



Saturday 23rd April 2022



Southend 1 – FC Halifax 0



Covering parts of Hampshire and Wiltshire, a large area of pasture, heathland and forest known as the New Forest attracts many visitors. It's also home to many ponies and horses who freely roam across its wide-open spaces. There are no football pitches!

Just inside the Bodyshop doorway lies a box full of bars of soap. Each colour of the rainbow is represented along with every scent of the boudoir. Further inside its shady depths, figures move casually from display to display, pausing occasionally to have a gentle feel or a delicate sniff. Few men are present, save at Christmas, but those who do frequent it savour the experience. No footballs are for sale.

Almost every street corner once boasted a Lyons tea shop. They were very popular, and people used to meet there and exchange conversations. Today they have been replaced by glass enclosed boxes bearing names like Costas', Starbucks and Caffe Nero. People though do still meet there; some even drink their products. But a very 'special' few much prefer to just stare at the milk pattern in their cups, give them names and then take photos. Football is rarely discussed!

All very well, you may be thinking, but what has all of this to do with the Blues?

Well today one of the Thunderbirds, instead of being in their pew at Roots Hall, was guilty of indulging in all of these activities. Had there been any special circumstances, a holiday, a wedding or perhaps simply a birthday celebration. then some leeway could of course be granted. However, he had merely opted to go and see a few vertically challenged horses running about in preference to supporting Blues.

Equally, rather than witness a superbly executed goal, he had huddled over his cup of coffee, his feverish imagination diving to new depths, before reaching for his camera and 'tweeting' a photo of the shape made by his milk. Together, Portsmouth and he make the perfect pairing.

Meanwhile Blues, totally unaware of his treachery, were warming up; performing a number of exercises that could easily be mistaken for potty training. As they strained and groaned, so the ground around them began to slowly fill up. Numbers have fallen over recent weeks but still enough of the truly faithful were present to create quite an atmosphere throughout the game.

Amongst them and nursing along the ambitions of the 'Junior Greens' were Marlene and Boycie. Their charges happily munching their way through burgers as their initiation into becoming Blues supporters continued. Chief education officer Albert was eager to present his curriculum, but our Siren of the Ironworks more purposefully directed them towards learning some of the player's names rather than naughty songs.

The path ahead of the two youngsters is both hard and tough. Supporting a club outside the Premiership is unfashionable (How can you support them. They are never on TV!) and the playground can be harsh and unfair. Accordingly, they were being instructed in how they could challenge back with questions such as "When was the last time you went to a game" and "Show me where Manchester is on a map!"

It's a passage that we have all had to partake and somehow survive. Some have emerged from the ordeal with honour, others clutching plastic cups of coffee. A few have even fled abroad! Nevertheless, the

experience of actually being at a game, no matter its level, so exceeds anything that a bum sited upon a sofa can understand that any wind coming from that direction can be completely ignored. For them, an away game is a stretch for the remote control, for the real 'us', it is a journey!

Of late, a number of what can only be described as 'groupies' have taken to sitting close to us in order to enjoy the considerable rapport that we share with the match officials and opposition. Uncle Albert being a considerable favourite of theirs.

Indeed, as their numbers have grown, so have the number of 'contributions' that they themselves generate. In a way it is to be supposed that they could be labelled as the 'Junior Thunderbirds'. Very encouraging on the whole. Except when, as now, they were all doing Marlene impressions!

The pain to the ears was excruciating and so whilst points for enthusiasm could certainly be awarded, those relating to star quality were equally very obviously absent. The target of their admiration though enjoyed it.

Quite a strong, cold, wind was blowing down the pitch from the direction of the North Bank within which just over a hundred away supporters were scattered. Blues elected to play into it for the first half and such was its strength that Arnold's usually loooooooooong goal kicks could barely reach the halfway line.

Almost immediately that the game started it became quickly apparent what Halifax's primary tactic was going to be. Out of their left wing they sported an extremely fast, and tricky, winger and providing him with the ball was pretty much their sole objective.

Certainly, for the opening few minutes, the tactic caused us severe problems and we were fortunate to exit the fixtures first ten minutes still on level terms. By then though our defence, led by Clark, had sussed him out and as a threat for the remainder of the game he was pretty much ineffective.

As his influence drained so ours grew and although clear cut chances were at a minimum, we were nevertheless the ones asking all the questions whilst they could only squirm as if residing inside Masterminds black chair. Then we earned a corner!

