



Tuesday 2nd October 2018



Burton 1 - Southend 2



“How did we win that?”

Did anyone have an idea? Did anyone care? Or were they, like the Thunderbirds, just going absolutely bonkers at the final whistle?

Football is a game of two halves. Everybody knows that. But what occurred inside each of the two 45 minute periods of this match will have all those fortunate enough to be there, witnessing it in the flesh, feeling goose bumps for quite some time. If it had been a boxing match then we would have been justified in throwing in the towel after just five minutes. If it had been a game of golf, then the 19th hole could well have been our refuge straight after tee off and, if it had been a tennis match then no amount of flying chalk dust would have been able to disguise our ignominious retreat back to the changing room almost before a ball had been served!

However it had been none of those things. Instead it had been a game of football and although it would have been every easy for us to just lie down and die given the hammering that Burton handed out straight from kick off. We had instead opted to stand firm and to fight back like scalded tigers!

Pussy cats of a more docile kind though were a feature of our departure from the county that we call home, outsiders Essex. TBII being surrounded by moggies as Mike walked out onto the annex's concourse to prepare her for her flight north. Warm, autumnal sunshine, had encouraged them to indulge in a spot of cat napping on, not only the engine cowl of the powerful Thunderbird, but also upon other nearby craft as well. Mikes approach was not viewed with any enthusiasm!

Well used to being ambushed by the nefarious and very furry 'Nevendon Gang', Mike was prepared. On this occasion though a little extra persuasion might be required (They did look rather comfortable) but, a few bribes scattered amongst them, courtesy of another cat with a rather posh name, should do the trick rather nicely. And so it proved. Their reputation might be such that foxes walk past them on tiptoe and they might also be the reason why eagles stick to mountainsides, but Mike had them eating out of his hands.

Trigger was eating out of his hamper. Well he felt that he deserved a little something having had to walk quite some distance between where he had moored up his car and the departure lounge at Tracy Island International. Almost alone amongst major airfields, Tracy Island does not charge any fees to persons wishing to use its expansive car parking facilities. However on this occasion both he and Granddad had had to indulge in a spot of hiking as fresh tarmac was being laid. Concrete apparently is almost as sensitive as the human ear to pain. So what with Marlene's singing lessons and the security guards morning chorus (Bach!) the carpark's surface had begun to resemble the moons. Remedial action was now being implemented and, although it didn't involve a gag and a pair of earmuffs, the airport authorities were confident that the repairs would last for a while.

With no religious ceremonies to be performed (Denzil was opting to sit in the dark again, comforted only by a bag of popcorn and the sounds of Abba emanating from the big screen) a fast turnaround was achieved.

Thunderbird II's flight above the undulating countryside almost uninterrupted until, her destination just 20 or so miles away, a halt at a roadside haven was taken.

We had been heading for a junction numbered 24. The turnoff for the service station was numero 22. A fact that, even Denzil and his maffs book could have worked out, meant another junction to go before we left the mighty waters of the M1 for one of its tributaries. Yet, upon our departure we immediately hit rapids, or rather slow Traffic being at almost a standstill due to roadworks. Even worse, the short run back onto the motorway, past the ANPR trolls, had somehow contrived to swallow up junctions 23 and 24 such that the next one in our guidebook was number 25!

Whilst Trigger buried his head inside a book containing lots of squiggly lines trying to work out where they had gone too, Mike, in true pioneering fashion pressed on. An approach that caused ructions within his aircrafts hold. The luggage was revolting! Of equal bemusement was the fact that whilst both of its main intransigents were clutching palm jewellery, each of their devices spoke with false tongues. Not only disagreeing with each other about what route we should now take, but also the mighty navigation system that was built into TBII itself.

With Trigger muttering darkly about circling Derby, Boycie forecasting disaster in the form of prolonged travelling times and Grandad puzzling over how two glowing devices, each connected to a spiders dinner plate, could be coming up with two such differing results, 'Smoke Me A Kipper' meanwhile just calmly guided TBII along the flight path that was indicated by his instruments.

The results of his blind trust were interesting, involving as they did sweeping views across countryside (Totally unappreciated by anyone other than himself) and even a halt to let a train sped past. But alas, such simply joys produced oh so much noise. So it was with some relief that Mike spotted the floodlights of the ground in the near distance. TBII had recently had a major service but next time one was scheduled he would be very sure to enquire about the possibility of a plank or two being installed close to the portholes!

