

## NEWSLETTER – Vol. 9 Iss. 02. – November 2013

### THE INTRODUCTION – Paul FitzGerald

#### Reasons to be cheerful Part 2

Some of you may have seen an article in the Echo that I wrote (with a little help from a friend) a couple of weeks back.

Following on from that, I'd like to report that I remain cheerful for several reasons:

Firstly, I got some good feedback on the article and a long time supporter who has been vocally negative about several Trust related issues has told me that the note struck a chord and he intends to re-join;

Feedback also, from Steve Kavanagh (and perhaps more surprisingly) Ron Martin - both of a positive nature.

We did win the game referenced in the article and were temporarily getting dizzy at the top end of the league. Several inconsistent results later and we move back into the pack, several very good results after this and suddenly we are dreaming again. If you've had a chance to see the team recently you will, I think, agree that there is talent and considerable effort displayed. It is not always paying off of course, but hopefully, that will come and with the tremendous result at Morecombe and subsequent last gasp winner against York. I am hopeful this could be a season to remember for many reasons.



Which leads me on to.....off field, we still await the magic moment when the fairies will be busy building our new stadium. As time drifts on and the cash flow/finances obviously worsen, I think back to a time when the players REALLY didn't like not getting paid and the promise of great things to come was not enough to prevent resentment between players and the owner. Whatever the rights and wrongs of that situation, we will all have our views - I'd hate to think the good work the club is doing, is undone by financial timing issues.

As a long time contractor, I know what it's like to not get paid on time and regardless of whether you eventually end up with the money, the negative impact is already felt - with motivation being hardly to the fore.

That said - BECAUSE finances and cash flow is such an issue, I would hope that some leeway is given to the club at this time and the first sign of an issue is not blown out of proportion - because only no good can come from it.

So why am I still cheerful?.....well apart from backing Hartlepool and Southend Win doubles 4 weeks out of 5... I see real effort from the Football Club on and off the field. I am very hopeful we'll get promoted this season and that Sainsbury's will get their shiny new superstore.

On Trust matters, we have some new events coming up and it would be good to see some additional faces at them, as well as the regulars of course! - These include a Mexican evening in Rayleigh which is our first eating venture out of the Borough. Why not help us to make a difference to our club by coming along and supporting and hopefully having a good time.

Finally apologies to the MAC draw winners - I am on the case, I promise!

As ever you can contact me at [pfitz666@aol.com](mailto:pfitz666@aol.com) if you'd like to comment on anything the Trust does or does not do.

## FUNDRAISING

### 100 Club

The latest winners in the scheme, pulled out of the hat during weekly draws since the last newsletter were **Graham Hilder, Andy Thorne** (*twice*), **Paul Brice** (*twice*), **Philip Conway, Paul Yeomanson, John Freemantle, Darren Posnack, Lesley Hicks, Andrew Haddow, John Cornwell, Mike Roles, Charles Ball** and **Paul Strutt**.

The nature of the 100 Club means the more people that sign up, then the bigger the weekly prize. To register your interest, you can still contact Alan Perry at [alanperry4@hotmail.com](mailto:alanperry4@hotmail.com) or by calling 01702 476458 and put yourself in with a chance of winning the weekly prize.

Remember, the more people that sign up to the scheme, then the higher that prize will be. By setting up a standing order for just £5 a month (or just £60 a year), you put yourself in with a chance of winning around £28.00 per week at the present time.

### Quid-a-Goal

**Our Quid A Goal scheme is now up and running for the 2013/14 Season.**

**So far this season the total raised after 21 games is £737.00.**



The aim of the scheme - like most of the Shrimpers Trust's activities is to raise money for Southend United Football Club and make sure that there is a club for us to be supporting in the foreseeable future.

In particular, some of the money raised from this Seasons "Quid a Goal" scheme will be donated to the Southend United Physio Ben Clarkson and his Department to help purchase much needed equipment.

#### **This is how it works:**

Those who support the scheme with a pledge have their name and details of their pledge displayed in the United match program each week and are detailed on this web site.

We ask you to pledge £0.25, £0.50, £1.00 or more under various headings such as clean sheets, various players scoring goals, or team goals. This does not have to cost you a fortune as you can easily judge in advance how much your pledge will cost you come the end of the season.

For example, the Blues rarely manage more than 80 goals in a season from 1st team matches. A £0.25 per goal pledge would therefore most likely not cost you more than £20.00 come the end of the season. If funds are tight how about £1 for every goal scored by our full backs? The 08/09 season would have cost you £3.00. If you chose to do £0.50 per point and we finished up with 80 points. At the end of the season we will write to you thanking you for your support of this initiative and asking you to send us a cheque for the amount of £40.00.

Last year this scheme raised around £1,300 from the 40+ people that helped us. This includes support by some of the Southend United's directors.

**If you would like to help raise funds for this worthy cause you can do so by completing a QAG Entry Form which are available at the Trust Info Stand in the Shrimpers Bar prior to any home game.**

**Entry forms are also available from the Trust Website [www.shrimperstrust.co.uk](http://www.shrimperstrust.co.uk)**

## STAGGER TO THE DAGGERS !!!!



On Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> January several Committee Members will be walking the 28 miles to the away match at Dagenham & Redbridge to raise funds for the Trust and the Stroke Unit at Southend University Hospital.

Monies raised will be split 50/50 between the Trust and the Stroke Unit.

Further details on how you can sponsor one of the walkers or how you can donate will be circulated in early December, however if you would like to join the walkers and help raise funds please contact Alec Trott on 07930 982023 or by email at [alectrott@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:alectrott@hotmail.co.uk)

## XMAS DRAW - 2014

By now you should have received your 2013 Xmas Draw Tickets.

The Trust Xmas Draw is one of our biggest fundraisers, which also offers our biggest prizes of any of our fundraisers.

