



Tuesday 20th November 2018



Crawley 2 - Southend 6 (aet)



Thunderbird II banked gently, her headlights lighting up the snow that was falling all around it. The darkness through which we had been flying suddenly now had white highlights and, for a brief moment, silence fell within the noisy cabin as everyone assessed the chances of it settling. Although it was quite cold (TBII's instrument panel was indicating that it was just 1 degree outside) the road was still wet through from earlier rain showers, so it was unlikely. But you know what the media are like whenever adverse weather effects the mud bank. So the morning news programs were sure to be full of stories of brave Kentish men struggling to work despite being up to their trotter clippings in melted frost!

News headlines over on the civilised side of the Thames though would be blazoning other news; the score line from this game being prominent amongst them. Aboard TBII of course it was almost the sole topic of conversation! Grandad happily already planning his campaign to extract maximum points out of Denzil who runs a score prediction league. Although he had rather timidly only gone for a 4 -1 win to us, Grandad felt that he nevertheless still held the upper ground and therefore a minimum of twenty points, if not more, should be heading in his direction. Denzil, notoriously mean when it comes to handing out extra points for finesse, artistic interpretation or sheer damn stupidity, might though harbour other thoughts!

Something that two of the other three passengers aboard were also having. Distracted from their self-ordained task of building up an accurate list of who had scored for us and in which order, they were watching with quite some interest as Trigger attempted to open up communications with the little imp that inhabited his new mobile phone. Intrigued after observing Albert's conversation with his, a short bark of "Oi Google, whose Ollie Palmer then?" which elicited an unmerited gentile response that indicated that he was a footballer who played for Crawley, Trigs was eager to explore the possibilities of this new and unexplored world himself. The problem being that Tigger's understanding of new technology rivals that of a caveman who's yet to discover fire!

Still, posing like Captain Kirk attempting to coax more speed out of Scotty, he selected the icon that had been shown to him by Boycie and yelled "Hello Google" in the general direction of his phone before just completely freezing. Stage fright had grabbed out little dormouse by the throat and he just didn't know what to say or do next. The cabin crew, by now helpless with tears of laughter rolled down their faces, could be of little assistance and so he just sat there, staring at his phone; Hamlet struck dumb by the appearance of a skull, whilst outside the snow steadily continued falling.

Mike meanwhile had identified our fifth scorer. Not that he had scored our penultimate goal, rather instead that his had been the name that had been missing from our list. So, leaving Trigger still deep within his trance, concentration returned to the game with Macca's goal easily being awarded the goal of the match, if not indeed the season so far. An award that, although universally agreed, rather split opinion within our ranks!

Whilst those observing the game in the sentry position jointly felt that Macca had played his best 120 minutes of the season, those who had adopted the roles of Generals and thus were seated at the centre of all the action, held more critical views. Interesting how a game experienced through a net can differ so greatly from one observed from inside a tent!

Crawley's ground reflects their journey upwards from non-league status. So whilst every area is covered, that is not to say that everywhere is enclosed by what would be generally considered to be stands. It's true to say that behind the two goals were neat, one story, roofed terraces and, over from where we were seated, was a conventional concrete structure complete with seats and dugouts. So far, so good. However our 'stand' was more like a tent.

Now if you are imagining the cricket ground example that loiters behind the goal at Bristol Rovers you are in the right country but unfortunately nowhere near the correct postcode! This was a far more permanent structure, albeit one that was surrounded by canvas rather than bricks. It did the job, but the high number of posts along its frontage did rather make you feel like you were inside a cage. And Albert was the tiger that was trapped inside it with you!

Feeling slightly peckish (he'd left his sarnies back at home!) and also a tad thirsty he had wandered up to the tea bar and ordered a sausage roll and a coffee. Having not had the foresight to glance at the menu board, he was then somewhat shocked to find only a small amount of change coming his way out of a tenner. His mood, already downbeat after having to stand for quite a while outside the ground waiting to gain entrance, darkened.

Still the coffee was hot and the sausage roll edible, so he then began heading for his seat only to be accosted by a steward who was obviously unaware of just what he was about to take on. "Could I please see your ticket sir" requested the still unsuspecting victim. Albert's response, his hands full of hot coffee and barely as yet munched rations, is unrepeatable. Safe to say though that there is now one steward in the world whose vocabulary has been considerably extended, and in colour!

Now, our still far from happy tribal ancient was squirming around in his seat trying to get comfy. It was like watching Baloo rubbing up against a tree as he wiggled this way and then that, before finally settling for a position that resembled an orangutan struck down with arthritis. Clearly Albert was not expecting to be entertained!

Neither were many of us. Our results, and performances, over recent weeks have not been encouraging. Our record when it came to cup games was even worse. So, even though for the moment it was dry and the wind's strength couldn't even be measured upon the butterfly wing scale, the scene was set for yet another ignominious F.A cup early exit. Still at least some of us were seated whilst the tallest and smallest amongst our number were not!

The game kicked off with us attacking the net furthest away from us. It was going to be a very busy evening for that net but, with Crawley bringing the game onto us, there were no signs of the excitement that was to come. They were buzzing around us and displaying quite a few neat touches. Clearly they were up for it. But were we too?

That was a question that took quite some time to get an answer. Sure we were dealing with their attacks, just, but when it came to making some of our own, the engine just wasn't quite cranking. All the right noises were there, just in the wrong order! Accordingly our fears that Barnsley would be heading down the M23 rather than the A127 come the second round, began to dig in and take up residence.

