



Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> August 2021



### King's Lynn Town 0 - Southend 1



With “When we were young!” bouncing off almost every wall inside the small ground that was home to Kings Lynn, an almost Wembley like atmosphere, so tangible that you could feel the goosebumps growing on the back of your neck, was steadily building up as excited Blues fans gave vent to their delight at finally being back inside a football ground after an exile of almost two years. And boy, were they venting!

No matter that we were now ‘Non-League’, no matter that it was raining and no matter that anything even resembling a hotdog or a cheeseburger was rarer than one of Albert’s abstinence nights. Blues were back, we were back and real football was back!

But three hours earlier there had been much quieter scenes at Tracy Island International Airport. Admittedly the arrival of Denzil’s psychedelically coiffured car, its driver getting out with all the energy of a sloth on Sanatogen, there was a bit of a stir. But once he started demanding entry to the main concourse, a pit stop being apparently a matter of some urgency, things quickly settled back down to normal.

Albert had performed a stand down job as an apprentice navigator for the friendlies but, now that the serious stuff was about to kick off, Denzil, his portable office to hand (Copy of the Sun, some tissues, two bottles of body lotion and a packet of crisps) was all ready to resume duties. So off we headed, due Sarf when our destination, the bizarrely named ‘The Walks’ stadium, lay due North by North East. Nothing changes!

To say that Norfolk is flat is to examine the effect of introducing a pair of witches’ tits to an iron. In an attempt to give the county some altitude, the local councils have taken to planting steep hill warning signs alongside mole hills. But we weren’t fooled. Well not all of us that is. However, our navigator got all goey eyed when Ely cathedral came into view and so got us lost!

One moment Kings Lynn was just a short distance away, the next we were surrounded by waterways full of pleasure boats all heading in different directions. We were totally surrounded by fens. Everywhere you looked there was nothing but marshland. Hardly even a tree prepared to stand its ground and so break up the monotony of a landscape that had evidently sworn off undulating for good.

With increasing desperation, he banged his adjoined fingers against the screen of his phone. Gluedo though was busy consulting the audience and so was too preoccupied to provide any guidance. Perhaps Page 3 of the Sun could help?

Momentarily distracted by a view of steep valley walls enclosed by the vaguest mists of attire he fell silent, allowing ‘Smoke me a kipper’ to concentrate upon the roadside signage. Quickly discovering that, once more, we were heading due Sarf when a more northerly route would have been much preferred, he duly performed some awesome acrobatics and very soon his powerful Thunderbird craft was back on track.

Mindful that we were travelling towards a ground that probably only harboured basic facilities, Boycie was now getting concerned that the time our still bemused navigator had lost us would mean that the parking spot we had booked would not now be available. A row of seemingly endless red traffic lights doing little to reduce his stress levels. But eventually a light bulb on top of a steel stick (Think streetlight but without all the scaffolding) signalled that the ground was nearby.

Despite it not being long until kick off, Denzil immediately trotted off in the direction of the town. After all that stress, a few quiet, enjoyable, minutes spent lingering inside Bodyshop was clearly called for and, should the planned march by a lot of Rainbow minded people happen to wander past, then all the better!

The other Thunderbirds though were keen to sample a lesser fragranced atmosphere. One that was charged with excitement and anticipation. So they made their way straight into the ground. Marlene thoroughly enjoying her moment in the limelight as a metal detector was employed to scan her for lethal weapons. All they had to do was to ask her to sing!

Kings Lynn's ground is what it is. A strictly non-league stadium with no evident aspirations to be anything approaching football league standards. Two pairs of nondescript goalposts, an unmown pitch and just a single stretch of seating that ran about halfway down the side furthest away from where the majority of the Southend fans were beginning to gather. Grandad was sitting within its confines, doing the Greta Garbo thing. 'Billy No Mates' to a tee, he sat in lonely isolation. His only comfort the cup of tea that he grasped in one hand whilst using the other to turn the pages of the match day programme he was reading. But over on our side, more and more travelling supporters were continuing to arrive; each singing out at the top of their voices 'Blues, Blues, Blues'. We were going to need a bigger stand!