So, if you want to be in with a chance of winning the 1<sup>st</sup> prize of £500, please return your completed ticket stubs and payment to:

**Xmas Draw**  
**The Shrimpers Trust**  
**PO Box 5830**  
**Southend on Sea**  
**Essex**  
**SS1 9FD**



Alternatively you can hand your tickets in at the Shrimpers Trust Info Stand in the Shrimpers Bar prior to any home game.

The draw will take place at half time during the game vs Portsmouth on 1<sup>st</sup> January.

If you did not receive your tickets and would like us to send some out to you please contact Alan Perry on 01702 476458, or by email [alanperry4@hotmail.com](mailto:alanperry4@hotmail.com)

## BLUES PLAYER

We have been made aware by several members and supporters over the last few months that Blues Player on the SUFC Website has not been transmitting Southend matches in full.

We have discussed this matter with the Club and they are aware of the issues and have been complaining to The Football League.

They say the League is aware and are resolving the issue and the Club have been informed that everyone who has complained so far is getting compensated in some way.

If you have not been receiving the service expected from Blues Player you must complain and then you will get compensated, so please ensure you complain to the service provider at every opportunity as the more Southend fans complaining the more likely they will look at our service and correct it as well as getting compensated.



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## MEMBERSHIP

### Welcome to New Life Members (Total 218)

**Steve Ray and Gary Warren.**



Life Membership of the Trust currently costs £100.00 if you have an email account or £125.00 if you prefer to receive Trust Mailings by post.

If you are interested in joining this group please contact our Membership Secretary, Paul Yeomanson via email at [membership@shrimperstrust.co.uk](mailto:membership@shrimperstrust.co.uk).

You can also join up as a Life Member in the Membership Section of the Trust Website [www.shrimperstrust.co.uk](http://www.shrimperstrust.co.uk), and postal applications will also be accepted at **Shrimpers Trust, PO Box 5830, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 9FD.**

### Welcome to New Members since the last Newsletter

**Ann Aldridge, Callum Burns-Green, Gary Collinson, Simon Darby, Paul Davis, Alan Farmer, Chris Hoskyn, Jarl Jansen, Geoffrey Lewis, Lynda Mead, Craig Moss, Jerry Moss, Joss Pountney, Martin Read, Ben Rowe, George Short, Maria Short, Dave Whybrow and Rita Wood.**

**\*\*Please note that the Shrimpers Trust would like to know if any of its members' addresses change, or if they have a new email address so that newsletters and other correspondence can be sent to the correct address. Please send any change of address details to **The Shrimpers Trust, PO Box 5830, Southend on Sea, SS1 9FD**, by email to [membership@shrimperstrust.co.uk](mailto:membership@shrimperstrust.co.uk) or alternatively fill in our on-line contact details form which can be found in the Membership Section of the Trust Website, [www.shrimperstrust.co.uk](http://www.shrimperstrust.co.uk) \*\***

## FORTHCOMING FUNDRAISERS

### MEXICAN NIGHT

**Monday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2014  
129 High St, Rayleigh**

The evening begins at 7.30pm with the meal from 8.00pm and the cost will be £15.00 per person for a two course meal.

We welcome Members and Non Members alike so why not come along for some good food and chat.

For further details contact Alan Perry: (01702 476458 or [alanperry4@hotmail.com](mailto:alanperry4@hotmail.com))



### QUIZ NIGHT

**Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> January 2014  
The Shrimpers Bar, Roots Hall**

The Shrimpers Trust will be holding a Quiz Night in the Shrimpers Bar, Roots Hall on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

The doors open at 7.00pm with commencement of the quiz at **7.30pm sharp.**  
**The cost will be £10.00 for adults and £6.00 for under 16's.**

Included in the price will be a choice from 5 meals (*Chicken & Chips, Chicken Nuggets & Chips, Sausage & Chips, Fish & Chips or Vegetarian Spring Roll & Chips*). The meals are provided by the Fish House and will be served at around 8.45pm.

Ideally we need tables of 8, but if you would be happy to join others who will come in parties of less than 8 please let us know.

For further details or to book a table contact Alan Perry (01702 476458 or [alanperry4@hotmail.com](mailto:alanperry4@hotmail.com))



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## RACE NIGHT

**Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2014**  
**The Shrimpers Bar, Roots Hall**

First Race at 7.30pm.



This is a great event for all the family, with Cash Prizes for each race plus chances to win Bottles of Wine, Trust Goodie Bags, a Meal for Two at the Elements Restaurant in the Rendezvous Casino at the Kursaal, a Meal for Two at the East Chinese Restaurant.

**Tickets cost just £2.00**

For further details contact Paul Yeomanson: (01702 302373 or [info@shrimperstrust.co.uk](mailto:info@shrimperstrust.co.uk) )

## JUNIOR BLUES



**The new Junior Blues is being run by the Club in association with The Shrimpers Trust to provide the best possible junior membership scheme for all SUFC fans aged 16 or under.**

For just £10 (a one off payment until 16 years of age) members will receive a range of discounts, offers and exclusive events.

Our two clubs with the Junior Blues are Little Shrimpers, for fans aged 11 and under, and Club Blue for those aged 12-16.

### Benefits for all members include:

- ✓ **10% discount on Community Soccer Schools**
- ✓ **£2 discount for Cup matches at Roots Hall**
- ✓ **Membership Card**
- ✓ **Membership Pack**
- ✓ **Exclusive Christmas Party**
- ✓ **Birthday and Christmas cards**
- ✓ **Exclusive Meet the Players Day**
- ✓ **Discount at the following: Adventure Island, Kursaal Bowl, Skirmish Paintball, Marsh Farm, Partyman World, Smyths Toy Shop, Laser Kombat, Papa John's and Playfootball.net**
- ✓ **Photo of your favourite player**
- ✓ **Chance to be a mascot at a first-team game at Roots Hall**
- ✓ **Reduced travel prices to away games on Shrimpers Trust Coaches**



### + More discounts and offers being added all the time

If you would like to sign up any family member or friends aged under 16's a membership form has been enclosed with this newsletter (we will accept photocopies if for more than one application). Please complete and return to Junior Blues, The Shrimpers Trust, PO Box 5830, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, SS9 1FD.

