



Tuesday 8th February 2022



Southend 2 – Bromley 0



It was impossible to get out. Everywhere was just a log jam of grinning, smiling faces and no one was moving. No one wanted too. Everyone just wanted to stay and savour the moment, enjoying the taste of the intoxicating atmosphere that is once more Roots Hall!

Was this real? Was that really us out there? Could we dare to dream?

The old lady has witnessed some truly remarkable moments, our thrashing of Manchester United, our humbling of Newcastle and our topping of the Championship table. Tonight's defeat of Bromley doesn't quite shine as brightly as those events did. But, when you compare where we are now, with where we were just a few short months back, this result and the manner in which it was obtained is just as astonishing.

When King Kev and his merry men arrived, we all hoped, ok prayed, for a turnaround in form. But even the most optimistic of our supporters could never have imagined such a complete reversal in our fortunes. During those dark days, teams like Bromley were having us for breakfast, but now they can't even get a seat at the table! The blue shirt is once more being worn, not only with pride but also determination and grit. The badge once more meaning something!

However, tonight's victory was about so much more than just every single one of our players giving 120%. Things ran much deeper than that. For not only was it a coming to the fore of our newly found confidence and mojo. It was also a sign, a blazing great furnace of a signal that spread right across the night sky screaming, to everyone from Dover at the foot of the pyramid to those wearing ghostly blue Shrimper shirts at the Etihad, that Southend United were back!

There have been indications for weeks now as, with each game, we have slowly improved. Our shape, which once resembled a herd of sheep that had just heard that Albert was in the vicinity, is now a template. A model of play that, akin to a shoal of fish, smoothly changes its form as situations dictate. No longer is each of our players an island but instead they are a valuable member of a team that understands, not only their own role, but also that of every other player. We are truly, once again, United!

Albert was confused. A state of mind that he was well used to. But nevertheless, it still puzzled him that he was feeling so lost and bewildered within the confines of the centre of the universe; usually a place of some solace. Having been summarily evicted from the Green's charabanc just as quickly as they could hit the button once the Hall was in sight, he had wandered into its confines. A stray dog looking for a friendly lamp post.

Grandad, somebody else who's so scared of missing kick off that he arrives at the ground long before the gates open, is usually his first victim. Standing alone and isolated near the tea bar, he presents an easy target and, once in our O.A.G's sights, he never stands a chance of escape. Especially as there are normally so few other people around to hide behind.

But tonight, the West Stand was teeming. Hot dogs and burgers were being consumed everywhere abouts, welcome suppers for those who had rushed straight to the ground rather than risk going home first.

Programme sellers were being overwhelmed and lost looking groups were playing follow my leader, as, led by someone peering at a ticket, they wandered up and down the aisles looking for their allocated seating. Something clearly wasn't right!

So many people about, this early. It just was just plain wrong, and Albert wanted to complain to somebody. But who? With so many possible victims to choose from, our, by now terminally confused tribal elder, was all of a fluster. Trigger too was feeling a mite overwhelmed. Used to being able to spread his picnic table all around him, he was most disturbed to find two complete strangers sitting right where the cream cakes usually resided upon their stand. And just where was he supposed to put the celery sticks?

Indeed, everything was in quite a turmoil as regulars and the not so regular merged, kaleidoscope like into swirling swarms, before once again becoming individuals seeking somewhere from which to watch the game. Over 8,000 seats had been sold for this evening match. Incredibly when you think of it being a Tuesday night non-league fixture. Eat your heart out Col Poo. Only your radio station loves you!

Mrs Green has recently rediscovered her taste for Milky bars. Something that's not at all shared by her husband. Despite this, she has insisted on them looking out for some, hopefully in the form of an egg. Willing to try anything that might prevent her from singing, the besieged Boycie had whispered the words that escape from so many men's lips in similar dire situations 'Yes dear' and then headed straight for the ground still some distance away.

Parking near to the Hall is now becoming nearly impossible. A murky, discoloured, brew made up of rare parking places and an increase in the number of the faithful, fermenting to the point that even Albert would only ever use it wash his smalls. The situation does not impress Boycie at all, and the growing distances away from the ground that he is now having to traverse betwixt seat and vehicle is becoming a pain. It does have one bright point though. The perfect excuse for chucking his sibling out of the boot just as soon the Roots Hall flood lights appear upon the horizon.

Denzil, as has already reported by these learned papers, is Portsmouth bound. To this end he has been getting tattooed and learning to ring a cow bell. However, he does seem to have misunderstood a key requirement. One that has to be met before he can join in with the ritual wailing of 'Pompey Loyal, Loyal Pompey'. Something that he has assured all the Thunderbirds he is looking forward too. It's the small matter of bearing his skin.

Your average South Coast ape wanders around scratching its arm pits and bearing its chest. It also has a full head of hair. Our map challenged navigator however lubricates any scratches with gallons of hand lotion, bares his head and lacks even a single follicle upon his chest! The cities tourist office is though helping him get a rudimental education (Just like the maff's course that he undertook a few years back) and so, after this game, he was once more heading for the M3 and all places doubtful. Hello Sailor!

