



Saturday 23rd October 2021



Dagenham 3 - Southend 0



Flying in and out of Tracy Island International has become a bit of a hazard recently. The caretakers at the airport, Mr and Mrs Green, had thought, hoped, that being surrounded by nothing but swamps and marshland, they would be safe from the developers. However, the local council, finally deciding to tackle the problem of the shanty town just to their south where Albert, its mayor, holds fort inside his ramshackle old cabin, agreed to it being redeveloped. Accordingly, quite a number of houses, some on stilts, others floating upon rafts, now decorate the land towards the end of the airport's main runway.

For Mike, the resulting increase in broomstick activity was little more than an irritant. Sure, someone flying a Thunderbolt VII could be a distraction. But built more for entertainment than speed, they presented few problems to such an experienced pilot. However, the youngsters aboard their Comet Two Ninety's, many neither licenced or insured, could be a real hazard as they swooped and flew over the airport paying scant, if any regard, to the desperate instructions being bellowed at them by infuriated air traffic controllers.

So, causally catching two of the worst offenders in his slipstream, he dipped his Thunderbird's wings to land with his usual panache. A term that could not, even in the loosest of terms, be used to describe the occupant of the only other craft sitting upon the apron. Indeed, only from a distance did it appear to be even slightly human. Closer inspection revealing just a bundle of old clothing and a mobile phone.

Boycie tried to catch its attention by rapping upon the window, but only met with a similar reaction to that of Petrocelli's who, despite many months of attempting to negotiate compensation terms with Rodney regarding the injuries that Marlene received whilst visiting his country estate, is still awaiting a reply. Indeed, it wasn't until both Greens were safely stowed away in the hold, that the strange figure exhibited any signs of life at all.

It was then like watching an Orangutan unfold itself as, wheezing and grumbling, our tribal elder finally abandoned his attempts to send a two-letter text message, and so started stumbling towards where Thunderbird II, in all its shining glory, was waiting. A highly technical discussion then threatened to ensue between the two brothers Grimm regarding the value of using emoticons but Mike, praying for a moment of peace and quiet, tried to head it off by casually mentioning that he had just received his Covid booster jab.

Talk about lighting a rocket!

Was this one heck of a sore subject for the occupants of the hold who universally had been trying to book their injections with absolutely no success what so ever. Oh how the miles then simply flew by as each one of the luggage crates took it in turn to describe, in excruciating detail, their experiences of trying to communicate with the NHS either via phone or Web.

It wasn't until the docks of Dagenham began to form on the horizon that radio Albert switched channels and so started broadcasting 'All Our Yesterdays'. There wasn't a building we saw, or a corner we turned, without him expressing some fond memory or other of what had occurred there several centuries before. It all therefore became very confusing, as Boycie, attempting to convey accurate navigation instructions, struggled to be heard over the flood of 'To the left' and 'Over there on the rights' that were being issued from the mouth of someone who Mike could have cheerfully clubbed!

And so we got lost!

We knew that we were in darkest East London. Albert kept on telling us that. We also knew that the ground was only 10 minutes away. Gozzle kept on telling us that. But just how to get there, given that we were blankly staring at a pink fence surrounding a building site that hadn't, according to the authority known as Uncle Albert, been there 'During the war' was a mystery. There was little room to reverse either, thanks to a bus driver who was 'benefiting' from having Denzil provide navigational advice.

Someone with snowshoes conquered Everest. Someone, also wearing giant snow boots, walked on the moon. Obviously then, all we needed to acquire was some oversized winter foot protection and our problems would all be over. Blues would be back in the Championship; Marlene would have vowed to give up singing and as for Albert ... well two out of three ain't bad!

Just one of the three points that were available today would though have suited us just fine as we trekked towards the ground some thirty minutes later. Having somehow extricated ourselves from the construction site before dumping our deranged old git at the ground, locating a parking spot had then proved to be quite a challenge.

Those laughingly in control of the railways had decided at late notice to close the local station for the afternoon and hence many of our supporters had had little option other than to travel by car. Accordingly, we had all been playing 'Follow your Leader' up and down the backstreets close to Dagenham's Victoria Road stadium, seeking berths for our various vehicles.

Finally giving up, Mike had decided to try further out and so eventually happened upon a location that, only with a great deal of imagination, could be considered a parking spot. But, with kick off now only some 40 or so minutes away, even Boycie was prepared to accept the possibility that goblins and fairies really existed, and so we had duly parked and then quickly sped away from the probably soon to be crime scene.

A very respectable away crowd of just over 1,300 greeted us as we entered what is by far the best stand inside the ground. Whilst it lies majestically behind one of the goals, the other three sides bear structures that even Albert would sniff at if offered one as a replacement for the hole that currently serves him as an outside loo. Still at least the cooking stoves had been lit and, even better, here was Marlene bearing a welcome cup of hot coffee.

