



Saturday 1st December 2018



Southend 2 – Barnsley 4



When Hans Christian Anderson finally put aside his quill after scribing “The Princess and the Pea” he could have little imagined the strange scenario that was to ensue at Tracy Island Lodge. Now, although Tracey Island International Airport is world renowned for both its hospitality and facilities, it actually receives very little day to day traffic. Oh there’s the daily mail plane, and then of course the research team from Oxbridge that always wants a full breakfast before conducting further studies centred around the behaviour of Uncle Albert. But beyond that, barely a landing fee gets received.

This of course means that the airport has very few full time employees. Just two in fact, if you ignore the islands security force. Named the Greens, they sort of hang around the place keeping it clean and tidy and it is the lady of the houses’ recent activities that would be of interest to Mr Anderson. Only her version of his famous story has got slightly twisted!

Ok, it should be said straightway that it is fully appreciated that probably only Trigger requires a bedside story to be read to him before he retreats into his teapot, and therefore a very quick summary of the books plot is probably in order at this point. So, basically, in order to prove that she is in fact a princess, a young women identifies that a pea has been slipped somewhere in between the pile of mattresses upon which she is resting.

For it to be so hard it must have been cooked by Cassandra, but moving swiftly on, Marlene, keen to establish her role within the Green household and only having a very slender grip on the story (And reality?) harnessed a whole packet of frozen peas, secured by her Southend scarf, to her leg. She then wandered about the lodge, unknowingly distributing peas (The bag had split!) which were then eagerly scooped up by the two rather enthusiastic security guard’s. A rather bizarre situation that led her despairing spouse to gently enquire, “Just what the ruddy hell are you doing?”

Some things though, as the Oxbridge crew were also finding out, can’t be simply explained. A certain linesman’s take on events was also later to fit neatly into that category. But that as they say is a spoiler alert so, be patient, more will be revealed in due time. First though. We have to rewind to that point from which all good stories start from. Such a shame that it ends up being a bad one!

Once upon a time ... two communications arrived at Tracy Island H.Q. The first was from a certain Thunderbird who is infamous for both hiding away at the back of cinemas and filling mooshbook with loads of photos. The second was from someone living further away inside a small enclave that has a country famous for its chocolates to its left whilst one known to have cracked the secrets of the enigma machine sometime in the last century is to its right (Complaints have been received that these reports need to be more highbrow, hence these subtle clues rather than more detailed geographical information). Anyway both of ‘em were making excuses why they couldn’t watch this game. To say that they were weak is to describe Albert’s attempts to solve Only Connects ‘Wall’. Oh he has all the equipment, helmet, ropes, crampons, that sort of thing (All his daughters think that he looks quite fetching) but perhaps not quite the right mental state?

Depleted in numbers then we were as we took to our perch midway up the West Stand. Tales from parents, doctors, shaggy dogs? were apparently all the rage elsewhere too in the ground as empty seats there were a plenty. However a reasonable number had travelled down from the North so, although we couldn’t

understand what they were chanting (Subtitles were not sadly available) the odd squeak of a clod or the squeal of a startled whippet could occasionally be heard coming from the direction of the North Bank.

It was not a day though that invited much enthusiasm from either sets of supporters. Sure, it was the 2nd round of the F.A cup and therefore almost virgin territory as far as we were concerned. But, with grey, weeping skies above and a cool breeze providing advance notice of adverse (e.g. Freezing, possibly even brass monkey asset robbing) weather conditions coming our way, there was little to encourage people away from their warm houses.

Our depleted squad huddled together in one corner of the pitch, perhaps discussing tactics, more probably gloomily wondering who amongst their number would be next to be upon a hospital waiting list. Demitriou has now joined the loooooooooooooong list of people visiting Dr Ben's treatment room. Out for at least two months, our international defender joins six other 1st team players who are listed as MIA. Man Utd, with all their resources, are bemoaning the loss of just one single player for six weeks. They should be in our shoes!!

Accordingly the team selection was not to everybody's taste. Chrissy is now encountering some quite strong headwinds as supporters grumble and moan about his formations and tactics. But, with more than half his first choice players unavailable, he has to try and harness what he little resources he does have to hand and, with games popping up every couple of days, rest players that he might have preferred to have playing.

