



Saturday 20th October 2018



Southend 1 – Coventry 2



“Dean Whitestone, you have pleaded guilty to the charges brought by this court, and it is now my duty to pass sentence. You are an habitual criminal, who accepts abuse as an occupational hazard, and presumably accepts criticism in the same casual manner.”

‘Bringing the game into disrepute’ is a charge that managers, players and chairman alike all face whenever they dare utter words that the F.A deem to be unsuitable to their public image of purity and godlike wisdom. So why not referees!

After games, whilst still caught up in the moment, the F.A insists that managers and players talk to the press. In many ways this is a positive action, providing immediate feedback upon incidents in the game and the players take on the game. Indeed things that might have caused puzzlement to the paying fans, Coker’s substitution at halftime for example, are quickly resolved in this manner. So why not referees decisions too!

Cox, having received two yellow cards for two rather innocuous fouls, got his marching orders. However, a player that scythed Manson to the ground years after the ball had gone was awarded just a yellow card whilst a foul on Yearwood that sent him flying up into the air got totally ignored. Just why the referee viewed these incidents quite differently though we will never know!

Equally, having already warned their number 10 once for preventing us from taking a free kick quickly, why, when the player concerned continued throughout the match to be ‘professional’ was no further action taken. Then there’s the nefarious action of Coventry’s number 5 to be considered. Already booked in the first half, he committed a very similar foul in the second and yet barely received a word of censure. Both of his fouls were a world beyond those committed by Cox, yet we were down to 10 whilst he was allowed to remain on the pitch and to taunt home supporters at the end of the game!

Lot of questions but zilch answers. Ever is the fate of the paying public and so it will remain just as long as the F.A quiver behind their ivory towers. Quick to point fingers at players but oh so reluctant to ever, ever, take action against a match official. Quite a spin on the phrase ‘Bringing the game into to disrepute’ when you think of it!

However, as Hopper so carefully worded his response to a question regarding Cox’s sending off, it’s all part of the game and we just have to get on with it. Attending a game though is not a cheap and cheerful option. Add together the cost of a ticket, travel (Especially to away games) plus refreshment and a family of four are almost looking at the price of a short foreign holiday. Surely we should get more for our money than being short changed by officials whose ability to referee a game is little above that of a four year olds.

Just for a moment consider how much more enjoyable this game would have been had it been refereed properly. Coventry were quite a decent side, as indeed so were we come the second half. The less said about our non-performance in the opening 45 the better. So, two fairly well matched teams, hovering around the same position in the league table, going head to head upon a gloriously sunny autumn afternoon. A prospect enticing enough to make even Trigger look up from his picnic hamper on occasion!

Alas though, instead of a banquet of smooth, flowing football, we got served something that came straight of the kitchen dustbin. Decisions were based upon the toss of a coin, the pitch was littered with examples of the referee’s mistakes and the game itself was a stop start affair that was as about as unedifying to watch as

Albert when attempting to 'Dad dance'. What could have been a three course meal with all the trimmings becoming a total dog's breakfast.

Attacking the seemingly cursed North Bank goal, opposition managers can with 100% safety plan playing a half without the need for any goalkeeper, Blues looked up for the game. For around 30 seconds that is before pretty much conceding the half to Coventry. In their defence it must be conceded that their cause was hardly helped by the sad performance of Robinson. Like any terrier pup, he was totally prepared to chase down any ball that he had no hope of catching. But, when faced with a ball that was easily in reach, he barely bothered to get out of bottom gear. We were down to 10 men long before Cox's dismissal!

Not that Coventry needed that advantage. Although their defence looked dodgy they had a reasonable midfield and a very fast, decisive, attacking force. Especially when it came to dead ball situations when they were winning everything in the air. No change there though as almost every other club in the league holds that advantage over us. Just why are we so bad at defending corners and free kicks?

The Thunderbird ancients expressed considerable chagrin (It would require an entire keyboard of * ~ and !'s to list them) every time Oxley fails to leave his goal line to collect the ball. It's a fair point but, 14 games into the season, our defenders should surely be aware of our goalkeepers aversion to abandoning his white line and act accordingly. Yet continually they appeared surprised that he wasn't sitting on their shoulders demanding the ball. Something to sort out there Chrissy!

Yearwood's performance was about the only bright spot in the game. Still coming back from a serious injury he has improved with each 90 minutes that he has got under his feet. His early appearances were marked by late, mistimed, tackles; the latter by such brilliance on the ball that any watching scouts must be drooling. There is no way that we are going to hang onto this lad, so we had best make the most out of the time that he does don a Southend shirt in anger.

So it is encouraging to see the partnership that is beginning to grow between him and the hardworking Dieng. Not every pass quite goes where Dieng intends it too but his work rate is only matched by that of Cox and Mantom's. It was clear, some twenty or so minutes before the end of the game, that he was running on fumes but still he kept on putting himself in the way of the ball. It's taken a bit of time but finally the signs are there that our midfield is not only up and running but also reporting for duty.

