and Trigger were still fighting over their seatbelts as V1 was achieved. A suggestion of some food though calmed one down whilst the other eventually responded favourably to the alluring scent of a waved £5 note! Albert then started holding court from his throne at the front of the aircraft. Boycie, squeezed into a corner whilst the delinquent pair to his right had settled their differences, made no comment but you could still tell that he was unimpressed.

Things soon improved though as the cheerful topics of wills, funeral song lists and having one's ashes thrown off Southend Pier all got discussed. It would therefore be safe to suspect that a black mood had descended upon us. An away game at Luton has that effect! However, anyone observing the goings on inside TBII would never have guessed that was what we were discussing as we were all rolling about with laughter.

Denzil, whenever he does bother to attend a game, is our usual 'picked upon' victim. However in his absence, Rodders' would do very nicely thank you. Especially as, following the appearance of a number of stunned moles upon the surface of his countryside estate's otherwise verdant lawns, he had become so concerned that they were exposing the whereabouts of his newly installed armour plated money chambers that he had begun to reconsider his financial position.

It was not a decision to be rushed. Because, say for example, he decided to liquidate all his share's. Not only would such an action ignite a run on the banks but the world's currency markets would turn bear faster than Mike refused a bite of a KFC hot wing! The very fate of nations was in his hands. And, so, quite sensibly in his view, he turned to Albert for advice!

It turns out that the two of them quite often correspond with each other exchanging insider financial tips that would, if discovered, have them both banged up just as fast as the National Crime Agency could find a docile magistrate. However now Rodney was expressing a slight desire to free up some of his assets. Perhaps buying a North Sea fishing trawler or the entire forecourt of cars that were stacked outside his local Mercedes garage would be a gentle start?

An immediately concerned Boycie would have taken Rodney's temperature right there and then. But Trigger, seated between him and the newly converted spendthrift, was in the middle of a feeding frenzy and thus dangerous to approach. Albert though was taking it all in his stride (He's a strong believer in little steps) and so began outlining a spending spree that would have had even Croesus turning pale. Rodders didn't even blink! Thus encouraging Albert's suggestions to become, not only more and more outrageous, but almost to the point of redefining the definition of expensive!

So what has all this to do with wills and things you might well be asking? Well, after doing enough digging to satisfy even the archaeologists at Fossets Farm, we eventually discovered that Rodders' was concerned that when the time came for him to try and short change the boatman, the government would, very quickly, cast covetous eyes in the direction of the treasure hoard he had left behind. More than alarmed at such a prospect, he was therefore looking to spend the Treasuries cut long before they got their greasy hands anywhere near it. And so, as conversations generally have a tendency to do, especially those containing even an element of Albert, one thread soon turned to another, that became another ...

Luton's ground is hidden away behind streets of identically looking terraced houses. But for the floodlights peeping out above the chimneys, you wouldn't know it was there. The local residents certainly ignore it, littering the nearby pavements with parked vehicles. Not a problem for TBII who had parked up elsewhere (That story is not told here but it involves a very long pantomime that starred both Boycie and Trigger with a mobile phone being awarded the prize for best supporting actor) but it was a major one for the supporters coaches.

Indeed one had mistakenly driven halfway up a narrow one way street only to discover that, it was not only going in the wrong direction, but that it had also become firmly marooned. Hastily fired distress rockets (Ok, discarded cigarette butts) resulted in the appearance of a police car. Quickly appraising the situation and trying not to laugh, one of its said occupants boarded the stricken coach and began to issue instructions to the driver as he reversed the coach back towards whence it had come.

Now unfortunately, due to the aforementioned but undetailed impromptu performance in the car park, the Thunderbirds were not quite in position to bear witness to what had happened next. But apparently a local subsequently claimed that his car had been backed into by the coach. Causing his vehicle considerable damage.

Latecomers to this particular stage we might have been but, whilst Trigger munched his way through yet another hamper of food, we nevertheless looked on with considerable interest as a lively debate began between coach driver and enraged citizen. After sharing our amusement for a few minutes the policeman who had been aboard the coach at the time of the alleged incident re-entered the scene.

