



Saturday 16th February 2019



Southend 3 – Portsmouth 3



Thirteen hundred hours, two bells in the afternoon watch, five shakes of Rodney's pockets and still no coins fall out. Whatever you want to call it, one p.m. is not a time to be either at a football match or staring down the barrel of a cannon that's already scored three direct hits!

Whilst it's not at all unusual for visiting ships to offer up a salute as they enter port, blanks are rather more customarily fired than live rounds. However Portsmouth had sailed into this game with all guns blazing whilst we in turn struggled to respond with even a water pistol. High up, above the stormy waters into which we had strayed, the Thunderbirds nest was flying flags. But no encouraging messages like 'England expects' were being signalled. Instead the mutinous Brothers Grim were hauling up Jolly Rogers whilst Marlene was fashioning a noose out of her scarf. She was giving our bench such black, malevolent looks that, had Chrissy had had time to look up from the charts he was using to try and somehow navigate us out of this situation, he would have been burnt up on the spot. The lady was not amused!

Neither were many in the crowd around her. Mike, very much an isolated island, was almost alone in still maintaining an optimistic outlook. No one surely had realistically expected us to take anything from this game, so did it really matter just how many goals we were losing by? Accordingly he was rather enjoying things as both sets of fans began to give Sky TV the bird for demanding a kick off time of 12:30. It suited their armies of armchair 'fans' but not many of those who had had to make rearrangements in order to be able to support their teams in the flesh. The cameras are coming back for our next home fixture too; only hopefully with not quite the same enthusiasm. It's taken some time for those on the terraces to get organised and so to show their strong disapproval of how unfairly they are being treated in comparison to the direct debit TV couches. Now though our opinions are not only being voiced but also heard. Loud and clear!

What though was not, was just how we, already three down and looking likely to concede more as a imperial Portsmouth treated the pitch almost as if it was just a one way street leading directly towards our goal mouth, were going to prevent an embarrassing cricket score becoming the match result. Any judge, seeking an unbiased, unprejudiced, balanced jury would not have lingered for long inside the ground. Apart from the odd oasis, where people not only possessed the ability to look up the number of players in our squad, subtract the number of those injured and then match that figure against the number of those upon today's team sheet, analysing the resulting data to reach a conclusion that our manager had very few other options available to him, screams were being yelled and hair was being torn out as fans expressed their frustration and anger. Think it's fairly safe to say your honeymoon period is over Chrissy 😊

Micky Pearce, enjoying a brief period of sanctuary before once more returning to the mainland, wasn't in a position to be able to lose much more head covering. However his facial expressions more than made up for the lack of any potential wig material around his feet. Constipated elephants displaying fewer winks and scowls. Uncle Albert, Vesuvius on acid, was far beyond the point of any eruption and as for his bro ... well! Trigger, on the other hand, was hiding any discomfort or dismay that he may have felt about our situation. Burying his head inside his picnic basket he resurfaced moments later with a satisfied look upon his face and a pork pie sticking out of his mouth. It takes a lot to ruffle our little dormouse!

In almost direct contrast, bells were ringing out of the North Bank as the Portsmouth fans expressed their approval of the games score line. Their team were walking all over us and, unlike Doncaster on Tuesday,

wasting none of their opportunities. With our defence looking extremely jittery, Humphry's already off the field with an injury and our midfield once more melting faster than an ice cream upon a hot pavement, even a whole row of Big Ben's wouldn't be sufficient for them to be able to fully express their joy with the eventual match result if things continued on like this.

Far away, hidden deep within the Alps lie secret valleys whose steep, vertiginous, slopes are buried beneath thick blankets of snow and ice. Viewed from afar, perhaps from a plane flying far overhead, they appear to be just one continuous sheet of whiteness. However, from further down, say knee high to a mountain goat or sheep, the perspective is quite different because, in all reality, they are full of small holes and crevices. Accordingly it only takes one loud noise or a clumsy footstep to encourage a whole mountainside to go on its travels. Now, staring at one such Matterhorn full in the face, we acted as a travel agent to a sizeable package of pebbles by pulling a goal back shortly before halftime.