Alternatively you can visit the new Junior Blues website <http://juniors.shrimperstrust.co.uk> where membership forms can be downloaded and printed off.

Also on the website you will find all the details of our partners including discounts offered.

If you have any enquiries please email Kay Fogg at [juniors@shrimperstrust.co.uk](mailto:juniors@shrimperstrust.co.uk)

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## BLUES LOTTERY

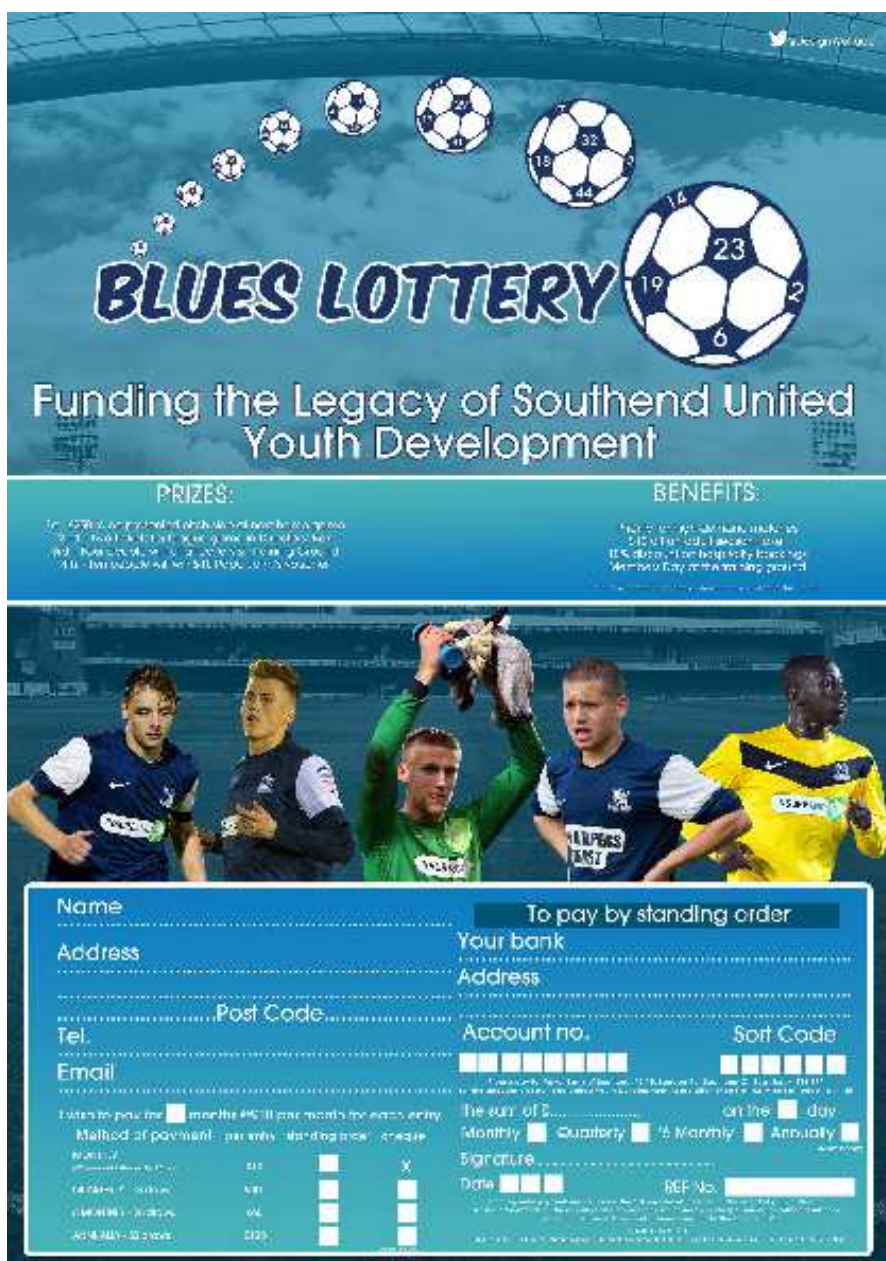
The Blues Lottery has undergone a re-launch and restructure to make it fit to serve the Club and provide a lasting legacy for the Youth Development of Southend United for the 2013/14 season onwards.

The scheme has existed and been supported by a number loyal supporters for a number of years but its existence has suffered from a lack of vitality and vision.

Numbers have dwindled and the restructuring is intended to address concerns of fans and to help drive the investment in the Academy and help produce more future stars, similar to Dan Bentley and Jack Payne.

By investing in the lottery the aim is you can win a cash prize and at the same time have ownership of the youth as they develop and feel in some way you have assisted in their development.

The Shrimpers Trust already support the Youth Team in various ways and would ask you to consider joining the Blues Lottery to help develop the SUFC stars of the future.



