



Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2019



**Southend 0 – Barnsley 3**



There were so many abandoned seats at the end of this game that you could but wonder if the fire alarm had gone off and, for some reason, you hadn't heard it. Alarm bells of another sort though were most definitely ringing. We had just been turned over by a team that, for the majority of the game only had ten men. One of their number being sent off midway through the first half for a horrendous tackle on Mantom.

Ok, so we've been playing with less than eleven of our first team for not just one game, but most of the season. But the big difference here was, whilst they were able to adapt their game to take account of their disadvantage, we have been struggling for months to come to terms with ours. The result? They are heading upwards and we are aboard an elevator whose ropes are about to snap!

Once upon a time Denzil, rather than hiding away in the dark of the nearest cinema, used to make cakes. He even enjoyed inflicting his efforts upon us, employing more and more bizarre ingredients each week. We are now getting that experience all over again except that this time around it is the fare upon the field of play that is giving us indigestion! It's underprepared, inconsistent and, more often than not, it also leaves a very bad taste in your mouth.

Each of the three courses presented to us today were disappointing. Our attack lacked flair and imagination, our midfield was flat and tasteless whilst certain areas within our defence looked totally burnt out. But is it the kitchen, the chef or the ingredients who are to blame?

Opinion is split. Oh not over any part that the kitchen has to play in this culinary disaster. Sure it's showing its age but the landlord did make some improvements, notably with regard to the larder area, in the hope of shoring things up until a move to better premises could be realised. So little finger pointing is being done in its direction. However that most certainly cannot be said with regard to those who are jointly responsible for the dire dining experience that their long suffering, loyal, customers are currently suffering.

Rarely has any sitting gone smoothly. Certain tables either being unavailable or taken over by parties whose interest in the restaurant's future is only of secondary concern. In an attempt to mask this problem, more modern, fresher, fittings have been introduced. In terms of future repasts it's an approach that promises much reward. However, when we are struggling to even provide the most basic of meals, exciting as some of these new dishes might appear, the prospect of a full English would fill the eyes rather more than the sight of a plate containing only a couple of lonely peas and a pig's left toe clipping!

The heat in the kitchen must now be almost unbearable. But what can our cooks do? We've a larder that's been raided by Trigger, we've a cooker whose meter is being fed by Rodney and with dishwashers named Albert and Boycie, is it any wonder that the health inspectors are our only regular visitors.

Well, there is a saying about 'Too many cooks', and with three fighting over the utensils, it's no small wonder that the kitchen's results are such a dog's breakfast. One week, a special laid on at Charlton, raw steak gets provided, the next, as evidenced by today's dismal offering, only left over offal, usually in the form of total tripe, gets provided!

So let's turn a butcher's eye upon the problem. Starting with the ingredients.

Well unfortunately a lot of it is well past its sale by date, and much of what isn't, is turning rancid. Take Mantom for example. Last season he looked a real prospect. A younger version of Timlin, he appeared to be everywhere upon the pitch at once. However this term, and especially since being made skipper, his performances have just gotten worse and worse. Today he couldn't cross the ball, pass or, without turning his back to it, head it. Tackles he did put in, but unfortunately only upon a one for me, one for you basis. Inside any team's engine room, such a misfiring component would cause issues. Within ours, a department that rarely functions anywhere near effectively, it's a real cause of concern.

Then, at the back, Turner brings a very experienced head to the game. So why is he so often amongst the first to lose it? Accepted, even he wouldn't claim to be a passer of the ball (So, why is he given the ball so often to do just that?) but even Albert, recovering from a successful evening draining away the results of his latest raid upon the off licence, could find another blue shirt more often than he does.

In the past we've had some dodgy wingers. Remember Iorfa, red faced Coulson and Byrne? However Kightly would give them all a run for their money. Well provided it wasn't over a distance any longer than 10 yards! He lays off passes that, if provided for him to chase, he would pull up faster than one of Rodney's hot tips and just sulk. His crosses wouldn't cause concern to a vampire and as for having a shot at goal! Can you remember the last time he worried a post, let alone a goalkeeper?

Famine relief are said to be consulting their lawyers with regard to Cox's situation. Suffering from a diet that either flies way over his head or gets delivered as a suicide pass, our hard working striker gets nothing like his just desserts. Yet he is one of the few of our players whose head never drops. Instead he just keeps on going, either desperately chasing after the ball in the hope of picking up a few crumbs or taking time out to encourage his team mates. If we only had a team of Cox's!

Which brings us back to our Maître D. Although key ingredients have continued to go mysteriously missing he has always somehow managed to put out a team. However with just 15 or so players to choose from most weeks, not only does that restrict his ability to alter his menu but it also means that sub-standard food has to be displayed upon the side tables. Supporters, naturally, assume that if a player is in the team, albeit amongst the starting eleven or warming a seat upon the bench, that they are not only 100% fit but also raring to go and fully focussed upon their jobs.

However, as in any work place, that is rarely the case. Lennon and Kiernan have been table decorations for a couple of weeks now but, despite a crying need for them, have not made much of an appearance. Hyam and Bunn are other examples of players who are probably as yet only 70% fit. Accordingly, even when things are clearly not going well on the pitch, Chrissy hands have been tied to an extent with regard to us employing them to any real purpose as substitutes. A situation that has led to many decrying his tactics.

That said, today Yearwood was definitely available, as was both Bunn and Kelman. Yet it was not until too late in the game that they were introduced. Indeed Yearwood's role was even shorter than the life expectancy of a pork pie inside a hamper that's been prepared by Mrs Trigger. So it does rather raise the question, why, when we were only playing 10 men, did we persist with just one striker (Dieng was doing his best to add support but, with Mantom operating so poorly, his presence was often required elsewhere) until we had fallen behind?

We can see what you see Chrissy, but you know things that we don't. That's accepted. However in the case of these three players it would be interesting to know just why they weren't introduced at half time when clearly some of your players were struggling. Had they been introduced then, rather than much later, then a desperately needed result might well have been our reward.

Instead we are now just 4 points away from the dreaded drop with some teams below us having a game in hand. Fortunately there are quite a number of other sides in a similar, or worse, position. But they don't have anything like as bad a home record. So, assuming the probable, that we get no reward from our next two games which are both away to sides whose grounds have never been happy hunting grounds for us, we will be firmly amongst the left overs come the end of next week.

Therefore, if our menu is not to be extended to include vegetarian fare next season, something needs to happen now. Whether you turn into Mr Nasty and so read some of your players the riot act or changes are

made to our training programme such that at least some of our corners beat the first man is up to you. We are a team that is made up of lots of green and unexperienced players. That though brings along with it lots of enthusiasm, drive and energy. Attributes that far too many of our senior players are failing to display. They do possess them though, as was proved at Charlton. The trick that you now need to perform Chrissy, is to get them to do it again inside each and every one of our eleven remaining games!

The good news, yes there is some, is that our future is still very much firmly in our own hands. Three wins and a sprinkle of draws being all that is required from those games to see us to safety. That's surely achievable. But only if you can, somehow, get every one of your available players fighting for the cause. Being a manager is more than just picking a side and choosing a formation for them to perform within; man management comes into the equation too. Many though are now questioning your motivation skills. But they were never a problem for you when you were a player. Just one glimpse of your wide grin being enough to put a tiger into anybody's tank. So, just as your players have to step up to the mark, so now do you. Go on and prove to us that you can by suiting up and becoming Mr Motivator!!

Come on you Blues!!