Soon most of the terracing behind one goal and all along one side of the pitch was bedecked in Southend colours. Even Grandad was in danger of having some company. We had taken over the ground and if there were any home supporters around then they were being extremely quiet and shy about revealing their presence. Indeed, apart from the program sellers, a single steward and those selling coffee at exorbitant prices, there was barely a Nawfoot accent to be heard. Perhaps the locals had all followed Denzil's directions?

Over previous seasons we have mocked the derisory away support of clubs like Newport and Tranmere. But upon witnessing how few people were bothering to attend a home match, even Rodney wouldn't break into a sweat at the thought of having to sponsor all their away fans travelling costs. Was it going to be like this everywhere we went?

As kick off approached and with the teams already shaking hands, Denzil finally arrived back from his adventures. Despite his cheeks being slightly flushed, he strongly denied becoming involved in any marches. However, the delicate fumes emanating from his man bag told a very different story. Being a total chav, he then of course insisted on us all smiling nicely whilst he took some selfies. The resulting pictures cannot unfortunately be shown here as the reactions he captured were rather too explicit, both in terms of message and content.

The opening exchanges of the game were fairly even, but then we began to boss events. Camping almost on the edge of their area, we were attacking their goal with real hunger. Refreshing to see after so many depressing seasons when a forward pass only got rewarded by ironic cheers. There was no crab like play today though, both sides being eager to get the ball up to the business end of the pitch as quickly as possible. However, don't think that all this meant was 90 minutes of hoof ball because quite a few neat passing moves were being executed. But always forwards and only very rarely to the side or back.

So, when, with Blues well on top, Sam Dalby put us ahead, we all began to think that life in this league was going to be fairly comfortable. Steve Arnold, in goal, had hardly had a touch of the ball let alone a save to make, Bridge was running midfield and with both Murphy and Dalby keeping their defenders honest, a two, possibly even three, goal cushion by halftime seemed quite possible.

But then reality hit us .... and how!

Rather than just rolling up in a ball and sucking their three thumbs, our hosts instead pulled up their shorts and set about asking us some very tough questions. Midfield quickly losing its status as a playground, becoming a battlefield with us very much the 'B' side. Remember football when it was a game for men rather than precious ballet dancers? Recall when a tackle was just that and not an excuse to perform a scene from Swan Lake? Can you remember wincing as a full blooded challenge went in? Well, happily to say, those days are back!

That's the good news.

The bad is that the officials at this level are seemingly totally unable to distinguish between a good, firm, fair tackle and a downright thuggish assault. Accordingly, whilst Murphy was being pulled up for the slightest shove, their assassins were granted full licence to do anything they liked short of an actual kill. That our younger players manfully stood up to such gruelling punishment speaks volumes, if not entire libraries. That said, if this is an example of what is to come, we are going to have to get used to taking to the field in full body armour rather than just standard football kit.

As time went by, and despite Kings Lynn's almost total control of the game, as fans we could begin to relax again. Ok so they ruled midfield like tyrants, but their attack was proving to be even more toothless than ours of last term and their defence also looked decidedly shaky. Especially when we gained possession of the ball and broke away fast. If only our finishing had been a mite better.

Especially in the second half when Murphy had a couple of very good chances to put the result beyond any doubt, but he kept on muffing his lines. Hopefully though this is just a sign of early season jitters. But unless he regains some coolness in front of an almost open net, more groans than cheers are soon going to greet his inclusion in the team.

Dalby though was relishing the challenge presented by the home side, eagerly going up for every ball and fighting off opponents to the left of him, opponents to the right of him and opponents in front of him. Always with a big grin. Possibly his batteries had been fully armed by his goal, but it was nevertheless notable that, whilst he was always surrounded by three defenders, Murphy only attracted the attention of one.

Time did the 60 second thing but still it wasn't moving quickly enough as the game had by now become a simple matter of attack against defence, and we were the Alamo! Glances at the bench and Brown, becoming ever more desperate as the home team just kept on applying more and more pressure.

Arnold's holidays were well and truly over. Covid had nearly said goodbye to his business but now he was taking full stock of what was occurring in and around his box, making a series of timely captures of the ball as a result. However, for just how long could this state of affairs continue? Surely we would very soon concede a goal?

