



Saturday 23rd February 2019



Accrington 1 - Southend 1



The passenger terminal at Tracy island International had a rather closed look about it. Through its locked doors, a few isolated lighted areas could be spotted; each one a bright oasis amongst the otherwise complete darkness of its cavernous depths. However, given the total lack of any signs of human activity, they had probably been turned on automatically rather than by any member of the airports ground crew.

Outside, somewhere in the hinterland surrounding the airfield, a blackbird was announcing its presence. Its beautiful song souring over the quiet, mist shrouded countryside as Mike pondered what to do. Nearby, TBII gleamed under a streetlight, the gentle ticking of its cooling engines providing a subtle accompaniment to the already heart stirring performance of the songbird. It was truly a concerto tra auto e Uccello that would have had Pavarotti sinking to his knees.

Banging upon the terminal doors might result in some sort of response. But, with the islands security force undoubtedly lurking somewhere in the vicinity, that didn't sound too prudent a course of action to take. Their reaction was unlikely to be positive given that, with dawn yet to break, their last meal was only a distant, if fondly remembered, burp. As the two guards appetites leave even Trigger gaping in total awe, Mike was in no particular hurry to become breakfast!

But the thought of one catering possibility made Mike think of another. Looking around, he could see that the local wildlife were regular callers. The husband and wife team responsible for running the airports expansive facilities even going so far as to put out dinnerware for the badgers and foxes to dine from. Perhaps then, if he imitated those creatures' calls, someone would make an appearance?

One problem. Although Marlene had the cry of a starving fox off to a tee, few others, aside from possibly tortured murder victims could quite hit the right notes. Which left badgers. But what did they sound like? Where was Rodney when you needed him? An avid watcher of programs like Springwatch and Countryfile, he was a world authority on bird life. Providing of course they wore tight leather trousers or boasted close fitting blouses! His dream was to meet one of these goddesses in real life and to this end he too courted the attention of his local fauna, amongst whose number were a number of badgers. So, thinking logically, if he couldn't sound like a badger, perhaps, thought Mike, an imitation of Rodney would be close enough?

Accordingly, grunting and sniffing around in the undergrowth, Mike set about performing Rodder's mating dance. As well as generating a lot of noise, it also involved quite a lot off beard stroking and wallet caressing. So, whilst the lack of a dingy, weather-beaten, raincoat did undeniably detract somewhat from the overall effect, it nevertheless wasn't a bad attempt. Indeed his song and dance routine produced results. The forbidding doorway cracking open just wide enough to enable a dishevelled head to look out and gruffly shout "Naff off!". Mrs Green was up at last!

Actually all of this was her fault. The early start, the journey, the battle to get the doors at the terminal to open! During the aftermath of the game against Portsmouth she had rather defiantly announced her decision that we were all going to Accrington. We had in fact been planning to do just that, but Marlene's orders made it official. Now there could be no turning back!

Even so Denzil cried off (It was his daughters best friend's goldfishes birthday and he just had to be there for all the celebrations) whilst Grandad, the beneficiary of a missus who had brought him a night's stay at a hostel as a Christmas present, was making his own way there. With Albert and Trig's both having prior engagements (Although completely separate events, each involved the heavy use of knives and forks) it meant that just the Greens and Mike were going to be aboard TBII as it made its way up North.

Flight condition were excellent and although a crash between a car and a lorry occurred directly in front of them (A unanimous judge's decision awarding all of the points to the lorry) swift reactions by 'Smoke Me a Kipper' meant that they didn't become involved. Another lorry did tail drive into the accident though. So it looked like the M1 might be blocked for some time behind them. Grandad, trailing some miles in our wake, reporting just such a situation. Who should have left earlier then, then.

Accrington F.C and the local council don't get on. As a result, not only was one road near to their ground not available to traffic but the carpark, situated just yards away from it, was also closed. A polite but firm notice informing those interested that whilst this was regretted, talks between club and council were continuing. Sound familiar?

