



Saturday 5th March 2022



Chesterfield 2 - Southend 2



“You to me are everything, Sam Dalby, Sam Dalby”

The away stand at Chesterfield was bouncing. Noise, songs, laughter and wild cheering coming from all quarters. After falling behind early in the game Blues had just equalised and the world was back on its axis. Well almost, because the sound of our support must surely have been shaking good old Mother Earth to her very core. Our wonderful players were celebrating too, dancing and jumping around right in front of us. What a feeling! Come on you magnificent Blues!!

It was very different scene from the one that had greeted Thunderbird II as she descended through grey, miserable clouds to land at Tracy International. For some reason the baggage handlers had just dumped the luggage here there and everywhere across the airports apron, but Mike soon got things organised such that the hold door was firmly shut just five minutes after his sleek crafts wheels had first touched the ground.

Grandad and Boycie were easily fixed into position. They were gabbing away at each other so much, a lityny that rarely lulled the whole way to Chesterfield, that they barely even noticed as they were clipped into position. Trigger however was not as easy game and quite a bit of shuffling ensued before he too was securely positioned and clearance from the tower to take off obtained.

By now it was steadily raining and prospects for a dry day ahead looked increasingly more distant. The airfields metrological officer had though promised clearer weather once we reached our destination some 250 or so miles away. There again, they, like Albert whose was under curfew orders once again, was not making the trip and so how much did they care?

Being of a certain age, the nether regions of TBII was filled with talk related to each other's health. To be fair, Covid had struck its fangs into the Thunderbirds over recent weeks and so this was the first time that we had been able to get together for quite some time. As Boycie and Grandad gleefully exchanged gruesome details about their symptoms, Trigger, who had taken some time to equate his conditions with the pandemic, concentrated upon his breakfast.

Although the airport widely advertised its menus and its extremely low prices, Trigs knew, through painful experience, the true meaning of such fake news. Accordingly he had made his own arrangements, and although two thick ham sandwiches and a Belgium bun were now history, his cup of coffee was still hot and disappearing fast!

As the flight continued, the cast of Casualty thankfully ran out of ways to describe their Covid experiences and so the subject of their conversation turned to Russia and Putin. The talking shop that is the U.N would have been horrified at the direct solutions being proposed by this, far from usually so, dynamic back seat duo. Trigs suggestions too, lacked that certain degree of subtleness that politicians like to adopt when they are spouting hot air rather than actually doing something.

Indeed, the match that we were travelling through such dire and gloomy conditions to see, didn't even get a mention until about mile 180. It was brought into focus by a phone call from Del Boy who was about an hour ahead of our position. He had had no plans to travel to the game but having woken up that morning with a

certain urge, he had given into it and so was contacting us to let us know he would meet us at the ground and to warn of more weather ahead.

Mike, now known as the 'Blue Baron' after being promoted for services to his Queen and country, grimaced. The road was already very wet and with so much traffic about, it was taking a lot of concentration to plot a safe course. Usually Denzil would be on hand, complete with his own unique take upon a road map, but providence, in the shape of a darkened empty cinema, had intervened and so Mike didn't have to struggle against that additional handicap. Things were already bad enough given the amount of noise being generated from the hold!

Trigger, perhaps trying to help, then delved deep into his pockets to reveal an aged folder that contained rather yellowed and faded A4 sheets of paper. Dated from his time in an office around 25 years ago, they were handed out, one by one, to a stunned back seat who didn't quite know what to do with them. Our librarian of antiquities seemed quite satisfied though just as long as they emitted a brief giggle; proudly providing them with a fresh sheet of whatever it was as a reward each time they made some sort of response. This procedure went on for quite some time.

Eventually their torture came to an end as the twisted spire of Chesterfield's church swam into view and, as it did so, we began searching for a mooring post. Finding one beside a small, rather picturesque, lock that was about a 10-minute stroll away from the ground. Trigs wanted to stay and play with the boats but, desperate for their Bovril's, his fellow passengers firmly directed in the direction of what proved to be a series of underground tunnels which eventually surfaced close to the stadium.

Built about a year before they were relegated out of the league, Chesterfield's home is quite a modern structure. Despite that, it has its own personality, not least the amount of unguarded open gates that we could have easily slipped through. However, having though already paid for our tickets, we performed our entrance the more traditional way and soon found ourselves the bearers of rather hot cups of a dark brown beverage.

If stock market trading was based upon the price of gravy grains rather than specs of gold coloured minerals then it would be both extremely volatile and unpredictable. The price of a cup of Bovril varying so much from ground to ground. For example, at Dover you could have brought a mountain of the stuff for the price that Chesterfield was charging for a single cup!

Our seats were behind one of the goals. In front of us stretched a rather shabby and uneven looking pitch. Scenes from the Sahara decorated each goal mouth, and the centre circle didn't appear to be much of an oasis either. Surrounding these sad looking areas were stands, each full of seating just like our own. However, whilst ours was steadily building up a real match atmosphere, the other three remained pretty lifeless. A situation that didn't change much throughout the entire game!

