



Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2022



## Southend 1 – Weymouth 1



Agatha Christie was a murder mystery writer who had over 50 books published. One, *The Mousetrap*, was even turned into a West End hit, a show that has been running since 1952. Her stories always had a number of twists and turns, but the reader was always assisted in navigating them by the likes of Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot.

Despite this considerable help, and notwithstanding that the approach to the final chapter of one of her books is always conducted high in the confidence that my prognosis is about to be proven 100% correct, I have yet to finish in front of Capt. Hastings in the crime solving stakes. Indeed, over such hurdles, I am very much the sort of nag who carries the weight of one of Rodney's five pence each way bets on their backs!

Accordingly, when at halftime, the broken-down old sea farer to my immediate right turned to me demanding to know just how, in blazes, we were one down instead of five or six up, I had no answer. Blues had committed everything short of murder to the attack right from kick off. Quickly establishing camp outside Weymouth's penalty box and remaining there for almost the entire 45 minutes. Only to then witness them, on their one foray forwards, open-up the scoring.

The farce though had started well before the game actually commenced. Just behind where the East Stand and North Bank meet, lies a small block of flats, eight or nine stories high. Each of the flats has a small balcony and upon one of the highest, enjoying the warm afternoon sunshine, were two gentleman whose attire we shall say was extremely casual.

Seeing them stirred something in the blood of our wandering siren such that she started swaying and wobbling from side to side, almost in time with the muzak that was already tormenting our ears courtesy of the far from at all well West Stand speakers. Her rusty ironworks were not fortunately also brought into play but, as Nanny dancing goes, it was not a pretty sight.

Her stumbling feet lacked the grace of Hawaii and although points might have been given for her attempts at a sunny smile, the resulting grimace made one wonder more about how she was dealing with her indigestion.

Nearby, Pompey Denzil was fiddling inside his man bag. Full of Body Shop lotions and bottles of tap water labelled Eau de Leigh marshes, he was having some difficulty locating his wallet. Eventually though it was retrieved from amongst all the detritus and so once again he was able to gaze hopefully into its depths, seeking his season ticket.

Having visited a location, not all that far from Brighton and all its delights the night before, he was understandably a mite confused. Accordingly. he had arrived at the match without a valid ticket or pass and therefore had had to perform much fluttering of his eyelids and to show off his tattoo before being able to persuade the club that, despite all the evidence in front of them he was, just, one of us and therefore entitled to a free ticket to the game. But where was that season ticket?

Add into this picture an image of one of Trigger's anti-tank cheese sandwiches, the noisy arrival of the Thunderbird groupies and Del Boy trying to convince his worried young daughter that Grand Ma Green was not having a fit, and chaotic seems a very gentle way of describing it.

As has already been suggested, the game was very firmly one of attack against defence. The ball entering our half of the pitch so rarely that even Albert could keep a tally without removing his footwear. Therefore, it was quickly becoming embarrassing, and indeed frustrating, that despite all of our crossing and shooting, their keeper had yet to be required to pull off even one decent save!

Their defence was certainly working hard to get in blocks and a six yard box full of bodies doesn't leave a lot of space, or time, in which to operate. But even so, after fifteen minutes, we should have been celebrating at least two goals. Instead we were left scratching our heads and wondering just what we had to do to score.

Unfortunately we lack any sort of guile up front. Whilst Cardwell is good in the air and Dalby is useful as a target man, we need a Stuart Brace, Colin Morris or even a Richard Cadette. Someone who has not only the ability, but also the vision, to take up positions that make goal scoring simply a matter of a tap in.

The number of times that the ball ran into acres of space across a completely open goal mouth, was almost unforgivable. No one was gambling. No one was taking a chance. No one was ruddy scoring!

Albert, his attention span rarely beyond that of a three-year-olds at the best of times, thought, dreamt, that he saw someone who was topless serving drinks to the two men up on their balcony. Instantly, goal mouth centred eyes switched focus upwards and to the right. But if titillation was their objective, then only disappointment awaited them. Not only was there no third person, braless or otherwise, but both men had slumped so far down into their deck chairs that even Marlene's pulse remained steady.

