



Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2022



## Southend 2 – Altrincham 0



*Tracy Island holds a secret. Located as it is, deep inside a swamp and surrounded by a hinterland that isn't much drier, it attracts only bird watchers and the odd dog walker. Indeed, the island does not have many visitors other than those making use of its internationally renowned airport. A situation that lends itself perfectly to the concealment of a certain facility that, if its existence was more widely known, could lead to worldwide approbation of the UK.*

*For deep beneath the shining edifice that is the airports departure lounge lie several chambers. Linked only by long tunnels, each such room has a specific purpose, and it was within the largest of them that a meeting of some importance recently took place.*

*The transcripts of what actually occurred in that room have been subjected to a 100 year ruling. However, despite quite a degree of personal risk, the Blue Baron has managed to smuggle out some of the papers, including one that reveals the purpose of the gathering, namely the trial and prosecution of one Rodney Trotter!*

*The charge? That he is a Jonah!!*

*More than strongly suspecting that this was the case, the Thunderbirds convened the court hearing in order that the felon be fairly convicted. Rodney however declined an offer by the court bailiffs to attend the sentencing procedure. Much preferring to submit a 325 page letter in his self-defence instead.*

*Unfortunately for him, the judge considered the document to be nothing other than pitiful drivel and so threw it out. He did though afterwards confess that he rather thought that some of the supporting photography had been rather well faked. But despite this, he still had felt that they lacked the necessary gravitas to be properly considered as evidence and thus they too were discarded.*

*This left only the prosecution's case to be considered.*

*It was all rather prima facie in that every time Rodders has attended a game, so Blues have performed disastrously and lost. The number of such incidents running into the hundreds and they cover a period of several disappointing seasons. Indeed, whilst the prosecution council did not actually go as far as to accuse the absentee defendant of being the primary cause for us suffering a number of relegations, enough of a hint was left hanging for the court to be able to determine it for itself.*

*His latest misdemeanour had occurred on the evening of March 15<sup>th</sup> 2022 when he was only granted entrance to Roots Hall thanks to a ticket brought on his behalf by his brother. It was to be noted that the accused only extremely rarely paid for him-self to attend a game and even then, only when tickets were available at specially reduced prices.*

*His dark, evil and indeed wicked intentions that night are almost too terrible to describe. Suffice to say that we lost, at home, to Dagenham by three goals to nil. Capital punishment or at least a sentence involving three years' worth of Col Poo season tickets was clearly called for!*

*The grandfatherly judge though was a kindly man, and he expressed no desire to give harm or hurt to what was clearly a very disturbed person. The prosecution's case though was extremely persuasive, and justice had to be seen to be administered. Therefore, he would withhold sentencing until another game had been played, without Rodney being in attendance. The result of said fixture determining the penalty of the court!*

Clear blue skies spread across the heavens as wide as the eye could see. The sun shining down benevolently upon the centre of the universe to send reflections all a dancing. Oh that its rays had been accompanied by something other than a freezingly cold arctic wind though!

Possibly over in the sleepy East Stand temperatures were above zero; the doubtful benefit of having the sun in your eyes throughout a game having to have some sort of a reward. But over inside the West the thermometer had frozen well below zero and even though Albert was, as usual, a source of hot air, little solace could be taken from the brightness of the sky.

Still at least one particular cloud wasn't going to be hanging over our heads. With Rodders chained to his TV by the prospect of some dog tin racing, there was no danger of his malevolent spirit affecting the team today. On Tuesday, all hope had been extinguished just as soon as news of his presence had spread, but today optimism was back on the agenda.

It started with the news that Husin was playing and not suspended as had been reported. Apparently, the cards that he had collected whilst a National South player did not count in this league and so, although still being unavailable for the remainder of the month due to international duty, he was free to play today.

Bridge too was back in the side after a long period of being side-lined through injury. It was going to be interesting to see how he adjusted to playing alongside a number of more than decent players compared to his last full appearance when he was the lone bright star in amongst a cluster of fading lights.

The game though did not start well for Blues. Following their midweek set back they looked unsettled and nervous. Every kick of the ball was hurried and Altringham, sensing our discomfort, quickly set about seeking to take full advantage of it. Rodney's hopes of his sentence being reduced to just a two year sentence attending the Community Stadium began to rise.

So when a strike from distance hit one post and then rebounded across to the other, his red and black striped shirt must have been performing the fandango around his kitchen chairs. If so, they, like their wearer, were in for quite a degree of disappointment as the ball, after striking the opposite post, rebounded thankfully to safety.

