



Friday 21st January 2021



Southend 2 – Kings Lynn 1



The entrance to the Thunderbird's nest is a bit of a revolving doorway these days. It being rather uncertain as to just whom will stagger through it and who won't. Take Denzil for example. Offer him an evening's entertainment surrounded by his mates and he will smile, take a moment to consider, and then look to see what is on at the Odeon or who might be appearing at the Cliffs before giving his answer.

Similarity we can never be completely certain about Albert. Little change there you might think, and you would be absolutely right. However, the threat of his sharp elbows and bouncing O.A.G act is predisposed, not on what might be happening in the dark of a theatre somewhere, but rather upon the availability of a lift. His long-suffering sibling, Boycie, usually obliges, Tracy International, the place where both he and Marlene work as caretakers, being not that far from the pub in which our terminal confused delinquent spends his many idle moments. However, other family commitments sometimes make caring for the elderly even more of a challenge, and so Albert has then to resort to standing close to a roadside ditch and employing his thumb!

Someone else with transport issues is Micky Pearce. Once a regular visitor to the centre of the universe, the past couple of seasons have obviously taken their toll upon him. Labelling Micky as a 'fair weather supporter' would though be a trifle thick. But given that he and Cassandra haven't graced the Hall for at least two years now, the question nevertheless does have to be asked. Discuss the matter with him, and excuses such as being banned from leaving the country get offered up. However, its far more likely that Germany, having cheerfully escorted him to the border and then waved him auf wiedersehen, won't want him back! Equally there is no denying that, if the desire is truly there, then so is the solution. Almost every day there are news reports concerning the number of people doing a reverse Dunkirk across the channel. So, just what is stopping them from purchasing an inflatable canoe and indulging in a spot of paddling?

A quick head count therefore confirmed the presence of Trigs, the Greens, Del Boy and the family problem. Some distance away sat, Garbo incarnate, Grandad, whilst surrounding us were over six thousand other Blues supporters. An amazing number given the situation that the club is currently in. But, until an Essex accent is apparently as endearing as a Geordie, Mancunian or Scouse one, there is little chance of the media taken any note! Still our players seemed to be appreciating the tremendous support that they were receiving, and that is all that really matters.

The old lady was heaving and even the East stand looked like it was being visited by intelligent life. Sure, the Zimmer frames were still a problem, blocking the aisles as they do, and care had to be taken less one slip upon a carelessly discarded sandwich crust (Matron usually cuts them off for me), but spotting a Blues shirt or a waving scarf over that side of the pitch was, for tonight at least, no longer rarer than Rodney getting a round in. The place was simply buzzing!

Out came the two teams, the royalty sporting blue, the peasants all yellow. Surely the whole of Norfolk cannot be canary fixated? Neither is it likely that their relationships with their sisters are quite as the Blue Voice were suggesting. There was equally little doubt that the absentee Thunderbirds, no matter how feeble their excuses, were missing out on a real Friday night treat.

Any game held under the Roots Hall floodlights has a special feel to it. But the atmosphere engendered by a game on the eve of the weekend is almost indescribable. Somehow everything feels just that bit more intense and real. And should we get a win, well then both Saturday and Sunday can be spent relaxing and happily contemplating the fact that there are three more valuable points in the bag.

However before then, Blues had a job to do and, straight from kick off, they set about doing it. Those of a loyal nature will recall with sadness how we looked at the start of the season as teams bore down upon our goalmouth, easily ripping our defence apart. Now though the boot was literally on the other foot (There were around nine changes in the side compared to the one that kicked off the season at Kings Lynn) and it was now we who were surfing upon the crest of a tsunami that had every appearance of sweeping everything away in front of it.

Unfortunately, their goal was not though of a mind to be accommodating and so it was having a charmed life. The number of our attacks being matched by the increased count of last second challenges or fortunate deflections of the ball. We were featuring (A bit of cinema speak there to try and entice Denzil away from his popcorn) two new signings. One was in midfield, Leon Davis, and the other, a 6ft 2inch striker, Harry Cardwell, was playing alongside Dalby upfront. A partnership that, once they have got to know each other's game a little better, is going to scare the bejesus out of defenders. Cardwell was strong in the air, had good feet and could show a greyhound a clean set of heels whilst Davis, clearly a good reader of the game, has a neat touch and a keen eye for a dangerous pass forward. Early days of course, but initial impressions are that our ventures onto the transfer market have been rather sound investments.

