



Tuesday 7th December 2021



Southend 1 – Maidenhead 1



Albert was nonplussed. Which, for him, was actually a step up the evolutionary ladder. He had had a handle on total nonsense for centuries and whilst non-stick sadly still remains just a somewhat distant aspiration (He and glue have a very close relationship) the ladies in France (He got 'lost' during the Boar war) eventually did get him to understand the meaning of 'Non'. So now, to be finally getting on first name terms with yet another non was quite an achievement. Accordingly he eagerly glanced around, his dark, shifty, eyes gleaming as he sought out anyone or indeed anything that might be preparing to congratulate him. He looked in vain.

Earlier in the evening it had been pouring down. It had also been extremely windy and fears that the game might not go ahead had been expressed. Indeed, the national press, renowned for the inaccuracy of its reporting, had already announced that the fixture had been subjected to a postponement. Their somewhat presumptive take, on what turned out to be just the finale of Storm Barra, did though unfortunately put more than a few people off coming; the ground looking almost deserted with just 15 minutes to go before kick-off.

Rumours of doom and gloom though are old hat to the loyal. With speculation already growing re the thinness of the players wage packets this week, rude letters from the tax man and even a transfer embargo, a little bit of breeze and a dribble of water was not going to prevent us from cheering on the lads. Indeed, given the encouraging result at Altringham 10 days aback, we had every reason to be feeling rather positive about Blues prospects against a side that was shipping more goals than Moller-Maersk did freight.

Maidenhead had slipped down the table, taking our spot inside the relegation zone, faster than a restaurant bill passes through Rodney's hands and on to those of his guest. Although still very much a work in progress (These are Brown's Boys after all) there have been some signs of us improving and surely against a team that were pretty much the kicking boys of the division, we stood a good chance of reducing the deficit in our goal difference. If only we could say the same for our bank balance.

That said, the departure of our young defender, Sayers, to Spurs this week and the resulting cheque should have relaxed our bank managers fixed grim a tad. But who knows with Southend. Money that should have helped towards strengthening the squad is probably already earmarked as a down payment against some M.P's future expenses chit.

Albert, meanwhile, had given up on any hopes concerning receiving praise, and so was playing with his pockets. Not many jackets life story gets related and for good reason. But his is worth a couple of paragraphs. It started out as simply a covering for some obscure creature's bones. A bullet though soon put paid to that form of employment and so it instead took up a career as a huntsman's trophy for a short period of time. Becoming used to hanging around walls and bars was to prove useful experience against the time that it was destined to spend with Albert. But that was still a ways off in the future, because, as it became tatty and more than a mite sniffy, so its descent through the ranks of deer's antlers and stuffed fish pretty much became a free fall activity. Eventually reaching the point where it was only fit to become an almost permanent exhibit upon a market trader's stall. Not as something to wear or admire, but rather as a cover hiding a pile of somewhat iffy gear that the other force in blue might well have some interest in.

Weather and the odd curious rat soon began to add their toll to its life experience though and so, when it finally found itself stuck away at the back of some charity shop, it wasn't all that surprised or disappointed. What did shock it though was when it was suddenly lifted up, dust, mould and who knows what falling from away it, by a short, dark headed, figure who was tightly clutching a quiz book and munching upon a sandwich.

Trigger is attracted to charity shops like sick to a blanket. The results, certainly according to Mrs Trigger, are very much the same. Save that bed coverings can at least be introduced to a washing machine whereas the junk that her errant husband often wandered home with swiftly made the acquaintance of the nearest bin if she caught even a glimpse of it. Accordingly, although very tempted, the coats indelicate colour scheme rather suggested a Rolling Stones album sleeve to him, he dropped it back on the floor and continued browsing elsewhere.

Noting this, one of the shop's assistants sighed in exasperation. They had been hoping to finally get rid of the damn thing, and even possibly the coat too. But clearly that was not going to happen any time soon. Still, at least they could do something about tidying up the floor and so the jacket got thrown out of the shops backdoor. A location that Albert passed by a week or so later. The rest, as they say, was history!

Anything that somehow manages to conceal Albert from view, if only partially, has to be considered a positive. However, there are so many negatives surrounding the coat, that it should be a perfect conduit for lightning strikes. Alas though our tribal elders' career as a bus driver's assistant didn't last very long (One afternoon and then a discrepancy in the number of tickets sold and the cash remaining in his pouch led to some accusations being made). Nothing was ever proven but as a result of this episode, he is now considered to be a bad conductor and so, again alas, the chances of him disappearing inside a puff of smoke are pretty much zilch!

In the meantime, as Albert fumbled around searching for something hidden inside the depths of his costume, and despite all the dire warnings of the Sun, Daily Mail and Women's weekly (Not C.P though, in whom we trust), the game had gotten underway. Maidenhead despite being based in stockbroker country, were for some reason sporting the colours of someplace further to their East. A city where the locals all spoke with a furred accent and thought that decimalisation should have been based upon the number six, namely Gnawrich. No idea why, perhaps they just liked yellow and green.

