



Saturday 22nd September 2018



Southend 1 – Fleetwood 0



Three across 'Hairless (4)', Five Down 'Football officials (8)', One Down 'Dislike Intensely' (4), Twelve Across 'Objective case of "We" (2).

Trigger gave a quiet groan of despair as he struggled with his crossword. He was waiting for the game to start and, lacking his usual picnic hamper, was indulging in food for thought rather than stomach. And, as a diet, it was working. Too well!

It probably didn't help that his fellow Thunderbirds were being their usual noisy selves. Albert was regaling anyone within hailing distance with a detailed account of his carpentry set, Marlene was tuning up; an assault upon the ears that caused people queuing up for tea and coffee at the nearby refreshment bar to look around and wonder where all the broken crockery was. Meantime, seemingly immune to his wife's iron foundry impressions, Boycie was paying attention to Rodney who was proudly explaining how, by using a combination of Denzil's 'Yoof card', a photo of a white fiver and the threat of showing off his legs, he had got in for almost free!

Eskimos, it is claimed, have 25 different words for snow, but when it comes to Rodney's pair of white sticks they are rendered utterly speechless! Trigs, still manfully struggling with 3 across, wished that something similar would occur with regard to those surrounding him. He needed to concentrate!

But news of the team was breaking. An event that meant the audience for Rodney's tale of daring do quickly matched Col Poo's average attendances as Radio Boycie switched over to broadcast mode. With the usual back echo of Albert, he went through our formation. To the expressed surprise of many, it lacked any wingers. Instead we were going to play with wing backs. Interesting, as so too was the fact that we were going to play with three forwards. Against a team some ten or twelve places above us in the table, Chrissy was clearly going for it!

A few seasons back, Mike and Albert had made a pact. A very successful one too it turned out to be as by remaining standing up until immediately after kick off, they had become directly responsible for a large number of wins and very few defeats. Boycie called it sheer coincidence. But, had Denzil been to hand rather than hiding away again in the dark of some backstreet cinema, a statistical analysis of our results, comparing our sitting posture with one more erect, would soon have proved our case. Even so we had not exercised our right to stand for a couple of seasons. However, now staring down that barrel at a fourth straight defeat, it was time for the pact to be reactivated.

So, to many disgusted cries of 'Sit Down' from our immediate left, Chrissy's secret army took to their posts as the two teams lined up. We started the game by attacking the North Bank goal, a net that we had yet to breach this season. You could almost hear Boycie mouthing the words 'Pure chance', but even he couldn't deny that we were soon knocking upon that particular door. Very hard!

Our attitude was in complete contrast to last weeks' no show at Shrewsbury. To a man, everyone was putting in 100% + effort and it was producing results. A shell shocked Fleetwood retreating to the very edge of their area before then throwing up a beach head that consisted of shoving, tripping and pretty much wrestling us to the ground. Hopper, as now seems standard, being their main target.

Trigs, being very ably aided by his colleagues rather choice descriptions of the follicly challenged referee who, although armed with a whistle, was refusing to blow it, suddenly realised the answer to '3 across'. Now for that puzzling '5 down'.

Just how referees can 'miss' seeing arms, enough to make it look like an octopus orgy is well underway, wrapped around Hopper every time he challenged for a ball is worrying. Presumably these guys drive a car. With eyesight like that!!

Of equal annoyance was the ref's sudden ability to spot such events when we committed them. Home team fouling? Heaven forbid. Buts we did and so and his decisions were correct. But, if they were to be penalised when they occurred up one end of the field, then why not the other? The linesman running up and down in front of a surprisingly vocal East Stand (Cockle shortage?) was doing his duty but as for the one slouching about in front of the West. Had he been a signalman on the railways then the resulting chaos would have made Dr Beeching's decisions seem brilliant in comparison. He simply hadn't a clue, and Rodney winced every time a coin got tossed because so many failed to be caught!

By halftime in a game almost totally ruled by Blues but without any goals to adorn it, a delighted Trigger had half completed his crossword. Mike's strongly expressed views upon the competence of a referee who had totally ignored Hopper being floored inside the penalty area just as he prepared to shoot, had helped things along no end. But '1 down' was still presenting a bit of a challenge. Perhaps half a loaf wrapped around a chunk of cheese would get the juices flowing?