Not a problem for TBII though, which was still able to locate a mooring post that was within spitting distance of the ground. However it was one for TBIV driven by Granddad because he had arrived so late. However, spotting an inch of earth free of any tyres next to TBII, he then demanded that we shift over in order to allow him room to park. TBII crews only response, pointing helpfully in the general direction of Manchester, Leeds, the moon, leaving him in no doubt whatsoever that such a manoeuvre was unlikely to occur any time soon. So, looking rather crestfallen, he wandered back to his car planning to seek a parking spot elsewhere. This proved to be closer than he had thought though because a local resident pulled out of a spot just as he began consulting Gluedoo for assistance. Accordingly it was four, rather than just three, Thunderbirdteers who made the short journey to the home of Accrington Stanley together.

As they fell under its shadow, so Mike got a rather familiar feeling of deju vu. Just like Tracy Island international before, everything was firmly closed shut! Trigger, who was no doubt somewhere making moon eyes at a pork pie, would though have been in his element as bored stewards were shuffling around everywhere you looked. They were very friendly too. So whilst one recounted her night clubbing activities in Newcastle, another told us everything, and more, about the location of the towns rubbish dump. If only we had thought to bring Uncle Albert along!

Eventually, and almost as reluctantly back at the airport, the gates did open and before us lay Gillingham's excuse for an away stand! A veritable building site greeting our rather startled and unbelieving eyes as we walked in. Having enjoyed some success in the various cups, Accrington were now investing in their ground and so building new stands. Grandad, his eyes all aglow, headed straight off to one that, whilst certainly providing seating for the elderly, also had a drawback in that it lay in direct sunlight such that none of the forthcoming proceedings could be properly observed. But, having suffered such a long journey, been delayed on the M1 and then also encountered parking problems, he probably needed an excuse to take a short nap anyway.

Behind the nearby goal though was terracing, and it was here that the other three Thunderbirds made their temporary home. Boycie, remembering expensive experiences at Charlton and Doncaster, had brought along a flask but Mike and Marlene's had not. Accordingly, fearing the worst, they followed a stewards directions towards where the tea bars were, only to happily discover that Accrington didn't mug visiting supporters. Coffee, Tea, Bovril, whatever your poison, it only cost £1.20 a cup. If they can do it, then why can't so called 'bigger' clubs do the same?

Their pitch did though look rather neglected. It had clearly been recently rolled, so bumps shouldn't present any problem but, especially within the goal mouths, grass was rarer than even Denzil's visits to the barbers. In fact there was so much mud around you could have been excused for thinking that you were out on Leigh Ray. But, with the sun shining brightly down, especially into the stand where Grandad was practicing salutes

just in case Prince Philip decided to crash in, rain was rather unlikely, so the pitch should be able to hold out. Just!

But what about us. With an injury list stretching longer than Albert's crime sheet, quite a number of youngsters, babes in arms really, were warming up alongside what few seniors remained fit in our squad. Accrington had been fighting well above their weight this season and a tough game was being anticipated by all. So, if our kiddies were indeed to be called upon, they had better be well and truly ready. There was some good news though as long term absentees like Lennon and Kiernan were at least now proving that they were able to kick a ball. Accordingly Ben should hopefully soon be able to surface from his treatment room at least once a blue moon.

A sad little scene then took place directly before the game as a wreath was laid out behind the goal that was in front of us. A young man in his early 30's had died earlier in the week, (Some said he had been murdered in Victoria Avenue but this is unconfirmed), and now his heartbroken father was beginning the process of mourning by laying some flowers down in his memory. As he did so, the entire away contingent quietly clapped their support. Many in the home stands, witnessing events from afar, joining in. It was a very touching scene and as the father was comforted by sympathetic stewards he looked up at us, tears rolling down his face, and applauded back in thanks. Bill Shankly got it wrong, there is more to life than football. But that said, it nevertheless has a tremendous part to play in it and, at times like this, the game really does rise to the occasion.

