



Saturday 6th October 2018



Southend 0 – Oxford 0



Act 1

Scene 1: A Dressing Room

Referee

When shall we three meet again?

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

First Linesman

When the match has been and done?

When the games lost and won

Second linesman

That will be ere the set of sun

Referee

Where the place?

Second Witch

In Hell!

All

Fair is foul and foul is fair

We're sh*t officials and we don't care!

Exeunt

Many years ago, possibly even a decade or so, a referee unfortunately collapsed and died upon our pitch. Of course, quite rightly, the game was abandoned and rescheduled for the end of the season. When that time, instead of a replacement referee from the bargain basement we were assigned a top flight individual. Best friends with the diseased, he had requested to officiate at the game as a mark of respect. He though left far, far more than that in the minds of those privileged enough to witness his performance. Or rather not witness it, because, for the majority of the game it was if he was not there at all.

The game simply flowed and ebbed in a manner that was beguiling to the eye. There was no idiot blowing his whistle every moment, no prima donna striding about as if it was he, and not the twenty two players, that we had all paid to see, no histrionics, no arguments and no questionable decisions. The games result was unimportant, neither team being at risk of either promotion or relegation, but still each side wanted a result and so it was a hard fought match. Despite this, the referring was at such a level that, whilst perfect control

of the game was maintained, you were hardly aware that the ref, or indeed his two linesmen, were there at all.

Such a contrast to today's monstrosity!

Grey, heavily pregnant, skies witnessed the event. Apparently some referee assessor did too. One took appropriate action. It's extremely doubtful though that the other one will. Despite a home player receiving injuries, severe enough that they had to exit the pitch, another home player being floored by a fully intentioned elbow and a mass brawl in the centre of the pitch, not a red card got shown. Instead both teams received just one yellow card apiece in a manner that very much suggested that the referee concerned just wanted to keep his post-match paperwork to an absolute minimum.

It all started in the 2nd minute of the game when Hopper, their number one target as he also appears to be too many teams, being shoved off the ball. It occurred right under the referee's nose yet no action was taken. Indeed the referee appeared surprised at both our players and crowd's reaction.

Encouraged by this, Oxford continued to hold, pull and rugby tackle our players. All to no censure. Bats fleeing from the eves of the West stand like black clouds of smoke as Mike gave vent to his anger. Few around him stirred though. It was just the Thunderbird nest making it usual racket. Every ref was a hell hound as far as they were concerned, and this one was no different.

Ninety minutes later though, it was very different story. "Worse ref we've ever had", "Never seen anything like it", "What did he think he was doing?" The solo performances of regular critics Mike and Boycie now had a chorus line made up of thousands. It had taken some time for the oh so evident to get through to unbelieving eyes, but now almost everyone was sadly talking about the referee and linesman rather than the game. More than time that the FA took action against these prima donnas. But they won't! Whilst players and managers get suspended from games, inept officials just get to don their clocks of invulnerability match after match. It's ruining the game and it certainly more than marred this one.

Egged on by their demonic, one sighted, manager, Oxford took full advantage of the situation. Unable, through conventional lawful tactics, to prevent us from sweeping past them with ease they quickly resorted to the more brutal. Possibly even themselves being taken aback by just how far the referee was prepared to let things go before finally blowing a whistle. Their two burly centre halves in particular enjoyed their afternoon. Taking it in turns to bash who ever came within a boot or arms reach of them, they were all smiles and apologies whenever the game got stopped. Rare as such occasions were.

Equally their strikers felt no shame, or indeed their collar felt, as they collapsed dramatically every time one of our players breathed upon them. Oxfords violence, that had it occurred outside in the street would surely have had blue lights flashing everywhere, was just ignored. even if it was committed right in front of an official. It's as if they had been each been issued with a pair of blinkers and instructed to totally ignore whatever Oxford did.

This might seem to suggest that Oxford had been given a license to maim and destroy. However it wasn't quite as bad as that because, at times, our visitors played some decent football. They were being allowed to! Whereas whenever we attempted to do likewise, if they didn't foul us, then the sour note of a referee's whistle did. So bad indeed was the situation that, apart from the opening 20 /25 minutes, we could rarely get into gear

John Whites departure through injury (Self sustained) hardly helping the cause. Kightly, his replacement, being almost as invisible as the aforementioned best friend. The guy is costing us a fortune in wages and it is high time that we begin to see some return. Returning to the injury, it meant that we had to change our formation; a tactic successful at Burton but not so today. Mind you, we could have played in any shape imaginable and fared no better such was the dogmatic Southend Bad, Oxford Good attitude of the officials.

Food stained fingers, pointed by a crossword fanatic, complained that we weren't shooting enough to possibly change things around. A fair point because, old story, whilst our build up play, when allowed, was quite good, no one would take responsibility to shoot once the white of the goalkeeper's eyes came into sight. Instead the ball just got played sideways, even backwards, rather than directly towards goal. And, on

the one occasion that it did, an unkind crossbar denied Cox, by deflecting his shot away from the gaping net rather than into it!

The second half was pretty much the same story save that Oxford, urged by their manager to be even more aggressive given the lassitude of the officials, were handing it out in buckets. Things coming to a head when, directly in clear view of both the ref and one of his henchmen, their forward deliberately elbowed Moore in the face. As our player went down so both official reacted. "Finally", we all thought, "Oxford are going to be brought to account". It was red card offence no matter what take you had. Even Oxford's bench admitting their good fortune at the inept referee's response, which was simply a caution. Never in a month of Sundays was that a yellow card offence. It was both premeditated and viciously carried out. Yet their assassin was still stalking the pitch. Oxford really did have licence to kill!

Shortly afterwards Demitriou performed an innocuous, certainly upon the scale that had been established by the officials, foul close to the centreline. The referee got so excited that he almost tripped as he struggled to find a yellow card. So possibly he had some excise for not catching the spark that set off the fire. But he certainly had a clear view as passion and frustration burst into flame. Players from both sides getting involved in a brawl that would had filled Southend police cells had it occurred closer to the Kursaal. Yet, once again, nothing happened. Not a card got shown, not a player even got spoken too. Just incredible!

The incident had however served to calm both teams down and so Oxford began to forego opportunities to maim and hurt. Alas though the damage had already been done. Our game had lost all its impetus and so, whilst we still attacked on occasion, their goalkeeper was rarely disturbed. Equally Oxley. Well almost, because in the dying embers of this bad tempered game, he brought off a magnificent save to deny Oxford more than the single point that they had gained, not by playing football, but by being schoolyard bullies.

The misdeeds and poor performances of officials have sadly only too often been reported in these reports. But rarely has a referee been so bad, so one sided, so incompetent as the specimen presented to us today. He totally ruined what otherwise might have been a fair game of football. Yes Oxford took full advantage of his largesse and some might say that perhaps we should have done so too. But we are not a team built around gamesmanship and confronting the officials (Ron fines us if we do!) so, when a game slides into oblivion as this one did, we can do little more than sadly accept our fate.

That should not be the case though. The F.A trumpet from the roof tops every time a manager or player steps out of line. It's now well past time for them to do little more than tinkle a triangle when an official performs badly. But, as in every self-governing organisation, it won't. Which is a pity because it's the game that is suffering from such protectionism just as much as certain teams. Still, Karl Robinson, their manager, enjoyed it!

Come on you Blues!!

p.s. The same cretin officiated in the Doncaster game that kicked off the season. He was just as awful then, which proves that either the FA gives FA or are as toothless as hens!!