



Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2021



## Chesterfield 3 - Southend 1



The Peak District. A slab of weather-beaten limestone measuring around 550 square miles that encompasses most of Derbyshire, bits of Cheshire and also sizeable chunks of Yorkshire. It's been inhabited since well before the Bronze and Iron ages and its Blue John mines have produced a veritable treasure trove of valuable gems. However, it is better known as the UK's first National park, containing as it does breath taking scenery that included towering peaks, magnificent moorlands, deep dark gorges and beautiful valleys filled with rivers that in turn harbour rainbow trout, pike and other such species.

As far as it is known though, it has never felt the thud of Uncle Albert's size 10's. Even so, evidence of his influence does exist. None more so than in the effect he is said to have had upon the spire of a certain market town's church tower. Built during in his youth in the 13th century, Chesterfield's church is famous for its crooked spire. Just how it came to be such a strange shape has intrigued masons, architects and mages for many years. The pendants amongst them stating firmly that it is not crooked but rather more twisted and leaning.

Whatever, various theories about how it came to be so deformed have withstood the tests of time. The most prosaic, e.g. boring, ones being related to the use of unseasoned wood and the lack of skilled workmen due to the black death. Much more interesting ideas though include the suggestion that, as the first wedding ceremony at the church got underway, the spire changed its shape to celebrate the fact that the bride was a true virgin. The story being that it won't resume its proper form until such an event occurs again!

Albert makes his entry into the scene when a legend involving a local blacksmith gets told. Instructed by a magician to shoe the devil's hoofs, the terrified man accidentally hammered a nail into Satan's foot causing it to flee in agony, catching its tail around the church's spire as it did so. A variation upon this theme involves the devil flying away after taking an uninvited respite upon the church's roof. The clergy naturally took a rather dim view towards this and so energetically rang the church bells in order to encourage it to depart. They succeeded, but the noise distracted the creature so much, that, as it leapt into the sky, it damaged the spire.

Colourful stories one and all but as Thunderbird II made her way past the famous scene, locating a parking spot was much more upon its occupant's minds. Grandad, recalling a previous occasion when he had visited the town, knew of a hotel that was near to the ground. Sadly though, both its name and location were just mist vapor as far as his memory was concerned. Boycie, firmly mind melded with Gluegoo, was issuing a steady stream of navigational instructions whilst Mike 'Smoke me a kipper' was adopting a far more straightforward strategy. He was simply looking for a vacant parking spot in one of the many streets that surrounded Chesterfield's home ground.

Such a place was located next to a picturesque lock. Mike thought to linger and perhaps take a photo or two, but the luggage compartment, hot food and a programme uppermost in their minds, were already striding off into the distance. So, shrugging his shoulders, he followed in their footsteps. Scrapes in the soil that led through a maze of underground tunnels and across wild stretches of wasteland that, some ten or so minutes later, meant that we were still no nearer the ground. All a bit of a mystery given that its floodlights had been in clear view all of the time. Still, if Simon, in the form of Gozzle, says "Go this way ....."



string of dangerous crosses coming into our area as a direct result. Fortunately, Arnold was able to deal with the majority of them, but nevertheless both of their goals came from such deliveries into our box.

We weren't exactly falling apart, but, as in the case with Albert, some of the joints were creaking and more than a few parts had seen better days. All was not doom and gloom though. Certainly, compared with performances prior to our new management team arriving, we were playing much better. And although at times, still disjointed, we nevertheless still had the look of a team about us. Accordingly we steadily began taking more and more of the game to Chesterfield..

The second half was therefore pretty much one way traffic with the tide definitely running in favour of the team in yellow. Right from the restart we took the game by the scruff of the neck and, had but Dalby's header not been well saved, we would have been back on level terms within five minutes. Unfortunately though that save, and the many others that followed, denied us such a well merited goal.

The home crowd, and indeed their team, were obviously aware though that they were treading on very thin ice and so their manager made several changes. A series of astutely timed substitutions breaking up the game. Made little difference though as we still kept on maintaining the pressure, trusting that the footballing gods would finally grant us some good fortune and so allow us to score that all important goal.

Despite all our efforts though it just would not come. Thoughts of offering up Denzil as a sacrifice therefore began to cross minds. It would be a small loss and possibly rather entertaining too. Alas though, not only was he absent, stuck in some cinema seat no doubt, but another of the vital criteria for such an offering was also, allegedly, no longer one of his attributes. However, something that most definitely was, was the training that the ball boys had obviously been put through. If the ball rolled to them and we were the fortunate recipients of a free kick or throw in, then they diligently, and slowly, walked all the way over to us before handing the ball back. Should however such an award go in the opposite direction, then it was quickly returned, either via an accurate kick or a precise throw. Live and learn Blues !!