**BLUES LOTTERY**  
Funding the Legacy of Southend United Youth Development

**PRIZES:**  
1st - £2000, 2nd - £1000, 3rd - £500, 4th - £250, 5th - £100, 6th - £50, 7th - £25, 8th - £10, 9th - £5, 10th - £2.50

**BENEFITS:**  
Help to get our young players to SUFC for their education, 10% discount on all club merchandise, 10% discount on all club tickets, 10% discount on all club travel, 10% discount on all club accommodation

**Name** .....  
**Address** .....  
**Post Code** .....  
**Tel.** .....  
**Email** .....

**To pay by standing order**  
**Your bank** .....  
**Address** .....  
**Account no.** ..... **Sort Code** .....

**Method of payment:**  one-off  standing order  cheque

**The sum of £..... on the .. day**  
**Monthly**  **Quarterly**  **6 Monthly**  **Annually**

**Signature** .....  
**Date** ..... **REF No.** .....

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## SHRIMPERS TRUST BEANIE

### Getting cold watching the Blues? Why not purchase the Shrimpers Trust Beanie?

Knitted from 100% soft acrylic and embroidered with the Trust Logo this is a sure way of keeping warm during the winter matches.

**Priced at just £10.00 they would also make the ideal Christmas Present for any Blues fan.**

The Beanies will be on sale from the Trust Info Stand in the Shrimpers Bar before any home game.

They can also be purchased using Credit/Debit cards from the Trust's online shop at [www.shrimperstrust.co.uk](http://www.shrimperstrust.co.uk)



**Order before December 15<sup>th</sup> to ensure delivery before Xmas.**

## THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO! – SUFC 1<sup>st</sup> TEAM MATCH REPORTS

**Welcome to our new Southend United 1st Team Match Report section for the 2013/14 Season.**

This season the match reports are being written by Trust Member Gary Beard, and as you read them you will realise that they are not your normal run of the mill reports, which you have probably gathered from the title.

The Trust Committee would like to thank Scott Barber for providing us with match reports in previous seasons.

**Friday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2013**  
**Southend 2 Fleetwood 0**



The evening light was slowly fading. Outside the pubs window a long line of cars could be observed slowly manoeuvring its way over the brow of a hill. Inside the friendly tavern, people were propping up the bar, couples were deciding where to sit and, immediately in front of us, three cleared plates bore silent witness to our inner contentment.

The coffees arrived as so did a side order of ice cream. Somewhat disappointingly to Mike, the waiter had no problems at all in identifying which of his customers received a beverage and which had a glass full of frozen coloured blocks plonked down in front of them. Obviously some more work had to be done on his poker face.

The conversation picked up from where it had been left. Was Brown going to reintroduce Prosser into the back four to help keep Cresswell under control or would he stick with the youngster, Kiernan, who had played so well at Burton before limping off with the cramp? Equally who would be playing up front? Woodrow was now finding his feet in the side but should Freddy be confined to the bench after scoring our late winner?

Onlookers watched on in amusement as tactics, worthy of any game in Brazil, were played out across the table. Salt sellers, spoons and even some shortbread all playing vital roles in their generals' masterful strategies. Subbuteo it may not have been, but as an after dinner diversion it was great fun. Now though it was time to venture outside and to head for the Hall to see Brown's take on the situation.

He, it turned out, had opted to stick pretty much with the side that had beaten Burton. Well there is an old adage in football about not changing a winning team and although neither of our line up's exactly replicated that of Blue's manager's, we decided we could go with the flow. Cassandra, who had found a more convenient use for the shortbread, declined to comment. Her hubby, Micky Pearce, surrounded by Germans as he was most days, found little opportunity to indulge in a real footballing conversation. Accordingly she was content to just let him play at being a fantasy football manager. She was however missing the Viking headgear that she had left back in the hotel. With its long, rain bowed, plaits and lopsided, but ear covering, multi coloured helmet it would have been just the job in the cool breeze that was now blowing the length of the West Stand.

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Our ex central defender, Cresswell, came out to warm applause from the Roots Hall faithful. He might have strayed from the path but whilst he had been on it, he had been a club stalwart. A state of affairs that was now being reflected by the greeting that he was receiving. Blues then took to the field and they got the full volume version. Away to our left a small, read tiny, group of away fans were doing their best to create an atmosphere. But, with their taxi long departed, they had no vehicle in which to take things forward. Accordingly, just like the last sparkler on bonfire night, they flared brightly but soon died away into oblivion.

The game itself was a credit to the division with both sides playing attacking football and oh that the officials had been up to the occasion. The linesman running the line in front of the West Stand needed only a deckchair and a stick of rock to make his relaxed view to his employment complete. Whilst the referee wanted only to show off how well he could talk utter tyke. Rabbiting away for centuries whenever a Fleetwood player committed a naughty; immediately issuing a yellow card whenever we reciprocated. Why is that teams that surround the referee, arms waving like demented windmills, get only a warning whilst the reward for more mature, professional sides who leave the officials, no matter what sized prats they are, alone to get on with it, is a caution?

No matter, back to the game which was a cracking affair. Fleetwood had first scent of a goal when one of their forwards unleashed a shot from distance. It flew through a packed area but, despite surely being unsighted, Bentley calmly dealt with the situation. Big things are being predicted for our young goalkeeper; keep up this sort of form and they may very well come true! We responded with both Hurst (Mike's insightful advice to his Dad once more pounding in his ears) and Woodrow testing our visitor's guardian with a shot and a header apiece.

The ball was moving around midfield with great pace; sometimes in the air where the giant's in each team enjoyed omnipotence, more often on the ground where wizzball's like Clifford reigned supreme. It was initially a game for everyone and everybody, home and away supporters alike. But then it took on a very welcome blue tinted aspect as we took the lead. A series of mini attacks in and around Fleetwood box had occurred before the ball went wide to Hurst, who put over a dream of a cross which was met by Corr's head. Net result ? .... GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOL !!

The home supporters were caught between celebrating the goal and asking Cresswell the score. Either way it was fantastic to hear the Roots Hall roar once again. It's been absent for quite some time now and it would be great if it was to hang around for a bit longer. Guess we'll have to wait and see but it sure was good to see the old Hall having a wild old time of it.