Albert, being Albert, will talk to anyone who is careless enough to even glance in his direction. Such was the misfortune of someone who we will just for now call 'Deep Throat'. Suffice to say that they have an insiders track within the club and so their words have a certain gravitas. Our ancient reprobate was happily showing off to them his ability to count to three without taking his socks off when Deep Throat interrupted him (A task rather akin to sticking a finger into a muddy wall just as the Dam Busters fly over) and explained that, as well there being arrivals as the club, there would also be departures. Some players going out on loan, others possibly upon a more permanent basis. The club could no longer tolerate a situation where members of the squad just idled their days away watching from the stands. Everyone was being given a chance by the new management team but soon decisions were going to be made, and implemented!

Although clearly puzzled, Albert had nevertheless caught the gist of most of what he was saying, and so repeated it back to us pretty much verbatim. He then thankfully fell silent; his mind struggling over the meaning of the word 'implemented'. Trigger, seeing his agony and wishing to help, whispered 'Dictionary' to him but that only sent the personage, whose record score at Scrabble is five, further into a stupor; his brain clearly overheating. As he slumped down in his seat, we began wondering about the identity of the players concerned; coming up with several names who might be becoming ex blues in the very near future. Sheer speculation of course on our part, but what most certainly wasn't was the way that Blues had set up their stall for this game. With the way that we were attacking at every opportunity, surely a goal would come soon!

And of course, it did, and, following the usual absurd logic of the game of football, it fell, not to the side that had had 99% of the ball but instead to the one whose grip upon it matched Alberts take on reality. One attack, one fumbled clearance, and we were behind. All credit though to the travelling supporters, around 90 of them, who had made the journey down and were now receiving a reward for their efforts. But what a kick in the things that Barry Fry claimed to have brought in order for us to be able to have a training session!

With our team's average age being barely above that of consent, it was going to be interesting to see how we would respond to such a setback. We had talent, we had ability, but did we have the inner strength and belief that was required to claw ourselves back into the game? Our visitors had barely had a kick of the ball but now, their morale rising at a faster rate than Boris's reputation sinks, they were challenging for every ball like their life's depended upon it.

A game that we had had total control over was now wavering. Would we simply, as per earlier in the season, just fold away our card table and call it quits or would we instead, like Rodney on a winning streak, splash out another sixpence at the bookies and accept that any chance was better than no chance at all.

Halftime arrived though with both the score line unchanged, and that particular question unanswered. We hadn't done a Denzil who, upon pulling back the curtains and discovering that it was still daylight, curled straight up into a ball. But equally our attempts to recapture those exciting moments before they had scored were somewhat more akin to those of a goldfish's rather than that of an elephant's. Perhaps a natter with the gaffer and a nice cup of tea might help.

The match then restarted and, barely had the sugar had a chance to dissolve, but we were back on level terms. Hobson, uncharacteristically imitating a winger, delivering a smasher of a ball across a vacant goal mouth, allowing Dennis to power it home and send Roots Hall aflame. People were up on their feet cheering, halftime cuppas were being spilt, scarves were being waved. Albert, conscious once again but eyes still glazed, was grandad prancing, Marlene in turn was performing her impression of the missing part of Bob Marley and the and as for Denzil? Well he was wondering just what the possibilities were of there being a late showing at the Odeon to finish off his evening once the event at the Cliffs was over!

With both Dennis and Cardwell having more speed than has ever been piled up inside an Opium den, we looked really dangerous upon every counterattack. Arnold, himself busy making some fine saves, was keen to take advantage of this, releasing the ball long and wide at every opportunity, Blues now have an attacking edge than is going to cause many a defence headaches. Still though, and despite our most earnest efforts, that second, more than deserved, goal just wouldn't come. The woodwork took a shaking, their keeper pulled off some blinding saves and when all else failed, a miskick or a fortunate defensive block would occur. Frustrating stuff!

Time was also steadily passing and so, as the game entered its final minutes, a stage show began to be performed. Various Kings Lynn players going down, each one apparently seriously injured. The ref, who unusually for these reports has not yet been mentioned at all (Be patient, he has a rather prominent part to play in events still to come) of course stopped play upon each occasion. An activity that succeeded in breaking up what spells of pressure we were being able to cast over their goalmouth. A draw therefore looked a forgone conclusion.

It would suit them more than ourselves, but still a point was a point even although our all-around game had definitely merited more, But, if that was all that was on offer, then we would reluctantly have to accept it. Accordingly, many people began leaving their seats at this point. Something which is always a mystery to the Thunderbirds. It's like reading a who dunnit and then skipping the final chapter. Ok, so on this occasion it was fairly obvious that the butler had done it. But there were others with weaker alibis, a hitch-hiking vagabond for one, so anything could still happen!