Meanwhile, back in front of the North Bank, Blues were conducting shooting practice. It was a bit like watching the half time challenge with balls going in every direction but the one required. Arnold, his one job so far to retrieve the ball from the back of his net after being left marooned by his teammates, could only watch on. No doubt with the same despair as ourselves as opportunity after opportunity went begging.

Still, should our management team have been in any doubt at all regarding where to spend Ron's cash during the summer, confirmation in droves was now being provided! King Kev has turned us from a side of teddy bears into one that now growls and is prepared to meet grit with grit. However, without any teeth, we are Albert gloomily eying up his egg and toast soldiers absent any cutlery.

For once, the break in play was not accompanied by the sight of flickering Tinkerbells. With few other games going on, there was little to encourage their appearance. Save that is for Trigger's. His apparently insatiable desire to provide us with meaningless information unabated, he happily played with his new phone, urging it to spit out information that he could then enthusiastically pass onto us. "Medway U14's ladies basketball team are playing", "Bradwell Glow-worms have a new mascot" and "Little Gumption won the third race at Goodwood" being just examples of the fare fighting for occupation within his mouth alongside a slab of cake. Funny how time passes so quickly when you are having fun!

Happily, not too much of it though was to be allowed to run through the hourglass before we were back on level terms early in the second half. For once we had attacked directly down their throats and a neatly timed pass from Dennis found Powell with only the keeper to beat. This he duly did, sending both the home crowd and his teammates mad with relief. It had seemed as if we would never score, but now that we had, surely the flood gates would simply spring wide open.

Alas though it was not to be. Instead, all we got was an almost exact replay of the first half. Although there was what was becoming a bit of a mystery regarding why we were still attempting to attack down their flanks and swing in high crosses when our only tall forward, Cardwell, had gone off injured at halftime.

We had met with our only success by attacking them directly down the middle and yet we were no longer doing it. So goal scoring chances were at a minimum. We even missed a penalty, yes again!, after Powell was brought down inside the box. It was extremely frustrating and disappointing.

Our work rate and desire for success is though first class. There is no doubting that. No one was shirking from their duties and not a blue shirt was there just for the ride. But if we are to avoid being also runs in the great

race for promotion next term something just has to be done about our poor scoring rate. This season's tally of around one a goal a game just won't cut it!

Equally, our approach play could be speeded up to good effect. Whilst playing the ball about at the back whilst attacking opportunities are assessed is all well and good, there is also a lot to be said for a decent, quickly taken, pass into space for one of our forwards to run onto.

However, on too many occasions, fine runs being made up front, were ignored in favour of a safer, inside pass. Admittedly, Dalby is not much of a sprinter, but at least two of our other forwards, both of them on the pitch today, are, and yet opportunities for them to chase a ball were rarer than any mentions of our new stadium.

Sadly then as time passed, it became more and more obvious that, try as we most certainly were, we could play onto midnight and still not pull a meaningful save out of their keeper. Trigger therefore grew bored and as he did so, so his little news snippets became more and more of a feature. Marlene too, glancing up towards a now unoccupied balcony, could only sigh. Lacking any sort of appreciative audience, why should she bother having a little bit of a granny bop. Then there was Denzil who was still preoccupied with the contents of his man bag. Having given up all hope on his season ticket, discovering something to munch was now his only objective. The Thunderbirds nest was certainly no scene of uninhibited excitement that was for sure.

The Roots Hall roar though built up to a bit of a crescendo as it tried to encourage the lads on inside the final minutes of extra time, but it was not to be. We had tried, very hard, but not well enough. Already relegated Weymouth were no doubt a very poor side and yet, for all our efforts, we had only scored once against them.

Having to share the points was hardly the issue though. Rather it was the fact that for the nth time in several recent games, we have totally dominated play but ended up having very little to show for it. It's a situation that cannot be allowed to continue if our desire to return to the football league is to become a realistic one.

Agatha used to wait until the final chapter to reveal the identity of the serpent within the nest. Blues however have had it in plain sight now for at least three seasons. Progress in the form of Dalby and Cardwell has been made in the right direction, but much, much, more work remains to be done if we are ever to become a decent scoring machine again.

Adding Murphy back into the plot might add a bit of spice to a dish that lacks sparkle but are dreams of another Freddy or Collymore really doomed to be no more than that? Surely not!

Come on you Blues!!