Keen to double our advantage, we were back on the hunt immediately following the restart. Once again Hurst was the delivery man but, alas, this time his package went to the wrong address as the keeper responded smartly to a goal bound header from Phillips. Had a goal been scored then, it would have stamped our authority over the game. As things stood though it was still an open market, with both sides fighting over the shares.

Blues continued to apply most of the pressure but Fleetwood were certainly still a force to be contended with; especially once they managed to break out over the halfway line. On one such occasion a dangerous free kick resulted in Bentley slinging himself to the right to push the ball away; only to see it returned back with some force. Once again though Blues keeper responded well; punching the ball out to the edge of the area where it could be cleared safely away.

We then got awarded a free kick of our own; directly in line with the penalty spot but some ten or twelve yards out from the area. Albert was convinced that Hurst was going to deliver it; sibling Boycie just as sure that Coker was going to be our hit man. But to the surprise of everyone the ball got slipped sideways to Conor Clifford who neatly teed it up before attempting to lob the ball goalwards over everyone's heads; the ball flying slowly but unerringly towards the roof of the net. Only a desperately retreating goal keeper was in a position to alter its destiny. And, at the very last moment possible he did! His outstretched hand being just the force necessary to push the ball over the bar.

No Blue Belles at halftime and although Uncle A did attend to his gardening duties the Thunderbirds were forced to find our own amusements. This they duly did; baiting the life form known as Denzil. Over recent years he's developed a strange obsession with seeing the back of hills. Point him in any direction that involves a slope and with enough gear to provision an arctic expedition upon his back, off he will speed, desperate to see what's upon its lee slope.

So as he related his latest excursion to a yawning audience, he soon discovered another downside to his exertions (Beyond that is fingers being strained by the need to stretch out maps so often to find out where he was), in that he was being photographed by admiring tourists. Planning a journey of their own to parts, even more remote than the foreign place in which they currently reside, our visitors from the continent were trying out Mike's camera to see if it would be suitable for them. The animated, often contorted face of our errant navigator providing the perfect vehicle for their attention. Glad to say the lens survived its ordeal!



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It's unrecorded whether or not either manager spiced up their respective halftime natters with any antidotes involving astronaut's, but both teams went straight into warp speed just as soon as the whistle blew for the start of the second half. The amount of work being performed by both teams was simply amazing but that of our midfield really stood out. We were closing down Fleetwood in packs. Our first tackle might be brushed side (They feed em big up North) but rarely our second. And, if things didn't quite work out then they surely did with our third attempt to regain possession of the ball. Exhilarating stuff guys!

Accordingly, with both sides up for the battle, things did get a bit clogged down around the centre circle where the two fronts met. Trenches weren't quite being dug (Later though, when fat boy Parkin came on, earthworks did appear) but both teams rear echelons could take a breather whilst foot to foot fighting was occurring further forward. It was therefore somewhat of a rarity when a rocket, fired at our goal, fizzed past the post. Fleetwood were a goal down but evidently their fighting spirit was still all that their manager could ever wish for. Time for us to do something about it!

We first gave notice of our intentions when another fantastic cross by Hurst (Boy does that lad listen to his Dad!) found Corr at the back post. Blues tall forward had been enjoying his own personal battle with his mate Creswell all evening through and honours had been pretty even. But on this occasion Corr soared above his marker, launching a missile of a header goalwards that had goal written throughout its length, only to witness it going agonisingly wide.

Undaunted though we attacked again, and this time around, Atkinson, such an unsung hero for Blues, speeding into the area, was floored by a desperate defender. An event that earned Blues a penalty. And what a crucial kick this was going to be. Score, and the game was most probably ours. But miss ... didn't even want to think about it.

Corr picked up the ball, winking a mischievous eye in the direction of Creswell as he did so. The ex-Blue might have been able to thwart an attack or two before, but now this he was about as helpless as Denzil faced with a Year 2 maffs exam. Up in the Thunderbird eerie a mixture of emotions was being expressed. Mike could barely watch whilst Del Boy and Rodney were having a knees up; already celebrating our second goal.

An air of quiet expectancy descended upon the Hall as the ball got placed upon the spot. The goalkeeper tried to make himself appear huge, his arms and legs so outstretched that he looked like a crucifix about to topple over at any second. Corr stepped back a step, then another. The ground drew as silent as a churchyard and then, with a loud whoosh, it was bursting with noise as the back of the net got burst apart. GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOL !!

Bentley was partying on his ownsome again. Stuck inside his kitchen of an area whilst his teammates all sped for the far corner flag. It almost got knocked down in all the excitement and Fleetwood had to wait quite some time before order could be restored. An unimpressed referee adding hours to his stop watch in spiteful retaliation. He really was an 'orrible man.

With his effigy in Mike's hand full of pins, the official who annoys hobbits by sheltering under them whenever it rains to keep dry, signalled the restart. Fleetwood though were clearly disheartened by recent events and so had little of the fire about them that they had been expressing just thirty or so minutes earlier. So their manager played his trump card. Introducing two giants onto the pitch. One of them, the much younger, was of willowy build and so didn't look too much of threat. The latter though was huge and swollen. Bloated as if it had just emerged from wallowing in a swamp for months on end, it stamped its way onto the pitch. Steam pouring out of his stretched shirt, Parkin, once the bane of the lower divisions, had gone 'large'!

His appearance sent the home fans into rapture and they joyfully enquired "Who ate all the pies?". Their only response, a series of grunts that could have meant anything. Their evening, already fun filled with Blues establishing a two goal lead, was now complete. With such a clown on the field, plonking his feet down with such force that his passage could be recorded by seismometers as far away as China, who could ask for more?

Well actually we did, because although two goals were indeed very fine, a third would be really nice. Blues dully obliged, pinning their visitors back with a series of attacks. Fleetwood tried to establish a series of deep trenches (Why else had Parkin been introduced?) but in vain. And in the dying minutes of the game a shot from Clifford had their goalkeeper scrambling across his goal as it flew just wide of the post.

