



Tuesday 2nd November 2021



Southend 4 – Dover 1



The air was full of the smell of smoke. Not wood, not coal but instead that of fireworks, Guy Fawkes night was still three or so days away, but loud bangs and brilliantly lit up skies have been features of the nightscape for many weeks now. Given the shipping problems, one wonders how so many arrived upon our shores. There again, quite possibly, they might just be coming from old stockpiles. In which case, just how safe were they?

From one burning issue to another.

For the fourth season in a row, Blues find themselves drowning in the dank, dark, waters of the relegation zone. Tonight's game, a fixture involving two sides who were planted at the very bottom of the table, was a key game. Not quite a 'Must Win', but nevertheless still important in that, against Dover, a very weak side, achieving a result would put some points into the bank.

Our new management team have been in place for two weeks / games and have yet to make any sort of a deposit. That said, signs of improvement, particularly at the weekend, have been there and so, on their home debut, could they turn promise into reality? The loan signings from Sheffield each looked a really good capture and their presence in the side had had a very positive effect upon those around them last time out. But, a big but, we only have them for a few months and so we really must capitalise upon them whilst we can. Starting tonight.

Walking to the game along darkened streets Mike wondered how he would be feeling on the way back. Elated or deflated? Passing cyclists, some with flickering lights, too many with none, provided little clue. Neither did the occasional shop window. Little kiosks of bright light, each shop an island unto itself, but still nevertheless a link in the chain that signposting the way to the ground. Itself a bevy of noise under a mist of glowing floodlights. A night game at Roots Hall. Could you wish for anything more?

Once inside and making his way to where all the other Thunderbirds were already gathered, he saw that Denzil, who had been to a matinee performance of 'Corry ... the best bits' (Not an overly long film as you might have already suspected) was tapping his watch. TBird speak for 'Why are you so late?'. Cheeky zod. Especially given that he rarely arrived anywhere on time and then always needed to empty the bilges. Anyway, there was still at least 30 minutes to go before kick-off, which seemed much longer as Albert was at full throttle (Oh, if only we could!) describing his tea.

Those over in the East Stand, sipping their tea, one finger cocked just so, the others covered in vinegar thanks to the cockles they were gumming, might well have been enjoying the music that was being played over the loudspeakers. However, in the West, it is just a very loud and annoying noise. Very similar to Albert!

The game started and almost straight away it was evident that something had gone wrong back in the changing rooms. They were in all blue whilst we were clearly playing in red! Rushing out of the traps faster than Rodney being chased out of a cafe by a waiter with a bill, the team in blue were running rings around those clad in red. They were just like terriers who hadn't seen a ball for months. Only one team was keeping possession, just one team was attacking and only the team in blue was ever going to win this game. Such a pity then then that it wasn't us. It just couldn't have been!

There's no mistaking John White though and he was, without question, one of those who were wearing a blue shirt. Someone, with an uncanny resemblance to Bridge, was too. This was all making the brain ache. The team doing all that fast, attacking play was in Blue. The side winning every second ball was in Blue. The eleven players who were ensuring that the red team couldn't get out of their half were also in Blue. The evidence, just as in the case of Mrs Green v Rodney the evil landowner, was simply overwhelming. But if the Blue team were so on top and playing such sparkling football, who were they and what had they done to Southend United?

Perplexed faces were all around. We hadn't seen Southend play like this for years and, as well as being unbelievable, it was tremendously exciting. Who would have believed that we had this sort of display in our locker? Not only were we playing some fantastic football, but we were also looking like a team that was a team. Yes, certain individuals still shone out (Notably our two loanees) but it was always to the common good. We looked organised, we clearly had a plan and furthermore, we were executing it with quite some style.

The Blues Voice forgot all about speculating over Ron's possibly experiences should he ever face a jail sentence for tax fraud and instead started really getting behind the team. The mood was infectious and soon even Trigger was bouncing up and down in his seat; an excited toddler clapping and cheering like mad. It truly was amazing stuff and so refreshing to see after a diet of dull, boring, defensive football that stretched back for years. The fare upon our senior reprobate's table might be plain, but this most certainly wasn't!

Our reward arrived in the 30th minute when a ball delivered by Brunt from a corner was met by Murphy's outstretched foot to steer it into the North Bank net. It initiated instant bedlam in the stands which erupted into a fervour of wild cheering and shouting. The pressure had been building upon Dover's goalmouth for some time and now it had just burst!

Gooo !!

A few minutes later and we were two up. Bridge, racing into the area had been taken out; Murphy coolly converting the resulting penalty. Now Blues football became superbly sublime. Full of confidence, almost every player was showing off little touches. Even Hobson got in on the act, selling dummies like a Mothercare salesman on commission. Amazing isn't it. How a simple small round object hitting the back of a net can so quickly turn clumsy dinosaurs into soaring eagles.