Playing against an upbeat Coventry and the ref, we were though Canute faced with a tidal surge. Last weekend we had visited a derelict mudflat expecting a referee from the bogs and instead we got a decent official who was more interested in the game than promoting himself. Today alas, we got a referee who clearly felt that we had all paid just to watch him! Put him on a scaffold though and he might just be right!

One big decision did though come our way and all thanks to a linesman who couldn't find Russia on a map! Coventry were convinced that they had scored, those sitting in the South Bank sharing their opinion that the ball had crossed the line. Fortunately though the linesman did not agree and so the 'goal' was ruled out. The officials were pretty much the only people taking that view. It being obvious that both sets of players knew the truth of the matter. But hey, it always a case of doing what the man with the whistle says and so, to Coventry's obvious dismay, the game continued on.

Unfortunately it didn't take them very long to remedy the situation and, yes, it was from a free kick, we were soon really a goal behind. Only someone as totally biased as the referee would deny that they deserved to be in front. It was still though rather disappointing to observe. As so too was our reaction which was pretty deadbeat and flat. Racehorses can be nobbled before a race by over training. Were we suffering from similar causes?

Somehow, we survived through to halftime without conceding any more goals. Not sure how but now at least Chrissy could set about changing things. So, whilst the sad majority of the Thunderbirds set to playing with their palm jewellery, words were being said inside the home dressing room and changes did indeed occur with Coker, riding upon one yellow card and dicing with a second, replaced by Bunn.

The game became more balanced now that we were taking more of an interest in it but, with Robinson still hopelessly chasing lost causes but ignoring those of worth, we were making very little headway towards

achieving parity. Indeed it was becoming increasingly hard to see where a home goal was going to come from so rarely were we approaching their box with any real purpose or venom.

Then Hopper replaced Robinson and the change in the air was immediately apparent. So much so in fact that Coventry immediately introduced themselves to him by belting him to the ground just as soon as he went up to challenge for the ball. Referee's reaction to a Coventry foul? No different from the indifference that he had displayed in the first!

However, try as he undoubtedly did, even he could not change the fact that it was now we who were attacking rather than Coventry. They didn't like it and so took to taking to the ground and crying for mummy. There was one ludicrous example when Yearwood, chest high to the burly centre half concerned, was amazed to see his opponent fall to the ground as if shot after he had failed to be crumped by the Coventry players challenge. The referee, of course, awarded a foul to our visitors. A reaction that we had become almost resigned to!

A few minutes later though the referee was signalling a goal. One of ours! Hopper, receiving the ball close to the halfway line, had gone on a run, not unreminiscent of those of the great Stan Collymore, past several defenders before unleashing a powerful shot from just outside the area that flew past the stranded Coventry keeper. Gooo

It had come out of literally nothing but it sent the old lady a dancing and a singing. Coventry's fans, who to give them their due, had been supporting their side well (They had been winning though!) now fell totally silent. We, in contrast, were in danger of bringing the house down as we celebrated a goal that had come right out of the blue. A blue named Hopper!

Now the game was on a real edge and what a wonderful affair it might have turned into but for the interfering and totally biased actions of a certain individual. We couldn't breathe on a visiting player without being awarded a blast of a whistle. They on the other hand could do whatever they wanted without any negative reaction on the part of the referee. This didn't mean that they were a dirty side. But they certainly knew how to take advantage of such largesse and so did. Pushing and shoving our players to the ground with careless will and not a little very blatant aplomb.

Accordingly, instead of a fiercely fought battle between two fairly evenly balanced sides we got a battlefield where only one side was allowed to fire shells! Dieng's tank might well have been registering empty but his bodywork had also taken a battering. So had Mantom's, Yearwood's, Hopper's and Cox. Ben's room is going to have quite a few visitors this coming week. Nothing too serious thankfully but nevertheless any number of bumps and bruises are going to require treatment.

The game entered its dying seconds with the score line still level. But our vulnerability to late goals at home is still a ghost that we have to lay to rest and so, well into injury time, a pinball machine of a ball entered the wrong net. A mishit cross hitting one leg and then another before ending up costing us the point that we had deserved, if only on our second half performance.

Gutting!

But was it that late, late goal that we were discussing as we left the ground. Nope? Perhaps then it was Hoppers fantastic shot? No? Ok so it must then be that brilliant bit of footwork that Yearwood performed in the first half!

Again a resounding 'NO'. Instead of the game of football that we had all been looking forward to watching being the main topic of conversation it was once again the dire performance of a match official that was on everybody's lips. And if that is not bringing the game of football into disrepute then it would be very, very, interesting to know just what is!!

Come on you Blues!!