"Hello, hello", he bellowed, "What's all this then, then?"

A court of enquiry, consisting of three, a number that quickly became four and then five, parties then commenced proceedings. And, as it was being conducted directly outside the ground and the gates were not yet open, we sort of lingered about. Well that's if Rodney, clinging to a lamp post and shaking with the realisation that he had just revealed the entire worth of all his vaults to us, can be described as lingering. It was really more sort of an Invictus dance, with bells on!

Anyway, with policeman Plod acting as a very able facilitator, the facts were quickly laid out in front of the court. A phone call to coach HQ revealing that the damage to the coach's rear bumper was ancient history whilst interruptions, courtesy of P.C Plod's radio, just added to the drama. Then, to our expressed disappointment, the entire court just suddenly got up and walked away!

Apparently, for some unknown reason (Insurance company instructions someone said) the allegedly damaged car could not be driven to where the court was sitting. Therefore, in the interest of justice (And, also because the coach driver was demanding to see said damage), if the mountain wouldn't come to Mohammed (Very apt given the nationality of the claimant) then a short stroll around to the next street was called for.

It was a journey of discovery that we declined to join in with as access to the ground, if such a disjointed collection of rubbish yard cast offs, can be called such, soon followed. Indeed, it was a rather bizarre experience to have to wander through someone's back garden in order to gain access to the tin shed that was going to be out home for the next hour or so.

But that is the way of things at Luton. A row of double glazed sheds, apparently nicked from a local B & Q, lined one side of the pitch, acting as 'luxurious' boxes, Then a more conventional stand stood behind the far goal, whilst, what can only be described as a traffic accident involving three, possibly four, structures, lined the other side of the pitch. They bore no relationship to each other whatever, but were nevertheless joined at the hip, knee and every other available junction; forming a ragged line that only occasionally stared directly across the pitch towards those supping their beers behind an Everest of glass. It was a total hodgepodge and it led to a suspicion that, Rodney, in another life, had been responsible for keeping a very strict hand upon the finances as the stadium was being thrown together!

Our stand, pig sty would be more descriptive, had once been plain terracing whose architect had clearly shared the views of Albert regarding step sizes. When forced by the results of the Hillsborough tragedy to provide seating where once people had stood on tippy toe, Luton had simply installed seats upon the basis of one seats leg room being no more than two, very diminutive, steps. Usually we have problems seeing over Boycie's head, now it was his knees that were the problem!

Obtaining refreshments was just as farcical an experience. Six people crammed into a telephone box sized cubicle, all talking ten to the dozen but not one serving. Eventually the fact that a queue of people had mysteriously formed finally sank in and one of them, yes just one, reluctantly consented to take an order. You would never have believed the bedlam that a request for a 'A sausage roil and a coffee, please' could cause.

There were more waving hands than at one of Denzil's concerts and the amount of disorder was very reminiscent of Albert, in charge of a lawnmower and powered by several brandies, attempting to steer a course between a garden ornament and a fish pond. The damp results were rather similar too!

Fortunately Grandad, who had been aboard the coach in question at the time of the alleged incident, had brought along with him an iced bottle of coke. So before you could begin to shout "Look out for the dwarfs fishing rod!" Albert had seized it; steam streaming into the air as his hands, covered in blazingly hot coffee, began to cool down.

So, all the warning signs were there. Talk of death and nasty taxes on the way up, followed by a coach crash and now the unseemly sight of a blaspheming Albert complete with purple hands. So why, again, had we done it?

The reason was warming up directly in front of us. When God hands out dreams, the lucky ones get to wear a Southend shirt and thus sixteen fortunate contestants were performing stretching exercises and responding to our cheers just a few yards away from us. Few sights are more stirring than a blue shirt bearing a Shrimpers crest and Luton's attempts to out glow EasyJet's livery just looked very sad in comparison.

Then the officials entered the scene ...

Although he was supposed to have retired in order to become the inspiration behind all the 'Who ate all the Pies' adverts, Kettle had somehow survived for another term. Whether the F.A's quota of lame referees had not been met (Doubtful) or their fitness requirements had been reduced (Much more likely) is open to speculation. Either way, the direct result of their lassitude was expressing copious amounts of gas (From both orifices) as he wobbled his way to the centre circle to begin proceedings.