Hopes were therefore raised when Egbri (Rumours that Grandad is about to his name printed on the back of all his team shirts are slightly exaggerated) appeared from off the bench. We badly needed someone up front who might ease some of the pressure away from our beleaguered defence. But then, to many groans, he was seen to sit back down again.

Although the noise from the away support remained unabated (Much to Denzil's enjoyment the drummer had not let off since kick off) evidence of stress was by now etched upon almost every one of our faces. We had had 18 months away from the Blues experience and being so rudely reintroduced to it was rather disconcerting to say the least. There was only one thing to do though, shout and cheer even louder!

A Somme like stalemate had developed out on the pitch. Despite all of Kings Lynn's best, and worst! , efforts, we were remaining firmly entrenched in our defences. Our occasional short-lived patrols deep behind their front lines, producing little of note. Both generals though were consulting with their staff and a few units had been exchanged for one another as a result. But still the standoff remained.

Then, as our hosts attempted to launch yet another blitzkrieg attack, their tricky winger for some reason or another, decided to stamp his studs down upon Demitriou's foot. Even a ref as home biased as this one could not ignore it as it had happened right in front of him. So they got reduced down to ten men. Not content with that though, the ref then decided to continue his one-sided feud with Murphy who, despite by now having been substituted, got booked, presumably for frowning too fiercely. Finally, with his assessor in mind, he attempted to balance this act of total spitefulness by also booking a home player who, as far as we could tell, was selected at random. Kids and their toys, eh?

Still the fact that we now had a man advantage with only twelve or so minutes to go was a badly needed boost. Well at least for the twenty seconds or so it took before Kings Lynn resumed hostilities around the

edge of our area. They were still in full out aggression mode and not a few of our brave soldiers had wounds to prove it. Even Arnold had a firm introduction to their offensive approach when, having successfully punched the ball away to safety, he received a below the belt thump from a tank of a figure who clearly was in mood to take prisoners. We got the foul. But even then the ref was itching to book our extremely winded keeper for time wasting!

Man Utd, Chelski, pick your despicable 'supporters' of choice, might like to take note of the fact that absolutely nobody was even thinking of leaving the ground early. Ok, so there were more signs of a herd of Yeti's than home fans, but still it was refreshing to witness people who actually wanted to watch a game of football rather than just have a memory card full of selfies to say that 'They were there'.

Eventually then, and to much relief, the final whistle was blown in the traditional way, and we had claimed our first three points of the season. In August too! Heady stuff. As so too were the celebrations that were being conducted both on and off the pitch. The away terraces were going mad, those in the seats were politely mouthing cries of 'Hurrah' and 'Jolly good show', whilst for their part, our team of heroes, almost every one of them well and truly battle scarred, smiled and clapped as they limped over towards us to be greeted with wild, totally uninhibited, cheering.

Very early days of course and far, far, too early for anyone to form any firm conclusions. But Arnold and Dalby both look good prospects. Other decent looking signings were out there too. But this supporter has to admit that faces and names have yet to be paired. Accordingly, whilst they undoubtedly contributed mightily to our victory, in order to preserve the hard-earned and thoroughly deserved reputation that these reports have for their integrity and 100% accuracy, they will have to remain unidentified for now. Sorry guys.

So, the big question is where Kings Lynn a good side or a poor one? Hard to tell on the evidence of a single game in this league. This could have been an extremely good result, narrow as it undoubtedly was, or a rather worrying one given that we only managed to score once against them. Time of course will provide the answers. But until then all we can do is look forward to our next game, which is at home, against another former league side, Stockport.

Couch supporters being far more valuable to the game, despite all of the television companies protests to the contrary ( 'Fans inside the ground have been sorely missed during the Covid crisis') kick off is at the unregulated time of 17:20. What? Do Sky, BT or whomsoever, really think that a Liverpool or Munch City shirt bearing, beer swelling, pizza munching sofa potato head is really going to want to watch our game? Get real, and also get back to letting football matches kick off when they should. Namely at 3:00 p.m. on a Saturday afternoon!

Come on You Blues!!