Then, with the ceremony over and cheered on by some 350+ supporters, Blues started the game attacking the goal that was furthest away from us. With both sets of fans in loud voice, a decent atmosphere soon encompassed the match which was being fought out by two very evenly matched sides. Whilst they had two nippy forwards, we for our part had two hungry, strong strikers. A nil nil draw therefore looked rather unlikely. Well unless of course you were sitting under a sun lamp in the away seating from where, of course, you could see absolutely nowt!

There is no denying that we now have the look of a more determined side about us At Charlton it was there in spades, far less so at Donny and equally in the first half at home to Pompey. But in the second period of that game, and now here in darkest Lancashire, we had a certain something about us. Nothing like the finished article of course, but certainly there is now more than a hint of its actual existence. Our overall shape, organisation and general cohesiveness is much improved and although a lot of work remains to be done, at least a step in the right direction has been taken.

Another one was taken in the 20th minute as Humphries rose like a salmon to challenge their keeper for the ball following a long goal kick up field by Bishop. The two players crashed into each other, falling to the ground, but our number 39's head had got to the ball first and so it looped back up into the air and continued on its journey into the back of the Accrington net.

The away terracing burst into a frenzy of cheering and excitement. Some minutes later their example was followed by those in the away seating who, having heard rather a lot of noise and so consulted their mobiles had just discovered that we had scored! Long moments later though their palm jewellery was reporting far less welcome news. Once again Humphries had scored a goal without realising it. A lost contact lenses being to blame at Charlton, far more seriously, a broken nose here at Accrington.

The sight of a stretcher being carried onto the field of play is never a welcome sight, regardless of whose teams player is injured. Accordingly the majority of those inside the ground applauded in sympathy as Humphries made an unwelcome exit from the game. A few boos though did ring out from behind the far goal. An example that unfortunately some of our supporters aped when their goalkeeper, who had at first appeared to have recovered, left the field a few minutes later. Two badly injured players, whose livelihoods might be at stake, and yet idiots were deriding them. What can you say? Especially given the reception that was provided earlier to a grieving parent.

Somewhat muted thus became our goal celebrations. It was great to be in front and it had also been rather impressive watching Humphries going in so bravely. He was now though being replaced by Hutchinson, an exciting young prospect, but in a very different mould to the man he was coming on for. We had been causing their defence quite a lot of problems, Cox and Humphries combining well together, but would that now be able to continue to be the case given that Hutchinson is more of a midfielder than an out and out forward?

Alas it did not. Instead our forward play began to falter a bit as we struggled to reorganise. Something that our hosts quickly recognised and so sought to take advantage of. Mention has already been made of our newly found strength and this now came to the fore as we fought to keep Accrington at bay. They became frustrated and some, not all, but certainly some of their players turned rather nasty. One, a forward on loan from QPR, took to imitating a stricken submarine at every opportunity whilst another, possibly in self-defence given that Coxy does not boast the most retiring nature within our squad, began trying to wind up our, now solitary, forward.

Things coming to a head when, granted yet another free kick by a very home biased referee, the player in question threw the ball down, yards in front of where the supposed offence had occurred, before booting a still rolling ball directly at Cox's back. The Accrington inclined referee, choosing to observe only what he wanted to, then booked Cox for ungentlemanly conduct. Now, given that the ball was miles away from where it should have been, had been moving and had also been hit straight at our forward who was looking away from it at the time, how is that fair?

But there again, given that a number of fouls and other wrong decisions went against us, including an incredible penalty award (More on that in a moment) no one, save possibly those seated to our right who were probably having to resort to listening to BBC Colchester in order to get some idea of just what was going on, was overly surprised. Had VAR been active at this game, and supposing that the authorities actually cared, then the game would have been much enriched by the absence of one incompetent referee today!

The booking was though now an extra worry. Should Cox be awarded a second, a very likely occurrence giving the way even more home players were now getting in on the act, then the resulting red card would mean that we had absolutely no strikers to field at home to Barnsley next Saturday. Cox was now walking a tightrope; one that had been fabricated literally out of thin air!

To be fair to Accrington, they were only taking advantage of the largesse being provided to them by a referee who was now strutting about the pitch like a cockerel who had just discovered the nearby presence of a hen house. The fact that he obviously lacked any of the physical attributes required to do anything about it bothering him not at all. He was perfectly happy just as long as he was allowed to swank up and down like the idiot he so obviously was.