Many thought that we had wasted it. Wishing to see a ball played directly across into the box, they groaned as instead its taker, Bridge, exchanged short passes with Husin before breaking free of his markers and sliding a very low ball right across the goal line. Awaiting it there was Clark who slotted home his first goal for three seasons.

It was a beautiful move and obviously one that had been taken straight off the training ground. To see it so well executed was reward unto itself and a much-chastened crowd only too eagerly stood up on its feet to show their appreciation. Any Blues goal is to be enjoyed but this one was really special.

Husin, since his return from International duty, has been a tad out of sorts. Today though he was looking much sharper and more up for it. Thus it was a pity to see him go off injured after just over half an hour. Atkinson was though a very able substitute and so the pressure upon our visitor's goal did not cease.

As so too did not their moaning. Of course, the referee came in for his fair share but the amount of heat that were giving each other was really something else. Obviously, they, like Denzil, had not expected that much of us but now that the sacrificial lamb had turned, and with quite some style, they didn't like it. They were still crying when the halftime whistle blew.

Come the celebrations with regard to the Queens reign during the summer it is planned to light a number of signal fires across the country. Church steeples, hill tops and even some especially constructed towers are expected to burst into flame in order to spread the message. Given the lack of sparkle within the Tinkerbells being held forlornly in the palms of certain Thunderbirds, a flint or two wouldn't go amiss inside the West Stand where reception is apparently still a bit of a problem.

Still, they could always stand and chat. So stand they did. But whether or not waving plastic boxes about hopefully in the air counts as communication, the jury is still out.

As expected, roasted by their managers unimpressed tongue, Halifax came straight at us in the second half. We though dug in deep and withstood their early charges. However, it was very evident that they not only expected to score, but very soon would, so the home crowd began to get rather nervous. Even the Blues voice going a bit quiet.

Time though steadily did its ticking thing and as it did so, the urgency of their attacking began to falter and break down. We were even beginning to venture back into their half of the field at times. The visiting management team therefore steadily made changes and indeed so did we. However, theirs were tactical whilst ours were forced. Both Bridge and Clarke going off injured.

Their replacements though fitted into the jigsaw just fine and so a picture was gradually being constructed which revealed that a top three side was being shown how to play by one in midtable. Indeed, but for the cross bar and a linesman with the keen eyesight of a mole wearing sunglasses, we would have increased upon our advantage.

Just how, as the ball rebounded back off the woodwork, the cretin in front of the West Stand failed to see Dalby get blatantly shoved in the back as he rose to head it home into an empty net is beyond all understanding. Apparently, he, and the ref, felt that our forward was already falling but, just when is a foul not a foul?

The eighteen rules of football used to be simple and straight forward, but they are now so open to 'interpretation' that almost anything goes. Even VAR is an interpreted science rather than an exact one. A bureaucrat, sitting with his feet up, sipping a cup of coffee, miles away from the incident, getting to decide a match's result! The beautiful game deserves far more, and if that means a return to the days when a rule is exactly what it states in the book then, please, please, make it so!

Full time was approaching but still, thanks to the officials, the result was very much in doubt. We were standing firm but all over the pitch Blues were limping and some like Cardwell could barely move. With four minutes of extra time signalled we looked to be in real trouble.

Sensing this, Halifax once more pushed forward. However, in doing so they left huge gaps in midfield that our desperate defenders were able to make good use of as places within which to clear the ball. Indeed, had either Dalby or Cardwell been in a position to take advantage of such loose balls, then hearts could have beaten a lot easier.

However, both of them were running on fumes and so the ball just kept on coming back towards our area. Trigs was running down the clock. Second by agonising second. Something that in itself wouldn't have been so bad but, as Albert was doing the same, only not within the same time zone, the arguments between the two only added to the tension.

Eventually though even this referee couldn't give them any more chances and his final blow of the whistle was met with both cheers and considerable relief. Blues had played well, very well, but with another game to come on Tuesday the sight of so many collapsed bodies all over the pitch was not all that encouraging. Each and every one of our team had played the game as if it was for their lives rather than just for a slightly higher mid table position.

Full credit then to them and their management team. Although, whether or not we will be able, our willingness is certainly not in question, to rise to such levels again against Boreham Wood during the week is very open to question. We looked to be utterly exhausted and totally drained.

Light training on Monday though might help to address that. Equally the plight of the players who went off injured will have had time to be more properly assessed. Even possibly King Kev and his two cohorts will find

time to gaze deep and thoughtfully into cups of coffee. But milking them to the extreme will probably be beyond even their talents as it does require rather a 'special' type of person!

Come on you Blues!!