



Saturday 25th August 2018



Bristol Rovers 0 - Southend 1



The journey down to Bristol was punctuated by photos of somebody at a garden party. Although not quite on their tod, not many other people were evidently there. And, of the customary drinks table, there was not a sign. Still, they claimed to be enjoying themselves. Never been proven though!

Sarongs are the native dress of Indonesians. However one was recently spotted being worn by the same certain Thunderbird upon Shoebury East Beach. He claimed that he was only joining in with what everybody else at the hen party was doing. Never been proven though!

Midweek football has been a feature of the football fixture lists since forever. However, one certain Thunderbird is apparently frightened of the dark (Well at least if a rather large flickering screen and copious amounts of popcorn aren't involved) and so avoids such games like the plague. Indeed, enquiries have led the rest of us to suspect that, rather than support the Blues, he is curled up in his P.J.'s in front of his television simpering over Corry. Never been proven though!

Still, whilst Denzil was busy cutting shapes and dreaming of Ena, we were journeying down an amazingly clear M4 towards a very uncertain future. On Tuesday, at Luton, it hadn't quite been a nightmare but it had had all the makings of one. Would the game ahead be a repeat of that sad experience, past history certainly suggested so, or would we instead be witnessing a 'Happy Monday' just like our absent navigator?

Bristol Rovers ground sits, surrounded by housing and tight, narrow, streets, atop a promontory that's exposed to anything that the Bristol Channel, and the Atlantic Sea, beyond cares to throw at it. Usually that has turned out to be huge amounts of water accompanied by a stiff, biting wind. However today, almost unbelievably, we were able to sunbathe upon the open terracing that forms the away 'end' at the Memorial Ground. It's the only uncovered area within the entire ground (Strange that) but today, whilst home supporters hid away amongst the shadows we could stretch out, catch some rays, and just relax.

Poor Mike though was suffering from Man flu extremilitus; a particularly virulent form of the infection that firmly tucks away such things as child birth inside the pin prick box. Mike, in common with so many other brave, silently stoic, men, still though had duties to perform and so had had to struggle on regardless. But whilst, Boycie, Grandad and Albert were suitably understanding, especially as this was clearly a case of man flu with major complications, Marlene, indulging in a characteristic that sadly affects most of her sisterhood, tended to be a bit more sniffy. Which is as about as bad as this version of the flu ever gets for the female of the species. They just don't understand!

An accusation that they will also levy at us. But whilst men indulge in hobbies such as fishing, football and cricket. Activities that they actually enjoy. Women will go out and excitedly buy shoes that are then painful to wear. How on earth are we supposed to understand that?

The nice warm sunshine, accompanied by just a gentle breeze, was though having a beneficial effect upon Mike. Or perhaps it was just the sight of a football being kicked in anger? Whatever, aided and abetted by a huge sausage roll that was so big that it might be more properly described as a sausage pie! his return to a world free of soggy handkerchiefs had obviously begun. But were Blues also on the road to recovery

following Tuesday night's disappointment? Not according to the tone of Boycie's voice as, with Albert acting as his echo, he read out the team sheet.

It had all the right (Ok, available) players, but not necessarily in the right order. Demetrious (Albert just about manages to get the first part of his name pronounced correctly but then things go downhill faster than a skier caught up in an avalanche) was once again playing in midfield with Elvis replacing him at left back. Kightly had returned to the team after his night off, taking the place of the injured Dieng in midfield whilst up front, Cox was being rested in favour of Robinson.

It is only game number five inside a long season but already the queue for Ben's treatment room extends halfway down the pitch. It's almost as if Chrissy trawled through the hospital waiting lists as only two of his several summer signings are currently fit and raring to go (Although Mantom did pick up an injury too in this game!). Accordingly the team is almost picking itself.

Not an ideal situation but hopefully one that will improve now that we have a week's break between games. The loan market too might yield some sort of result but at the moment even Rodney's highly secretive, but sadly not lucrative (Loonytype kinda works though) horse racing system is performing better.

So, our larder was bare as we took to the field of play. Much speculation had surrounded our choice of colours. Bristol Rovers played in a chessboard arrangement of blue, so both our home and away kits could possibly clash. Did that therefore mean that we would be playing in last season's away colours?

The answer was 'No'. Instead, we were wearing our home kit as we started the game; attacking towards the Rovers fans who were gathered together behind the far goal. The early signs though were not encouraging. Our hosts, yet to get even a single point from a home fixture, were hesitant and unsure. We, playing Simons' Says, followed in their footsteps. A situation that resulted in a hoof ball game with about as many attractions as those that were about now taking to the stage in Denzil's mate backyard.

