



**Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019**



## **Southend 2 – Gillingham 0**



The Samaritans were on full alert. Col Pugh had lost again and BBC Colchester was being flooded with distress calls. As indeed so too were Radio Mudbank whose airwaves were full of sobbing voices all claiming to have been robbed. Ah bless.

Just what is it about any fixture between us and the temporary standers? It seems to matter not whether it be at home or away; each and every game's major talking point is always a controversial decision by the officials. But, after seasons of being at the wrong end of them, finally one broke in our direction, and boy were their supporters crying about it!

So did the ball cross the line or not? Well accordingly to the people responsible for deciding such things it most definitely did not. So, the simple answer is nope. Indeed, apart from the rather splendid aftermath of the incident in question, it's a point barely worth talking about. Unlike the sending off of Robinson which was the direct result of some sheer petulance being displayed by yet another height-challenged individual.

What is about us and bald and / or short referees? Are the shower controls in their dressing room too high for them to reach or something? They come onto the field holding a grudge against us, carry it about with them all game and then probably travel home with it too! According to BBC Colchester we got awarded 8 fouls to their 18. Now whilst that information certainly does reveal the wide gulf that there was between decisions for them against those that were for us alas, as per usual, their data is corrupted. Perhaps the reason is that, just like their favourite team, they have six fingers to count upon. So easy then for them to get the count wrong, because in actual fact we only got 4, possibly 5, free kicks awarded to us over the entire 90 minutes. We know because Boycie, not Denzil, was doing the maffs!

An incident, close to the end of the game, highlighted the referee's bias when Robinson got completely taken out by their defender and yet no whistle got blown. Seconds later Robinson challenged for the ball, (Actually the word 'challenge' suggests something much more forceful than the half-hearted attempt he really made. But it was still enough to get the creature, who would struggle to meet the minimum height requirements for a garden ornament, all excised, and so a foul against him got awarded. Robinson, totally astonished that so little could result in so much, duly complained; comparing what had just happened to what had been done to him and got booked for his troubles. The referee makes a mistake and it's one of our players who has to carry the can!

Then, inside the dying seconds of a match that had until then been relatively tame, Robinson again throwing all caution to the wind, makes his second 'challenge' of the match and so receives the award of another yellow card, closely followed by a red. His push would hardly have worried a toddler and players, on both sides, had been guilty of far greater offences but received not even a hint of a card. So why Robinson? Is it cos he's tall?

Or was it simply because we had yet another diminutive individual trying to make up for his lack of inches, probably in every department, by over-exercising his authority? A survey, comparing the number of cards issued by more standard-sized officials against those waved under player's noses by referees who are dwarfed by their roles, might be quite revealing. But probably in these overly P.C. days that would attract an accusation of 'heightism'. However, if so, they started it!

Indeed, the patter of tiny feet were definitely a factor that affected this game. Gillingham were not an overly physical side and it was not a dirty game. However they, like us, did occasionally cross over the line. But whereas our transgressions, no matter how mild, always got punished, theirs rarely did. Accordingly, not only were bats fleeing away from the Thunderbirds nest but Boycie's gruff commentary upon the situation too was being heard both near and far.

His views on Chrissy team selection too had shades of the rainbow about them. Robinson, despite his abject displays at Oxford and Coventry was in, Cox, an individual who had worked his socks off in both games, out! Yes, Cox had now played continually for a number of games and was probably due a break, but, with no fixture next weekend (Doncaster still being involved in the F.A cup whereas a linesman's mistake had denied us the chance) what was the urgency?

It was later revealed that Cox had a leg wound so possibly Powell was just being prudent. Given his squads considerable injury problems this was quite understandable. But the depth of unease and disquiet that arose over this decision did reveal just how many are now questioning both Chrissy's team selections and tactics. Mind you, when you look at how Scunthorpe, with a similar butcher's bill to our own, are faring, some might consider Powell to be coping quite well with the situation. Still, there is no doubting that murmurings of discontent are beginning to grow upon both the terraces and from afar via social media.