Bromley looked a bit misshapen too. The height of their team varying from average / medium to someone who had spent too many hours stretched out upon on the rack. Their central defender was so tall that he had had to gain special dispensation from the league in order to wear window screen wipers, so often was he his head lost amongst the clouds. Even upon a basketball arena he would have stood out. He was not alone though, and several other giants within their squad strode around fee fie fo fumbling during the warmup period. Wonder if they were planning to employ the high ball tactic at all?

It was obvious from the game's opening exchanges that a: once again we had a cretin for a ref and b: we were in for a cracking game of football. Bromley were indeed playing the air ball form of the sport whilst we much preferred to disturb the sleep patterns of any dozing worms. Each team was putting its all into the match, and as result the already fantastic atmosphere within the Hall just started to build and build. It was an ever increasing crescendo that resounded off the roofs of all the stands and it encouraged every blue shirt to give their upmost. And they did!

The ball was being moved from end to end, foot to foot and goalkeeper to goal keeper at dazzling speed. Indeed, any impressions that we might still have been harbouring that non-league football was all

about hit and grunt were being firmly put to bed as two very equally matched teams went full on, head to head. This meant that the officials, (Do they do any training beyond one arm saluting?), struggled to keep up with the pace of the game and the ref would clearly have relished being offered the use of an oxygen tent after just ten minutes.

By this time though he had already booked two of our players for innocuous looking fouls. If he had carried on at this rate, then everyone involved in the game, including his guide dog, would have received a caution before halftime. Fortunately, he calmed down (It is also possible that he had lost his crayon) and so the possibility of the game ending up as a five aside did gradually recede.

The pace and speed of the game was incredible, as so too was the accuracy of each team's passing. Both teams being fully intent upon showing off their skills and indeed, also benefiting from them. The match alternating in direction as first one team attacked, and then the other. However, they did process a talent that we most notably lacked, that of instant reincarnation.

One of our players, say the tenacious Atkinson or the determined Husin, would win the ball employing a technique that, before foreign managers and players flooded the game in this country, was known as a tackle. Its outlawed now and coaches, also mostly foreign, much prefer instead to concentrate upon improving their charges shirt pulling and neck throttling abilities. Both of course are still 'offences', but ones that match officials just never ever see for some reason.

Anyway, so there we would be having won the ball, steaming at a rate of knots towards their goal mouth when off would sound a whistle as the Bromley player who had just lost the ball, lay on the ground like 10,000 volts had just gone through him. His boots nailed to the pitch and pining for the fiords, he was obviously bereft of life and had gone to meet his maker. His metabolic processes were now history, and he was off his twig. A stiff. He had kicked the bucket and had lost his mortal coil. The curtain had been pulled down and he had joined the choir invisible!

Not at all well you might say.

But then, stage right, would appear a running figure. Was it a bird? Was it a plane? Nope, instead it was their trainer, someone who must surely be on the wish list of every NHS authority in the country because within seconds, yes seconds, what had once been just a heap of dead meat had leaped to its feet and was running around like Bambi chasing a Farley's rusk,

It wasn't a miracle that he pulled off just once either. No, each and every time, they lost the ball, so his marvellous, magical, abilities with just a sponge and a bucket of water would be required. Disappointed morticians wondering just why they had picked such a dead-end career. Strangely though, the ref never caught on. He totally brought into every performance, earning Nectar points by the ton and awarding them spurious free-kick after free-kick. Still, it gave Boycie and Mike something to shout about!

Beyond that is the yells of encouragement that they, and everyone else amongst the 8,000 + crowd (Bar the 120 away supporters who had just discovered the rainbow at the end of the M25) were giving the team. Every stand was rocking, yes, even the East. Admittedly though that might have been solely due to the effect of so many Zimmer frames groaning into action as halftime and a cup of tea beckoned.

The glow of thousands of Tinkerbells filled the ground almost as soon as the ref's cuckoo clock advised him that 45 minutes were up. The magical attraction of the mobile phone was once more exerting its influence over the totally mindless. It's now an almost automatic response for people to whip the damn things out, whatever the provocation. Just what is about filming yourself behaving like an idiot whenever a goal gets scored? Surely celebrating and enjoying the moment should come way before taking a selfie of a grinning face that has already been photographed in insane mode a million times before?

Strange some people. But then that's what tends to happen when the likes of Albert are allowed to be registered as breeding stock.

Regrettably it does have to be said that Blues do not have a terrific record for the period during the ten or so minutes following the break. The number of goals that we have conceded during this time rivalling the amount of discarded betting slips inside Rodney's bin. However, upon this occasion we sprung out of the traps faster than Slinky's on acid. Immediately bearing down upon their goal in numbers.

Right in amongst them was Dalby, who once again was having an outstanding game. Indeed, now with defenders snarling and threatening on each side of him, he was extremely unfortunate to see his powerful shot from just inside the box, rebound of the far post and away. But following up was Dennis, who slotted it home to instantly make Roots Hall a hazard to all flying aircraft. Then, barely had we regained our seats (And put away the Tinkerbells) but they were at it again. This time Hobson heading home a corner delivered by young Clifford.

