



Saturday 9th February 2019



Charlton 1 - Southend 1



The town of Dover, The Chase, 1,625 meat pies, horses all over the country struck down by man flu and a list of East London pubs, all closed down by Albert that rivals the record of the Luftwaffe. All that was missing was a cuddly toy and our annual visit to a certain supermarket's carpark!

The day began with the A.A and every other navigation system on the planet strongly suggesting that we take the bridge of totally unrequired height over to a certain mud bank before heading west. Fortunately an auspicious weather system made such an obscene suggestion totally impossible and so Mike, with a certain delight and relief, piloted his powerful, sleek and elegant form (TBII looked pretty trim too) in the general direction of a rabbit warren that the tribal elders insisted ran under the Thames.

Uncertain of their exact location, he was reliant upon directions provided by them and a system called Gobble, Googhell, Goddle? Whatever, it knew god all about road conditions and so steered us straight into a jam that delayed us for longer than the whole trip had taken so far. Still at least that provided time for Albert to lovingly relish the sight of all the pubs that he had once provided custom to. Sure, they had all gone now; small business or equally small piles of rubble marking the locations where he had once stood and made a certain splash back in the day. But in his memory they remained open for business. Such a pity then that they didn't just stay locked up inside his head instead of being described, endlessly, for mile after mile. "You could get a good pint in there for tuppence but that one over there added water to theirs. Still it was only a farthing a pint and you could easily get a girl legless for less than sixpence!" But such is the joy of any trip that takes the Thunderbirds unto the upper reaches of the A13!

The tunnel the ancients had in mind was protected by a ring of traffic lights that were all armed to the teeth with red bulbs; green ones being sighted less often than Rodney's securely welded shut wallet. Indeed, our little bookies mate was at that moment back in deepest Essex gazing sadly down upon a discarded form book and racing list. His stable of 'sure fire winners' were all at home, wrapped up inside warm blankets and sipping down gallons of honey flavoured drinks, rather than trailing across the finish line long after everyone else had gone home. In Australia it had taken hags just like his over six months to recover from the flu and so now, with a short row of unemployed 10p coins looking forlornly back up at him, he was wondering just where to splash out his 50p this weekend.

Perhaps Denzil, celebrating yet another family birthday and dressed up to the nines in a nifty, but thankfully not too revealing, outfit, could help. AWOL once again from his footballing duties, and having sampled the delights of a children's cartoon at the cinema in the morning, he was already planning an afternoon and evening joyfully filling up gigabytes of mooshbook memory with still more selfies. With his man bag, stuffed to the seams with lavender scented soap and raspberry flavoured hand sanitizers, swinging suggestively, he was approaching Southend Central, heading for the bright lights of the smoke, just as we were finally released from our prism (sic) of ruddy coloured ones.

Down deep into the earth's bowels we went; flickering overhead torches not only guiding our path but also indicating the many undulations that lay in our way. Hued out of the Thames mud by hand and shovel rather than through any mechanical means, the tunnel wound and dipped its way across the rivers bottom before finally ascending back up towards the surface and South London. Water didn't so much drip down from its

roof as slime down its walls. A total collapse might not have been imminent, but the desire of the government to build a replacement one could be readily understood. Just such a pity that geography demanded that one end of it still would have to be sited in a marsh!

As we emerging one more onto the surface, so our ears were besieged by messages from Gluedoo; each and every one demanding that we take the first left. However, wise to the mischief that the said spawn of the devil wished to play upon us, Mike steadfastly ignored them despite all the heart rending wails and gnashing of fangs that were issuing from his baggage department. Well he knew from previous experience how unreliable was the advice that was now being screamed at him by the clearly irritated palm held jewellery. For lead them not unto the home of Charlton Athletic would their screeching do, but instead unto the portals of the aforementioned supermarket would we be steered. A fact that Mike casually relayed to the occupants of TBII's hold who by now were almost clambering out of its doors in their desperation to follow their likkle darlek's not so sage advice.

Aloof from such goings on, the descendant of Marco Polo coolly savoured his smoked kipper as he drove straight past the turning of ultimate despair, selecting instead the second road on the left. His by now totally delirious crew did not though calm down until signs appeared that pointed towards the ground. Their ace pilots decision had been the right one, again. It's hard sometimes to be one amongst so many. But when supported by knowledge, experience and downright charisma, the job somehow becomes easier!

Trigger had travelled to the game aboard one of the supporters' club coaches. Their journey must have seemed just as long as ours because, whilst we had been forced to listen to Radio 'Who shut the pubs down', those trapped in seats close to our wandering dormouse had had to endure endless replays of the previous nights episode of 'The Chase'. Apparently it's a show where contestants get to face off against some pub quiz expert. If they win, they get oodles of cash; if they don't then they have the doubtful privilege of being able to say that they were on the show and were also a loser!