The female linesman running the line to our immediate left wasn't any kind of idiot though. Yes, just like everybody else can, she made an odd mistake. But certainly nothing that deserved anything like the mindless abuse that she was receiving from one particular bigot who was standing close behind us. If he had restricted his comments to just her abilities as an assistant official then that would have been fine. Certain Thunderbirds hardly being qualified to line up and throw the first rock! But unfortunately he didn't. Instead it was her femininity that appeared to be the problem as far as he was concerned. Her proper place, he felt, being in some kitchen cooking food rather than running the line at a football match.

His lines, straight out of the misogynist's handbook, being laced with expletives and delivered with about as much intelligence as that displayed by a two day old dung beetle. Everyone is entitled to their views, but such offensive, inaccurate, and aggressively delivered remarks have no place inside a football ground.

Halftime thankfully soon arrived in the usual manner. Bishop cheerfully acknowledging Boycie's shouted call that he had just earned his first assist of the season. Our other players, although clearly as pleased as we were at being in front, were though concerned to learn more about Humphries condition and so were exiting from view rather quickly. Humphries, as well as suffering a broken nose (Something that no doubt will fuel training

room humour for quite some time) had also been concussed. A condition that automatically means that he can't play again for two weeks. Seems that that our home supporters are just going to have to hang on and wait to see our latest acquisitions skill, and downright bravery, in front of goal. Going to be well worth the wait though chaps, especially given the quality of the goals he has already scored away from Roots Hall.

Just a point a game from now and until the end of the season will be sufficient to see us comfortably sitting in mid table. However we have a tough run of matches ahead of us and, with us now once again lacking strike power, you do have to wonder where the goals are going to come from. Still, for the moment at least, we had three more points towards our safety margin. The question being could we, in the face of such biased refereeing, hang onto them!

Accrington obviously didn't think so, storming forward straight from the whistle seeking the equaliser. Fears that we might simply sit back and try and see out the game being heightened as we seemingly appeared content to just rebuff one attack before reforming into position for the next. However we were still managing the odd breakaway attack or two. So when Macca worked hard to win the ball before knocking it past the last defender and giving chase, we were all up and cheering him on as he ran toward us. It was just as if he was the favourite in the National, over the last fence with the finishing line there, right in front of him.

But then, he suddenly was no longer running. Instead he was stumbling as arms were wrapped around his neck and feet attempted to help complete his fall towards the ground. Enraged, we cried out in anger. Our man had been clean through on goal only to be brought down by the sort of tackle that even at Twickenham would have been frowned upon. But no facial expressions, except for sublime satisfaction at once more thwarting us, appeared upon the referee's face. Neither was a whistle anywhere near the vicinity of the gaping hole through which, presumably by his keepers, food and drink was shovelled. Unbelievably the cretin had seen no foul even though he was but a yard or so away from the incident.

One had to presume he had parents. Although it was altogether quite possible perhaps that their courtship had been restricted to just being adjacent test tubes upon some bench. The presence of any marriage certificate was through very questionable and Cox's obvious restraint as he enquired about the official's eyesight could only be admired. Mike wanted blood tests to be conducted. Not any involving needles, blunt or otherwise, but rather through the examination of the results of the referee's sudden encounter with a number of fists and a whole army surplus stores stock of studded boots!

Macca was therefore still carrying his injuries as Accrington built up an attack down our left flank. He tried, manfully, to get back in position but in vain, the ball being slipped inside to an unmarked player who lashed it home with some aplomb. Bishop had had no chance at saving it but there again, thanks to the referee; Macca had had no chance of blocking it either!

Fuming, we lined up to restart the game. Too many times this season we had suffered, not at the hands of our legitimate and identified opponents, but rather from the underhand, filthy, criminal activities of a member of an underworld that is seemingly untouchable. The more we complain, the less the football authorities do. But we do get to hear of the 'Respect' campaign. How about some for the paying customer then!!

