



Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> August 2021



## Southend 0 – Stockport County 1



Just four Thunderbirds were missing from the 'Friends Reunited' experience as we gathered together in our eyrie up in the West Stand, close to the halfway line. Rodder's because, hopefully, he was supervising badly needed repairs at his holiday let (A Health and Safety Issue has arisen that has left poor Marlene limping for the past six weeks). Meanwhile Denzil, after cutting some shapes down with the kids at some 'happening' pop festival wanted his award of a 'Dad Dancing' necklace to be engraved with his initials before returning home from the South Coast. However, Micky Pearce and Cassandra had possibly the strongest excuse for missing this, Blues first non-league home fixture ever, as Micky is busy performing missionary work somewhere in the hinterland of Europe.

Mind you, a single glance at Triggers gloomy face, and one could have been forgiven for thinking that perhaps the Infamous Four had made the right decision. Our dormouse was not at all happy. He also had no idea what to do with his hands. Other than that is, than to employ them alongside his mouth, ever an eager accomplice, in emptying the hamper that Mrs Trigger had carefully prepared for him. For some reason, (Commercial incompetence?) Blues had failed to produce a match-day programme and with nothing to read and few stewards around to harass, he just didn't know what to do with himself.

Albert unfortunately did!

More excited than a child with a new toy at Christmas, he was bouncing up and down in the highchair that his brother Boycie had secured for him. Elbows flying and jaw rattling away like a pneumatic drill on speed, he was boring anyone without ear protection ... 'During the war ...' Kaiser Wilhelm sure has a lot to answer for!

Although more practiced at switching her Bother (sic) in Law off, Marlene was also pulling a few faces. Hoping to gain entry to the bar after a rumour had been spread that programmes might be available in there, she had been deterred by the long queue to even get past the bouncers. In an attempt to get an invitation to jump said queue, she had tried flouncing about in front of them. But her dodgy ankle rather spoiled the effect, leaving her with only one option. However, unleashing her rather unique take on singing this early in proceedings seemed a mite premature and so, empty handed, she had despondently returned to her seat. Now, along with over 5,000 others she was expectantly awaiting the first appearance of our heroes inside the tunnel.

Compared to Kings Lynn's unkempt backyard of a pitch, ours was a verdant lawn. It also appeared to be slightly narrower than preceding seasons. It was certainly a good foot shorter in width in front of us. As for over with the cockle and tea brigade, it was hard to say, but presumably the same held true for the East stand. Curious.

Nay a bump or grass blade taller than a cock sparrows' knee was upon it though. The ball, coloured the traditional white rather than the beachball effect favoured by the Premiershite, was going to run nice and true. No sudden applying of the brakes as we had witnessed in the fens.

As far as Stockport, resplendent in their bright pink shirts and socks, were concerned though, the grass could have been waist high because all they were interested in was playing moon ball. Well, when they weren't either strangling or otherwise maiming our players. Evidently very different rules to the football league apply in the National. Certainly, as far as the cretin in black was concerned!

Over the years we have suffered many of his creed. Self-important little Hitlers who, with or without the TV cameras upon them, feel it is only incumbent upon them to strut up and down the middle of the pitch and issue the occasional random order. Not once did today's example leave the trench that he was steadily ploughing down the centre of our turf. Not for him that nonsense with wiggly lines that the TV pundits love to crayon in order to reveal the exact path that someone has followed to gain a throw in. No, perfectly straight lines, they were the thing. Besides, he might just hear what those nasty minded supporters were calling him if he dared to get too close to the touchlines!

Mind you, his two 'assistants' were no better. Indeed, there was little point in them being there at all! He either totally ignored them or overruled their calls at every opportunity. Blues had two, possibly three decent penalty claims turned down. Including one captured in a still frame that shows their goalkeeper throttling Murphy. It could be just about accepted (Not by either Mike or Boycie) that the referees view was blocked for one of them. But isn't that just precisely why the linesman are there?

The relevant authorities appear far more bothered about employing pretty coloured balls than having them to tackle the ever-growing problem of inefficient, incompetent and frankly inept performances by their officials. It would be very interesting to read just what the assessor had to write about today's game. But there again, probably only Albert's handwriting tutor would be able to decipher his scribbles.

Suffice to say that the opening twenty minutes of this game resembled a chess board with injured pawns (us) scattered about everywhere by bloody minded rooks (them). If we went up into the air, then we were very quickly grounded either by a judiciously jab of an elbow or a more straightforward clamp of the body. Were we instead to attempt to run with the ball, a swift upper cut to the chest soon revealed the futility of any such ambitions and should, heavens above, we put in a tackle ... well we got booked !

That is not to suggest that our visitors were a dirty side. Just an extremely physical one. And, given a referee that had at least taken a glance at the rule books cover, they might have been brought under some sort of control. As it was though they were allowed to run straight through us just as if we were playing rugby or possibly its softer version, American 'football'.

It was during this period of open warfare that we conceded our first goal of the season. A high ball (Were Stockport capable of doing anything else) caused confusion to our defence allowing a pink clad attacker enough freedom in our area to pick his spot. A bad goal to concede on so many levels. But with plenty of time to set matters to rights, probably not that much of a problem.