However, after about 20 to 25 minutes things began to change. For one thing the weather had become total Bristol with dark clouds overhead dripping huge droplets of water. This was more like what we were used to! However, the usual state of affairs at the Memorial whereby we just stand back and then let the home team run riot was not also up and running. Instead, rather remarkably and even if it was only by a head, it was we who were beginning to make a fist of it.

Even so, to describe this game as a classic would be to suggest that Albert's wardrobe was designed by Saville Row instead of being the by-product of several boot sales. But sometimes watching two boxers just slug it out can be as edifying as if they were stinging each other like bees. Only in this case, just one side was producing all the punches!

They also threw in trips, pushes, shoves and diving. Nothing it seemed was below Bristol Rover's, save perhaps attending a musical interlude upon an almost empty lawn. Aided and abetted by a referee who, despite Mike's most earnest pleas, couldn't be bothered to enter the home sides end of the pitch and thus witness first hand just what was happening to Hopper, they were denying us goal scoring opportunities by any means possible. What was refreshing to see though was that we were getting onto the referees back about it, whereas at Luton we had just kept stum. Perhaps there is some purpose to Kettle after all!

Then, just before the break and right under the referee's nose, they shoved one of our players to the ground and blocked the run of another. A nice attacking move down one wing therefore got forced out wide towards the other. However, Robinson seizing upon the chance, then sent a ball across into the area where it eluded both an attacker and a defender before meeting Hopper's foot. Its subsequent introduction to the back of the net sending the away terrace and stand (Well, tent) into a frenzy of celebration. We might well be getting wet but our team, the only team in Essex despite all of BBC Colchester's attempts at denials (Who got thrashed at home then, then!), were in the lead. Now to stay there!

We thought that we had done a lot more than just that when, a few minutes later, once more the ball entered the Bristol net. Alas though, the ref, suddenly deciding that he could see offences inside the area after all (But only if they were ours!) awarding a free kick instead. Disappointing. But he wasn't anywhere near on Kettle's level. So, as the Dalek said climbing off a dustbin, we all make mistakes.

The sunshine returned during the break but it was generally met by curses. Not from already sunburnt supporters but by pale inmates chained to their mobile prison. Shining brightly, the sun was preventing them from reading off their precious devices; their unhappy expressions fully matching those of the home supporters whose team were losing once again. Only this time to the mighty Blues!!

Following a bout of fisticuffs at Plymouth, Chrissy was observing a one match touchline ban and so was following proceedings from high up upon a TV gantry. Perhaps not the optimum position for a manager during a game but a least it did provide him with a bird's eye view of things; a fixture that we, whilst not anywhere up to our usual standard, were indeed winning. We were also keeping Rovers at bay with comparative ease and comfort. The ref did try and improve things for them; awarding an endless series of fouls in their favour whilst ignoring the many illegal tackles that we were suffering.

However whilst that did cause a slight rise to anxiety levels, it was evident that even playing against 12, we were holding out. We even managed to create a couple of good chances on the break. But Hooper, squeezed between a cry baby goalkeeper and a defender, saw his close range effort go over the bar, whilst Cox, a late substitute for Robinson, opted to dance with the ball rather than hit it straight into the back of the net from just outside the area.

A few minutes later though, and to loud shouts of jubilation, both on and off the pitch, the game finished with us still 1 - 0 in the lead. The match might not have been one to particularly remember, but our first three points from home were nevertheless definitely something to celebrate. Chrissy hurrying all the way down from his mountain perch to join in with his players as they thanked the away supporters for our support.

Not that we had really done all that much. Perhaps put off by Tuesday's display, perhaps preferring to pogo dance along to the Wurzels, many had stayed away. Just over 400 of the faithful making the journey and, although our actual chanting was on a minimalist level, our players certainly still knew that we were there supporting them whenever they ventured up field towards where we were all gathered.

Festivities over, we returned to where TBII had been moored and headed for home. Somewhat foolishly, Granddad tuned into BBC Colchester, hoping to hear Chrissy's take on the match. Nearly an hour later, and despite many promises to the contrary and the happy fact that Col Pugh had lost, our managers voice finally got granted air time in favour of the suicidal tones of those closer to our counties northern border. A joke's a joke guys, but this one is getting really tired!

A combination of missing road signs and a back seat, so focused upon their electronic toys that they rivalled a fully loaded Albert (With crayons, not booze !) faced with a blank wall, meant that our visit to Reading service station was a short one. A very short one! Never been proven though!

Accordingly we were back in Blues County even before Denzil was gazing lovingly at his P.J's. Our first fully successful away game of the season behind us, seven lovely points gleaming back at us from the league table plus the prospect of a loan player or two joining us next week meant that we had a lot to look both back upon and forward too. Well at least that was the case for some Thunderbirds. Denzil, on the other hand, was still eagerly anticipating the appearance of David Cassidy upon stage. Never been proven though!

Come on you Blues!!