For some reason Burton had declined to offer us our usual berth somewhere upon the terracing situated behind one of the goals. Yes, despite being in the Championship for two seasons, only one side of their ground had seating, the other three being simple concrete boxes that contained terraces. How did they get away with that one? Especially with St Georges Park, the England teams training ground, being just down the road and so within easy walking distance for any F.A official interested in knowing why their organisations rules were being flouted. Guess though, along with the nice blazer comes blindfolds!

Anyway, rather than allow us to stretch our limbs and so stand throughout the game, they had instead shoved us all into a small pocket of seating right over in the far corner. Not the best position from which to cheer on the lads. But if they thought that we would be as quiet as their meagre following (Just over 2,000 locals bothered to attend) then they were in for a surprise. Ok, so we weren't exactly raucous, particularly in the 1st half, but compared to their supporters who only sung at corners, we were the Rolling Stones to their Peters and Lee!

Fuelled up on fare that had been served both hot and large for a very reasonable price (Trigs, despite all his motorway snacks, somehow managed to pile his way through a huge pile of mushy peas and faggots before going onto to tackle a mountainside of chips that even Tensing Norgay would have considered a challenge) we settled down to watch the game. Only one change had been made to our line up compared to Saturday with Yearwood taking the place of the presumably injured Mantom right from the start. Kightly was on the bench again but of Macca there was not a sign, despite a number of inexperienced youngsters being employed to make up the numbers. Hint of a not too subtle hint there Chrissy?

To say that we were taken aback straight from kick off would be an understatement. But Burton had earned themselves a corner without us even touching the ball to any real purpose. Shrugging us aside, skilful artisans rather than schoolyard bullies, they had pummelled us pretty much into smithereens within five minutes. They were faster than us, their passing was quicker and more accurate than ours and when, on the very rare occasions that we did have the ball, their numbers appeared to swell such that every one of our players was

surrounded by at least three or four hungry opponents. They barely needed the assistance of a rather home biased referee and a totally blind linesman at all!

We were just swept aside by a form of football that was performed both at pace and with incredible energy. Poor Yearwood, making his season debut, just couldn't come to terms with how fast the ball was being passed around him. The timing of some of his tackles being so late that even Denzil passed them on the way into work. The referee took note and admonished a rather lengthy dressing down. Fair enough. But why were Burton's misdemeanours barely raising a whistle let alone a lecture?

Mike wanted to know and, in the near silence of the stadium, his strongly phrased enquiries went directly to receiver. Alas though the phone must have been off the hook because the response of the mongrel in the black was only to attempt to slink away out of earshot. Faint hope cos Mike was only warming up and although his beloved Blues were being treated like lambs to the slaughter by their hosts, at least he could take some pleasure in taunting the officials.

Fun though as that was, the Boyce / Mike ensemble proving that acoustics' don't all have to be of Albert Hall standard for points to be scored, it couldn't disguise the fact that we were in for a right old hiding. They had already scored after 21 minutes of total domination and with only Oxley's brilliant goalkeeping keeping them at bay, if we weren't three or four down by the break then pigs would not only have sprouted wings but jet engines too. We just couldn't even start to compete with them. Instead they were running rings around us. John Wayne and his faithful rifle might have been able to hold them off, but we weren't even firing blanks! That said, on one famous occasion, Cox did head the ball against a post.

However, by then they had witnessed balls coming back off, not only each post, but also the crossbar. Oxley, a man inspired, was responsible. Each time diving full length, using the sweat on his fingernails to just reach the ball and change its path. It wasn't a case of one man standing up against eleven though; our other ten were doing their best too. But Burton were just far, far too good for us.

However, proving that strange lamps found in dark caves don't have to be rubbed in order for magic to happen, we somehow survived through to the break just that one goal adrift. An almost unbelievable fact that led Mike and Boycie to indulge in deep and intense tactical discussions. Mike, brought up on stories where four children and a dog win through despite whatever the odds, thought that we just had to stick to our guns and then perhaps a kind bounce of the ball would grant us a chance to equalise. Boycie, a person who lives in a world where rocks are rocks and don't huddle under bridges awaiting lost goats, felt otherwise. For him, our cunning ploy of employing flying wing backs was crashing around our ears and he wanted us to go to a flat 4 4 2 formation instead.

The events of the second half proved that although Mike might be an ace pilot who also knew just how he wanted his herrings served up, he wasn't of even non-league standard when it came to game of 'Football Manager'. Whilst Boycie and his team would be sampling the joys of Europe, Mike's head would be being called for by the proverbial man and his dog. Chrissy, tuned into Radio Boycie, had taken note and acted accordingly!

