



**Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> August 2019**



## **Stevenage 1 - Southend 2**



The sky was turning black. Earlier it had been a brilliant blue but now it was just a gloomy sea of ever darkening shades of grey. It matched our mood. An enthusiastic full moon had tried to raise our sunken spirits. But, up against the glare of the floodlights, it was just a glow worm whose ambitions were way beyond its abilities. Just like us!

Were we in the division of the unwashed and so basking in both overinflated glory and oceans of dosh, the style of football that Bond is trying to instil in us might just work. If, that is, the players available to him all went aboard every two years to compete in International football kickabouts. Alas though, our squad, although having players who occasionally do get to dip their toes in such exotic waters, are more mud lark than swans.

Hans Christian Anderson equally does not sit upon our bench and thus, attractive as such a strategy might be, when inside a setting of a League 1 or 2 ground it's a total non-starter. Only if every opposition midfielder had a name that Albert could pronounce, given a few weeks of speech therapy, and thus was inclined to stay in their own half whilst we play 'pass the parcel' in ours, could it work. Instead, almost every midfielder in England's version of the 3rd world much prefers to be breathing our aftershave; no matter whereabouts upon the pitch we may be.

Such again had been very much the case in the first half of this game. A match that we had started very brightly only to then fade away even faster than the promises that Rodney believes he's on. We had our fireflies of course; Elvis had probably his best game ever in a Blues shirt and over on the other side of our defence, Ralph performed well too. But too many of our players were inclined to be just short fused sparklers. Initially being full of promise and excitement but soon tailing off to be no more than a rather dull end result.

Accordingly, as our hosts, Stevenage, bottom of League Two and like us, defeated in every game so far this term, grew into this game so we back tracked out of it. Inviting them on; allowing them to have free pop shots at goal that, although Robinson like in both their accuracy and power, encouraged them to keep on trying.

Kilt clad spiders certainly have a lot to answer for and so did Bishop as their first shot on target flew past him to put us into a position that is becoming far too familiar. Yes, he should have saved it but there again just how many of our midfield stood around and let the guy take time to aim and shoot? Football is supposed a team game but we were, once again, playing like a bunch of individuals who barely knew one another.

Then, 'Sick note' Lennon hobbled off the pitch. At the time we thought that he had done an East Stander and so pulled a muscle. But later we discovered that he had been concussed and thus, under F.A laws will be unable to play in either of our next two games. Chrissy Powell was unlucky with regard to injuries and his replacement is showing little signs of experiencing any better luck. Still, with John White a more than reliable replacement, an injury crisis is not yet upon us.

As the opening paragraph of this essay suggests, the air was gradually growing cooler in step with the temperature of the skies colour. Accordingly it was rather a puzzle as to just why so many drink breaks were occurring. Barely ten minutes of rather unedifying football would go by before our hosts would be shouting

out the equivalent of 'Cup of tea anyone?' and so completely desert the pitch, goalkeeper included, for a quick huddle around their urn. Except, just possibly, their manager went by another name. Curious.

The referee didn't seem to mind though as indeed neither too did the home crowd (About 1,000) whose team were comfortably, and sad to say, deservedly, one up. But we, the loyal (300+) stuck behind one of the goals had nothing to keep us warm in the growing chill but fond memories of when, in the very same competition, we once thrashed some Northern outfit to within one inch of their lives. Oh for a Freddy tonight!

Someone has introduced young Kelman to steak over the summer. From looking as thin as one of Denzil's excuses for missing a game (Tonight's little gem was that he had to visit the cinema again just in case it had moved since his visit yesterday) he has filled out such that he now looks more than capable of powering his way past any burly centre half that tries to stand in his path. Hutchinson would do well to follow his example!

Early doors, Kelman had been involved in most of our good moves but then, after being starved, along with Cox, of any sight of the ball for long periods he might just as well have been off with Denzil and all the other rain macs. Humphrys meanwhile was warming the bench; a seat it rather seems he is going to have to get used to this season. Whilst "What's that white, round thing" Robinson can at least look forward to an occasional airing, it is already pretty apparent that our saviour of last season is going to be held back in reserve against a similar situation arising again. But just why Bond?

Possibly words have been exchanged, maybe even forthright views. But grown men should be able to deal with that and move on. However there was no doubting that Humphry cut a lonely picture at halftime, as, alone amongst all our subs, he practised his professional skills i.e. shooting (He didn't miss once!) whilst they stood around some distance away practicing their social.

Something is very wrong and although Kelman, and indeed Goodship too, show considerable promise, Humphry has a certain pedigree in front of a net that we have been missing for a very long time. Accordingly to see him languishing behind the scenes when our results demand that he be in the limelight is not only disappointing, it's very disturbing too!

That said we came out of the blocks for the second half just as if Rachael Riley was the rabbit. It was the opening minutes of the first half Part II. Only this time around we did more than just play pretty football around the box. Much more!

Our first all-out attack though was thwarted. But undeterred, we regrouped and the ball eventually found its way out to the far right wing where Elvis had been playing his defender like a guitar all evening long. Now, with 'Don't be Cruel' not featuring at all upon his playlist but rather 'King Creole', he skipped past his marker in a way that was 'Gentle on my mind' before, in a way very reminiscent of "Return to Sender" he played a dream of a cross that Kelman rose to meet. Powering the ball home with his head to bring the scores level. Then of course it was all a case of 'The wonder of you' as we, and the team, all celebrated. Come on! I have managed to hold off for over a season 😊

So now we were back in the game and as home shirts shrunk, ours blossomed. Blue, or rather yellow, badges storming around the pitch as suddenly everyone wanting the ball. Our strikers even got the occasional forward pass! Stevenage were clearly shaken and, for once, we took advantage of the situation. Kelman coolly picking his spot, before powering home the ball to score, his, and ours, second.

We were leading in a game for the first time this season and you didn't quite know whether to laugh or cry. Boycie was in no doubt however and he wanted Kelman, having just scored one with his head and another with his foot, to score another with his other foot to make it the perfect hat trick. Alas though it was not to be but the two goals that the young striker did score were enough, just, to get us through the first round of this cup competition for almost a decade.

The 'just' being just that because, even though Stevenage were reduced to 10 men having suffered an injury after they had already used all three subs, they still were a force to be reckoned with. This really should not

have been the case but after a brief spell of sublime supremacy following our second goal we retreated deep back into our shells; popping out heads above the parapet only to clear the odd cross or corner.

You can appreciate the way though that Bond wants us to play and, for about 15 minutes, five in the first half, ten in the second, we managed to achieve such heady heights. However expecting us to extend a third of a half's performance to even double that amount, is really stretching it. Our, indeed any teams at this level, players just do not have the required skills or concentration levels required. It's great as a plan 'B' or 'C' and even then only for short periods of time, but as a plan 'A' it's totally Albert.

So whilst it was terrific, and indeed somewhat encouraging, to witness our first victory of the season, haunting the back of our minds were two issues. Will Bond refute the lessons of Coventry, Blackpool and tonight by persisting to insist that we play 'pretty' football? And, just as importantly, when is he going to recognise that leaving Humphry sitting on the bench is pointless, both in terms of goal scoring opportunities and league positions!

Come on you Blues!!