Against the run of play, we had broken up field. Now Hart doesn't seem to have much of a tackle about him for a left back, but he does nevertheless have some skill on the ball. It was at his feet now and with surprised Pompey defenders backing off ("What the hell are they doing in our half of the pitch?") he was approaching the edge of the box, just in front of the almost silent Blues Voice. With our midfield trailing well to his rear, he had little support around him, so a cross into the box seemed the best option. Accordingly he duly exercised it and there to meet it was a player who always uses his head to good effect. This time he employed it to cause Roots Hall to rise out of its growing lethargy and to instead stand up on its feet to cheer and celebrate!

Life looked a bit better now and Trigs apart, (His hamper had mysteriously emptied itself), everyone was feeling a mite more cheerful. The score line had a touch more decency about it and, although there was absolutely no chance that we were going to pull the other two goals back, we now had at least something positive to take away from the game. But what was all this? Now that we had had a taste of living up at their end of the field, we obviously rather liked it and wanted more. Their fans were shouting much politer obscenities for one thing and for another, we were pretty much camped now outside their box, firing in shots and earning corners.

Accordingly it was now Portsmouth whose ship was taking a turn at being aground. Sure it only appeared to be stranded temporarily upon something resembling that other side of the Thames, but whilst it was there, we wanted to make hay. And harvest another reward we so nearly did as the ball fell to an unmarked home foot inside the box.

Alas though it was not Cox's but instead that of a Blue who had been just as equally uninspired as the Thunderbirds by Denzil's poor show at Brentford (<http://www.southendunited.net/Pages/brentford1.html>). His resulting shot scaring, not its target, but instead a small flock of seagulls that had alighted upon the North Bank's roof. But at least it went down as another attempt at goal.

Halftime was not a joyous occasion. Albert wandered off to empty his bilges; returning with a cunning plan that involved us playing eleven forwards and a canary. A cross eyes octopus would also have been involved, possibly as a substitute keeper, but already had a prior appointment in someone else's deranged imagination. Strangely, but then perhaps not in the case of Albert, it wasn't that we were two goals down and looking less likely to get back on levels terms than even the Titanic that had his collar all ruffled. Instead it was Chrissy's assertion that we weren't the sort of side to chase a game once we went behind that was making him sprout sulphuric ash and gases. Or was it possibly just something that he had cooked?

There was no doubting however the fact that he just couldn't come to terms with any manager saying that about their team. Mike's placid attempts at calming him down, "He was only being honest", getting very short drift from our miniature planetary rupture. He desperately not only wanted another forward to be supporting Cox, no argument there, but also planned to add to our numbers in defence by easing either Lennon or Kiernan away from the bench alongside youngster Kelman who would play up front. Unwisely perhaps, Mike then attempted to point out that, welcome as such additions would be, providing indeed that they were actually fit to play (Doubtful in the case of both our centre backs), having 13 players on the pitch would be to break the games rules in such a manner that even the most mathematically challenged referee or linesman would probably notice. Albert's short, succinct, response could be interpreted as that he cared not!

The opening gambits of the second period were tame. Perhaps having been reminded by their manager that they were here as guests, Portsmouth had reined in their attacking tendencies while we for our part, being gracious hosts, were doing little to disturb our visitors equilibrium. This polite state of affairs might even have continued but, when Cox fired home from the spot after Kightly had been floored inside the area in the 78th minute, some spice definitely got introduced into a stew that had, more than somewhat, gone off the boil.

Up until that point in the half, both fleets had been seemingly content to just manoeuvre around for a position and then fire off the odd shot as if almost for show. But not now. Instead Trafalgar had broken out and whilst Portsmouth were steadfastly trying to maintain a parallel line to us, we, encouraged by some bold substitutions, had broken all ties with conventional strategy and so opted to line up instead in two columns and approach the Portsmouth forces perpendicularly to their line of course. Perform a full Nelson in other words!

It was a masterful tactical change that not only enabled us to only break through their formations, a seemingly impenetrable barrier in the first half, but also to cause absolute mayhem once we got there. Tides and winds of course stay for no man, but it was nevertheless still as if those within the confines of Roots Hall had been set in stone. Flowing directly North to South in each half, the games current was treating each team equally. It had been in their favour during the first and now it was streaming in our direction in the second. That impossible, dreamlike, third goal, the one that would be the equaliser, be it Albert, Denzil or the F.A performing the maffs, could now almost be tasted.