From somewhere the referee dug up five extra minutes but, for once, we had no fear of the game turning all ugly upon us. Indeed had Straker, a very late introduction for the injured Leonard, not opted to spend the last minute of the game playing with the corner flag, we could have gained our third. Two of his teammates had accompanied his flight up the field; only one Fleetwood defender in their way. And a ball into the box would surely had brought further dividends for the best team on the night.

No worries though. That's another three points in the bag and we've now moved back up into sixth place in the table (Well at least temporarily overnight) so happy days. Fleetwood, and their 60+ fans (Second in the table

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playing twelfth, you'd expect more than that) though faced a long journey home and with both the A127 (Road crews playing with their buckets and spades) and A13 (Fire), possibly fate was trying to tell them something.

Blues recent form tells us that they have turned a corner. On the field at least. With time though fast running out with regard to Fossetts Farm, life support machines might well be needed off it. Ron has been extremely quiet over recent months. Something that either suggest happy Shrimpers will be opening brick shaped parcels come Christmas morning in preparation for a Boxing Day spent in a field just west of Shoebury playing Lego or .... let's just not go there eh? Instead let's just reflect on another very good all-round performance by the only team in Essex.

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**Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2013**  
**Southend 0 Dagenham & Redbridge 1**



I'm lying in the dark trying to fall asleep. Outside a howling wind and enough falling water to refloat the ark are only adding to the ambiance of the evil, horrible dream that's keeping me awake. Every time I close my eyes, so the replay button gets hit. Let me introduce you to my nightmare ...

Blues are playing a home fixture. In fact it's a local derby against some outfit hailing from the smoke. Despite the short distance, hardly any away supporters have bothered making the trip but a fair sprinkling of home fans are spread around the ground. Out on the pitch two teams; one in god given dark blue, the other in something that was presumably picked up straight off an abattoir's floor. Blood red, with dull blue and grimy white striping, their shirts look like something that's been painted in the dark by Uncle Albert.

However they are not the scariest things on view. No three spooky looking boogiemens, led by one who obviously feels that his long sideburns make him look like Elvis (The eel, not the singer!), are stalking around the pitch. One is happily attempting to climb the netting hanging from the furthest goal, another is playing with its flag whilst looking around hopefully for a carnival, and meantime their inglorious leader is figuring out just which orifice to stick his whistle in. Unhappily he finds the wrong one!

Anyway the game commences and almost before his first peep has even finished the cretinous referee is blowing again. Corr has apparently breathed upon a visiting defender, who holds his hands to his face as if he had just been attacked by a tribe of harpies all armed with sharp nails. Corr looks at him in disgust. Boycie gently advises him to 'Man up'.

As acting goes it was all rather poor fare. Unfortunately though it was only the aperitif for the full banquet that we were about to be 'treated' to for the next 90 minutes, Yes the comedy partnership, bill posted as "Bent official and his playmates, were now in full flow. So much so that 'Harpo' was blowing his horn in front of a bemused Brown and Clohessey, even before two minutes were on the clock.

The over excited official had diarrhoea, not only of the mouth (He was fully prepared to run 60 yards to berate any Blue who dared to attempt a tackle, but not even an inch to talk to any Dagenham player guilty of committing a very real foul ) but also of the whistle. Breaking up play so successfully that we were finding it difficult to maintain our early grip upon the game.

Even so Blues were playing some attractive football, swinging accurate passes from one side of the pitch to the other with quite some style and panache. At one point Will Atkinson put over such a teasing cross that a visiting defender almost did the own goal thing. Unfortunately though his goalkeeper came to his rescue. At the other end of the field Bentley too had to move sharply after a cuffed shot eluded everyone and he only just caught up with the ball before it crossed over the line.

The game was shaping up to be a very entertaining affair with both sides launching fast swift attacks; both teams defending resolutely. But this meant that the match officials weren't having any fun. Ok, so it was a real laugh setting off that bloke in the West Stand whose voice sounded like a hen laying a square egg, and the team in Blue were great for having a natter with. But where was the original comedy in all that?

Cautions therefore got thrown to the wind. White was unfortunate to cop one, his opponent, revealed the depth of his up dragging in the kennels known as Arsenal, by falling to the floor like he'd been shot. Phillips was next in line; only the linesman, sorry assistant prat, wanted to get in on the action too. And so, after a word in the ref's ear about how bright and shiny his red card would look in the floodlights, our centre half duly got dismissed from duty from the rest of the night.

Opinion, both at the time and after the match, was very split over whether or not a yellow card was all the challenge merited. But it mattered not how much I pinched myself to try and wake up, nasty things were occurring in my dreams and we were down to 10 men! Halloween had arrived early!

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The dismissal shook Blues, and Dagenham took full advantage of their sponsor's largesse; pushing us over and pulling the backs of our shirts to get possession of the ball before finally scoring with another mishit shot. Even the scorer looked embarrassed! Not so the officials who raced each other back to the centre line punching the air in delight.

And then my stroll through the darkness turned really nasty!

Ten against thirteen, even in Denzils's giant book of maffs, aren't equal odds. But despite this, it was Blues who were doing all the attacking and not one, but two penalties should have come our way. First Corr (Remember him? the heavy breather), got shoved in the back as he went up for a cross. Everyone in the crowd saw it except for Blind pew and his shipmates. And then Conor Clifford broke into the box, goal at his mercy, only to find his feet whipped out from under him.