Anyway, they were clearly up for the game whereas we, for our part, just as definitely were not. Like over excited wasps they swarmed around the pitch whilst we, clumsy blue bottles in comparison, seemed set only upon protecting the entrance to our hive. Clearly keen to make honey at our expense, they buzzed about everywhere and maintained possession of the ball. An object that we were treating with absolute distain and giving away at every opportunity.

Our shape was all wrong, our decision making was abysmal and as for energy levels? A sloth on a slow day would have easily shown us a clean set of heals. Accordingly, Maidenhead, so often of late at the wrong end of a blunt stick, were delighting in treating us as their whipping boys. Actions that we didn't seem to mind, or indeed care about, at all. Passion, desire, creativity with the ball. None of these attributes did we display. Instead, we were totally lacklustre and frankly, absolutely dreadful. Should Maher have paid a visit to the East Stand and shaken awake eleven of its incumbents, pointing them, and their Zimmer frames, in the direction of the pitch, we wouldn't have been in any worse position.

Our visitors, despite good intentions, weren't very good though either and so the game gradually drifted into one where the ball just gets banged about the field, pinball machine style, first one team having it, then the other. On a cool, wintery, evening it did little to warm the cockles of your heart. In fact Trigger totally gave up on watching the game entirely. Preferring much more instead to indulge in a spot of dad dancing whilst remaining seated down. Either that or he had a bad itch!

The match officials, it's sad to say, were the best team on the pitch. Given how poor they were (Arnold was being forced into occasional action and thus guilty of steering the ball wide of his posts yet nay a corner came our visitors way) that pretty much tells the story of this dreadful game. It is though, to their doubtful credit, that they did at least provide some entertainment to Mike and Boycie. But, their 'throw a dice' decision

making process apart, there really was very little else to get excited about. As one supporter close to our nest commented "I have been to many football matches, and this is certainly one of them".

Then, literally out of the blue, one of our midfielders, losing the plot entirely, played the ball forwards. His defenders were aghast, Maidenhead were astonished and as for us, poor souls forced to watch this crud, it was almost beyond belief. Us, Southend United, the only team in Essex, playing a ball forwards. Never!

But be it a miskick, loss of concentration or simply a case of lack of any spatial awareness, the ball had undoubtedly travelled in the general direction of our opponent's goal. It allowed both of our forwards, until now pretty much as unemployed as a conscience mentor at Westminster, to seize their opportunity. Murphy and Dalby exchanging passes before the former, just inside the box, turned upon a sixpence and slotted the ball home to send the astonished home supporters into rather startled cheering mode.

It was as if a switch had suddenly been turned on. Until this time, crash dummies one and all, Blues hadn't been in the game but now they had really come to life. Playing the ball not only forwards, but also accurately and at speed, we were now ripping Maidenheads defence to shreds such that, with a degree more luck, we would easily have been two up before the break which was now unfortunately only seconds away. Forty four minutes of total Corry and a mere minute of Star Wars!

Halftime started off in the normal fashion. Boycie and Denzil racing each other to be the first to whip out their mobile comforters whilst Trigger began digging into his picnic hamper. Certain promises however had been made earlier, and the results of somebody who bears a 'I Love Body Shop' badge whilst cooking in the kitchen, were being awaited with mixed degrees of anticipation and trepidation. Yes, the recipe had featured upon one of those ever-present cooking shows but, given that they never deliver real food, pie and mash, beans and chips, a fry up etc., etc., was that necessarily a good thing?

Denzil though was beside himself. He had re-watched the programme several times, running the key moments through again and again in slow motion. Accordingly, he was pretty sure that he understood the basic ingredients, heat, water, flour and also some fruit that looked like camel droppings. The big question though was, could he combine them together such that the results resembled, in any way at all, what he had witnessed on his tv screen.

Well they weren't totally flat, providing you were in a similarly generous mood to someone who was considering awarding the title of 'Mountain' to a bump in the Norfolk landscape. The fact that his creations were also covered all over in some white sticky stuff, wasn't all that encouraging either. A reddish blob had though been aimed, in a somewhat haphazard manner, at the centre of the 'thingy' in an effort to give it that 'happening' feel. Unfortunately it must be reported that the attempt sadly failed.

Its texture though could at least be considered as thereabouts. Because, if thrown Frisby style, it wouldn't cause that many injuries. However, munching your way through it was like chewing upon a leather strap. Still, if you closed both eyes, wore a bandage over them and then popped a paper bag over your head just to be on the totally safe side, then, compared to the TV chef's efforts, they were equally inedible. Trigger finished his though!