Two goals in almost as many minutes and the whole place was simply going ape. Yes, you could sit back down if you wanted. But only at the risk of experiencing that of a pea inside a drum being hammered by Keith Moon. The very ground was throbbing and the heavy thud that was hitting the soles of your feet was thundering out "Blues, Blues, Blues". Noise abatement societies as far away as Aberdeen must have been filing petitions!

Sampling such an atmosphere was more than some of the away supporters could evidently stand. Not too sure exactly what was going on, but over the next half an hour or so a steady stream of Bromley supporters found themselves being firmly escorted out of the ground by stewards. Ever friendly, the Blues Voice bid them a noisy farewell, despite being just as puzzled as everyone else as to what was going on behind the North Bank goal, given that so many were being invited to return home early.

No matter, out on the field the game had resumed its frenetic pace of the first. Stunned by our goals Bromley's manager, ex Blues goalkeeper, Andy Woodman, began introducing taller and even taller players into his side. Our defence, very ably led by Lopata, was winning pretty much every ball that they pumped up into the air and so such a response was not at all unexpected. As so indeed was its utter failure.

We simply just continued to comfortably clear each and every air ball, snow covered or otherwise, that they directed at us. And, should not a Blues head meet the ball, then the extremely able hands of Arnold did. Once again, the Blues keeper was on top of his game and Bromley just had no ideas as to how to beat either him or indeed Blues themselves.

Their manager later made cryptic remarks about us having strengthened the squad since the date of the original fixture (Postponed due to Covid). Well perhaps if he too had ventured into the transfer market instead of preferring to pay for his team to have Norwegian Blue imitation classes

We should have had a penalty, possibly even two. But just how the result of a coupling between a diseased vulture and a dung beetle that had just enjoyed a good meal curtesy of an elephant suffering from chronic diarrhoea, totally missed Husin being pushed to the ground is beyond astounding. Our midfielder had swooped upon a loose ball to break into their penalty area and was just preparing to beat their keeper when he was shoved from behind and so thrown to the floor. It happened right in front of the ref and even Bromley couldn't understand how he had not made the call. But perhaps the relevant authorities would like to explain?

Yeah, not holding my breath either!

Even with a copy of their rule book written in braille directly to hand, they rarely care to comment or respond to any questions. However, handing out fines to infuriated managers, they don't seem to have many problems with. Strange.

Now usually its Trigs or 'Pompey' Denzil that takes on the role of a speaking clock as the final minutes of a game wind down. But, as the latter was grooming his palms and the former filling his mouth with the final remains of what had once been a fruit cake, our recalcitrant pensioner took it upon himself to claim the microphone.

Tuning into Radio Albert is rarely an experience to be relished and this was no exception. Painstakingly, and with great care, he counted down every second as it passed. It left you uncertain as to just why you wanted such a splendid game to ever end. Possibly it was simply because you wanted Blues to maintain a clean sheet. Or, much more likely, you couldn't wait until the air pollution had cleared

Many, many congratulations to whomsoever was patient enough to teach him how to tell the time. But such a skill, more usually learnt well before one receives any form of communication from the Queen, is generally conducted within the silence of one's own head. Accepted, he was proud of his achievement but perhaps modesty is a subject that you could, to some profit, approach him with next?

Eventually though the game did come to an end and with it the annoying time commentary. Not so the Hall, which immediately started going totally crazy all over again. We had been loudly cheering on the lads throughout the game but now it was as if a nuclear explosion had combined with an eruption the size of Krakatoa to form a heavy metal band. Everything was thundering and vibrating about. It was as if two thousand underground trains, their headlights no further than feet away, were rumbling towards you. The whole place was simply going absolutely mad!

So, can we dare to dream? Can we really?

As the team made their way around the pitch, being cheered and applauded everywhere, a ditty whose theme is our return to the football league, began to spread and spread. Soon it was upon everybody's lips. You couldn't resist joining in and it also made you begin to wonder. You really began to wonder. If we can keep on performing like this. If we can keep on improving, game upon game. Could the Impossible really become possible?

The thought, dream, utter fantasy, call it what you like, just wouldn't go away. It's undoubtedly completely ridiculous and totally out of the question. For one thing, we are eleven points short of even having a shout at the P word. That's four wins, almost as many as Weymouth would need in order to push us back into a relegation slot. However, pipe dreams have a tendency to keep on playing and so this one

Singling out any of our players performance is impossible too. Each and every one of them wearing the badge, not only with pride, but also courage. However, a special word does have to go to Dennis, who not only responded to a youngster's request for his shirt, but also spent some time talking to him when he could have been back amongst his teammates enjoying the plaudits that they were all receiving and so richly deserved. It kind of sums up the relationship that our club has been re-establishing with its supporters. Together we have been through hell, several times, but a bright light is now a beckoning and it's no longer an oncoming train but possibly, just possibly, an express ride to rival no other!

Dare we really dream?

Come on you Blues!!