A more definite penalty you could not wish to see! But as you know, dreams are often inhabited by strange and unexpected things and the director of my horror flick wasn't about to change anything so fundamental. So, whilst clearly the damage had not been done by the two Dagenham defenders who were bursting their sides laughing, it was instead an invisible, but nevertheless deadly, mammoth slug who, as you only too aware, are right little blighters when it comes to tripping people up! So rude then of the home faithful to be so loudly impugning the official's eyesight/honesty. The boo's and cries of 'Cheats' still echoing around the ground as the officials traipsed off to spend halftime happily shifting the night soil inside their coffins.

Now to an un-jaundiced eye some of these reports might seem a tad biased from time to time, and it cannot be denied that they sometimes are. But never, ever, have they been as one sided as the supposedly impartial officials were being in my dark play. During the first 45 minutes the referee had interviewed each and every one of our players at least twice, but nay a single word had he had with a Dagenham shellhole. As he was their chairman he probably didn't need to. Either that or his wife and family were being held hostage somewhere. How else can you explain such a prejudiced performance?

Second half and it was no different. A night's sleep is supposed to consist of 40 winks. Either this one was longer or Denzil was doing the counting, because the nightmare just carried on, and on. Footballers, denizens of the Premiership aside, aren't stupid and both teams, well all three teams as certainly all the officials were equal cohorts when it came to cheating, knew exactly what the score was. Accordingly some credit must go to Dagenham who, on occasion, looked very embarrassed as the referee leant over backwards to give them every advantage.

Were those nasty locals making your goal keeper sweat? Never mind, I'll give you some free kicks right up against their box. Feeling under pressure? No worries, lie down on the ground and play dead. Tell you what, I won't even stop my watch! What, you're not getting any time to control the ball? Shocking, hold your hand to your eye, leg, or even your stomach and I'll find some way to make those nasty boys give you their ball back.

The officials could do nothing though about the fantastic shot that Woodrow unleashed from distance. It fizzed towards the goal so fast that although the referee tried, he couldn't get his whistle into his mouth fast enough to stop play before the ball entered the net. It was a wonderful shot and had Dagenham not still been riding their luck it would have been the equaliser. As it was alas, the goalkeepers outstretched hand pushed it away from under the bar for a corner.

Boycie caught the moment perfectly as he boomed out "Blimey, if this lot fell down a sewer they would all come back up sucking Mars bars!" It really did feel that way, and later, when equally powerful shots by Freddy, on as substitute for Corr, met a similar fate it was obvious that my dream was not going to start improving anytime soon.

Dagenham and their pet ref were still on edge though. With us attacking them from all quarters, each and every Blue shirt dripping with sweat, they just couldn't relax. Accordingly when Atkinson got unceremoniously tossed up into the air by a tackle so late that the dawn chorus were tuning up aboard it, the referee felt that, once again, he had no option but to do a Nelson.

At first, the home crowd did not realise this; thinking instead that he was merely playing the advantage as we had the ball. And we had no doubts that just as soon as play broke down, back he would trot to the player who was still on the ground crying for Mummy, and the game's second red card would appear. But silly billy's us! He wasn't our ref, we hadn't given him a free ride on the team bus and we hadn't loaned him any money to place a bet on an away win. So when eventually the ball did go out of play he did nothing. Not a thing. Our player had earned enough air miles to visit Florida and he hadn't 'apparently' witnessed anything. Unbelievable, just unbelievable. But there again, dreams, good and bad, have a tendency to be like that.

Therefore we shouldn't have been that astonished when a few minutes later almost every player inside the penalty area at a Blues corner kick played "Atishoo, atishoo, all fall down". Well at least that must have been how the referee interpreted the situation as at least eight players fell to the floor. Both teams were

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represented. So logically, either they fouled us (What them, such nice boys with oodles of Arsenal autographs to give away) or we (Boo, hiss ... not even a stick of rock in sight) had fouled them. Either way a crime had certainly been committed even if its' victims/perpetrators weren't immediately identifiable.

But not to the referee's, or linesman's eye's. Both parties being as equally culpable in not carrying out their duty of observing events and ensuring fair play. Perhaps though, to be fair, the corner caught them by surprise or, as Boycie in a rich vein of form, observed "How do you sleep at night? Hanging upside down from some perch?"

Despite six substitution's, more near death dramas than a whole series of Casualty and a player being booked for time wasting (The ref mistook his identity for a home player and with the card already up in the air, he had no choice but to follow through) only four minutes of extra time got played. Perhaps this representative of the powers that be, should borrow a watch from his mates who officiated at Chesterfield and Bury!

Ooooooooooooooh No ! Everything's going all blurry again. The vision's rewinding and something tells me that I'm about to live through all that again. Noooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!

It can't all have been for real though surely? Those wonderful chappies at the F.A who care so much about the game at its lower levels would never, ever appoint officials like these to a match. And should such a tremendous, unforgiveable, error occur, then just as assuredly they would step in straight away and set matters to rights. Ordering a replay and retracting all the cards.

Only, you don't think I'm having another sort of dream do you? I knew I should haven't eaten all that salad!

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**Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2013**  
**Newport 3 Southend 1**



Bridges!! Whoever invented the darn things should be dangled over the side of the monstrosity that spans the moat between England and Wales until they repent their evil ways. A log across a stream is one thing, but once things get beyond a certain point, say as far as one can comfortably jump, then that's where ships called ferries come in.

They have shedloads of advantages over overgrown Meccano toys. Paint one, and you don't immediately have to start all over again. Should the river suddenly widen due to flooding or whatever, no problem, the propellers just need to spin for that bit longer and if, as it naturally would, trade gets busy. Buy another boat!

Simples! Except that for some reason provide someone with a hammer and a mountain of steel and they immediately want to build something complicated. And before you know it, every puddle and village pond is suddenly spanned by something that's a: way too high and b : Held together only by string and spit. Airborne constructions with no flying license, a zillion feet above terra firma and some person, inhabiting an upright sardine can, who wants money from you. Room 101 them I say! (Do you think my insurance company will fork out for a new steering wheel? Only mine got gripped so tightly as Thunderbird II did the 'Per Ardua ad Astra' thing, that it's now rather damaged).

