



Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2018



### Southend 2 – Scunthorpe 0



Fairfax Drive was a sea of falling diamonds and each of its street lights a lighthouse whose bright beam lit up the night to reveal dancing raindrops that sparkled in the cool dark air. Far into the distance, four mighty towers could also be espied. Like giant watch towers they peered out into each of the four cardinal directions. Fierce, flaming fires were seemingly atop of them. Messengers conveying words of power that provided guidance unto the centre of the universe should any be needed.

Alas, on such a wet and dreary night, few appeared to be heeding them. Lowry's road might well have been full of matchstick men all heading towards some central goal. But tonight, Blues form well below par; many were opting for the delights of a comfy sofa and a LED screen instead. Indeed Roots Hall almost seemed to have been turned into the Community Stadium so deserted was its appearance as they two teams came out.

That so few had travelled down the A1 was little surprise. Just three days before the Scunny faithful had had to travel down to Portsmouth. And so, attractive as the Essex Riviera is in high summer, upon a wet, cold and drizzly November night its pull was somewhat akin to the sight of Rodney dabbing on after shave out of a bottle that was a Christmas present at least a decade or so ago!

But what of the Roots Hall roar. Where were they? Well, some of them, on a school night mind, were present. However, although at times they did burst into tune, even Marlene has completed more songs before her audience vanished. Equally, sales of cockles must have fallen through the floor in the East Stand whilst both the South and West stands had a depleted stock look about them too. Blues face hard times off the field as well as on it apparently!

Still, we started the game in our customary manner. Tearing into the opposition, we launched a number of well structured, fast, attacks. However when it comes to that final yard or so our game just comes to an abrupt halt. A sad series of miss-controlled balls and passes being pretty much the sum total of our achievements.

Against a clearly demoralised side (Their record over the past six matches exactly matches ours) Christmas should have come early. But the only snow on show was on top of the ball which was visiting the stadium roofs on a regular basis. Still, as had been the case in so many first half periods, we were clearly the better side and who knows, even though we were attacking the North Bank goal, miracles could happen.

And one did. Following a period of sustained pressure, the ball fell out wide to Bunn who planted a more than decent cross into the box where Dieng nodded the ball home with quite some power. As the net bulged, so the Hall leapt to its feet in celebration. In a game like this, the first goal was always going to be crucial and we had just scored it!

The Scunthorpe players looked totally dejected. If we got our act together, then, as Boycie was urging the lads to do, we could really "tuck in". Another Crawley score line being a very real possibility. But, what one hand gives, the other taketh away and so, just a few minutes later, Demitriou was crawling off the pitch with an injury. Our players are really taking a battering this season and the effect of Jason having to leave the pitch was almost immediate as we began backing out of tackles that just moments before we had been winning for free.

It took our visitors some time to realise this, but once they did, so they began to become more and more involved in the game. Not that that meant very much because, apart from one shot from distance, Oxley was able to pull a Denzil. Still it did mean that we were no longer attacking with quite the flair that we had shown earlier. Old story, because that has happened in many games this season. We get a chance to put a team to the sword but somehow (In this case some splendid goalkeeping and a post that was 1 ft. short of its desired position) we fail to do so; to our cost! With Scunthorpe now beginning to take a bigger role in things, would these missed chances return to haunt us? Again!

Trigger was just beginning to think about the contents of his picnic basket when his musings over the choice of a pork pie the size of Brazil or a cheese sandwich with slices that could have been seen from space were interrupted. For some time the tackles that Scunny had been performing had been rather questionable. One of their players had even been booked by Kettle, a referee notorious for not cautioning our opposition whilst at the same time exercising no restraint when it came to waving cards in our direction!

Now the very same player (Idiot?) had committed another very questionable naughty and Kettle (Throw him a meat pie quick!) was reaching for his pocket. Even the player's manager didn't contest the decision, the player leaving the field totally unacknowledged by his bench and also his colleagues. We rather liked him though because now, with still more than half of the game to go, we were only facing 10 men.

Sun Tu, a Chinese general from a time way back before they starting playing around with loads of scaffolding and Lego bricks, wrote a book. Entitled 'The Art of War', (Sandhurst officers to this day take it to bed with them for a cuddle), it is mentioned here because one of the premises in the book concerns when, and when not to take on enemy forces. Basically it advises that when outnumbered, run away, when not, sharpen your swords. Clearly then football was not a game that he had had much time for!

