



Saturday 15th September 2018



Shrewsbury 2 - Southend 0



It was just beginning to grow dark as we moored up at the service station. Its lights in the far, far distance appeared welcoming but it was all groans and moans from the passenger compartment as the gangplank got lowered. “There’s loads of other parking spots nearer, why this one?”, “You want us to walk that distance? ... From here?” Mike, barely listening, could sympathise with coach drivers forced to hear similar disparaging remarks and complaints as they delivered their loads of Old Age Moaners back to their day care centres after a day’s outing. If he had indeed parked much closer to the facilities then the same sound track would still have been played, different tunes perhaps but nevertheless the similar, stale, theme, ‘Moan, moan, moan”

Herding together his bovine inclined cargo, he directed it to at first take one hesitant step and then another towards the pretty lights. An untidy convoy of disparate shapes and groaning lumps in the growing darkness it might have been, but progress of a sort was being made. Our stumbling footsteps though were a direct contrast to the beautiful ballet that was being performed over our heads as small flocks of birds flew around performing intricate acrobatics seemingly at will. They were all busily hunting and eating a late evenings harvest of insects and other prey. They seemed happy and carefree. We though were not!

The Greens, as was their habit, quickly grabbed a table almost as soon as we passed through the doors. Denzil, casually swinging his shopping bag, paused for a moment. Hoping for trade or just getting his bearings? None of us knew for sure although, earlier in the day, he had gone shopping. Returning with a gaily coloured bag that he refused to open in front of us. He claimed that it only contained a new pair of trainers but Mike and Boycie both suspected different. One enquiring about the size of the heels whilst the other asked if they had pink or rose coloured tussles. Neither received a polite answer!

Anyway, a bright golden letter ‘M’ soon caught his attention and, with bold eager steps, he quickly headed in its direction. Mike, torn between simply grabbing a coffee and having something more substantial to eat, followed. His eyes brightening up just as soon as he realised that the menu contained something called ice cream!

Back in the day the term ‘Fast Food’ meant a quick and efficient service. But in the modern day, where nothing is what it says, fake news rebounding from every papers front page, our fare, simple as it was, took an age to be prepared. Accordingly it was sometime before the less than dynamic duo re-joined the Greens.

By now, bored with eating some long dead vegetables accompanied by what can only be described as the contents of a very poorly cats stomach, Boycie was playing with his mobile. Apparently Chris Philips (Evening Echo Sports Reporter) wanted to hear supporters views on the total debacle that we had just sadly witnessed. He began counting to ten ... very, very slowly!

You may recall that once upon a time there was a TV series called the ‘Time Tunnel’. Its primary premise being that whenever its two main characters enters a dark swirling tunnel they were transported back through time. Now, resisting the urge to return back to that fateful night when Albert’s father proposed an early night to his wife to suggest that they go out to the pictures instead, everybody imagine that a big tunnel is staring you in the face. Like a huge, hungry, tornado on its side, it’s sucking you in, further and further ...

Grandad, in his self-appointed role of scout, was aboard a supporters coach that was going nowhere. Stuck in a jam and faced with the stark choice of either communicating with those around him or the Thunderbirds, he opted for the latter. Deciphering his message took some effort (Grandad's skill with a keyboard is only rivalled by Triggers) but eventually we gathered that there was problem, a 30 minute or so one, about 10 miles ahead of us. Now in some peoples diaries it might be reported that the aid of something called 'Goodle? Gobble ?, Gluedo ? was sought and granted. More reliable historical accounts though will point to the state of the art navigation system sited aboard TBII. Whatever the source you choose to believe, TBII and her 'Smoke me a kipper' pilot skilfully avoided the problem by flying across country.

Learned students of previous reports will no doubt have noted that whenever the multi-talented pilot of TBII flies freelance, his piratical crew nearly almost always attempt a mutiny. Cries of "We're lost", "We're doomed" or 'I Bet this doesn't appear in the report!" filling the air almost as soon as roads with names that don't start with either a letter 'M' or 'A' start being employed. But on this occasion there was only what can be described as a very smug silence.

Now normally such rare moments of peace and quietness are to be treasured. Certainly never questioned. But Mike couldn't resist a peep in his rear mirror to see what was keeping his cargo bay so satisfied. Unsurprised, he quickly realised that their hand held jewellery was doing the school room equivalent of peeping over his shoulder, copying and mimicking almost to the second the accurate and timely navigational instructions that his instruments were providing. Small things and small minds eh!

As on previous visits, we left our Thunderbird craft quietly sleeping in the car park of Percy Thrower's garden centre. About a five minute walk from the ground it's a perfect haven. And it was at this point that our party of four split up into two. One group heading for the ground and all things football related; the other skipping off happily in the general direction of some boutiques and perfume shops. It is left as quite a head scratcher for the reader to discern the identity of our mystery shopper!