But, with each ships glasses rapidly emptying, all such optimism gradually began to fade. But at least we had now made a fist of it in front of the cameras. Equally, and perhaps even more importantly, as Boycie indeed pointed out, we had shown that, despite almost overwhelming evidence to the contrary, there is fight and spirit within our side. Chrissy just needs to find some way of plumbing its depths on a far more consistent basis. If he can, and we pray that he does, then relegation should quietly pass us by like a ship in the night. If though it in some way eludes him, then he has very little other ammunition left inside his arsenal. Our resulting plunge towards Davy Jones locker could then rival that of a whale that's just been hailed by an amorous call from below.

Somewhat resigned then to our fate, we settled back into our berths. As we did so, we heard the Pompey bells begin to ring out in celebration once again. They had been rather subdued for a while but now, with their manager introducing experienced after experienced player to help his team see out the game, confidence was growing within the away ranks that they would be cruising comfortably into harbour with their one goal lead still intact.

But in home waters they were not. Rather their considerable armada was, unwisely perhaps, beginning to drop anchor far from any familiar anchorage and we had rather a cunning plan to deal with that. Fireships!

Well not literally of course, Ron would go mad if his, not yet a season old, lawn got burnt or singed but certainly the equivalent of. Now whilst seasoned blood had much to recommend it, wisdom, knowledge plus of course experience, yoof can though offer up energy, enthusiasm and drive as counterbalances. Such qualities our water babies, (Bishop, Elvis, Hutchinson, Klass and Wabo) were now exuding out of their pore's in copious amounts. The result?

Only one whopping great season changing goal!!

The harassed Pompey defence had only half cleared the ball and so it fell to Dieng who slipped in a lovely pass behind a defender that set Cox clean through at goal. Now, the speed of light is said to be much faster than that of sound, but it would really have had to be on its toes if it was to be able to outrun the roar of absolute delight and sheer excited disbelief that broke out of Roots Hall after what happened next.

In films, everything would have suddenly gone into slow motion (Perhaps on Sky T.V it still did. Their adverts certainly manage it without any problems!) but for us, those who were actually there and breathing in the hallowed air rather than sampling it second hand, time simply stood still. The ball was in the back of the net, Coxy was running off in celebration, and as for us? Well it was as if Freddie's goal against Man Utd, Reeve's one against Orient, Piggott's at Wembley, and, Benjie's promotion clincher at Bury had all been rolled into one. It didn't matter what had gone on before. That dreadful first thirty minutes, our inability to pass the ball

or even to put in a tackle. None of that was now a hill of beans against the Himalayan Mountain that we had only just gone and blooming conquered. Let's just say that the scenes on the terraces were not only uninhibited but also somewhat wild!

"Three nil up and you mucked it up, three nil up and you mucked it up"

The away fans were streaming out of the ground. A tide of once joyful Pompey supporters ebbing away fast, emptying out the North Bank. There was still five or so minutes to go and their team were attacking. But none of them seemed keen to hang around to hear us repay the taunts that they had so generously thrown in our direction earlier in the game. Once united in their scorn and derision of Sky TV, the two tribes were now parting. They adrift upon a sea of bitter disappointment, us riding upon a wave that's crest sparkled with the point that had once seemed so impossible.

This game proved that fight, this team undoubtedly has. Ability too it can boast. But seemingly only on very rare occasions. We are currently seven points (Just four if you take games in hand into account) clear of trouble with a baker's dozen of games to go. A similar number of additional points should then see us to safety. A rate of just a point a game and our away form suggests that such a haul is achievable. It is only when you take into account our home record that squall lines appear.

Still, no one expected this result. Ok, so Micky Pearce entered it as his prediction but only as a wild card! Therefore can results against Accrington, Barnsley, Blackpool and Sunderland surprise us too? Well hopefully, but no way is the ride going to be easy. But then it rarely is when you are a Southend supporter!

Come on you Blues!