Indeed, had we but held out against the forces of shove and drag a little longer then Stockport would never have been able to score at all. Because, although it had taken us quite some time to get there, we had finally found out how to counter their tactic of attempted lunar landings, namely by playing the ball to feet. Once we started playing the ball along the ground, our passing game had them all at sixes and sevens. Even the referee, whose part time job was as their coach driver, couldn't help them overmuch, and as a result they never had another shot at our goal.

Unfortunately, the exact same held true for us. Neither goalkeeper being called upon to make a meaningful save for the remainder of the game. In their case, as just explained, we had them totally sussed, in ours though the pot was a little more mixed. For example, had we remained a little calmer when the net was in a sight, then success might very well have come our way. On the other hand, had the boil on a hippopotami's lip taken more action when our players were being blatantly taken out, not only would our visitors have been down to six men, but we would have had more opportunities to score.

Chris Phillips of the Echo has to be taken to task here (Just joking Chris) but we supporters know very little about what actually occurs upon the training pitch or, for that matter, inside the injury room on a week to week basis. Accordingly, when the team gets announced we therefore assume that everyone is 100% fit and raring to go. Experience though is a great teacher, and we all know that this Pollyanna view of the world is almost as rosy as Denzil's cheeks following a visit to Bodyshop.

However, when you see that Bridge has been anchored out wide after being granted a fairly free licence to roam in previous games, one does have to wonder why our loanee from Norwich, Dennis, is warming the

bench. Brown presumably had his reasons but, particularly when our midfield was being so ineffective early doors, we could have used Bridge to better effect more centrally.

Undoubtedly, we have a crying need for some sort of physical presence in this area of the field. On the evidence of the two fixtures we have played in this division so far, the game is much rawer and rougher than we have been used to and the officials even more ineffective. Who'd ever believe that we would be wishing that Kettle was back out there!

Possibly Atkinson and or Dunne could, at least to a degree, resolve this issue but a Cornwall or Cusack would suit us better. We need a man mountain that is capable of giving back more than he receives. We also, as a team, need to get on the referees back to a much greater degree. At least one of our penalty claims was gilt edged but barely a murmur did we make when our shouts got ignored. And Ron is to blame!

On occasions such as an AGM's (Remember them?) he has made it very clear that he will not suffer suspensions that occur as a result of a player showing dissent. Not sure what the consequences to the player concerned actually are, but the sheer fact that we receive very few cautions for this offence does provide some indications of Ron's wrath. Very Corinthian of you Ron but please, please, do open your eyes. Already it is only too evident that, especially in this league, if you don't ask you don't get. So, are you really prepared to trade goals (i.e. Points) for sportsmanship like behaviour?

The Thunderbirds are certainly trying to do the job on your players behalf, Mike once again causing distress to bats, but they do need to be granted a voice. Possibly just the captains, but, getting real, and given the lack of any intelligence evidenced by the ref's we have encountered so far, surround them with more players than they can count with their socks on, and they will get so flustered that the thought of a yellow card never arises.

Some of the football we played after Stockport had scored was very encouraging. We obviously have some talented players and the will of everybody to give everything for the badge was also extremely evident. However, we have to first earn the right to play such attractive football and both at Kings Lynn and today, we allowed ourselves to be bullied out of the game. The official's hands were no cleaner than Macbeth's to be sure (Who says these reports aren't bilingual!) but we are obviously going to have to get used to fighting, tooth and nail, for the right to be in the game before we can start playing in it. It's a lesson that we must learn fast!

Once we did start playing the ball at grasshopper heading height, Stockport just couldn't live with us. Indeed, it was almost a reverse mirror of last weekend's match when we bossed Kings Lynn right up to the moment we scored and then retreated back into our shells allowing them to take over the game. The flamingos from up North also took complete flight after their goal, much preferring to roost deep inside their own half and just strike out the odd beak or claw when necessary.

It was clearly going to be up to us to somehow open them up and so test their keeper. But with three teams on the field, two in total opposition, it was akin to persuading Albert to walk past a pub. Each and every time we looked like breaking through their determined bruisers of a defence so a judicious foot would be stuck out or a shirt be half ripped off a back.

On rare, very rare, occasions such events got noticed by the representative of the warthog's wind appreciation society, but only ever for a free-kick to be awarded at our expense. How he came to such conclusions was beyond baffling. There was our player being mugged by at least two assailants, easily identified by their dazzlingly pink attire, and yet the victim was being punished. Oh, to have been able to force him to listen to Marlene's greatest hits for just 10 seconds!

Not too sure what the TV audience, if indeed there was anybody watching a 5:20 kick off, made of it all. For the committed, it was an enthralling experience if, eventually for most, a somewhat disappointing one. But for the neutral, sitting on their sofa, their stomach bursting out of their Man Poo shirt and swigging a can of beer, just a single shot at goal and a multitude of fouls cannot have been all that enjoyable even compared to having to watch their, us, we team upon the box. So, not really one suspects, a great advert for this division.

We can make amends though, certainly in terms of both points and goals, at Wealdstone on Bank holiday Monday. Once again, we have completely taken up our away allocation of tickets so for sure (Is there no end to this linguistic banquet?) there will be plenty of Blue's support. Equally we can be certain that our team will be turning up. But will we have any better officials? Somehow have to greatly doubt that. However, if we are going to experience any success at all this season, then this, alongside giving out grief as well as receiving it, is something we have to not only learn to live with and do, but also overcome.

Come on you Blues!!