It had been a very close shave though and unless we pulled ourselves together, and quickly, another heavy defeat was more than on the cards. It's hard to say what actually then slowly began to unfold but possibly it was case of them running out of belief just as we were beginning to rediscover our inner selves. Whatever, we began to take on more of a role in the game and, whilst still nowhere near being back at our best, at least we no longer looked a complete shambles.

The home crowd, down by a thousand plus on midweek, started to find their voices too. Credit though must go to the Blues Voice who never lost theirs, and if the missing 'fans' were only those who could boo ... well their presence, like Rodney's, was hardly sorely missed.

Sometimes when you watch a game you suddenly get a sense that a goal is about to be scored. Mike was certainly of that mind as Blues prepared to take a corner in the 35<sup>th</sup> minute. Nothing definitive but there was a certain something in the air and, as a linesman's flag cheerfully got waved, it was joined by a massive forest of celebrating arms and limbs.

The ball had dropped right into the middle of the goal and enough legs to keep a centipede's chiropodist busy for years got stabbed in its direction. One belonged to Ralph and under his direction the ball hit the top of the bar before bouncing back down. But had it crossed the line?

No one was sure. Neither team was certain, nor was the ref but Mike and the linesman were in total accord. We had scored and so taken a lead that had seemed so incredibly unlikely in the game's opening twenty minute period.

However now you could see the belief flowing back into every blue shirt as it lined up for the restart. Our veins were full of energy and enthusiasm whilst they looked shell shocked. One of the game's best managers, a certain Mr Clough, once said that a team is never more vulnerable than just after it has scored.

Accordingly, it was with this in mind that the Thunderbirds keenly observed the proceedings of the next few minutes. It soon became clear though that our visitors were becoming less and less of a threat and thus the risk of them equalising was pretty much on par with Marlene ever being honoured by a Brit award!

Some of the credit for our first goal must go to an eagle eyed linesman whilst, just as amazingly, an equal amount of recognition must be attributed to the referee for our second when he chose to allow play to continue on after observing Clifford's shirt being almost ripped off his shoulders as he advanced upfield with the ball.

An object that he smoothly passed into the run of Bridge who took it almost to the byline before slipping a low cross into the six yard box. An area haunted by a goal hungry predator named Matt Dennis, and the rest, as they say, was history!

Certainly, any hopes that Altringham might have been harbouring were dashed after the ball hit the back of their net for the second time. It sent a rejoicing Roots Hall up on to its feet and the 'Curse of Rodney' had been dispelled. The heavy fall of the judge's hammer could almost be felt. A verdict had been reached!

We too now looked full of decision and purpose. As Daggers, empowered by certain evil forces, had done unto us, we were now equally determined to do unto our visitors from up North. Their supporters, just about filling a minibus and a motorcyclist's sidecar, sensed this too. They had been supporting their club well, but now they fell silent and were to be heard no more.

Although Tinkerbells there were a plenty during the break in play, they nevertheless took some time to stir into action within the Thunderbirds nest, our reactions regarding the first period being rather mixed. Although clearly the serious charges that we had laid against Rodney had now been proven beyond all doubt, we weren't quite 100% sure just how, especially given the poor way in which we had started the game.

It was just like in the good old days when the Sally Army used to proudly march out onto the pitch and a packet of crisps plus a programme came to less than half a crown as everyone began talking about the game rather than wailing 'I can't get a ruddy signal!'. Nevertheless, no consensus was actually achieved, partly because Trigger began tucking into his picnic hamper and Denzil realised that he hadn't applied any hand cream for at least five minutes, but mainly because it was difficult to reach one.

We had turned a game that we looked like losing, and badly, onto its head and now were pretty much running it. A state of affairs that continued happily throughout the second half when Arnold was just as much a spectator of events as we all were.

Opportunities to score a third, decisive goal, though were rare. Altringham's habit of packing their area with every one of their players every time we crossed the halfway line hardly helping matters. Equally the referee's bizarre decision to award them free kicks each and every time one of their players grazed their knees, broke up the flow of the game; making it hard for us to exert any sort of real pressure.

Minor niggles though because after 90 minutes three more valuable points had been added to our tally. Somewhat annoyingly we remain in 12<sup>th</sup> position, our target of finishing in the top ten seemingly being continuously put on hold. However we do remain well in touch with sides around us so such ambitions, incredible as they seem after our abject start to the season, still remain both achievable and credible.

Equally absolute is the situation regarding our uncovering of a Jonah. The evidence is more than clear and Rodney, quite rightly, is now a condemned man!

Come on you Blues!