



Saturday 3rd August 2019



Coventry 1 - Southend 0



Alone and abandoned, a small flask, the size of a child's toy baby bottle, stands on sentry duty at St Andrews. Darkness is falling and the noise, once loud, from nearby streets is gradually dying away. It peers hopefully into the growing gloom. Perhaps its owner might still return and whisk it away back to the home where it was once cherished. But deep down inside, swirling amongst the now cold coffee granules, it knows that she is by now far away, speeding back towards Tracy Island International Airport. So, what now lies before it?

A question that could very well be asked of our manager Bond, whose team selection and tactics for this opening fixture were frankly woeful. Over 1,000 of the faithful travelled to this curtain raiser; an event being hosted by Birmingham City as their near neighbours, Coventry, were homeless once again. Their supporters must feel rather like gypsies, having had 'home' fixtures over recent seasons in Coventry, Northampton and now Birmingham. Their ground keeps moving from under them and so it's anybody's guess where they will be next year. However for us, if our manager keeps on making these sorts of mistakes, then the 'R' word will be, without any doubt, featuring heavily in our future!

Such gloomy thoughts though were far away as a trio of Thunderbirds, one hopping from foot to foot in his eagerness to see in the new season with a performance of his water ceremony, hammered upon the hanger doors at Tracy Island. Built of stout, almost Albert proof, oak, the portals unto the abode of the Greens, the airports caretakers, are though used to being mistreated. The incumbents of the hanger having reached an age where both speed and hearing are a bit of a challenge. Accordingly it was some time before they creaked open and a pair of fingers, very Churchillian in their manner, appeared. Mr Green was afoot!

Denzil though barely requires an inch before he grabs a yard and so, knocking the tall tribal elder roughly aside; he sped towards the throne room with some urgency. Almost immediately the islands security force began voicing their complaints. But a threat by Marlene to re-enact one of her favourite scenes from X Factor soon had them retreating back to their beds. Fast!

Not as quickly though as Grandad and Mike ran for the safety of TBII. Purring upon the islands main runway, it was all ready and prepared for a flight plan that would involve the traversal of three motorways, the M25, M1 and M6. Its spacious cargo area had been fitted out with all the various harnesses and clamps that would be required to securely tether its boisterous manifest and its climate controls were already in action, keeping the slightly sweltry conditions at bay. All was in place then for its inaugural flight of season 19 – 20.

Civilisation is beginning to extend a wavering finger towards the dank marshlands that encompass Tracy Island International. Indeed the areas only redeeming feature is the main runway at the airport. Despite this, Mr Green is not impressed and so the early stages of our journey were spent listening to a rather despondent Eeyore as he outlined, in richly described detail, just where all the new cottages and barns were going to be built. Albert, whose straw bed floats nearby hidden away somewhere in amongst all the swamps reeds and stalks, is though rather in favour of all the new pubs that have been scheduled. He's hoping that they will provide him with an alternative route to his usual stagger home of an evening.

Signs then began to appear warning that the M6 was closed. This was news to Glueglow who was in total denial about the whole thing. Denzil was distraught, how could his wonderful toy not know? Matters being not helped along greatly when Grandad, rather unsubtly, suggested that Denzil's version of Gozzle Maps

might well be out of date given that the one upon his own phone was revealing a rather different picture. Whilst the two argued away about whose plaything was the latest gismo on the planet, Mike calmly directed his craft towards the M40. There was more than one way to reach Birmingham and if one was closed off, then another would suit just as well.

Millionaire then calmed down everyone's nerves. Well at least until 'Smoke Me a Kipper' began joining in with all the right answers. Does no one else ever read a book or watch a documentary? Whatever, our virtual winnings just kept on growing and growing and we all knew what that meant! So Mike dropped back out of the game in the hope that the law of averages might then begin to work in our favour. But alas, possibly inspired by their pilots sheer genius and general knowledge, the hold began stumbling upon correct answers all by themselves ('Phone a friend' must also claim some of the credit). We were clearly doomed!

Driving in Essex certainly can be an experience but has anyone ever had someone just stop and park their car upon a roundabout? Almost unable to believe what we were seeing, this happened to us just as, with kick off fast approaching, we began looking around for a mooring post. Indeed, some signs had indicated the presence of a carpark not far away but, with a vehicle apparently taken up permanent residence in front of us and blocking our exit off the roundabout, we were going nowhere, and not very fast!

What the driver concerned was thinking we had no idea but, encouraged by the sound of several car horns, including TBII's, they finally edged theirs way past the long queue of traffic to their left which had been gleefully taking full advantage of their stationary status and so got out of our way. Great we all then thought ... for all of a second. Because then we discovered that a workman had also used the situation to his advantage and so blocked off all access to the road leading to the carpark. Refer to any page within Albert's very slim lexicon if you want to discover the words we were now all thinking!

The area around Birmingham's ground is very akin to that of Luton's, being very notably Asian in its character. So whilst Denzil looked around in vain for any sign of a McDonald's, the rest of the luggage quietly amused themselves constructing menu's out of all the various business names displayed above many of the shops. One of them though did completely stop them in their tracks, "Hoors Hairstylists"!!