Possibly in our new ground (Remember that?) the changing rooms, or at least the home one, won't be situated directly underneath where all the dropped cockles and tea bags end up. Because the drowsy East Stand atmosphere (It has one?) definitely has a detrimental effect upon our lads during the break. They enter the room buzzing and come out snoring.

Maidenhead though must have spent the entire 15 minutes out in the carpark because they came back to the game refreshed and revitalised. Yes, they were a goal down but, especially after all their recent drubbings, it was only one goal and playing against this bunch of stiffs anything was possible. We, full of Ovaltine and with oxygen levels very akin to those of the currents in Denzil's buns, looked lifeless and bored. All the Thunderbird's stomachs sank, and it wasn't just because they were full of sour dough.

Atkinson has performed better in midfield recently. Particularly in the first half at Altringham when he was very effective. But it is at the expense of Brunt who has been forced out to a much wider position. Of course, he still has an influence upon the game out there, but not as positive a one as if he was in the middle of the pitch. Sorry Will, but for the benefit of the team, Maher and co must move Brunt back to where he can be a much bigger influence upon our play.

That said, Will's cause is not a lost one because he still makes up for three of Ferguson who is a total waste of space. He reads the game like its written in a foreign language, his reactions speed are slower than a snail overdozing (sic) on Nytol and, whilst he does have the ability to have a go at goal, his accuracy varies as much as those fired from a bow upon the Golden Shot!

To play him in the same team as Walsh is criminal. Either one of their own, on a day the rest of the team are fully on their game, is just about possible. But to expect nine players to carry the weight of these two combined, is totally unreasonable. Walsh will improve, if given time, Wandsworth understudy Ferguson though needs to be shown the door.

About midway through the second period, there was a small whimper of triumph as Albert retrieved what he had been so busily searching for inside his deep pockets. Having such shorts arms made the job a real challenge. But, high on his success, he was now wildly waving the brick shaped object about whilst all the time yelling at it "I'm at the game, I'm at the game"" Just why the lump of concrete would be so interested in his whereabouts was unclear. But Albert is Albert, and so that didn't deter him at all. Instead, he just shouted at it even louder. It didn't shout back.

This eventually puzzled him. It had played a tune, something between a constipated gnat desperately squeezing its cheeks and the grunting of a gorilla suspecting that someone has just stolen its bunch of bananas. So why wouldn't it now talk to him? He tried shaking it, holding it upside down and even pointing it towards the ground. But, deep down, it was the shouting that he really enjoyed, and so he did some more of it.

The linesman, his head still spinning from the advice that had just been directed at him by Mike and Boycie after he had somehow missed yet another foul, wondered if he was having a Joan of Arc moment. He kept on hearing voices. Well rather just the one. A very loud and noisy one. One that kept on claiming that it was at a game. What did it all mean? What was going on? Was it the new 42?

He had more questions than answers. Certainly more than our decrepit O.A.G was getting from his pet brick. And so Albert decided that it was time to show off what one of his despairing daughters had taught him for the nth time at the weekend. Namely how to check back on who had just called him. After all, it wasn't a difficult task. It could have been one of his three offspring!

Despite the shortness of his contact list, he nevertheless somehow contrived to misdial, ending up phoning a complete stranger. Just like the linesman, who was by now twisting a finger inside his ear and wondering if his mike has gone for a burton, he was bewildered as to why the hell someone was shouting 'I'm at the game'. Something that they will probably never discover because, just at that moment, Maidenhead decided to score.

It was a more than a deserved equaliser and of course it had to have been scored by one of our old boys, Kane Ferdinand. It was as if Denzil had written the script! Now we were really in trouble. We had taken the lead, somewhat miraculously, on our one attack of the first half. Now though we had not only lost it, but were also very much in danger of losing the game as well. Those with positive, can do, cheerful, attitudes crossed their fingers, those with more of an Eeyore take on life began chewing their newly regrown fingernails.

Sometimes when the opposition scores, it has the effect of encouraging the conceding side to renewed efforts. But not in our case. If anything, we got even worse. They had spring in their steps, we had boots clogged down with snow. At this late stage in the game, they laboured, as if pulling sledges, we looked though like we were dragging icebergs. This is not to suggest that they were any fitter. They just cared more.

Throughout the entire game they had showed much more energy and displayed far more desire for the ball. Eventually being rewarded by the least of what they deserved. We got far more!

Maher, weighed down with Brown's droppings, has a mammoth task ahead of him if he and his management team are ever to turn this juggernaut of a disaster around. Despite all of Ron's promises (Collymores too?) there is no money to spend and even if there was, his chairman's fixation with playing chicken with the taxman means the embargo would prevent us from venturing into the transfer market anyway.

Still, compared with those poor supporters in the Premiershite whose clubs are guilty of only winning every other week or so, who are we to complain, eh?

Come on you Blues!