Anyways, it seems that this lady had won £75,000 despite getting questions wrong (It's quite possible that is was only £20,000. Trigs had got very excited about the whole thing and this often leads to him becoming confused). It all seemed rather Colchester against face to us, but as he had obviously enjoyed it

Whatever the sum was that she won, it wouldn't have stayed in her pocket for very long if she had wanted something to eat and drink at the ground. With a cup of coffee being priced at more than a jar of the stuff and meat pies costing a king's ransom, many decided to stay thirsty and starve. As Denzil can surely attest, cinemas get away with murder with their prices for stuff like popcorn. But then their audiences expect to be kept in the dark whereas we, loyal football supporters rather than wannabe Barry Norman's, just wanted to be able to buy some sustenance without being required to also take out a mortgage at the same time!

Boycie, lukewarm cup of Bovril in hand (At £640 per gallon it made your eyes water and Charlton very, very rich) took the lead as we searched for our seats. Advised by the stewards that we had to sit where our tickets indicated, we took up a berth that was close to the corner flag and adjacent to the touch line. A location that, not only provided shelter from the blustery and chilly wind, but also afforded a great opportunity to chat to not only the linesman but also our bench. More upon that in a moment.

Whilst Grandad waved his meat pie around (His wife's loyalty card subsidises all his drinks so, whilst still not quite a 50/50 split, his indulgence was not quite as expensive as it might at first seem) and we, mere peasants in contrast, supped at our bread and water, out on the pitch one of our injured was being given an airing. From the look of things, Bunn is almost at the point of return which is good news. He looks a decent player, when he's available that is!

Chrissy was going to play a 4 4 2 formation with yet another player that was returning from injury on the bench. Lennon has been out for quite a while with a broken toe but now, possibly, could get some pitch time against his former club. Such an eventuality though would depend upon either us incurring yet another injury or our being under intense pressure. Neither was a prospect for us to savour given our current circumstances!

done, Yearwood had nevertheless committed a two footed tackle with his feet off the ground. A red card therefore it had to be.

The Munro in front of us had just become a fully paid up member of the Himalayas club. How on earth were ten men, albeit each one a shining knight in blue armour, going to mount a defence against a hostile home crowd, hostile team and also a set of hostile officials? By digging in and showing the mettle, that's how!!

Cheered on by an away support that was almost beside its self, our fabulous Blues dug down deep within themselves. Emerging chrysalis like from a state of hibernation, something many had feared had become permanent, not as brightly coloured butterflies, but as a proud unit of determined and very defiant warriors. "Bring it on", they seemed to be saying, "Show us what you've got!"

So Charlton did, as indeed so too did their fully house trained referee. Not another decision going our way before the break. Didn't really matter though because our resolute defence didn't cave in either; despite our hosts giving it their all. Yes their very fast running wingers were causing problems. But to the pitch and groundsman, not to us! For all their running and trickery, nowt resulted from their wing play save either a goal kick or a throw on. In fact, only one home shirt was causing us any grief and that was the one worn by Ben Reeves.

Best known to us for scoring the goal that sent us to Wembley whilst he was on loan at Roots Hall, Reeves was running the show for Charlton. Anything of note that they produced having his stamp written all over it. If we could only keep him quiet then a result could very well be on the cards. But that was far easier said than done. So, whenever the ball was anywhere near his sphere of influence, you had little option but to hold your breath and just pray.

Someone in a red top must have been doing rather a lot of that because, during the break in hostilities, he not only got a chance to win an amount of dosh that would be enough to keep Trigger buried in meat pies for about a week (Get Denzil to do the maffs and divide £6,500 by 1625 and you'll be inside the territory that Charlton were charging for just one such pie) but he also converted it into ready cash by successfully kicking the ball against the cross bar. Quite a few years back, Blues ran a similar competition. Well at least we did until a car got won two weeks running and then, rather strangely, the competition got discontinued for some reason.

We all very much hoped though that he would be the only home supported who would be leaving the game with a smile upon his face. But with another 45 minutes still to go, and us being a man short, no one really rated our chances. Still, where's there's a blue badge involved, you never know. And there were ten being worn very prominently out there right now!

Our team, quite rightly, has been accused of lacking any character, certainly over recent weeks. However now it was boasting so much, that it was as if Rocky, King Kong and John Wayne had all been bundled together into one, rather special, package. If they had the ball, then we wanted it, if we had the ball, we wanted it and if nobody had the ball, then it was ours!

This led Charlton to resort to fouling and sure enough, so frustrated were they becoming that before very long the referee had a golden opportunity to even up the numbers as a two footed, off the ground tackle, took out Kightly.