And it did!

Three minutes into injury time, Dalby burst into the area with the goal at his mercy and, just as he was about to hit the ball home, so he was hacked to the ground by a defender who clearly had the Sherriff of Nottingham dangling from a branch somewhere upon his family tree. Well at least that is how the referee saw it. Those much closer to the play (Just what is it with refs in this league. None of them seem to want to be nearer to the ball than 200 yards away!) had accepted it as being a perfectly fair challenge. But hey, it's happened to us, on far too many occasions, and now it was happening to Kings Lynn.

Their manager was not exactly H.P, or indeed P.C, about how he expressed his displeasure either!

A fact that the 4th official duly drew the referee's attention to; a red card being awarded as a direct result. Which was all fine and dandy of course, but it all served to add to the pressure that was building up upon Dalby who was waiting to take the penalty kick. He had missed his last such opportunity, away at Chesterfield in the cup. A lamented fact that set the Thunderbird's all of a shrieking and wailing. "Not Dalby", "No, not Dalby", "He's going to belt it right over the bar", "Anybody but him!". Indeed, only 'Smoke me a kipper', Mike,

was staying calm and so holding his tongue, and indeed also his breath, as the Southend forward, his ears still smarting from the 'advice' offered up to him by two of Kings Lynn's defenders, put the ball down on the spot.

Roots Hall fell silent.

An away supporter began jumping up and down desperately behind the North Bank goal.

The keeper tried to fill his goalmouth.

The referee blew his whistle.

Dalby began his run up.

The keeper swayed. First to the left, and then to the right.

Trigger chewed thoughtfully upon his sandwich.

A foot swung back

A ball, its mission blessed by over 6,000 anxious, keenly watching, eyes, sped on its way.

The keeper dived.

The wrong way! Roots Hall simply exploding as the ball hit the back of the net.

2 - 1 to the Super Blues and three more valuable, priceless, points were almost all ours. But there were still a couple of minutes to play and so now it was our turn to play at being injured soldiers. Just why Denzil had elected to go to the theatre when drama like this was available to him is unfathomable. Here was a situation where our fantastic players were having to draw upon hidden depths in order to keep a determined and vengeful Kings Lynn at bay. An angry and desperate team that were now taking throw ins so fast that their arms were a blur, every kick was being aimed in only one direction, forwards, and players who, just minutes before had looked to be certain stretcher cases, were now charging around the pitch like enraged rhinos. Daktari was never like this!

Albert was getting more and more concerned. The drawing of a clock that he was proudly holding up revealed that there was at least two more minutes to go. Even worse, the rubber that he was using to change the time had worn down to the point that it was now no more than a stub! Were our nerves thus doomed to be continuously stretched for ever and always?

Fortunately, instead of relying upon some rather dodgy fridge art, the referee had Alexa to call upon, and her advice was that time was up. Accordingly, accompanied by wild cheering from all around the ground, the final whistle got blown. The ref immediately finding himself surrounded by almost every member of a hugely disappointed and irate away team. Our heroes on the other hand strolled, as if to the manor born, around the pitch enthusiastically accepting the plaudits of a delighted home crowd.

Things of course eventually calmed down. Well on the pitch anyway, but Albert still had a problem. Being night-time, it was dark. Furthermore, a court order prohibited him from wearing day-glo or any other brightly coloured attire. So just how was he supposed to attract the attention of someone who might be willing to give him a lift back home?

Did we care though? Not a lot! Blues had just earned themselves another three points, our third league win in a row, and that was truly something to be celebrated. Lady Fortune had finally smiled in our direction and perhaps by sacrificing Albert to a long walk, we would keep upon her sweet side. It was a happy thought in any case!

Kings Lynn were not a bad side. They were certainly better than when we had beaten them at their place way back in August. However, they had just suffered from the sort of misfortune that haunts teams when they are stuck within the basement level of a division. That such a spectre had not cast its ghostly shroud over us, indeed we had just encountered the exact opposite, was quite an indicator of several things.

One, we are now approaching safety in this league. Two, we are most definitely a team that can win games that, at best, would have been draws, or worse, in the not-so-distant past, and, thirdly, perhaps most importantly of all, we now look organised and confident. Surely now for us, as Otis Clay once put it "The only way is up". Something that, after so many seasons of utter disappointments and lost hope, is certainly to be cherished.

Come on you Blues!!