Hot it might well have been, but any evidence offered up by the defence regarding even one coffee bean having ever been dipped in it was very open to question. Carefully conducted scientific examination might have been able to prove that the plastic cup had heard of places like Columbia. But as to it ever bearing any legal exports from that country, or indeed those of any of its South American neighbours, would have at best only have been in terms of traces. With a jar of cheap coffee costing around £2.00; at the prices being charged by Dagenham, our money would have been far better employed had we been purchasing gold instead!

Precious metals though were being held in relatively low regard right now in comparison to precious points. With the relegation zones gaping mouth gripping tightly around our dangling feet, everyone is now hoping that our new management team will somehow be able to produce the magic that is required to drag us up the table and so into a position of safety.

That such a long journey would start today though was in some considerable doubt. For one, the guys had only been on the job for two days. So, apart from their players C.V's which presumably Brown had also read, they hardly knew anything about their squad. Equally, with barely a defender in a fit enough state to play and an injured goalkeeper, keeping a clean sheet was going to be a big ask. Then, add in a midfield that only know how to pass backwards, and the problem definition begins to write itself.

The saying "You are only as good as you are now" carries quite a lot of resonance because, let's face it, most of our players are simply not good enough. Indeed, it is challenging to come up with even five names that, in more agreeable conditions, we would be willing to scribe upon a team sheet.

Agreed, players like Murphy might perform better if he started to receive the ball quicker and more accurately. But right now he has totally given up on running off the ball after his early season attempts were

so unrewarded. A few of our younger players performances might also improve were they to be playing alongside more experienced players who still had some hunger in them.

Alas though we appear to have nothing but a set of world-weary old bulls who are quite content to graze away their final seasons rather than wander down towards the other end of the field to see just what all those pretty cows might have to offer. We lack desire, we lack fight, and most of all, we lack ability.

So, expecting Maher and co to do the fairy Mother thing overnight is about as unrealistic as expecting Trigger to share out his halftime tucker. Instead, it is going to be a thankless job for them for at least a month and possibly more. Time within which they will be discovering just what this set of players can do, and what they can't. Only then will it become possible for them to start setting about addressing the issues that they have uncovered. Our job therefore as supporters, is to not only to grant them that time but also support them throughout, and beyond, it.

Unfortunately, there was few signs of such a 'Can do' attitude amongst our fans today. Apart from a few half-hearted songs of support as the teams warmed up, we might as well have not been there. Accepted, such has been our sad experiences over the past few seasons, it is now completely up to the team to provide us with something to get excited and to shout about. But anyone who has attended a game over the past three years knows just how unlikely that is. Indeed, apart from one header that grazed the post, Blues once again provided us with very little to get out our seats for. It's a chicken and egg situation that has to be cracked, and fast!

Equally sadly were the actions of some people who purported to support our club. Far more interested in antagonising both the oppositions supporters and stewards, they barely faced the pitch for the whole 90 minutes. Even as the game came to its inevitable conclusion, they were still throwing cans and smoke bombs. Grow up lads, please!

The effect of their actions inside the ground were also felt outside it once the game had finished as the police, quite sensibly, sought to keep each group of supporters well apart. A plan that unfortunately added considerable distance to our already long route march back to where TBII was moored. Albert, nurtured only by a diet of self-catering, was therefore in no condition for such an odyssey and so once more had to be abandoned to his own devices. We tried to make the best of it, and, somehow, succeeded!

A squadron of parrots flying over our heads also helped to cheer up the dreary journey back to the car. TV has been reporting that parakeets have been in-habiting London for a number of years, but this was the first time that any of us had witnessed them for real. Bird lover Boycie waxed lyrically over the sight, even managing to forget for a few moments the desolation that we had only so recently left behind.

The A13 was closed on the way home (Do the relevant authorities even consider consulting each other when planning such activities? Combined with the lack of any form of railway service, this left only the A127 as a viable route back and it was already clogged up with traffic). So, our return journey was also elongated. It was filled with discussions about formations, players and Denzil's early departure from the disaster scene.

Despite having other means at his disposal, our hapless navigator had elected to travel to the game by train. Late decisions by the railway company meaning that he had to adjust his plans to include the services offered by a bus. Finding it fairly empty on the way to the ground he had nevertheless expressed fears that there would be long queues for it following the game. Therefore, eagerly anticipating an evening filled with recorded repeats of Corry and Emmerdale, he had sought to depart the game, not only early, but also unnoticed.

Failure!

With almost the entire stand being alerted to his blatant treachery by the far from subtle observations of his fellow Thunderbirds, he had no choice but to beat a shameful retreat towards the exits. The only pity being that there were no toilet rolls available to be thrown!

Come on you Blues !!