Mike meanwhile, following an ice-cream van that, for some reason, was playing the theme tune to 'Blue Peter', found a turning in which he could park up his craft. A short walk later and we were all standing outside St Andrews, surrounded by home supporters, and wondering where on earth was the away end. Around, the corner, down some steps, across the road and then a sharp turn to our right was the answer and there, waiting for us, was a gang of security personnel!!

Visit the theatre, go to the cinema or even just pop down the pub and do you get virtually strip searched and then robbed of your possession? No! So why are football supporters expected to undergo such treatment?

Ok, level accusations of ageism if you will, but if we were a group of likely lads, or even possibly Albert lookalikes, then some sort of response from the stewards might be expected. But none of the Thunderbirds are exactly in their youth. More rather we are splendid examples of experience, maturity and everything that is British. Ok, so one out of three still must count for something. Right?

So just why Marlene and Denzil had to have their shoulder bags put through a more exhaustive examination than is ever carried out by Customs at an airport is a puzzle. The results though weren't. And although Denzil, his security advisor totally nonplussed by the discovery of so much hand cream and lotion, did still succeed in smuggling in a bottle of coke, Marlene had no choice but to surrender up her flask of coffee. Dangerous stuff coffee beans!!

Her flask then had to be left behind amongst all the other confiscated weapons of mass destruction,(A half-drunk bottle of water, some crisp packets and a leaflet detailing the wonderful welcome that people coming to Birmingham could expect), whilst she made her way into the ground where another surprise awaited her.

Birmingham City are a Championship club, so you would perhaps have expected facilities somewhat above those provided by the grubby likes of Col Poo and Borient. Instead they have old fashioned turnstiles, rough and ready facilities and as for any means of obtaining a drink, especially given that they have just gone to

such lengths to prevent any liquids being brought into the ground, well forget it! Unless that is you fancy, with kick off just ten or so minutes away, joining the end of a very long queue that finished miles away at a solitary outlet offering such fare. Other suppliers were available, but they were all shut!

Almost 1,000 away tickets had been sold well in advance of the game but all that Birmingham / Coventry had evidently prepared for was around 50! It was a very poor show but there was nowt that we could do about it. Other than make out hungry and thirsty way to our seats that were amongst the loyal who were sitting behind one of the goals. To our immediate left, and also at the far end of the ground, was just a sea of blank seating. So where were all the 'home' fans? Well they had all been packed together in the stand that was to our right in a rather too obvious attempt to try and create some sort of atmosphere.

However with none of the usual fanfare that usually signals a football league fixture, tannoy noises, music, dancing girls, all that kind of thing, there was just a rather tatty looking woolly mammoth thing wandering round looking lost upon the pitch. Accordingly all the noise was being generated by us, that infamous group of coffee drinking terrorists from Essex!

Earlier, whilst we had been walking towards the ground, Goggly had reported that, rather than Humphries leading our attack, Robinson, the guy that had missed a complete sitter at Dagenham, was playing. Initially we had all just put it down to Denzil's unwillingness to have any up to date software upon his phone. But now, to our absolute astonishment and disbelief, we could see that the palm jewellery had not lied.

For some completely incredible (Read 'stupid') reason, Bond had introduced his best forward to a seat on the bench whilst handing a shirt to a guy that couldn't hit a barn door if it was two inches away from him! Impressed we most definitely were not. With news also breaking that Yearwood was about to sign for Brentford, we began to wonder if the day could get any worse. It could!

Straight from kick off you could see that something wasn't right. Whilst Coventry were pushing the ball around with some confidence, we for our part looked like a group of teenage girls. Nervously huddled up together in the middle of the pitch and encouraging those naughty boys from Coventry to eye us up hungrily.

Employing chat up lines that were no more complicated than a simple forward pass, they began to open up our defence with ease. In contrast we were just virgins upon a sacrificial alter; there for the taking. Even Rodney would have been in with a chance, so unorganised and under confident did we look.

Evidence aplenty there was too that our midfield woes of last term are sadly still there. Milligan will no doubt provide some of the answers, but Macca and Hyam are little more than just liabilities. With Yearwood apparently on his way out, Bond must, after learning from all the mistakes he made in this game, make securing at least one additional midfielder, hopefully a creative one, a priority.

However in defence we looked far more solid and it was this more than anything that got us through the first 15 minutes of the game. We then began to abandon the direct, route 1, hoof ball game that had had Robinson running around in useless circles. Instead adopting a more considered ground level approach that had Robinson running around in useless circles. But at least it was limiting their attacks to just one a minute rather than two or three!

Somehow, a complete miracle, we managed to struggle through to half time with the game still on level terms. But Birmingham City's parasites had had at least three clear cut scoring opportunities. So, unless Bond woke up to the dreadful errors he had made, both in terms of team selection and negative 'pray for a draw' tactics, we would be going home with nothing. Therefore few spent the break in a happy mood. Instead many used it to reflect upon our sad opening half performance and to wonder just why Robinson had been put in front of Humphries and why Goodship had been made to play out so wide. Denzil though simply played Candy Crush!

