



Saturday 26th January 2019



Southend 0 – Luton 1



As the game entered its 29th minute so a cry of “We are not worthy” went up from the Thunderbirds nest. Yes, that’s right we had just been awarded our first free kick in a game that had already seen the Luton formation diving team awarded at least five or six by a referee who was so tame that they had him eating out of their hand!

However, unusual as it may be, this is not a gripe at the officials, much deserved as one undoubtedly would be, but rather an adverse comment about the innocence and naivety of our team. Unedifying as it was to watch Luton’s player dive to the floor every time they got breathed on (They were like stuka bombers but for the sirens). There was no denying that, given the level of officiating that we suffer in this division, it was an extremely effective tactic. One that, apart from possibly away at Bristol Rovers earlier in the season, we simply do not have in our arsenal. 100% marks for adopting a Corinthian like attitude chaps. Very laudable. But also very expensive in terms of points too!

If, a massive if unfortunately, we had decent referees then there would be some reason for us to maintain our ‘Nice but Dim’ persona. But as it is, with referees still wet and smarmy after emerging out of the primeval slime running hopelessly about on pitches, we have to smarten up and get with it. In other words, it is long past the time when we not only learnt to be nasty but actually are!

Teaching our midfield how to operate as a unit wouldn’t be a bad idea too. As individuals, each of the players given that area of the pitch as their responsibility had something to offer. Sure, Yearwood has yet to rediscover his early season form and so is operating well below par. But, given some sort of support, such as he used to receive from Timlin, he would surely recover it sooner rather than later. Sadly as it is he is being left to his own devices as his two fellow midfielders concentrate upon their own games. Each man thus is functioning as an individual rather than a unit. An accusation that certainly couldn’t be levelled at Luton.

They were extremely well organised, knew their game and their role within it, and, most importantly of all, they played as a team. When they had the ball, they attacked as one, when they lost it, they defended as one. We in contrast displayed a lot of effort and willingness to work, but as for any show of cohesiveness ... Forget it!

That’s to not to say that we were disorganised, just that we, for some reason, were prepared to just sit back and simply let Luton get on and play their game. Later in the match, when we finally decided that enough was enough and so started to get in their faces, they began to fall apart and so earn bookings just as we had earlier in the game. Had we but adopted that ‘down their throats’, attitude right from kick off then the result of this game might have been very different. But as has already been said, we are far too nice.

Listen to anybody in the game and they will all say what a friendly bloke Chrissy is. Therefore it is unsurprising that his team is a full reflection of that. An approach that unfortunately other sides take full advantage of; robbing us blind. We’re frail old ladies taking a stroll down a road lined with muggers. Were the Sweeny to be hanging around too, then no problem. But with every bobby back in the office adding another tree to a mountain already full of reports, it’s a suicidal approach to adopt.

That all said, and given that Luton were ‘earning’ free kicks here there and everywhere, the fact that they only scored one goal and rarely looked like adding to that total, speaks volumes about how well, even in our

innocent state, we coped with their style of play. Yes, they did have a lot of the ball and undoubtedly they looked the better side; forcing us to change tactics and formations at least twice in an attempt to get back into the game. An event that unfortunately, but for the final ten minutes or so, looked less likely to occur than Albert's fridge ever being filled with bottles of cream soda rather than brown ale!

So, is that a criticism of our forward line?

In one word, No! Both Cox and new boy, Humphries, worked hard; both in terms of helping us to defend and attack. However so poor was the service being provided to them that they were forced to adopt the role of mangy mutts scarping around inside dustbins for anything resembling even an opportunity to run at the visiting defence, let alone score a goal. Famine relief charities would be lining up to support them if videos of this game were to be widely circulated. Afternoon advertising spots, currently occupied by yet another reminder that our time on earth is limited, being filled instead with photos of our two strikers with a plea for just two or three passes a month to support them.

So where should the finger of blame be pointed?

At our midfield. As a defensive force, its light sabra's are powered not by the force but by humble batteries. Death stars could laugh with impunity at our efforts but it's quite possible that white helmeted pilots could find us a bit of a challenge. So a rating of 'Could do better' there, then, then. But when it comes to providing any kind of support to our attack, albeit through a pass or even just in terms of numbers, then our wands emit less light than a dozing glow worm and even an Evoke could tickle us to death.

At times Luton looked like a team of Ray Wilkins as they passed the ball endlessly across the pitch. But always it was with the purpose of delivering a final, killer ball. That such a tactic did not work is a credit to us and how Chrissy had set us up to deal with such a threat. However, whenever we got the ball, if it was at the foot of one of our defenders then it soon got passed to Turner to hoof forward. (Why? His passes have an accuracy rating that rivals Rodney's charity contributions) and were it to be in the procession of one of our midfielders then our goalkeeper was far more likely to become involved in the game than theirs. Forward passes being rarer than sightings of Shergar with Lord Lucan aboard!

Our position in the table reflects this issue. Sure, injuries to key players have robbed us of several league positions but so has the lack of any forward thinking by our midfield. Chrissy has said that we are chasing another forward in this transfer window. Great, and even though apparently two slipped through our fingers this week, another addition in that department will be welcome. However it is the crying need for a creative player in midfield that more urgently needs to be addressed.

Yearwood has the potential, and indeed ability, to be that player. But not on his own. He needs to be supported by other players who are prepared to chat to him and offer fatherly advice upon the pitch. Cuddles and pats from his manager away from it are all very well, but in is in the light of battle that he occasionally needs someone with a torch to spare. Certainly rather more than a whole row of floodlights after a game!

But to end on an encouraging note. Although Luton ran this game to more than a fair extent, such an advantage was not turned into goals. Indeed, but for a defensive mistake (Why was no one positioned at the far post at a corner?) for all their pretty passing and imitations of Swan Lake, they would not have scored at all. In fact it could even be argued that the gulf between us in twelfth and them in first, is not that big at all. So, had Hooper, Coker and a few others remained available to us, then who knows what might have been possible this season?

But, alas, we supporters have to live in the real world. Fantasy football, where all of our best players are not only available to us but on top form too, only exists in the mind. As so too is any hope of a pitch controlled and managed by officials who are up to the job. So just as we have to get real, so do our team. Time to get dirty boys!!

Come on you Blues!!