



Saturday 24th November 2018



AFC Wimbledon 2 - Southend 1



The supermarket carpark was pretty empty. It was almost closing time so, apart from a couple of lads playing with a remote control car and an elderly couple unloading their trolley into the back of a small family hatchback, few people were about to witness as Mike, still wearing his colours, slowly made his way over to the entrance. His shopping list wasn't that long. So he ignored all the parked trolleys and instead selected a basket from the pile that was stacked close to the doorway.

Being so late in the day, there was not much left on the shelves. Still Mike was hopeful that a bargain or two might still be available. Now, usually he just wandered up and down each aisle, selecting items as memory served. However this time around he was armed with requirements not drawn up only by himself but by the rest of the Thunderbirds too. So close attention had to be paid lest something got forgotten.

Strikers, strikers. Now whereabouts would they be found? He looked around for a shop assistant. But they were either tied up explaining how the automatic tills worked to Rodney/Trigger clones or watching on from afar with amused expressions as their colleagues struggled to explain that cards had to be inserted, not held up to the screen. Midfielders then, they shouldn't be too hard to find. However, although some rather tattered and spent examples were to hand, none exactly shouted 'Buy me!'. Accordingly Mike examined his list once again before heading off to the part of the store that always had had plenty of defenders before.

But again, someone had been there before him and a barren wasteland was all that met his disappointed eyes. Uncle Ron's credit card, burning a hole in his pocket, was never going to see the light of day if things continued on like this. Time for a rethink!

"Footballers have lots of attributes beyond just their positions", he thought. "So, if instead of looking to find players just based upon what area of the field they inhabit, should factors like drive, heart and fight also be considered. More to the point, given the sad, disheartening display that Blues had put on earlier in the day, wasn't that exactly what had been missing from our game?"

Everywhere he looked around the store was signs of Christmas. Unlikely looking holly was dangling off the shelves, dancing Santa's were doing impressions of Albert whilst flour, masquerading as snow, was liberally sprinkled about everywhere. Even the mince pies looked like they had been around for months. Only the word "Sale" was missing! But Mike knew that, given time, every window in the store would be emblazoned with the word. So perhaps, he should return again, early in the New Year, by when the shelves would surely have been refilled. Only, with an almost empty cupboard, how on earth was he going to survive until then?

This was an important question. Because whilst for the moment, there was just enough fat on the bone to survive a few barren plates. An extended diet of unemployed shiny knives and forks would surely result in energy levels sinking beyond the point where even emergency surgery might not be enough to bring about a recovery. Where was the Red Cross when you needed them?

For just a moment, a bright ray of sunshine had broken through the sullen, dank, clouds that surround our game at the moment. Lady Luck had, for once, smiled in our direction and an own goal had provided us with

a lead. Having only had one decent shot before the goal, and precious few following it, it gave us a leg up just when we had needed it most. But it was a lift that we sadly scorned!

Chrissy had opted to play with two forwards. Well on paper anyway! But as one was struggling with man flu and the other's control of the ball reflected that of a two week old puppy, to say that we were toothless would be to be looking at a hen's mouth. Accordingly, given that we were unlikely to score, he had concentrated instead upon a strong defence. A strategy that did not go down well with every supporter. But Wimbledon are a struggling team, 1 win now in 9, so the chances of snatching a point, even 3 were good compared with those against Scunthorpe at home on Tuesday when a stronger, more attacked minded, team would need to be fielded.

Equally there are always things going on behind the scenes about which we are ignorant. For example, is it at all likely that Cox is the only one suffering from a cold? How many of our players truly are 100% fit. Who has worries about their family? Perhaps someone at home is sick or has problems. Then there's Hyam who has only just returned from injury, so would two games in almost as many days be too much for him? As fans, we always naturally assume each and every available player in our squad is capable of putting in a good performance for 90 minutes. But that just isn't the case. Yearwood is another example that supports this argument.

He's a strange lad. Brilliant when he is fit, but almost always a liability when returning from injury. Earlier in the season we witnessed this when, during his first couple of games back, he was so inept and his timing so bad, that he was lucky not to get sent off on a couple of occasions. Now today, again returning from a spell on the side lines, he looked clumsy and out of sorts. The only cure alas is to keep playing him until the magic dust once again gets reactivated. Then he's almost unstoppable. But not today.

Deing is another enigma, drifting in and out of matches like the tide. One moment his game has depth, the next it's so shallow that crabs cover his boots in claw marks. Mantom too is a paper tiger now that he has the weight of the captaincy upon his shoulders. He works hard and covers a lot of ground. But to what effect, especially when both sides seemed determined to play hoof ball, bypassing his area of the pitch entirely.

Then there's our defence. More scared of crosses than a convention of vampires, they don't know whether to stick or bust. Like Rodney, struggling for a decision over a 10p each way bet, they hesitate to go forward and crunch gears whenever reverse is selected. We look, and indeed are, a team that has completely lost both its way and mojo. Chrissy now faces many challenges, but perhaps addressing these two are his most important. However, he has very limited resources with which to turn things around. Just as with Mike, his shopping basket is empty!

The view ahead for the club is as bleak as it was for the faithful Blues supporters at AFC. Stuck deep down in a ditch, buried beneath two look out towers populated by guards that kept on getting up and down blocking the restricted view even more, it wasn't possible to see much more than half the pitch. Even so it was only too evident that we simply weren't functioning. There is no fight in the team. There are no leaders, and most telling of all, there is absolutely no one, save perhaps Cox, who is prepared to die for the cause.

How frustrated must he be. Continually making superb runs that none of his team mates spot. Fighting for the ball, and winning, to only then discover that no one has bothered to support him or challenging for balls so far over his head that NASA astronaut's mistake them for UFO's. If we had a team of Cox's we would be strolling this league. Instead we have a team of oxen and the trough that we are ploughing leads straight down into Division 2!

Something must change. However the makeup of our team is one thing that cannot, injuries have seen to that! Which leaves tactics and man management. Over the past few weeks, Chrissy has played around with his formations even more than an American general in WWII. The resulting lack of success leaving him open to many claims that include suggestions that he is simply confusing his players. So, if formation dancing isn't going to help us out of this mess than that only leaves manipulating the grey matter that's in-between his players ears.

Now Powell, unlike Brown, is a player's manager. No buses linger around his vicinity awaiting a player to be slung under them. Instead he prefers the brotherly arm approach. Something that again leaves him open to criticism. But that is Chrissy's character and it won't change. Therefore something else just has too!

There are at least nine games and 21 points (Two are cup games) between now and when Chrissy, and indeed Mike, can start filling their baskets. No diet, based upon utter starvation, is therefore realistic. But once based upon rationing is!

By harbouring whatever resources are available to them (Cream eggs, peanuts in their glasses and hot wings in the case of Mike, 16 fit? certainly moral challenged, players in the case of Chrissy) survival becomes possible. Along the way though will be casualties and amongst them, as demonstrated today, will be the lovely game. We simply do not have the players to be able to play that sort of football.

Instead we need to dig in deep and just pray and hope that trench warfare rather than May pole dancing will be enough to get us through until January. But are our troops up for such a fight? At the moment the answer sadly is a very definite no, but who knows? The sight of winter snow can inspire some people although it does also simply encourage others to just bury their heads even deeper. And, without any doubt, we currently have a team of ostrich's. So Chrissy, now is the time to take a leaf out of Kitchener's book and let your players know, in no uncertain terms, that "You're club needs you!"

Come on you Blues!!