Top of the league and yet their fans still could barely be bothered to raise even a burp. We in direct contrast were already lifting the roof and by the time the game actually started the atmosphere inside the away end was really something. Over 800 of the Blue Army had marched and we were certainly making our presence felt as the match got underway.

Our hosts though had done their homework and so, knowing that we liked to exert pressure on defences straight from the kick off, they decided to get their say in first. Indeed, our penalty area was being sprayed with dangerous crosses long before we even managed to set a meaningful foot inside their half. In particular their left winger looked to be very fast and effective in this regard and, even with two of our defenders tightly shadowing him, was still being able to deliver lethal looking balls into our area. Worrying stuff.

But gradually, our midfield, led by the seemingly ageless Atkinson began to assert its authority and so BBC Col Pugh would have been forced to start reporting upon our game rather than their journey up or their Granddad's employment as a window cleaner. However, when in the 8th minute, the ball was hit from some

distance into the back of our net it would have been difficult for them to describe just what had happened. Yes, we were unfortunately one down, but just how had the ball flashed past Arnold and so into our goal?

Many thought that he should have been able to easily catch it, others that a raised arm would have been sufficient to do the job whilst quite a few suspected that a subtle change in the balls path had caught our superb keeper out. The debate ranged but few, possibly even the scorer and Arnold themselves, really knew the whole truth of the matter.

Anyway, the home crowd had raised itself from its lethargy enough to give a brief cheer before then falling asleep again. We though were up on our feet and urging the lads on. We had fallen behind to the sort of shot that either goes in or is a million miles wide. It was just one of those things and what was important now was addressing the situation and Blues were doing just that!

From the moment that they had scored, Chesterfield barely got another touch of the ball as Blues pushed forward seeking an equaliser. Displays of sublime skill were everywhere, especially as performed by Atkinson whose seems to have taken a Peter Pan pill. He was popping up everywhere, and one bit of skill that he coolly performed on the edge our box had everyone up on their feet and applauding.

Others in blue, or rather yellow, attire were more than doing their bit too, but unfortunately not to very much effect. Although obviously rather shell shocked by our so positive reaction to their goal, our hosts were nevertheless still defending well and so chances for us to score were very limited. Equally, sandy, uneven, pitches don't really feature in Dennis's playbook and so, without his bursts of speed down the wing, we were pretty much struggling against heavy traffic.

Accordingly, whilst certainly level on points in any boxing judges eyes, the score line said otherwise as the break in play arrived. Opinions amounts the faithful were therefore somewhat split. Whilst those weighed down by a somewhat gloomy mindset were a tad mournful, others felt encouraged by our display and still felt that a result was on the cards. Additional cups of expensive Bovril though most certainly were not!

Blues came out of the traps in the second period as if they were greyhounds without the burden of a six penny each way bet by Rodney on their backs. Simply blowing Chesterfield away like a tornado rampaging through a cornfield, we put their goal mouth under notice, sticking it firmly there with concrete. With increasing desperation, our hosts tried to stem our yellow tide but, just like Canute, they were being swept off their feet as we smoothly played the ball all around them.

Dalby has come on leaps and bounds from the young colt that was introduced to us way back at the seasons opening fixture against Kings Lynn. He is not yet a stallion, but all the signs are most certainly there, and images of Barry Corr kept superimposed themselves over him as he either fought for the ball or kept possession over it. Brown was certainly wearing his 'canny man' cap when he signed him.

Mention has already been made of one of our tribal O.A.P's, and this doesn't refer to Albert who was polishing his leg irons upon his sofa, but rather the evergreen Atkinson. What a game he was having and so, when he burst through their defence, clean through on goal and directly in front of us, the entire away stand was up on its feet in wild anticipation.

Their goalkeeper who had been suffering some rather uncomplimentary observations about his private activities, attempted to close him down but only succeeded in fouling him. Despite this the ref, who remarkably to say had a pretty decent game, allowed play to continue as another Blue now had the goal at his mercy. Alas though what should have been just a tap in, resulted in an open goal being missed and our hearts immediately sank.

Only to rise again quicker than an M.P raising their hand in support of yet another rise in their pay, The referee had only been waiting to see what developed before blowing his whistle, and so he awarded us a penalty. The keeper of course protested, and really should have been given a red rather than just a yellow card. But then the goalkeeper's union does have a rather strong reputation.

Nevertheless, both he and their very mouthy number three kept on giving it all that to Dalby who was calmly waiting to take the penalty kick. Endlessly reminding him of the last time he had taken such a kick at their ground when the ball had flown way over the bar. They were trying to get inside his head, and you can just imagine how much venom we were giving them in return!

