



Saturday 17th November 2018



Southend 1 – Blackpool 2



Rodney faced a dilemma. His house was freezing cold and snow was beginning to fall again outside. This left him with two options. One, the simplest and the most obvious, would be to just top up the electricity meter with some more money. However his crystal radio set had warned him that the cold spell was likely to last for some time, possible some months, and he only had a very small amount of cash to hand. The ground being frozen and therefore hard to dig through in order to retrieve any of his treasure chest. However, splashing out in such a manner would result in all of his home becoming nice and warm again. If only for a while.

The alternative was to take a small axe from his garden shed and sneak into the woods close to the bottom of his garden. Once there he could gather up enough firewood to light up the fireplace that was in his lounge for quite some time. Sure, only one room would then be warm, but think of all the savings!

Chrissy Powell faces a similar problem. The cold draft of relegation is blowing down the back of his neck but his resources to deal with it are extremely limited. One fit goalkeeper, barely enough defenders to call it a line, and one worthwhile attacker save a kid barely out of his nappies. The only thing he does have is a multitude of midfielders, albeit with the caveat that many of them are only here to take the money!

So what does he do? Does he opt for an attacking formation or a defensive one? Earlier in the season, before a catastrophic injury crisis hit the club, he played around with both systems. And, once some of the weeds had been cleared off the field, we had steadily climbed up the table until promotion started becoming a realistic ambition, if only via the play offs.

Now though, without a strike force worthy of the name, he has to decide whether to not to try and hang on to the point that we start games with, or risk everything by attacking. Advocates of the beautiful game cry 'Be bold, play more than one striker'. Others with our precarious League 1 status in mind, advice caution, 'Play to your strengths and if that means being defensive, so be it'.

"4 4 2 or 4 5 1, that is the question!"

There is also an elephant in the room though and it is the legacy that Brown left us. An expensive group of players who occasionally rise to the occasion but far more often play as if they have lead weights tied to their heels. Fate has also seen to it that, whilst much more hardworking and valuable members of the squad have all suffered season long injuries, these limpets have remained fit and healthy. Equally, whilst they might have lost their appetite for the game, they still nevertheless have no problem at all eating deep into our wage bill. Hence the small size of our squad and the difficulty we have finding enough money down the back of Uncle Ron's sofa to attract fresh blood. So, lacking any conveniently near 'wood', Chrissy has to somehow another way of fuelling a team that is nowhere near our 'A' side. Neither for that matter our 'B'. Indeed we really are 'C' sidlers!

Many people have unfortunately yet to fully realise this though. Bleating away upon Radio Colchester or singing like crows with terminal laryngitis to Chris Phillips, they complain that we are playing hoof ball and that Chris Powell's strategies are all wrong. They certainly have a point, indeed a very fair and good one. But what choice does he have given the limited number of players that he can pick from?

The heart, lungs and limbs of our team have been stolen away leaving C.P with just some talented players straight out of infant school and a bunch of have beens. Sure, there is also a sprinkling of real 1st teamers

available to him too but the dice of fate clearly haven't finished being thrown. Yet the result being that yet key player, Yearwood, exited this game early on with an injury. With at least eight more game until the transfer window reopens, our cupboard is therefore almost bare! Small wonder then that Chrissy evidently prefers to try and keep its door firmly shut, thus preserving what little reserves he can call upon, rather than slinging it open so that it shelves can be emptied faster than a supermarkets on Christmas Eve!

Judging upon the amount of crying from some supporters though, this is not a popular move. Indeed a few have even gone as far as to suggest that, had Brown still been at the helm, many would now be demanding his head. To do so though would be to ignore the fact that whilst Brown was sunning himself aboard a comparative cruise ship, Chrissy is trying to steer a shipwreck through a hurricane! The situation at Roots Hall is really as serious as that!

It's also important that those beginning to bray for Chrissy's departure, note that today's team only contained two players that were actually signed by him. To that number can be added a pair of loanees, but that still means that just a total of four out of the eleven who played, actually form part of C.P.s stable. The rest are all cards left behind by Brown. Some are judging him upon how well he is able to play another man's hand, not his own!

Some of this pack did begin to perform well after Brown's departure (But how much of that was just down to trying to impress a new manager when he had a number of alternative options available?) others didn't. Now though, they have all returned to their usual low standards. A situation that is being well and truly reflected by a set of results that bear a striking similarity to those Brown experienced when he selected those self-same players too. The difference being of course, that he had pretty much a full squad to play around with, whereas Chrissy has not!

Sure we all want our team to win and do well. Equally shed loads of goals would be nice too. But given our current circumstances that is all fantasy way beyond anything involving hobbits, dragons and Harry Potter. Instead, if we can just somehow scrape even a draw then, for now, that has to be viewed as a success. Alas though it would appear that we don't even have the ability to do that!

Playing 4 5 1, we conceded a goal, playing 4 4 2 we conceded a goal. Playing 4 5 1 we should have had a penalty and also scraped a post. Playing 4 4 2 we did score a goal but opportunities to add to it were far and in-between. Formations then can only take you so far. Equally the numbers game doesn't by itself guarantee points. What would you rather see, 'Three or four Uncle Alberts confusedly wandering around the opposition's box, or Yearwood in midfield?

Given a depth of talented, interested and fit players, formations can of course come into their own. But when it's so easy to disturb Browns pond life by just extending a toenail, then such things become almost irrelevant. We simply do not have the players to see out a game tactically. Our bench is younger than even Denzil claims to be, our average age on the field is pensionable compared to many other sides in this division and our strength in depth would barely keep a newts back wet! We are in trouble folks and so whatever is your favourite brew 4 4 2, 4 5 1 or any other combination of numbers, all we can do for now is grin and bear it. Tough though at times that might certainly be.

Come on you Blues!!