There was little though to excite comment about this games opening period. Indeed for a local derby it was a very 'polite tea with the vicar' type of affair. Neither side appearing to want to really go for it. So whilst attacks did occasionally occur, they usually just got quickly bogged down inside a midfield battle that no one seemed to want to win. It was a phoney war being played out by two fairly well matched teams.

Entertainment of a sort though was provided by their lanky, oooh look at my hair all tied up in a bun, excuse for a forward. When he wasn't trying to impress the Russian judge with his diving, he was moaning away, Ena Sharples on speed, at the ref for imaginary fouls. Envisage Albert, about twelve centuries younger, without the stoop but just as unsteady upon the pins, gabbing away about his breakfast, mid-morning, lunch, dinner and supper menus, and you will sort of get the picture.

Still it gave us something to shout about in what was otherwise a rather gloomy affair. Trigger wasn't quite driven towards his crossword, or, even more amazingly, his tuckbox, but it was nevertheless a rather close run thing. Denzil of course kept himself busy, and the world bored, by continually updating his Mooshbook profile. His new look for 2019 is the 'Village werewolf'. This requires the face to be left totally unshaven whilst the single hair (Known as Nigel) that sprouts out from the top of his head is allowed to grow all wild. Taken all together with his pale complexion (He spent a third of 2018 hiding inside the dark of a cinema!) it's quite an affective disguise and but, for the lack of a blanket plus possibly a sorry looking mutt, he could have hailed from underneath any cashpoint machine in the High Street.

After giving away a number of easy corners we began to earn some of our own. But our attempts to get a ball into the area were always thwarted by the first man. How come we can hoof the ball without any apparent problems but barely lift it off the ground when it comes to dead ball situations? Accordingly, as Mantom lined up to take a free kick from just outside their area, expectations were low. Albert even going so far as to make a disparaging comment.

Imagine then our astonishment and delight when the ball totally eluded as least three defenders, and most importantly, their goalkeeper, during its flight into the back of the North Bank goal. Not even Mantom had expected it to end up there, but take the lead we most certainly had and the New Year's day home crowd celebrated it to the full.

Not so the pathetically low number of Gillingham supporters. Just a hop, skip and a jump across the Thames away; barely 500 of them could be bothered to make the journey. We provide them with fabulous acoustics, proper seats and a roof! Whilst we have to sit out in the open and face up to whatever the elements opt to throw at us at their dump. Yet we regularly take at least a thousand to cheer and encourage our side on. Poor show mudbankers. Poor show!

This game though was as well. The goal had brightened things up but only to a degree. Indeed it wasn't even enough to attract any amorous minded glow worms and the only moths in view were those seeking

sanctuary from Rodney's wallet. The second period unhappily was little different. Yes, Gillingham had added a mite more urgency to their play and were pushing us back. Rather, that is, we were retreating too deep on our own accord. Why do we do that? It just turns the game into one of defence against attack, and, as well as players like White and Moore can cope with such situations, surely it's just begging for trouble.

And deep in the doo dah we would most certainly have been but for the magnificent display being put on by our kiddy of a goalkeeper. Barely yet weaned away from his play station, young Bishop was absolutely superb. Making a number of key saves before pulling off an unbelievable one in response to a close in, well directed, and powerful, header. Such a mature display of goalkeeping from such an unexperienced head signals that there are going to be some tough decisions ahead for our manager. With three more than decent goalkeepers to pick from, well at least once the queues for Ben's services dies down, Chrissy might well have to resort to Browns furry dice in order to select who is going to stand between the posts. Great position for the club to be in of course, but, should the expected bids start flying in, or agents get involved, just how long will we be able to resist?

So, as the game entered four minutes of extra time it was pretty much down to just the one player that we still maintained our lead. Very determined defending had obviously helped as well but, now, as Gillingham began to really pile on the pressure, things were coming to a head. Given that even well-constructed dams have a nasty habit of bursting; it wasn't that surprising that our defence was now beginning to leak corners. 617 squadron had been in the air for quite some time and now, as seconds stretched into what seemed hours so it seemed to all that the Dam Busters were fast approaching the Mohne.