Well at least we think so. Nobody in the jubilant away seats being able to quite put a finger on what Chrissies fantastic Plan 'B' actually was, other than it had worked. Yes, Robinson who had been rather too easily disposed of the ball in the first half had been replaced by Kightly. But just how well had that particular substitution worked on Saturday? Wycombe pulling back two goals almost as soon as the change had been made!

So, although our winger played much better than at the weekend, that wasn't the complete answer. There had been other changes to consider though as well. Moore appeared to be playing wider whilst Demetriou had tucked in. But these were just pawn moves upon a chess board where castles crumbled and queens swooned. Or rather it had been because, whatever mystery ingredient X was, it sure was working, because it was we who now had our opposition rocking on their heels and it was Burton, not us, who were hanging on desperately.

Their lead, totally deserved as it had been, was now under considerable threat. Cox was keeping their defenders honest whilst Hopper was being treated to their less lawful side. Dark, some of their tactics might have been, the ref's glow worm like attention span just somehow missed catching them. But even those underhand manoeuvres weren't enough to stem the blue tide that had switched so abruptly from total ebb to full flood.

A great pass from Kightly on one wing, swept across the field to the other where Demetriou was lurking. It resulted, just like on Saturday, in a terrific cross into the box where a brave diving header from Hopper directed it goalwards. From where we were, directly in line with the ball, it crossed the line. However with the linesman miles behind play and with a perfect record of not granting us anything, everything was in doubt until the goalkeeper, fumbling for the ball, completed its journey into wonderland.

The entire away stand just lifted off and took to the air. A hurricane force storm of cheering and shouting in the otherwise library like silence. Our players ran across us, our joy and excitement reflecting off all of their faces. It was almost as if we had won the F.A cup, the boat race and Rodney had brought a round all at the same time. The celebrations were just mad and even the ref, who until now had maintained a school masterish stern expression, couldn't completely hide a grin as he came over to guide our delighted players back into their own half, such was everybody's exuberation.

Burton made a fist of it for a while after we had scored, nearly regaining their lead immediately. But fortunately a powerful shot from just outside the box flew wide of our far post. It served notice though that whilst we had somehow, (Other than our fantastic attitude and increased work rate, the turnaround in the game remained a mystery) now got a foot back in the game, it could still decide to wobble either way.

During our first half drubbing, it had been generally agreed that, were we somehow to get a point then it would be akin to armed robbery. So what would stealing all three feel like?

Well, in a totally unbelievable 78th minute we found out! With just 12 minutes remaining on the clock we, masked up to a man, crept into the study, grabbed the candlestick and waved it gleefully at the heavens. A blinding cross by Coker had just been headed towards goal by Turner and it had looked to be going in. But just to make sure, and scoring his third goal in as many games, Cox had then blasted it into the back of the net making everyone in the away end suddenly go one to one with the stars.

How we arrived in orbit, few of us had a clue. But there we all were, our heads way above the clouds shouting, cheering and yelling for all that we were worth. There have been many fantastic moments along the journey with Blues, the Community Stadium down in Wales, Wembley and of course the night that we thrashed Man U, but this was right up there with them. We hadn't been on the racecourse let alone lining up for any race in the first half, but here in the second, with just a few minutes to go, we had only gone and taken the lead. What a brilliant, unbelievable feeling!

Memories of Saturday though started haunting us. Then we had been three goals to the good before conceding two in the dying minutes of a game that we should have been easily killed off. A similar period now had to be endured, only with a far slenderer lead and against a much better side. Faces, a moment ago aglow, were now darkening as the digital clock to our immediate right went into snail mode.

Burton quickly earned a couple of corners; we just couldn't seem to clear the ball away. Things were getting desperate and when the board went up signalling an extra five minutes an audible groan spread throughout our ranks. The game was now firmly back in first half mode; we barely able to get a touch of the ball, and tick was only becoming tock if it counted to at least 500 in-between. The tension was unbearable and so a huge cry of relief went up as Chrissy made a substitution; breaking up play rather nicely by replacing the goal hero Cox with McCoulsky.

It's doubtful that the young loanee striker from Bristol City even touched the ball during his short period on the pitch. But the time taken for his introduction had steadied our nerves. Burton were still attacking, and with quite some venom, but now we were able once again to hold them at bay to a far greater extent.

To our amazement (It was only the 3rd free kick that we had been awarded) a whistle then got blown in our favour. Our ensuing delaying tactics wouldn't have fooled anyone even as gullible as Albert, but somehow the ref let us get away with it. And almost as soon as the ball had been launched in the general direction of Stoke some ten or so miles away, the final whistle was blown initiating some incredible scenes as the away end just dissolved in a cauldron of total delight mixed with gallons and gallons of incredulous disbelief. "How did we win that!"

Come on you Blues!!