Exacerbating the situation even further, whilst we are only too aware of the plight of players like Hopper, Coker and Lennon, many other, apparently fit players (They're playing so they have to be, surely?) Must be carrying knocks and bruises that, in more normal circumstances, would have seen them rested. So although eleven blue shirts matched up to an equal number of red (The ref was in disguise!) who was to say that every home engine was up to running sweetly for 90 minutes?

It quickly became evident that at least two of our fleet were running on fumes. Yearwood (Radio Albert claims that he has been sold to Crystal Palace for £5 million but is remaining with us until the end of the season) had clearly been rushed back from injury too soon. Although willing to run and close down players it was almost as if a shrunken version of Robinson was playing. A steady stream of well-intentioned passes from his foot failing miserable to find their man. At least though he had an excuse! Kightly was only making up the numbers.

Cox was running his boots off, Elvis was sweating buckets but the shirt of a certain Brown 'Wow' signing was barely crumpled. Of course there were spells in the game where he did get involved (Halftime orange that sort of thing) but for at least 90% of it, the best that could be said was that we had provided someone to walk the referees guide dog for him. When the chips are down is when you find out who is on your team and who isn't. Let's just say that Kightly was asking for more vinegar on his then!

Not sure if it is the weight of the captaincy or something else, perhaps niggling little injuries, but Mantom is not firing on all cylinders either. At times, he was running midfield, but at lot of others he looked to be as exhausted as if he had just ran a marathon. Deing was also struggling to find first gear. He professes to be enjoying his new role as a makeshift striker but to all intents and purposes he looked confused; caught in a trap between his more normal midfield role and supporting the hardworking Cox. As a result, far too often there was massive gap between our number 10 and the rest of his team. Space that out visitors were keen to exploit.

Barnsley look to have got the balance between a strong physical team and a skilful one, able to play football, just about right. A tall, lanky, awkward looking forward being well supported by smaller players that possessed more skill and energy. That said, the individual in question was a bit of a prima donna; willing to hand it out but not to receive.

Now, given that he was 100 ft. plus, a strong challenge from John White should have presented him with no problem. Instead he dived to the floor like a stricken Stuka, his siren wailing worse than an agent reviewing Marlene's advance ticket sales, and demanded medical attention.

This duly arrived. But when the concerned Barnsley 'Ben' examined his writhing patient he had trouble identifying any injuries. So, instead he just set to mopping his little soldiers face and hands. A pitiful sight that

the astonished on looking West Stand swiftly seized upon with glee. Taunting the fallen hero with quite a number of well-constructed, and humorous, jibes. Many of them very, very, non P.C!

All good things come to end though and, from a corner, he made his reply. Soaring above any of our challenges (There were some weren't there?) he headed the ball powerfully past Oxley to put his team ahead. Our view of a certain arch therefore began to waver, and although we tried to respond, playing with only nine, eight? non-functioning engines, an uphill task now faced us.

Halftime was fast approaching by now, the board signalling an extra five minutes (More than a few robust Barnsley tackles had resulted in some additional Blues carrying injuries) and radio's all over the country were broadcasting that our visitors were taking a single goal lead with them into the break. But what was this? We had earned yet another corner and although not much was expected to come from it (Why are we so good at conceding from them but not scoring from them?) a chance no matter how faint, was still a chance.

So, with a small sigh, Trigs put down his picnic hamper and began to retake an interest in the game. Alongside him, our eagle eyed tribal elders did the same. Therefore it is somewhat a mystery, why, once they had calmed down from wildly celebrating our equaliser, they all claimed that it was an own goal when clearly, as was being accurately reported by Mike, the ball had gone in directly from a corner taken by Mantom. A rare event it is true, but the fact that six pairs of backseat eyes got it all wrong, does rather explain a lot about why TBII so often ends up in strange locations!

Being in the right place at the right time also proved to be a problem for the two linesmen in the second half. A period where both of them played key roles in the games eventual result. The first, perhaps aroused by the scent of so many cockles, got over excited when, in front of the East stand and his view blocked by at least five players, he decreed that a Barnsley attempt on goal had crossed the line following a corner.