That's not to say it was all Christmas and bright lights. We were only playing Dover after all, A side with even a worse points to games ratio than ourselves over recent seasons. So, whilst it was all very enjoyable, we couldn't get too carried away. Especially as the referee was obviously very keen to maintain the reputation of his creed.

Compared to Saturday's sad specimen he was an improvement. But that was like saying the leak in the bathroom was only five inches deep rather than six. Like all of his lazy kin, he was tethered to the centre circle; only abandoning its comforting round lines upon rare occasions. Officials are supposed to have regular fitness tests. One can only suppose that such examinations consist simply of being able to walk their guide dogs for five minutes and then not to immediately break into a sweat if asked to make a decision. Tea or coffee?

Being resolute and not giving ground though clearly was not part of this ones agenda. Yes, he did spot that a throw in was being taken by Dover some 50 yards forward of where the ball had departed the pitch. And agreed, he did make the player retreat back. All goot as they say in foreign parts. But then, he not only allowed the player to return to exactly where he had just stolen so many yards, but even allowed him to sneak forward a few more before releasing the ball. Useless wimp or what!

Despite Blues being two up, halftime in the Thunderbirds nest was spent in the usual manner. Even with them playing such dazzling football, the game barely got a mention. Instead, mobile phones were being tenderly caressed, and countless selfies were being taken. Only Trig's had other priorities. his picnic hamper!

Its contents a family secret, he was steadily emptying it, huge mouthful by huge mouthful. Clearly something had given him an appetite! We could only hope that Blue's similarly newfound hunger for the game lasted a

bit longer than just the break. If it continued right throughout the second period. Then we would be well pleased. But, with memories of Wrexham keen in our minds, fears that our brief visit to the dressing room would once again result in the brakes being applied were difficult to suppress.

Right from the restart Dover, obviously urged on by their manager, set about exploring our half of the pitch. We though were in no mood to cater for unexpected visitors and so, after a few minutes of fingers in the dyke sort of stuff, we recovered our composure and so set about seeking our third goal of the night which duly arrived in the 59th minute.

Murphy, after some tricky footwork along the goal line, had pulled the ball back to his fellow striker Dalby who controlled the ball nicely before half blasting, half chipping the ball into the back of the net to score his third goal of the season and also our third of the night. Huge celebrations resulted as it was just so good to have both our strikers add to their respective accounts. Brilliant too for their confidence!

You know that feeling you get on Boxing Day? There's still a certain magical sparkle in the air but something seems a little bit flat. Well, it felt just like that when in the 69th minute, a myopic linesman adjudged the ball to have crossed our goal line following a corner. Just how he could tell with a bundle of players obstructing his view is hard to say. But that the East Stand should feel thoroughly ashamed of themselves for letting him get away with it so easily is undebatable. Perhaps though, as it was well past their beddy-bye time and Ovaltine's had been indulged in, they were simply sound asleep!

Were we though now going to copy their dozy example and so allow our visitors back into the game? For a moment or two, as a rejuvenated Dover poured forward down both of our flanks it certainly looked so. But then, experience in the form of John White, accompanied by that of Dunne's, took a hand and gradually, what had looked like a ship stating to sink, began to recover its stability. Our fourth goal of the night, a low shot from a difficult angle by Bridge, enabling us to settle back into our comfortable, free flowing, rhythm very nicely.

More goals could have then followed as woodwork got hit and goal bound shots got blocked. Our hunger for success was unabated and it was really enjoyable to watch. Especially as we were playing the ball forwards so much. Much of the credit for that must go to Brunt who led by example throughout the game. But home-grown players like young Phillips were in on the act too, quickly revealing that they, not only harboured similar desires but, shackles and leg irons having been removed, had the ability to do so too.

A great result on the night then that totally matched our desire and play. Three badly needed points earned which resulted in us ascending up the table and out of relegations trapdoors. Well, at least for a while anyway. Maher and co are obviously having a positive effect and are now also being rewarded for their efforts to turn our club around. Our ship, limping and badly damaged, is finally off the shoals but many still lie ahead before a safe anchorage can be reached. Some of the holes in its damaged hull look to have been repaired but many others still, at best, only have peeling sticky plasters over them. It's still a case of the iceberg being out there!

Accordingly, whilst it was great fun and wonderful to see Blues play like this. It's important to remember, not only the level of the opposition, but also that this is still very much a work in progress. Many setbacks are undoubtedly still going to occur. Injuries to key players, suspensions, ridiculous refereeing decisions, they all await us just around the corner. Bright fireworks though were certainly a feature of Blues display tonight, but even sparklers get damp if its starts raining. So, it's probably best for now to just to take tonight's result as being encouraging and hope and pray that we can now begin to build upon it.

Come on you Blues!