Already out of breadth and in a need for a sit down, he blew his whistle. Our immediate response was to start playing the ball around with some aplomb; Luton, for their part, struggling to even get a touch of the ball. But then a hoof up field, a pig's trotter of a shot and the ball somehow found its way into the back of the wrong net!

Kettle was not a happy man. He had just put all that effort into running to the very edge of the centre circle and now he had to do it all over again. His reaction had Fray Bentos nervously eyeing up their piles of stock. KFC had been brought low earlier in the year by a logistics problem and now, looking at Kettle's hungry expression, something similar might very well be just about to occur.

With Luton's groundsman looking anxiously on, Kettler rolled his laborious way back to the centre spot. Whereupon he repeated his whistle blowing performance once more. Only this time around, and just a few minutes into the match, we were one down. Again then, just why did we do it?

The games road signs though were now only set in one direction, due Pig Sty. Accordingly the next thirty or so minutes were just one way traffic as we launched attack after attack. Mind you, when I say attack, it's a kinda catch all phrase for describing how we made our way towards the edge of their penalty area. Oodles of points for flair and aptitude of course, but when it came to actual execution?

Then alas our ropes became frayed, our bullets blanks and someone kept forgetting to put any money in the electricity meter. For sure (Last report awesome German, and now fluent Dutch. Wow!) Luton were being quite physical in their approach to defence. Hopper being shoved from defender to defender upon a regular basis with no reaction at all from Kettle. But even so, we didn't ourselves look interested in having a shot at goal at all. So whilst our build up play was very pretty, our attempts at getting to base were, just like Rodney's, a total anti-climax.

But then, suddenly, we were all up on our feet and cheering away like mad. Hopper, rising like a starving trout to a fly, had soared into the air before planting home his second header in as many games to draw us level. Game on!!

But what was this?

That low life Kettle, so low that worms use him as toilet paper, had decided that a very slight nudge indicated a foul and thus the goal was being disallowed. Now, if, indeed any contact had been made at all, it was hardly even a kissing cousin to the ardent approaches that Hopper had been suffering. And yet that barely mobile slime ball had decreed it to be unfair causing an artist's palate of coloured words to flow out of an enraged away stand. If only the goal had stood then we could have been talking a whole new ball game.

Please, remind me, we did this because ....

Moments later his name was being roundly cursed again as a home player dived inside the area. A career as a Russian judge clearly beckoning, Kettle duly awarded 10 points in the form of a penalty. Luton had hardly had a foot in the game, and now they were about to have two! Kettle was indeed doing them a fine job!

Now we had a mountain to climb. Which would have been challenge enough in itself without Kettle and his two henchmen being determined to act the role of Zeus to our Sisyphus. Because from that moment on, we could barely cross the halfway line without being adjudged to be offside, sweating too heavily or merely daring to breathe!

This only encouraged the home fans to finally find a voice. Whereas we had been encouraging our team throughout the game despite it's oh so predictable status, they had been quieter than even the proverbial church mouse. Now though, with a pair of Kettles less than discrete droppings having disgraced the game, they were beginning to stir. Don't you just hate supporters that only sing when they're winning?

Halftime was well halftime. People went away; either to take what Kettle had been doing all game long or for refreshment, and people came back. Bruised and bashed shins marking both their departure and return. Had we been cattle then the RSPA would have soon intervened but loyal supporters? Who gives a Kettle about us?

Seismologists must be given forewarning whenever he takes to the pitch. Otherwise their readings could spark all sorts of evacuations and scenes of panic. When Kettle pulls into view, the ground doesn't so much tremble as do a full Rodney (His reaction when he spots a debit entry upon an otherwise spotless bank statement has to be seen to be believed!). Like an overworked steam engine, Kettles lungs bellow out clouds of obnoxious steam whilst his nostrils launch loose nasal hairs faster than a porcupine suffering from alopecia.