Bond had evidently though seen enough of Macca because he was yanked off the pitch before the restart, being replaced by Hutchinson. During pre-season the youngster had looked quite good at times and, initially at least, he was a vast improvement over his predecessor. But after a while his inexperience began to show as

he either overcomplicated things or hesitated over the ball for far too long. It is a learning process though, so hopefully he will improve.

Upfront though there was still very little sign of it. Although a good ball in from the aforementioned Hutchinson did open up a way to goal for us. Unfortunately though Robinson just elected to go for it, swinging a hopeful boot at the ball to send it flying way over the bar when a simple side tap would have provided Goodship with almost an empty net to aim for. That said, Robinson is probably at his best when he acts instinctively; it's only when he has time to think that things begin to go all Albert.

Then, with the ball now once again up the other end of the field, Coventry opened up their account for the season. Hutchinson should have done far more than just wander along in the wingers trail as he cut in from the flanks, but our midfield too should have at least attempted a tackle. But no, instead he was allowed to almost walk into our box before he released the ball to a colleague who blasted it past Oxley into our goal.

The home crowd drew in a collective breath and then exhausted it again as they celebrated their team's success. Their celebrations lasting almost as long as 5 seconds before they once again went to sleep. Roots Hall can hardly claim to be a hot bed of passion but Coventry fans made it appear to be Rodney's boudoir. Well at least in his imagination!

Bond had finally seen enough and realising, what we had all known ever since the team had been announced, that he had made a gigantic boo boo. He made changes. At last Humphries was being unleashed and trotting along happily alongside him was none other than Mr Cox. Various accounts have been circulated about just how he incurred the injury that prevented him from having a pre-season but watching him perform, on in place of Robinson with Humphries taking the equally disappointing Hyam's place, you could well question why have a pre-season at all. He looked fit. He looked ready. And, above all, he looked creative!

Now so too did our team! With two playing up front, either of which was prepared to take on a defender rather than just play 'After you Claude', suddenly Coventry lost their cock sure attitude and began to fret. Impossible as it seemed, the home crowd grew even quieter whilst we for our part were yelling "Yellows", "Yellows" with all our hearts and soul. Our season had finally started and all that was needed to make things complete was for a ball, white, weight around 12 ounces with a 27 inch girth, to enter the net that was right in front of us. And it very nearly did!

First, from a corner, a header by new boy Shaughnessy should have got us all up on our feet and rejoicing but it just crept wide of its target and then another fine effort from Humphries shook the bar before an over imaginative linesman declared the same player to be offside just when he was about to fire the ball home. The final 20 minutes of the game revealing just what joy the previous 70 might have produced had Bond had but a bit more faith in his players and so not played so defensively.

He made a very similar mistake at Rochdale last term; overthinking the situation rather than just trusting in his team to do the job. It is therefore to be hoped that, once all the dust has settled from this defeat, he will take time out and so learn the lessons that this match should have taught him. Two attackers are better than one; play the forwards that score; and that Robinson, whilst having some worth as a late substitute in order to change a game, is a liability if he is on the pitch from the start.

Rather a lot then was going through our heads as we left the ground and it wasn't until we had returned to TBII that Marlene realised that she had left behind her flask. Cool Hand Mike took it all on-board though and quickly altered his flight plan so that we could go back and pick it up. Only to then be thwarted by the very same roadworks that had blocked his exit from the roundabout earlier in the day. So alas, it had to be left behind.

Denzil meanwhile was looking very crestfallen. We had questioned both the accuracy of his beloved Gooddle and its relationship with the modern world. So, remembering all the long queues that we had witnessed on the other side of the M40 on the way up, we wondered if just possibly the situation on the M6 had by now been resolved.

Well, talk about rain falling upon a desert. His liddle face split open in the widest smile since Trigger spotted a left over slice of pork pie. Out came his aged palm jewellery and before you could say 'Bond is a total idiot' he had our route to Motorway numero six all plotted and keyed in. What he forgot to say though was just how many twists and turns the journey to it would involve. There again, if you are using software designed by the Egyptians and written by the Romans, what can you expect!

So, feeling rather like a golf ball that had just bounced its way down a helter-skelter, we found ourselves not only on the M6, but also heading in the right direction. But, is so too our club? That was the big question of the day for the T'Birds as we went back over the game and Bond's strange decisions again and again.

The general consensus finally reached was that we now certainly have better players than last year, particularly up front and in defence. That all of the new players had performed well and that although Milligan had, at times, found himself a man alone in midfield, should one, even better two, replacements for Yearwood come in. then that department too could become useful rather than useless. Therefore, providing Bond does indeed learn from this lesson, which was a wasted opportunity as Coventry, although decent enough, were well within our ability to defeat, we should be ok. But only if Bond does indeed learn!!

Come on you Blues!!