Given this situation you can then just imagine the away terraces, and indeed our teams, reaction when this total berk awarded a completely spurious penalty to Accrington! Again the attack had built up down our left flank. We seemed to be dealing with it but then a player fell to the ground in a very dramatic fashion. The referee though responded by simply signalled either a corner or a goal kick, depending upon from whereabouts you were watching. On 1 Player it seemed that the ball was now ours to kick up field, from behind the far goal, it looked like they should be preparing to put over a ball into our area. Hardly important either way though because, after a couple of seconds during which he no doubt imagined being carried off the pitch by hundreds of cheering home fans, he changed his mind and so pointed firmly towards the spot.

Un ruddy believable! If, indeed what had occurred had been a foul, then it had been committed much closer to the corner flag than the penalty spot. So whilst a home free kick was a distinct possibility, the award of a

penalty was so farfetched as to be akin to holding a bathing ring over Alberts head and then demanding that the Vatican declare him to be a saint! It was all so mind boggling wrong that the brain just couldn't take it all in. Yet there, in plain daylight (Blinding sunlight if you were sitting down) was an absolute prat of a man pointing at the spot.

Rescue came our way though in the form of a waving linesman. Probably just as stunned as ourselves, he couldn't believe what the referee was doing and so had taken action to intervene. After a short discussion, Rodney talking to someone holding a charity box, sanity was returned to a confused scene. Yes, we still had to defend a very dangerously positioned free kick, but compared to a penalty

It would be nice now to be able to report that the referee's nefarious activities began to tail off after this incident. But no, Bishop, rising well above everyone else to collect the ball from a cross, was then taken out by at least three attacking players. The ball ran loose and all sorts of mayhem occurred before finally a refined blue boot was able to clear it to safety. But where was the whistle and why had no foul been awarded? Our young goalkeeper had clearly not only caught the ball but had also been in full possession of it. So, if no mugging had occurred, then just why had the ball appeared, totally unaccompanied, just seconds after he had been assaulted? Why was this guy still being allowed to run around upon the planet!!!

In games past, we might very well have folded up our tents at this point. The referee clearly had only one result on his mind, so why not just give in to him and save all this hassle? However instead it was almost as if our group mind had said 'Sod this, no way are we going to be robbed of a result!' Because, almost from that moment on, it was we who were doing all the attacking rather than them.

A generous referee might even have awarded us a penalty after Mantom was brought down inside the box. Unfortunately none was present and in any case it would have been a soft one to award. But at least the 'foul' had been committed inside the penalty area not miles away from it. We also had a series of corners from which we might well have scored. Macca went close as so too did Hutchinson. Headers from Moore and Turner went even closer and, had but Turner's knee been square instead of round, a ball bouncing off our senior defenders leg would have entered the net instead of gliding agonisingly wide of the goal.

When it arrived, the final whistle caught many people by surprise as we were just about to take a throw in, close to their corner flag. Many officials would have allowed it to take place, but not this one. Had it been down the other end of the field though

The journey home was almost as clear as the flight out. Roadworks of course littered both the M1 and M6 (How can it be ok for a line of abandoned traffic cones to hold up traffic for over 20 miles!) whilst on the M25 a series of downright lying traffic signs warned of multiple lane closures when, in actual fact, there were none at all. Traffic had nevertheless, on both occasions, dutifully all lined up into just one, stop, starting row. Can only presume that some residue from those test tubes was operating the traffic cameras!!

Hopefully though Blues will encounter no such traffic conditions between now and May. There are still some very tough roundabouts and junctions to negotiate though. Starting next week in front of the cameras. Fate also still appears very determined to keep Ben extremely busy. However we have now dug down deep and discovered that, actually, there are some guts and determination about us. We saw it at Charlton, caught glimpses of it when playing against Portsmouth and we definitely witnessed it again today. If it's not just some passing fad, but instead a clear signal indicating that our team is finally getting its act together, then our final match of this term, home to Sunderland, should be a fairly relaxed occasion. Fingers crossed then that that indeed proves to be the case!

Come on you Blues!!