We are far too nice a team. Whereas other sides would have surrounded the officials complaining and demanding at least a second, if not a third, referendum, we just shrugged a few shoulders and got on with it. Commendably Corinthian old chaps, but really? Whilst no one would want us to become a 'Leeds' we though do need to become more 'professional' in situations like these. Now from the Thunderbird eyrie it was impossible to say whether or not the ball had indeed crossed the line (Just as many players being between us and the goal as there were for the lineman) but more than a question hang over the fact and yet there we were, Uncle Albert's to a man, struggling to respond to what's two plus two!

Our socks were still off, well Yearwood's certainly were, when Barnsley scored a third. Attempting to play his way out of defence, our allegedly 5 million takeaway lost the ball. Only two seconds later to find it again, buried in the back of our net! The equation concerning how many coaches would be required to transport our supporters to Wembley becoming almost as theoretical an exercise as counting the number of loose hairs in Denzil's hairbrush!

Calls for Chrissy to make urgent changes began to tumble down the terraces. However our manager was facing a bit of a dilemma, 'Go for the Money' or 'Go for Points'. With the game seemingly beyond reach (There were only 15 minutes to go) was there any point in us risking fresh legs that might be better employed in the league? In Robinsons case the call was obvious, far less so with regard to Bunn's. As for McCoulsky's position ... well just what is it? We are now almost halfway through his loan period but he has yet to appear in the side with any frequency. So, is there really any point in hanging onto him beyond January when we so desperately need fresh faces to replace our injured. Players that will actually play rather than warm the bench.

The three substitutions though did inject fresh energy into our team and, from a corner; Dieng powered home a header to reduce our deficit to just one goal. All of the games goals had come from such situations which spoke volumes about each side's defences and also at least one side of A4 about their attacks. But now, instead of sitting back in our seats and resignedly watching yet another home defeat, we were up and cheering the lads. The game was back and truly on!

So when, two minutes from time, Turner headed the ball home you can just imagine the scenes as Roots Hall erupted. Trigger was running up and down his abandoned aisle like a kid that had just discovered ice cream, Boycie's face was as red as a turnip, his arms held high in triumph whilst even the Oxbridge students hadn't a

clue what dance Albert was performing. A mixture between an Irish jig and a camel attempting to play hopscotch probably best describes it. But what scenes, what jubilation ... what disappointment!

Because linesman number 2 had just emerged from his hole and was holding his flag aloft. But what was the problem? Turner had had at least five defenders between him and the goal, so offside couldn't be an option. It was clean jump, no visiting player was down on the ground hoping to get an Oscar to go alongside a free kick and even the goal keeper was hanging his head in shame for not getting to the ball. So just what was going on?

Total confusion being the answer!

Most of the Barnsley players had dejectedly lined up for the restart, we were still going absolutely barmy and our players, for once, were asking both officials to just explain themselves. The referee, his trip home aboard the Barnsley coach at risk, walked over to his linesman and conducted a short conversation with him. He then pointed to the centre spot, a decision that had us all going totally ape all over again!

But then, seemingly totally confused, Denzil in Bodyshop deciding between a bar of rosemary scented soap and a fragrant, if delicate, shower gel that tasted of raspberries, he urged the goalkeeper to get on with a free kick. We just couldn't believe it, neither could our player. But, keen to ride their luck Barnsley had endured that the ball was already in the air and heading towards our end of the pitch. A few moments of 'Who the hell knows what's going on', then ensued before we were back to two goals down.

The fact barely registered such was our anger and fury at the officials decision. It was so clearly wrong and we had been robbed. Don't bother watching Police 5 or Crimewatch though because neither the referee's assessor nor the F.A will be reporting the theft. In their book, the ref had conferred with his linesman and then taken a decision. That the results of their deliberations were 100% incorrect matters not. And, were we to complain. It would be we, and not the guilty, who would be decreed to be bringing the game into disrepute and so fined. Eighteenth century practices rule ok!

Only they most definitely do not and, slim as our chances undoubtedly were, come next May, no Shrimpers flags, scarves or badges will be being displayed down Wembley way. Not because we were beaten by a better team, although Barnsley definitely looked useful, but because the officials weren't up to their jobs. Again!!

Come on you Blues!!