Remember the photo fit description, bald, fat and short? Yeah, well then you won't be at all surprised to learn that no red card was shown then, then! Apparently, although both Yearwood's and Kightly's assailants feet were off the ground and each had employed two feet, Dru's had been a fraction higher than the home players and thus his foul had merited an early bath whilst theirs was barely being treated to a face wash. Do referees make up rules to suit themselves? Bet your bottom dollar they do!

A very angry Mike was calling the ref scum. Grandad had been silenced into utter astonishment and as for the rest of the Thunderbirds, hidden away as they were amongst a mass of enraged Southend supporters, they

might very well have been singing along to a ditty that associated a more severe four letter with a whistle, but, being so far away from all the action as they unfortunately were, it was hard to tell.

Had it become ten against ten then we would have stood a chance. But with a referee who was humming 'Red, Red Robin goes a bob bobbing along' as he wobbled about the pitch, we were just a bunch of Cornish pasties staring Trigger straight in the face. One of Rodney's sick gee gees had more chance of winning the National than we did this game. And yet we still fought on. Nobody sought out a trench, no one fell to the ground adopting a prone position and there was not even a hint of a Blue shirt getting waved as a flag of surrender. We were truly Southend United!!

If you watch any movie involving goodies and baddies, at some point in the proceedings the forces of evil to do get a turn at the bat. That's not to say that Charlton were being overtly 'professional'. They didn't need to be given the attitude of their bald, fat and short mascot and, in any case, they didn't have the look of a side that indulged much in that side of the game anyway. However they were making the most of the home bias that was now being expressed by not only the bald, fat and short cretinous scum, but also his linesman. Charlton were also winning an awful lot of corners!

Accordingly, despite all our gallant efforts, eventually they scored. The ball rebounded unkindly off a post, before rolling back along the line to where it encountered the other post and so entered the net. Bishop, who was having an outstanding game, pulling off at least one breath taking save, was distraught. This was even though the goal had not been his fault; rather a player had escaped his marker for a moment. But his attitude spoke volumes about how our entire team were feeling.

With still quite some time left in the game everyone now though got the 'Titanic' feeling. We had been making steady headway as the clock ticked down, but now an iceberg had struck deep into our hearts and even if we took to the boats, would we survive?

Spoiler alert, we did!

But just how we did it is a mystery. Equally, almost as impossible, is the fact that not only did we get a point out of this game but really we should have taken all three! Because, incredible as that might sound given our dire circumstances, the final five minutes of the match were not spent desperately defending our own goal but rather in attacking theirs!

From behind the goal it would have been impossible to see properly. However from the fantastic vantage point that Grandad and Mike had, it was clear that, once Klass had wiggled his way around the goalkeeper, he had had the whole of the goal at his mercy. Alas though his resulting shot, accepted to be at a very acute angle from the perspective of those striving to be seen/heard from behind the goal, was more than a degree out of the wide trajectory path that would have led to us being able to come home claiming a famous victory. Decent enough effort, especially as the young midfielder had only been on the pitch for a few minutes, but, had the chance fallen to either Cox or Humphries then voices would not be returning to those fortunate enough to have witnessed this game until sometime next month!

Still no one was grumbling as the whistle finally blew. It signalled that we had somehow, despite all the odds, survived the shipwreck contrived by the referee and so secured a fantastic result in very adverse conditions. We've not had many opportunities to feel proud to be a blue over recent weeks but boy did we have one today! The away stand was just a sea of smiling, happy, faces as we made our way out to the exits. The short journey home was surely going to be both fun and enjoyable.

Save for the fact that South London still thinks it's in the ruddy war. Sure, there was the occasional sign post. But it was either broken or situated where it was of no use to anybody. Least of all a Thunderbird craft that was stricken down by having a 'helpful' Albert aboard. One moment we were cheerfully heading in the direction of a tunnel that would take us back to the civilised side of the river, the next we were steering in the direction of one that would take us all the way over to mainland Europe!

Come back Denzil, all is almost forgiven! The choice between a navigator who can read, if his eyes can be peeled away from 'Dear Deidre' and one whose activities are described by 'Dear Deidre' but rarely believed, is a lose/ lose situation. But there is at least a chance with our cinema obsessed, hedge wearing navigator. Whereas with the individual whose village is proudly announcing to all and sundry that they idiot has disappeared, we were lucky that he still thought that he was in the U.K even if he did believe that the next town we would be passing through was going to be called Swansea!

Mike, as always, though soon returned calm to an uncertain situation allowing the hold to settle down for a badly needed nap. Marlene's resulting sonics were disturbing, but they were more Eurovision than the Voice. Even so Boycie was having nightmares as it now looked very much like we would be landing back at Tracy Island just in time for him to experience it for real!

Come on you Blues!!