They had had plenty of practice runs, too many for comfort in fact, and now, as their crosshairs centred firmly upon their target, all hell was beginning to be let loose. The ball was going here, there and everywhere; a shot, a fine save by Bishop, another shot, another save, a blast of the ball, a rebound off the line, a blocked shot and then a pass / shot across the area and the ball is in the back of our net ... or is it?

To our intense relief, and not a little surprise, the Sorpe dam was still standing and no linesman's flag had waved signalling its destruction. Furthermore, whilst the individual concerned was on the receiving end of an enormous amount of flak from enraged enemy forces, those defending were simply getting on with the job. Bishop, somehow maintaining a clear head despite all the chaos that was erupting about him, threw out a brilliant ball to Cox, who totally on his own, had the whole of their half of the pitch all to himself save their advancing keeper.

Urged on by three sides of the ground, all up on their feet, Cox ran towards his target. Bedlam was still going on far behind him, but as he concentrated upon his task he suddenly became aware of speeding feet fast catching up with him. Had some member of the linesman lynching party spotted him and so was now giving chase?

No, instead it was none other than Taylor-Moore giving it his all, as indeed he has done ever since joining the club on loan, hurrying up field just as fast as he could to give his support to Cox. What an example to other players this guy is. We are not even his club, but still he wears our badge just as if it was. Fantastic attitude, and, as Cox first drew the keeper out of position before slipping the ball into his path, so he got his reward, his first ever league goal!

Boy did we, and indeed all our players celebrate. One moment we had all been fearing that once again extremely valuable points had been lost inside the final seconds of the game (A familiar story this season) , and the next we were another goal up! Less than 30 seconds had passed between the two incidents and Roots Hall was simply going absolutely mad.

The Gillingham players were still belly aching to the ref, ours were having a party and as for us ... well even Denzil was showing signs of animation. Or was it just the breeze that was giving Nigel some exercise?

Just how unselfish was Cox! A player whose barely had a sniff of goal, let alone seen the ball from him beat a goalkeeper for around seven or eight games, presented with a golden opportunity and, instead of blasting away seeking glory, he instead opts to slip a gentle pass to a team mate; presenting them with a straightforward tap into an abandoned net. Not many others would have done that!

Blues are now 9th in the table. However they are nevertheless some distance away from the play off positions. So, even if Uncle Ron's purse strings are loosened during the transfer window, promotion must remain the dream that it has been for some seasons. Of more immediate importance, both to our future and Chrissy's first season in charge, we are also a number of places away from the relegation zone. The pattern of win one, lose one that we have maintained for a considerable period though should see us safe, providing of course it continues.

It should not though be allowed to act as a cloak to hide the weaknesses that definitely exist in our side. Although today our midfield functioned efficiently as a unit; its inability to act as a feeder to our forwards remains a worry. It's also lacks both power and leadership. Fears that Yearwood might depart have now been alleviated to a degree because he has taken quite a time to recover his form after injury. Today, he did look much sharper and almost back to his best, but the length of his journey has hopefully put off some interested parties. Well at least until the summer sales!

So a fully functioning Yearwood would obviously help the cause in this area, but another new body would improve it even further too. Up front, well little has to be said. Robinson was brighter today, but is he really the answer? Not in a month of Sundays. So Ron might well have to perform an impression of Rodney faced with a menu that boasts a total absence of anything resembling an egg and cress sandwich, especially with regard to price! if this matter is to be resolved. But, with a fairly strong lifeline now tethering us to this division, will that indeed occur, or will we instead opt to await the summer, perhaps aided by a loan signing or two, and then see how the likes of Hopper and Barrett are faring before waving any white fivers around?

Who knows, but for once, just for once, it was enough to leave the ground in the full knowledge that inside the horse carts making their way back over the Thames, more than a few curses were being thrown at the officials. A situation that we have become only too accustomed to ourselves following this particular fixture and indeed many others!

Even better, upon BBC Colchester, it was wailing hour and miserable Col Pugh supporters were pouring out their woes; calling for their board, manager, team of donkeys and indeed anyone associated with the dead end club, to be sacked. What a great start to 2019!

Come on you Blues!!