But then, Dieng stepped in to intercept a pass before slipping the ball out wide to where Bunn had a clear run down the wing. This he duly did before playing the ball across the mouth of the box. An area inhabited by a certain Mr Cox who stretched out a foot to guide the ball into the far corner of the net. Tiger Feet It may have been not, but still Albert was displaying some nimbleness of foot as he danced around with uninhibited glee. His two fellow Thunderbirds, Mike and Grandad were also performing routines that the judges on Rodney's favourite TV show would have had no trouble at all in awarding 'Sevens!' as they joined in the celebrations.

However we had taken an early lead in the first game, only to then throw it away later. So Boycie's phone call to Blues ticket office to get a ticket for the next round against Barnsley was slightly premature. Still the goal had settled down some nerves both on and off the field, so a good time was being had by all.

That was in the 17th minute, so when we scored again 14 minutes later, tranquillisers were no longer required. Some good play by Macca had resulted in a high ball being played into the box where Cox powered it goal wards with his head. However, ex Blue, Morris, in the Crawley goal pulled off a decent save that saw the ball rebounding to safety. Or so it seemed before Bunn arrived on the scene to firmly plant the ball home to put us two up!

Cigar time! Now we could all just sit back, enjoy the game, and relax. Or so we thought!

There was still little warning of what was to come as halftime arrived and departed in the usual manner. Ours and theirs subs had come out, booted a few balls, commented upon how cold it was and then retreated back to the dugouts just as the two teams returned to the field. The away stands were in good voice, the home perhaps not so much.

Accordingly the match restarted with us singing out our support and our players responded by immediately seeking out the third and surely decisive goal of the match. Cox was well denied by the goalkeeper but then Robinson was guilty of missing two chances that even Denzil would have put away with ease (If you wish to see an example of Denzil's shooting prowess, or rather its absence, pay a visit to <http://www.southendunited.net/Pages/brentford1.html>)

Had he taken either of the chances then the game would have been over. Crawley appeared to realise this and so stepped up their game. We were slow to respond and so the inevitable happened. First, a cross into our box was only headed on by one of our defenders, it went straight to the foot of the aforementioned Ollie Palmer who made no mistake in reducing his teams arrears to just a single goal.

"Here we go again" we all thought and we weren't wrong because just 13 minutes later, they were level. Palmer again doing the damage after turning neatly inside the box to elude two of our defenders before pulling back the trigger which set the home crowd, and the 'neutral', BBC Colchester match commentator, going absolutely mad. As so too were we, only in a rather different manner. How had we let a comfortable two lead goal lead slip away?

The game then became rather scruffy as nerves once again began to effect both teams. Our death zone this season is in the final 10 minutes of a game and as we entered that period so whimpers of fear went up every time Crawley entered our half. It was a very nervous time but eventually, after 5 minutes of added time, extra time loomed large upon the horizon.

One of the gentlemen in front of us decided to grab a quick pee. For whatever reason his return was delayed. A hesitation that meant he missed our third goal of the game. Scored, in just the 2nd minute of extra time by Cox, a shot from just inside the penalty area, it restored both our confidence and lead. Shame for the bloke concerned though who was totally unaware of the change in events until his friend gleefully points his attention towards the scoreboard.

A few minutes later and the same thing happened all over again. One of them slipped away and we scored! We had been awarded a free kick over on the far edge of the area and the resulting cross was well met by the foot, yes the foot, of John White and a one goal lead had become a rather nice two. Surely, with just another twenty minutes to play, we couldn't lose now!

The Thunderbird generals weren't taking any chances though and so we encouraged and urged another of the gentlemen to go off and visit the loo. But they were wise to the trick now and although Albert was suggesting all sorts of inducements, they opted to stay put. Two missed goals had tightened up certain bladders it appeared and so we began to settle instead for a rather nice score line that now read 4 -2 in our favour.

But before another 10 minutes had passed the scoreboard was being updated again. This time to reflect a rare goal by Mantom whose strike from outside the box following a loose ball after a brilliant run by

McCoulksy (On for Cox who was being rested for Saturdays game at AFC) hit the back of the net to great rejoicing from the away supporters. Wow, supporting Southend could be fun after all!

The carnival then just got better and better as the evening finest goal, a curved ball piloted and guided by Macca, sealed our victory. Our first in the F.A cup for what seems eons! Of course we all demanded seven but the scoreboard had struggled to record our sixth goal, so seven was probably well beyond it. Worried though we were not, and although extra time had meant enduring the cold conditions for a mite longer than we had expected, no one was complaining come the final whistle.

A short, enjoyable, walk back to where we had moored TBII then ensued. Those of us though who had thought that the evening's entertainment was well and truly over though were mistaken. The stage curtains upon Triggers one man stage rising just as soon as we reached the awaiting Thunderbird craft.

Albert had clambered aboard in his usual untidy way; Grandad too was also anchored comfortably into his seat. But where was Trigs and what about poor Boycie who was freezing his vitals off in the now freezing night air? Trigger, as you may have picked up, is not exactly talented whenever it comes to anything remotely technical. So, getting a seat belt fastened was proving to be rather a challenge for him!

Accordingly, whilst Mike carefully prepared TBII for the flight home and Albert moaned about a cold draft with Grandad calmly, if somewhat puzzled, watched proceedings as they unfolded, the unfortunate Boycie had to hop from foot to foot stuck out in the cold as Trigger entangled himself deeper and deeper inside a bird's nest of seat belts.

Eventually though, just as we were wondering if a strategically placed stick would result in a Boycie Lolly, things got sorted out and so the journey home could begin. But then it started snowing and Albert just couldn't resist in having a shouting match with Google

Come on you Blues!!