Eventually though the ref put them both back firmly in their cages and so a ceremony whose crown was the ball nestling in the back of their net got under way. The keeper had guessed the direction of our determined forwards kick but could do little to prevent it from slipping from his grasp and so into the goal. He was desperate, we were delighted. Nearby traffic being halted in its tracks by the amount of noise with which the goal was greeted. Ok, so it might also have been due to the lights changing to red, but surely that would have just been coincidence?

We were back on equal terms and how we so deserved to be. We were playing some terrific football and Chesterfield simply appeared to have no answer. But then one of those things that happen in football occurred. We had played the ball out wide for Dalby to chase down but as he attempted to do so, his path was blocked by the afore described number three and he fell to the ground injured.

Repairs took some time, and their manager duly took advantage of this to get some strong views across to his team. Accordingly, once play had restarted, although still extremely ruffled, their feathers were sufficiently back in place for them to begin asking some questions of their own once again. A game in which there had only ever going to be one winner, suddenly now had two candidates for that role.

Substitutions were also taking place and so the match became a bit fragmented. Dennis, possibly carrying an injury from an encounter in the first half, was replaced by the energetic Powell whilst they too played around with the make-up of their forward line. Both managers evidently being equally determined to secure all three points.

Theirs looked to have succeeded too, as bad marking at the back left one of their players a completely free header at goal. With only ten or so minutes left we were back in trouble. However, about how we would respond, there was no question. But their crowd's weak whimpers of support, certainly in relation to ours, which by now had reached a crescendo, must have been somewhat disappointing to the home team.

Urged on by both their talented management team and their extremely vocal away support, Blues soon took over control of the game again. Chesterfield had been able to raise theirs for a few minutes, but lacking the Viagra effect of our support, they just couldn't keep it up. So now they were back peddling like mad, as wave upon wave of Blues attacks swarmed all over them.

Then a fantastic ball from Neal set Powell clean through at goal. Once again the keeper, heart very much in mouth, advanced, but before he could perform his party piece, Powell was steering a low curved ball towards the goal. Many thought that he should have taken an additional touch of the ball, others that he had timed it perfectly. Whatever, whom so ever laid out the pitch and the goal posts had been out by about three inches, and so the ball failed to meet its so promising destiny.

Just seconds were now left in the game, and everyone felt that that must have been our last opportunity to earn the point that we oh so richly deserved. Everybody that is save for those bearing a yellow shirt, because, without even taking a breath to express disappointment, we were straight back at their throats following the goal kick.

Bridge, on for Kensdale who had had a very tidy game, received the ball wide. Beating his marker, he sped towards the line and the edge of the box before drilling a low ball across it. What happened next can only be described in terms of an eruption of pure joy and excitement as the ball somehow found its way into the far corner of the net.

The sheer bedlam that was now the away end is impossible to describe. Someone went hurtling past us, tumbling down through the seats and taking others with them. Their leap of sheer joy had taken them out of

their seat and into a fall. Such though was the throngs of people all up and dancing, that no damage to anyone resulted. A grinning teenage soon rushing back up the stairs to re-join his mates who, like everyone else, were having one hell of a party.

The scenes on the pitch were no different. Our team going absolutely ape as they danced and pranced around in front of us. Our exhilarating journey over the past through months is just going on and on and what its pinnacle will be, no one knows. But with a team like this, with players whose hearts are the size of melons and for whom, the term impossible has no meaning, anything and everything seems achievable.

What scenes. What joy. What amazing sounds. This was Father Christmas, sitting on top of an Easter Egg, enjoying a slice of Toblerone. Hearts were pumping, legs were jumping and faces were split wider than those of Cheshire cats tackling a banana sideways. Wow!!

But what was this. Some idiot had misread the time and so was signalling six minutes of extra time. Impossible!. Yes, we had certainly partied for quite some time following our late, late equaliser but six minutes? Even Boris didn't attend one for that long. Well, apparently at least!

So, we still had some nervous moments to get through. Especially as Blues seemed determined to go home empty handed; giving away free kicks around our box more frantically than even Marlene's agent offering out concert tickets. But, somehow, in some way, we survived, and the final whistle was met by some incredibly wild celebrations.

Yes, we had only drawn but it truly felt like a victory. Twice before this season, we have met Chesterfield and came away severely chastened. Now though it was their turn to be humiliated because that was what it was. Both they, and their oh so quiet supporters, had been hammered into second place. Not only in terms of this game, but also in the league as Stockport had over taken them at the top.

In regard to ourselves, we had further secured our anchor in 12th position. A situation undreamed about just a few dark months ago. The transformation in our team since then has been beyond amazing, and too much credit simply cannot be given to King Kev and his court. Blues though are still very much a work in progress and so it is going to be very interesting to see who stays and who goes at the end of the season.

Our leap up the league positions has come too late for a realistic run at promotion this term. But the foundations are definitely in place for one next year. Other teams though will also be rebuilding and those slipping out of the league need also to be considered. So, no forecasts should really be made at this time. But, with these players, from here

Come on you Blue!!