Less than ten minutes into the second half and Fleetwood had a similar problem. A loose ball inside their area had been seized upon by Robinson who slid it across a completely open goal mouth for Cox to then do the business. Gooo!!!

'One down' now had a completely different connotation and it was one that we were all enjoying to the full. Our overall play in the first half had merited at least two goals, and now our long wait for one had finally been rewarded. A very scruffy goal from both teams point of view. But did we care? Not a whit! Blues were back in winning form again and it was good to see, never mind how our lead had come about.

Prior to the game. Boycie, who is fast turning into a Denzil clone what with the same addiction to his palm jewellery and now statistics, had been disturbed to discover that today's offering from the F.A's compost heap had quite a record for issuing cards. But on the evidence so far, little to no credence could be paid to such claims. Seemingly Fleetwood could foul just as much as they liked without fearing any censure.

But then things suddenly changed and yellow cards began flying around like a flock of disturbed pigeons. Crimes that had barely been noticed before, well be the officials, the eyes of those inhabiting the Thunderbirds eyrie had spotted them easily enough, were suddenly being deemed to be capital offences. Refreshing, but why so late in the game. Had but a few cards been issued in the first half then our ability to breakdown their defence would have been much enhanced. However, it was happening now, even if was too little effect, because Fleetwood just kept on fouling.

Cheered on by an away support that required the inclusion of the coach driver and everyone upon the away bench in order to pass the 50 figure, Fleetwood did not look like a side so far above us in the table. Either they were in a false position, or we were! Their midfield played the ball around quickly and accurately and their defence was pretty strong, particularly when it came to man to man wrestling, but up front they were just about as toothless as us. However at least we were recording attempts upon goal whereas Stockdale, making his final loan appearance in goal for us, had very little to do other than catch the odd cross.

Trigs, his attention caught between a gigantic slice of pie and his crossword barely noticed though. This simply wasn't cricket where a man had a chance of peace and quiet in between runs occurring. How on earth was he supposed to complete his puzzle and so have a chance of winning the junior title (Denzil is not the only Thunderbird to lie about his age!) with all this noise going on?

His dark looks of annoyance weren't the only frowns to be seen though. The aforementioned West Stand linesman was now outdoing himself; proving beyond any doubt at all that he was totally incapable of implementing the rules of the game. Demitriou, in particular, falling foul of this official's incompetence, being

floored directly in front of him only to see a throw in awarded to the other side. As sad jokes go, these weren't even of a standard to challenge BBC Colchester!!

It's true that time was running down but nevertheless we didn't appear to have benefitted at all from the master class that Shrewsbury gave us in match control last week. Whereas they had let time slip by at every opportunity, their goal keeper taking an eon to take a goal kick, every throw being a matter for deep consideration, we just kept on doing things quickly. Fleetwood, for very obvious reasons, did the same and so the game began to descend into a bit of a disorganised scrap. One that was being decorated by more and more yellow cards as the referee really got into his flow.

Eventually the inevitable happened as a visiting player, forgetting that he had already been awarded a yellow badge of damage, committed yet another nasty. He therefore received another yellow for his troubles that was quickly followed by a red. Sympathy flowing like basalt from the stands as he exited the pitch. Watching an opposition player make an untimely departure from a game is almost as rewarding as waving goodbye to rival supports whilst enquiring rather loudly if there is a fire drill!

Five minutes of extra time got awarded and while supporters at other clubs are usually cheering from the rafters at this point in a game if their team is ahead. But us, experienced Blues fans, know that to do so is only to encourage the God of Chance to throw an evil dice throw. Particularly after what has happened in the two preceding home fixtures. So breaths were held and fingers crossed as the final minutes crawled away.

Then to huge cheers, it was all over and Blues had rediscovered how to claim all three points. What a relief, what a wonderful feeling after a drought of three, long, fruitless, games. Not only had our points tally for the season received a badly needed boost but we had also rediscovered how to play the game. Our team had let us down, badly, last week but today they had all played like men determined to get a result. If we can only carry that attitude into our next few games, all big challenges in their own different ways, then a mid-table berth from which to launch play off challenge could once again become a reality.

Meantime, Trigger, realising that he had eaten all his food, and wondering how and when that happened, finally got the clue that he needed for 'One down'. Now if only someone could help him to remember his name and address ...

Come on you Blues!