His stomach sags so low below his waistline that P & O are seriously considered renaming the plimsoll line, whilst his knees jerk up and down; broken ball valves within a cistern system where even dung beetles wouldn't consider dining. His forward motion is not so much measured in terms of miles per hour, more feet per day!

But stuck with him we were. Just as were also stuck with a Southend team that had by now completely lost all its sense of direction. Given enough moss and a few trees, even Denzil can just about arrive at a compass heading that's not due north. But, although armed with an entire forest of virtual GPS systems, our players were now finding it difficult to even locate a small rectangle of earth; colloquially referred to as the oppositions area, let alone something known as the 'back of the net'!

It was a map reference though that we had to achieve on at least two occasions if we were to get anything out of this game. But, despite having at one point four forwards on the field, it might as well have been the deepest of King Solomon's mines as far as we were concerned. Whilst not being completely headless chickens, our inept play was resulting in a foal (sic) atmosphere building up in the away end. Exacerbated by the home fans braying, our mood was not being improved by the fact that Luton were now the ones beginning to pull all of the games strings.

Indeed, without some fantastic goalkeeping by Oxley, (Head and shoulders above any other candidate for 'Man of the Match'. Even Kettle as far as the home fans were concerned), we would have lost by a far more embarrassing total. The less then said about the second half the better!

So, swiftly moving on, where does Chrissy go from here? Tactically he appears to have been out thought at halftime and offensively his team has less penetration than a hammer meeting Kettles thick skull. Only in defence, where young Elvis shone before being substituted when we threw everyone forward hoping to find El Dorado, were there any shining performances. Bad day at the office syndrome then, or something deeper?

Had we been scoring goals for fun before this fixture then the first option would have been tempting. As it is though, our lacklustre performance when it comes to even having a pop at goal does rather suggest that a problem does indeed exist. Tough call for Chrissy but changes need to be made, not just upfront but out wide too.

The long term injury to Sam Barratt has robbed us of one possible solution; our apparent lack of success in procuring an additional winger, another. So, we're pretty much stuck with McLaughlin and Kightly. Cox though is the real dilemma. His work rate is to be applauded but far, far, too often he is way too far back, albeit putting in tackles that perhaps the two aforementioned wingers should be doing, to benefit from any knockdowns that Hopper might be providing. The two can work successfully together, but only as a front two, not on a 'ships in the night' basis.

Robinson undoubtedly is a marmite player. Adored by some, not rated much by others. The truth probably lies somewhere in-between. So his current role, whereby he comes off the bench, is probably his most effective. Which leaves us with the youngster from Bristol City.

Two goals against Championship side Brentford revealed what he can do. But he was pretty much the 'invisible man' when brought on late in this game. He spent last season in League 2, so this is a step up for him. Therefore, in and out performances are only to be expected. However it also helps to understand why Chrissy would dearly love another striker.

Mention of our midfield has been strangely absent from this endless scroll. That's about to be corrected as we consider the differing, and not so dissimilar, attributes of players in that department. Mantom, Deing and Hyam are all good signings. Add into the mix Yearwood (Well around February or March) and we really do have the makings of a fantastic midfield. Only, not just yet.

Mantom and Hyam are two very similar players. Equally they are both more inclined to a defensive viewpoint than that of attack. Of course they do play the odd good ball forward, but it's not something that any of our

forwards could depend upon as a regular diet. But, if we are up against a side that is going to press us, then those are very two names that you want to appear upon the team sheet.

Dieng, when he's not injured! however does look to play a forward ball; often to good effect. He is also tall and so has a much needed midfield presence in the air. Within an open game, he would have a major part to play for us. Accordingly, individually, and depending upon the type of opposition we are facing, each of the three have an important part to play in our side.

Unfortunately though, as shown tonight, if they don't, for whatever reason, gel then our game plan just dissolves. Accordingly, whilst fingers can be pointed with justification at our forwards, our midfield is not totally blameless either. So, lessons do need to be taken from this defeat.

That said, we were at Luton, and Kettle was the referee (Well, at least dressed up like one) and so those factors do need to be taken into consideration as well. Do just tell me again though, why did we do this?

Come on you Blues!!