News then began breaking with regard to a stranded coach. Distress signals from Granddad alerting us to the fact that its driver, having completed his scheduled hours, was having a nap! His tachometer, taking no account of the long delay on the M1, had called time upon any further driving activities on his part and so he was taking advantage of the situation. Grandad was not amused!

We were though. Very! Grandad likes to be the first to arrive at any ground. So his distress at being amongst the last to arrive can be imagined. Equally, for some obscure reason, the little, helpful, texts that we sent to him suggesting that all the programmes had been sold, that they had run out of hot drinks, and that the game was over, hadn't improved his mood any. Strange!

Chrissy had made two changes to the side. Turner, badly in need of a rest, had got his wish with Moore taking his place. Equally Elvis, after a decent run in the side was being given a break in favour of Demitriou who had just returned from International duty with Cyprus. Our team therefore, whilst not perhaps back to its best, had a more experienced look to it. Against a side that had yet to win a game, surely we were in with a shout!

Barely 200 of the loyal though had made the trip to the Welsh borderlands. Two home defeats on the trot had taken their toll and the general mood, although hopeful, could not really be described as all that upbeat as the two sides took to the field. Still we gave the lads a good cheer before settling back down into our seats behind one of the goals to enjoy the game.

Five minutes later and you could hear a pin drop inside the away stand. On their first attack upon our goal Shrewsbury had scored. Not a thing to encourage joy and laughter. Neither were the twin facts that one, our defence had been easily left standing whilst they lined up to take a shot and two, that the referee had somehow totally ignored the foul that had led directly to their attack commencing. Committed against Hopper. It was so blatant and obvious that everyone stopped playing, expecting a free kick. But although he did raise the whistle to his mouth, the referee, for some reason, changed his mind and so disaster had taken its course.

Like so many home crowds, Shrewsbury's only sing when they are winning. So now, whilst having to deal with the fact that we had conceded a very defendable goal, we also had to cope with a choir of, once in a blue moment voices, giving it their all. Sickening.

But the dogs breakfast had only started being prepared. Expecting our heroes to pick up their game and so take it to their hosts, we instead got shocked to the core as they simply began falling apart. The proverbial curate's egg was supposed to consist of two parts, one good, t'other bad. We were that egg and the goose, hen or whatever that had laid it must have been suffering a really bad day!

Cox was our one shining star and, had but the other 10 of our players put in even half the effort that he did, then three points would surely have be coming home with us. Others did try to emulate him, Coker, Moore, White and Hopper. But as for the rest

No idea what Demitriou ate while he was away, probably something that only the Green's would recognise, but whatever it was, it had robbed him of both speed and agility. Throughout the game he was left behind like Albert in a 100 yard sprint where the only prize was being the first to break a bit of string rather than taking home a bottle of plonk. Macca was no better. His tackles wouldn't have tripped over a toddler and his passes made Rodney seem like Casanova in comparison.

Our midfield was an absolute disaster area. If, for a moment, our forwards were to be considered to be hunting dogs, then both Mantom and Dieng would be liable to be taken to court by the RSPA for not feeding them nowt but scraps. Too often Hopper was having to gaze up to the heavens, waiting, surrounded by at least three defenders, for the ball to reappear from amongst the clouds. Boot and rush now appearing to be our game rather than the sweet, swift, passing moves that had so graced our start of the season games. What has gone wrong Chrissy?

In almost every department, in pretty much every position and now also in every game, we look a complete shambles. Park sides displaying more cohesion and understanding. At times today Dieng appeared to be tackling himself whilst Bunn, after an enthusiastic 10 minutes or so, got as bored and simply vanished from the game. It left us a five aside team playing against eleven!

It would be lovely to be able to fire bullets at the officials and blame them. But, other than that one, admittedly big, mistake, no fingers can be pointed accusingly in their direction. No, this was a home grown problem whose root cause was anybody's guess. Is everything as happy at Roots Hall as we are told? Has our long injury list affected team morale? Is Chrissy up to the job?

If Brown had been decorating the touchline, then the amount of abuse and scorn that would have been thrown at him would have been tremendous. We had invested both time and money in travelling to support a team that looked as just disinterested in events as Boycie forced to sit in front of a small screen and watch X Factor. A few, already identified, faces apart, there was no evidence of any fight, determination, or indeed desire to get back into the game. Instead it was akin to watching a school break kick about with nothing at stake except the chance to retrieve the ball from the girls school the other side of the bike sheds.

Embarrassing, inept, unacceptable choose your adjective. It was pathetic!

