



Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2022



**Southend 0 – Wealdstone 1**



Back in 1952, when the architects of Roots Hall first began considering the pitches alignment, they must have had much more in mind the challenges that would await goalkeepers than those of its supporters. For whilst the guardians of the nets at the ground face few issues regarding the positioning of the sun, those upon the terraces and stands are not so fortunate.

On cloudy, overcast, days, little to no issues arise for either party. But, when it's like today, the sky a perfect blue and the sun's rays beaming down, so problems begin to arise. Indeed, such is the situation that its almost possible to identify whereabouts inside the ground a supporter is going to sit whilst they are still outside it, walking to the game!

Ok, accepted. East Standers are always easy to spot, their Zimmer frames and nannies a dead giveaway. However, should one have managed to escape their guardian's attention, then the fact that they are wearing a cap is usually a fair indication of their intended destination. Failing that, a simple comparison of the clothing being worn by a cockle slurping tea guzzler against those being borne by their neighbours from across the pitch, usually works.

For whilst the average "I say old chap, that referee's a bit of a bounder, what!" might be sporting light clothing accompanied by the slight sniff of animal fat (Mother being well aware of the dangers of being exposed to too much sun) their opposite number from the West Stand will be well hidden away inside winter clothing.

Despite the aghast looks of bystanders, the experienced West Stander knows better than to wear the T-shirts and shorts that weather conditions like today's strongly hinted towards. For inside their shady, dark and cavernous stand, heavy weather clothing is much more strongly advised if one is not going to spend the entire game shivering and wondering just how the polar regions can be melting when it's as chilly as this!

Whenever the weather does decide to be more inviting, Marlene might be as bold as to discard her scarf whilst with Trigs, it's remains as always, very much a case of whatever clothing is closest to hand in the dark. However, Denzil, always grateful for a chance to show off his tattoo, will tuck away his gloves and Boycie, just possibly, will opt for a cup of coffee rather than Bovril. But as far as Albert is concerned, his size 10 army (Boer war) issue clogs are a permanent fixture, no matter what 'Carol' might have had to say in her forecast.

By the bye, people have remarked about how the size of his paw wear keeps changing. The explanation is simple. Wood, being porous, shrinks and expands depending upon just how much he is sweating!

Such then was the situation when the two teams took to the pitch. The West Stand shivering whilst the East saluted them from afar. In the bright, summer like, conditions both teams kit gleamed. Less so those of the officials whose colours reflected those of an agitated wasp. Blues have suffered many a sting from such creatures this season, so would today, once again, be a case of *Deja vu*?

Straight from kick off though we showed that we meant business and inside the opening quarter of an hour we could / should, have been three goals up. Alas, dismal finishing and the incredible fortune of our visitors combined to maintain the status quo. We even had a doubtful award of a penalty saved!

The book of football does not have many chapters and we are only too familiar with all of them. There is the one where one team runs away with the game, another where both teams battle it out to no effect and then there's the one that everyone dreads, where your team is so on top that the flags upon Everest's crest are mere specs and then the opposition, on their one attack, scores!

So, despite Blues almost continuous siege of Wealdstone's goal, Mike was beginning to fear the worst. The gathered away supporters (250) in the North Bank must have thought though that it was all their Christmas's combined into one as the ball did everything but enter their net. Their goal was having a charmed life and even when, on the stroke of halftime, we did eventually break through its magical barrier, the goal was disallowed as a linesman, a zillion miles away, somehow spotted a Blues handball inside a packed goalmouth.

But, as he was directly in front of the East Stand, the less said ... and it most certainly wasn't!

The second half was an exact rerun of the first half. Arnold could have been on a beach somewhere, so rarely were his services being required. Nevertheless, he did pull off a blinder of a save when an unmarked opposition forward seized upon an opportunity to have their first attempt upon goal.

Their second was only moments behind it, but again they were thwarted as Hobson cleared the goal bound shot from off the line. Perhaps an additional chapter was in the process of being added to a certain book, A very relived Thunderbird nest certainly hoped so!

Indeed, as we continued attacking, the breakthrough seemed imminent at any moment. But if King Kev does nothing but shooting practice in training following this game then it will be time well spent as chance after chance just got thrown away. Still, our visitors must have been holding their breath, fearing that at any moment the deadlock would be broken.

And, eventually, it was, with chapter three coming to the fore as a hopeful punt from distance somehow eluded a mis sighted Arnold and so entered our net. They went delirious, we were deflated. At this point in the match, if we had been 8 – 1 up then they could have had few complaints. But instead, inside a game that we had been running for fun, we were behind.

Of course, they had used up more luck than Blues usually encounter over three seasons. That said, Lady Fortune cannot take all the blame as our finishing was abysmal and the lack of any running into spaces, a lovely chip across goal to the far post courtesy of Bridge went totally begging, just couldn't be forgiven.

Perhaps though it was not all the fault of the players because our management team could also have been a trifle guilty of extorting too much control over their player's positioning. After our last home game, comments were made regarding the players not sticking to orders, particularly when defending free kicks, and instead being guilty of just doing their own thing.

With this statement very much in mind, a situation that was very apparent in the first half, less so in the second, was the freedom that their number four had at the back post whenever they had a free kick in or around our area. Each time a high ball would be played over to him, and every time he would meet it with an unchallenged header, causing chaos inside our box.

Yet, despite all of Arnold's pleading, no one would leave their fixed position to mark him. At halftime, this situation was addressed, Cardwell being assigned to keep station upon him, and the danger went away. Did this though point to a situation where the players were sticking strictly to their orders rather than applying common sense? Could it also explain just why so few of our players felt free to abandon their midfield berths and so freelance further up-field in support of their forwards?

Just an idea but one with some depth perhaps?

Regardless, the expression of 'Just how on earth did we lose that!' was on almost every face as people left the ground. Equally, whilst there was general agreement that we had performed much better than of late, certain players were definitely still off their game. With our having such a shallow pool of talent, this is

undoubtedly a problem. If a key players form dips, then so does ours. It's something that will have to be carefully considered and addressed over the summer if, as we all hope, Blues are to challenge for a promotion spot.

Meantime, as matrons busied themselves removing sunglasses and the like from their charges in the East Stand, those in the West hurriedly unbuttoned their coats and prepared with eager anticipation to once more feel warm. Another game, away at Barnet, awaits us only a few days away and surely, surely, we cannot be so profligate in front of goal again. Can we?

Come on you Blues!!