



Tuesday 8th March 2022



Southend 1 – Grimsby 0



Albert was in full foreman mode. He had left his bright yellow Bob the Builder hat at home. It was a present from someone who wanted him to wear it in order that everyone spotting it, had time to get clear. So, whether or not its absence was deliberate was rather an open question. What was not, was his loud voice as he demanded of everyone as they arrived in their seats "And just what time do you call this?"

It didn't seem to matter whether they were a Thunderbird or not. No one was safe, even if their intended perch was some distance away from our nest. As they made their way along the aisle, pleasantly greeting friends and familiar faces, so a bellow would be aimed at them by Albert. Our eldest reprobate was out to make the most of his visit to the centre of the universe and obviously didn't care who he upset or annoyed.

Desperately trying to look as if they had nothing at all to do with him, the Greens attempted to chat quietly with Denzil about his transfer to Fratton Park. Had the tattoo's hurt and why was he not growing his hair yet? Trigger, his nose buried as usual inside a plastic sandwich box, had little idea what was occurring around him. Someone was making loud noises nearby, but as that was pretty normal, he had far more interesting things to concentrate upon. Mike simply sighed and hoped that Albert's Duracell batteries would run down real soon.

The pitch, verdant and green when compared to the beach like condition at Chesterfield's, was empty of life at the moment. Both teams had been out to warm up but had now retreated back to their respective changing rooms for a last minute natter with their manager and coaching staff. So strange then that so many teams decide to form a huddle just seconds later when back out on the pitch. However, neither side indulged in such dramatics tonight and the game kicked off with Blues attacking the North Bank.

Behind it resided around 200 away fans but we hardly noticed their presence all evening long. Apart from the odd sniff of fish oil or possibly a trawler's bilges of course. Thumbs up to them for making the journey on a cold Tuesday night but why bother if you are then just going to sit there and do East Stand impressions?

Grimsby, their team, though did look like they meant business and so set about playing siege to our goal mouth from quite early on. However, the days when our defence was so soft that even Albert could gum contently upon them are far gone. We now have a far tougher centre, and although balls flew around our area, that is all they did. As far as any end product was concerned, Grimsby were very much a Marlene album.

Just as at the weekend, we weathered the early storm before beginning to make our own contribution to the game. Again, it was our lions in midfield that swung the balance in our favour. Snarling and roaring into each tackle, they soon let our visitors know that they we were more than up for it. Unhappily the ref, a somewhat bewildered, lonely figure who wandered around as if seeking guidance, took exception to our performing things that, in the days before the foreign invasion, were simply known as tackles. Accordingly, the first half was a pretty fragmented affair as he kept on blowing his tin whistle. Even his linesman looked exasperated with him at times!

He also had a memory rather akin to that of a goldfish suffering from amnesia. The ball would clearly leave the field of play at point A and yet, time and time again, he would allow the Grimsby players, one in

particular, to advance up the field, not to point B, but even as far as C or sometimes D. We of course gently advised him of this fact, but he was evidently deaf as well. Still, Boycie enjoyed himself!

Halftime arrived with no change in the score line. We had created a couple of half chances, them not even a gasp of breath. The game though could still certainly go either way, but there was little doubting that we were the better of two rather useful sides. Of course, none of this got discussed. Instead, the stands were full of Tinkerbells; each little palm fairy desperately trying to get a signal. It didn't seem to matter just how hard their fixated owners clapped or shouted, few tinks were up for doing the business.

Then Albert, almost on the point of tears, realised that he just about got something if Denzil held his balding head in a certain way. Boycie, who had also been getting discouraged, very quickly enthusiastically joined in with the experiment and sure enough it was soon discovered to both brothers very evident joy, that Denzil's bounce could reflect WIFI signals. Marlene had been sending plenty of her own, but she too was encountering problems getting messages across to her very preoccupied spouse!

To say that the second half was all one way traffic would be inaccurate. Route one providing Grimsby with some sort of weak response to our policy of all-out attack. Despite all our hard work and endeavour though, their keeper was rarely getting tested. Equally, Arnold didn't even have an exam paper to read, so little was coming his way. The game was very much one of a midfield battle.

It wasn't chess and it wasn't battleships but something in-between. Drafts with attitude perhaps? Both sides were taking risks but we had a monopoly of possession. As for the officials? Well they barely had a Cluedo.

Actually that's not really being fair to the linesman who was running the line in front of the winkle stall that is the East Stand. Whilst its inhabitants indulged in slurps of tea, many via a straw, he had a fairly decent game; albeit whilst also being somewhat guilty of not knowing where a Grimsby throw in should be taken. His colleague, sleep walking in front of the Thunderbirds, though barely showed any interest in proceedings whatsoever. Both Mike and Boycie tried to break through his reverie but, rare for them, totally failed.

Having to play so many games in so short a period is beginning to tell on some of our players. Take Callum Powell for example. Just a few months back he was playing games at a speed and ferocity way below this evenings. That adjustment must be difficult and, although full of determination and grit, you could see the batteries beginning to wain long before the second period was even halfway through.

Nevertheless his attempt to make the most of a lost ball inside their area resulted in a penalty being awarded our way. In all truth, given the way that the match was unfolding, such an event was the only means by which either side was going to score. The big question being, as Dalby placed the ball on the spot, would he take a better one than on Saturday or an even worse one?

Roots Hall held its breath. Many could not bear to watch. Trigs though began searching through his picnic basket. He had his own priorities, and little was going to get in the way of them!

The goalkeeper dived but the ball hadn't moved. Instead our wily forward had only shuffled his feet and, now that the keeper had committed himself, he could almost casually steer the ball into the empty net. Roots Hall becoming a cauldron of noise and excitement as the Blues Voice rendition of "You, to me are everything ..." echoed back off almost every stand.

There were still twenty or so minutes to go in the game though and Grimsby looked very determined as they lined up for the games restart. Would we be able to hold out?

Back in the day, when other managers were at the helm, there is little doubt that, having established such a lead, we would have immediately adopted a defensive posture and camped on the edge of our box, desperately playing hoof ball in order to run the clock down. That is not King Kev's approach at all though, and so instead we simply continued on pouring forward in numbers, seeking that second decisive goal.

We almost got it too. A terrific shot from distance by Bridge, on for the exhausted Powell, hitting the bar with the goalkeeper grabbing at thin air. With just about five minutes left on the clock that would have wrapped up the evening very nicely but, as a very relieved away side put everything into retrieving the point that was still somehow available to them, we had to endure a few uncomfortable moments before finally the whistle blew signalling yet another Blues victory.

It had not been an easy game. Far from it, Grimsby were a very decent side and they had been very tough to beat. But we had and so three more points were in the bag. It's further consolidated our mid table position and we are now a massive 22 points away from the relegation zone. When you consider just how long it took us to accumulate even half that number, that is quite some going.

Keven and his court though will be facing some difficult decisions over the coming weeks. Some players are beginning to show signs of inexperience at playing at such a level of intensity for so long, Accordingly, they will benefit from some sort of rest period. Equally others will be making a return from the treatment room and so will be eager to partake in as many games as possible. The challenge thus being how to balance those necessary adjustments to the teams make up and shape without creating such a bow wave as to impede our forwards direction. Have complete faith in them though and whilst a defeat will eventually inevitably occur, our current run of thirteen games without one is definitely something to celebrate.

Come on you Blues!!