Not believing what we were witnessing right in front of our eyes, we had little option other than to just sit and suffer. Sure, for periods we did have the ball but we did very little with it, other than to play suicide roulette. Some of our passes put players under so much pressure that they could do little more than give it a hoof. With other teammates in space, ok, standing completely still, but nevertheless temporarily abandoned by any Shrewsbury player, we continually played the ball to someone who was surrounded by the opposition. It was like watching a game of 'Pass the parcel' where the 3 year old competitors had been told that the prize was one of Marlene's albums. Edifying it was not!

Then, just before halftime we committed the unforgiveable sin of conceding again. Shrewsbury breaking through our defence like a hot knife through butter, sliding the blade into our collective bellies with ease,

resistance simply melted before them. Home crowd getting to enjoy their break with hot cups of tea and beaming smiles leaving us, looking up to the skies and saying "Not again !"

Never in all the fifty or so years that I have been supporting the Blues have I ever witnessed such a contemptuous reception to our players as they entered the pitch for the second half. Not from the still deliriously happy home supporters, but from us! Denzil, alone, not only amongst the Thunderbirds but everyone else, clasping perfumed palm to perfumed palm before being quickly corrected by the gruff voice of Boycie. Not a cheer, not a yell, not even abuse broke out of the away stand. Instead we just remained silent as our team crawled back onto the pitch.

They knew. For certain they knew how we felt. Light blue shirted faces looking quickly in our direction before just as swiftly turning away. But did they feel the pain that we feeling? Were they experiencing the same anguish as we were suffering? Did they feel embarrassed?

Cox certainly did and he responded by pulling all his team mates into a huddle and urging them on. His body language telling the whole story, but alas, certainly from our second period performance, few listened or took any sort of note. What has gone wrong Chrissy?

In any type of accident, a car crash, a plane turning cartwheels, Albert turning up at a game, bad things happen and then things start improving. But what we were sadly witnessing was no accident. This has been building for weeks. Two home defeats with decisive goals scored in the dying minutes had established the plot. Now the entire tragic play was unfolding in front of us. Not over a single one scene but rather two. The second period of play being even worse than the first, with us not registering even a single shot at goal. We were simply dreadful and getting worse! Impossible as that had seemed at halftime!

Last year at Plymouth, we had turned to black humour to rescue us from situations such as this. But this time around we had no time to even attempt to start singing "We've got the Ball" because it was being given away so quickly. No one in light blue wanted it. Least of all Macca who eventually got substituted for Robinson. A switch that made as much difference as one employed during an electricity black out.

Sorry Chrissy but it has to be said. Your substitutions are totally ineffective. They either occur too late in a game or involve the wrong players. Why for example was Cox taken off today? He was by far our most effective player and yet you removed him. Sure, things do go on behind the scenes at clubs of which supporters hardly ever get a sniff. Fully accepted, and possibly Cox, given how much energy he puts into his game, has only around 80 minutes in his tank. However less criticism, and it is mounting, would be heading your way if such situations were made clearer. Perhaps then some clarification at next week's supporters meeting?

Trying to be positive, both of our midfielders are still struggling with injuries, so perhaps that explained their dire performances. Demitriou had obviously eaten or drunk something that disagreed with him. Did that though explain his attempt to boot his opponent into the stand during the second half? Macca is well just Macca and Bunn is perhaps struggling to find his feet, as anyone would, inside a team that has totally lost its mojo.

Few bothered to applaud the team when the game ended. What was there to clap about that performance? Someone though did exchange some words with Coker who raised his arms in supplication. Didn't catch what was said, but Coke's was one of the least deserving players to receive any abuse. But you could certainly sympathise with that supporters need to let at least one of the team know how we all were feeling.

The walk back to the garden centre was not a joyful one. Neither were the first fifty or sixty miles of the journey home. Periods of long silences only being broken when one or another stricken voice expressed a dismal view of the game. We felt totally let down and deflated. Throughout the fixture, in all its entirety, only one incident, the foul not given when Hooper was shoved early in the match, had got us out of our seats. The remainder of the game being just a barren desert, empty of any excitement or anticipation, endlessly stretching hopelessly on and on. What has gone wrong Chrissy?

Very difficult to be upbeat after such an experience. But, the Thunderbird spirit being what it is and helped along by our total ineptness whenever it comes to naming Eddie Stobart trucks, humour did begin once more to surface. We even nearly won £1,000 in an on line version of Millionaire!! Well a share in it any way. The rules meaning that, had we somehow managed to correctly answer 12 questions (We did manage a very respectable eight before Denzil's slow fingers got us timed out), we would have won the princely sum of £10.45 each.

But small things do often lead to bigger ones. So rather than type chapter and verse in response to Chris Philip's question, Boycie confined himself to a single sentence. Its contents will though forever remain a mystery as Mr Phillips is barely ever prepared to commit Eeyore's bleats to actual print. Even so, the very fact that Boycie was once more hoping against hope to get published was enough to put a smile back on everyone's faces as we started the rest of our journey home.

Come on you Blues!!