Because as we know. both to our cost and benefit (Remember the victory at Swansea when we were down to just eight men!), numbers don't mean very much in this game. Of course, like tactics and formations, they have bit parts, sometimes whole cameos! but deep down what really counts in any match of football is the ability, mental strength and desire of the players involved. Eleven players therefore can still easily be beaten by ten, even nine, men if the numerically challenged side are up for it and their opponents are away with the daisies.

The second half then would reveal if we were really only ripe for milking or in a far more bullish mood. Meanwhile the Blue Belles were out there performing in the rain (See what you missed Rodney!) and Lady Penelope was handing out biscuits. Our team might, or might not, be about to tuck in but the Thunderbirds were already way ahead of 'em!

Whereas we had played with the tide and wind in the first half, now we were battling against it. It also seemed as more than a few quiet words had been spoken in Mr Kettle's ear by folk with a Northern accent during the break, because suddenly we weren't allowed to be in the same postcode as a Scunny player without a free kick being awarded against us. It was farcical, all an 'Irons' player had to do was to perform an impression of a dying swan, arms and feet flapping everywhere, and the immediate award for his performance was a free kick of the ball. The game becoming very stop start as a result.

Mrs 'P's biscuits had been a fine appetiser but what a growing lad really needed was proper nourishment. Accordingly the lid of a creaking wicker basket got opened, an experienced hand darted in, and the return was something oozing fat and mustard. Beef sandwiches, thick enough to make even Desperate Dan have second thoughts, began appearing, and then disappearing, just as fast. Trigger's attention upon the game had wavered and now both his stomach and hollow legs were taking on fuel at quite a rate of knots.

What we needed was a second goal just to settle us down. But although brave attempts were being made to wake up the scoreboard, just as in the first half, good chances were going to waste. If, somehow, we could just discover how to put away even a fifth of the opportunities that come our way then our survival in League 1 would be assured. As it was, although three points were enticingly in our grasp and Scunthorpe's attempts to become a ballet troop worthy of a Russian tour were becoming more and more pathetic, victory would still not be ensured until the final whistle went with us still in the lead.

To say that hearts were in mouths would though be to be exaggerating more than just a bit as the team from up North, despite showing a fair degree of determination, were rarely in a position to cause us any real concern. Nevertheless when we did score a second, a blazing drive from just inside the area by Mantom (See, we are not the only side haunted by ex-players) a collective sigh of relief spread around the ground. Surely they weren't going to come back from two goals down!

But they very nearly did! and straight from the restart. A long, high ball into our area, our usual defensive mix up and there was a guy clear through on goal. Fortunately his attempt to chip Oxley only hit the bar but, with all the players concerned spread eagled on the ground, it rebounded back to the Scunthorpe player presenting him with an easy tap in. Plumbing skills though must be in great demand further up the East coast because his attempt to score was so weak that, even had a fleet of Dyno rod vans been to hand, the ball wasn't going to go anywhere near our net. Phew!

Before long though, with the lake full of bewitched maidens and the heroine (Select any Scunthorpe players) about to take a dip, Kettle decided he had had enough of getting soaked and so blew for time. Our celebrations though were somewhat muted. A number of our players appeared keen to get off the pitch (It was, and had, been raining quite hard) so it was only four or so who eventually wandered over to accept our congratulations.

Still, three extremely valuable points were in the bag. So even if BBC Colchester only, as ever, talked about their team, it had turned out to be a perfect evening. For sure (Little Dutch impression there!) we have played much better, and lost. Equally we have played worst and won. Such is the nature of the beautiful game. Will it though still seem so attractive after our next two games, Barnsley at home in the cup then Portsmouth away? Who knows!

But to be a Southend supporter is to experience both the games highs and lows. At the moment we are in the doldrums, adrift in a playerless sea until the tides and current carry us into the roaring transfer window. Then cheque books will flutter and doors will open and close upon a number of careers. Chrissy and Uncle Ron control the combination key for our safe, and how well, or indeed badly, it is employed may very well determine our League 1 status. Many roads to be travelled before then though and if, as was the case tonight, a reasonable number of them have three points at the end of them then, for now, that will be enough. Just!

Come on you Blues!!