The minutes always seem to whizz by when you are behind in a game and as the threat of the final whistle began to hover, we responded by changing our formation to 1 4 5 using attack minded substitutes. It looked to be a good throw of the dice, because Chesterfield up until this point had been pretty much restricted to their half of the field. But sadly, it almost immediately backfired. A swift counterattack leaving Arnold completely exposed and their forward with plenty of time and space to pick his spot. The roars of relief that met the home goal more than confirming the accuracy of these reports.

Darn! Perhaps a combo of Denzil and a photo of a railway ticket issued by Virgin, then then?

The thought almost worked too. After having a number of blatant opportunities to do so, the referee finally awarded us a penalty with just two minutes to go on the clock. A score line on 3 -2 would be a far better reflection of the game than 3 -1. So as Dalby prepared to take the kick, we held our collective breaths. Everyone preparing to urge Blues on to give it their all and so see if they could also get their, so deserved, third additional goal in whatever time was left..

A great plan that fell short on two accounts. One, we didn't score from the penalty spot and two, the ref somehow saw red and so sent Brunt off, despite him being the victim of an attack that involved a home player attempting to unscrew his neck! There was also some sort of a scene as both players left the field. However, it was later reported as being simply an overreaction by the 4th official. So ,whilst there is little doubt that the authorities will somehow 'overlook' the more than somewhat ill-considered action of one of their representatives, concerns do however remain that their generosity will not also extend to Brunt's appeal.

Many will be aware of the 'Mexican Wave' and have certain views regarding it. Denzil though is a very enthusiastic exponent of the ruddy thing, so quite probably he will be delighted to know that a similarly welcome crowd activity has been named after him. Some might recall that he left the Dagenham game early for some pathetic excuse; an action that the Thunderbirds have taken to calling the 'Denzil Retreat'. And, alas, more than a few were also guilty of performing it as this game came to a close. Now, given that they

faced a journey of around four hours to get back to civilisation, what possible benefit was there for them in indulging in the 'Denzil Retreat'?

Those that did remain to the bitter end, witnessed a 3 -1 defeat. Making it seven goals to them, and just one to us over the two matches. Not good reading at first glance. However, when subjected to closer inspection, there are many differences between the two games. Chesterfield had barely to get out of 1st gear when netting their four away goals against us. But today they, their pet official (Was it mentioned that whenever this ref has officiated at one of their games, they have always won?) and their ball boys, were all covered in sweat despite the near freezing conditions. Proof indeed that this game had been much closer than the score line suggests. In fact, with only a modicum of better defending in the first half, and an improved ratio of conversions to chances in the second, we would definitely have got something out of this game.

Still, we are, as they say, where we are, and, as things stand, that is in an improved league position and also in an improved state of both mind and play. Encouraging factors that should see us climb away from the foot of the table and into a position of safety well before the end of this season. Do not though take this to mean that our agonies are over because undoubtedly, we are still, two, possibly three, players short of a squad that can make the difference that is required. Identifying those players, getting them signed and then bedding them in, will take some time. Equally the work of improving the performance of our current squad of players is still a very long term project. So, patience has to be the key word here.

The cold conditions had been rather grim so it was a relief that the trip home was thankfully proving to be pretty uneventful. The M1 was behaving well, no hold ups at all, allowing a swift return journey to be made. Therefore, it all came as a complete shock when suddenly TBII found itself surrounded by police cars in full Blues and Two's mode. Mike was completely taken aback for a second before he swiftly reacted to being boxed in by the three police vehicles. Immediately switching his persona from one of 'Relaxed and cool' to that of 'Smoke me a Kipper' he expertly slowed down his elegant, beautiful, craft to match the speed of the surrounding police.

Had Albert been with us, then charges under Section 5 of the Wildlife act (Possession of a dangerous animal without a licence) might have had some legitimacy. Equally a pub landlord or two might have filed complaints against him ranging from vagrancy to repeatedly boring everyone with accounts of 'During the war'. The absence of Marlene's equally prevented any possibility of accusations regarding the carrying of weapons being made. All of which left the three of us at a total loss as to just why, what was so evidently occurring, actually was.

Things were now happening very fast as first one police car pulled over directly in front of us and another drew up alongside, leaving the third to jockey for a position behind it. This was all becoming truly bizarre. Had the referee's association taken a note of our number plate? Had our loudly expressed thoughts concerning the competence of one of their member's caused offence? (Good !!) Would we now, like Brunt, be facing trumped up charges?

Anything seemed possible. But then, snakelike, the three cars wiggled their way past us to sweep away up a motorway turn off. Their prey evidently was not us, but rather some other vehicle which was elsewhere. Even so, it had certainly livened up the atmosphere inside TBII and a comfort break was obviously going to be welcomed. Equally, although they didn't actually say so in words, (Probably because they had both been left speechless by the incident) Boycie and Grandad were obviously very impressed by their pilots handling of the situation. Tips though were not a feature as we landed back at Tracy Island International a couple of hours later. Strange that!

Come on you Blues!!