Yes Thunderbird II had to fly (More literally than I really appreciated) to where Blue's were playing an International fixture at some place called Casnewydd. Even viewed through the rear mirror it still didn't read like a word. But, judging by all the street and shops, it did in fact exist. And to get there we had had to traverse across a wide expanse of water whose tidal range was only something in the region of 43 feet. So why exactly did the road need to tower so far above the landscape that it created its own climate?

Also, why, on entering terra foreign and bumpy, did it immediately start raining? Mike's fingers were just being prised off the steering wheel with a crowbar when the world suddenly turned all wet. For one horrible moment all his fears became true; the wobbly metal thingy had broken and now they were sinking down deep beneath the muddy waters of the Bristol Channel. Quickly he reminded Marlene of the Titanic tradition where the band went down with the ship. Her reply cannot be printed!

Fortunately the rainy tantrum didn't last overly long. One problem solved but now we had another. Roads in Wales aren't designed for fast travel and with the land of a thousand worried sheep also hosting some egg chasers World Cup tournament, the undulating countryside track that we were following was rather on the busy side. The road signs didn't help much either. Spelt by Albert, pronounced with the help of a herd of irate llamas, the plenitude of 'rubble ewes', whys and dees was overwhelming!

The natives obviously knew how to deal with the problem though. Indeed in the car next to us a young couple were wearing face masks; obviously seeking direction through eye slits helped to reduce the problem. Without such aids we were left on our own to decipher a host of scrabble boards, populated by dyslectics with a gee fixation, before finally spotting the ground.

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Actually that's an exaggeration because, hidden as it was down a side alley, and also a forest of tree's, it was only the fact that Boycie had been advised to look out for a pair of houses sporting a pair of blue, rather strangely entangled, posts in place of the more normal garden gnomes, that we found it at all. Not a sign, written in human or druid, was there to see. Indeed Mike donning his wet gear, not against the inclement climate but rather the effects of the language as its spat in these here regions, had to venture forth to seek confirmation that 'Here' was indeed the place from some local natives, before Thunderbird II's engines could be safely downed.

Things then began to improve. We had found a mooring post not 50 yards from the ground, the gates were just about to open and best of all some very appetising smells were flooding the air. Accordingly not many minutes later Mike was halfway outside a very tasty hot dog, Boycie was burning his tongue upon a volcanic cup of tea and Marlene. Well Marlene she was off on the hunt for an empty, plastic, shopping bag!

Let me explain. Just as we had been fearing, the away terraces behind the goal were populated not with standard barriers but seats. Ugh, uncovered terracing with seats! Especially on a day like today when weather of the wet and windy variety was being predicted. Granddad, who had travelled up by coach and was residing comfortably underneath the umbrella of the main stand which ran down the length of the pitch to our immediate right, waved across cheerfully. At least I think that was what he was signalling!

Things weren't quite as bad as at places like Gillingham though. Whereas that swamp only offered piles of scaffolding, Newport had at least put in plastic seats. Even so, with the skies having wept so copiously at witnessing Mikes torment during the crossing over from Blighty, they were nowhere near as dry as we might have wished. Hence our siren's desire to locate some sort of covering and also some tissues with which to wipe them down first.

Whilst she did the 'Hunter / Gatherer' thing, Mike just as pragmatically decided to seek out some sort of shelter. Two nearby cave like structures offering interesting possibilities. Parked to the side of our 'stand' and immediately in front of the house that was serving as changing rooms for the teams, were a pair of abandoned dugouts, complete with roofing and seats. Their attraction was obvious. So, even before the first sausage seasoned burp had had a chance to bid adieu to his very satisfied taste pads, Mike had taken up residence.

He was soon joined by Mrs Green. But the master of the Grange at Tracy Island wasn't for moving. He liked his rain sodden perch, halfway as it was, up a flight of creaky stairs. It reminded him strongly of the belfry back at cher repose and, although the bats were off flying somewhere else, they were certainly very close. Very close indeed!

In the event it didn't really matter as amused stewards soon evicted us. Apparently the dugouts were there to provide shelter for people in wheelchairs etc and so reluctantly we returned to where Boycie was roosting; huddled down against the elements looking for all the world just like one of the things that you see adoring the edges of church towers. Gargoyles would have paid good pigeons to have seen his performance as an effigy.

It's uncertain as to whether or not Newport/ Casnewydd share their ground with a rugby club. Certainly eggy paraphernalia like posts were strewn around and the pitch too showed signs of scrum damage. Given that a gusty, uneven, wind was also blowing directly across the pitch it was going to be interesting to see how the two teams coped with the conditions.

Our hosts kicked off, attacking the goal furthest away from us. This of course meant that Blues were going to have to play uphill towards where their 480 fans were gathered. Some, warm and dry in seats to the side of the pitch, the rest open to whatever the gods chose to throw down on them behind the goal. Boycie was having to be quite firm with Marlene who, having noted that no residents had taken up shelter within the 'caves', was keen on moving house.

Newport bossed the opening minutes of the game and, with young Auger making his debut at right bank in place of the suspended White, the home team were keen to exploit the opportunities such situations presented by concentrating their attacks down their left flank. Supported by their loudly singing and cheering fans, Blues held firm though and we were soon in the ascendancy.

So much so in fact that inside of 20 minutes we should have been 2 – 0 up. First, Woodrow, bursting into the area, allowed the ball to run too wide. His eventual shot was powerful but, with a rather tall goalkeeper in its path, also wide of its target. But by not by much, and this encouraged Southend to continue attacking. Possibly too much so because in our enthusiasm to score we started getting in each other's way.

Hurst was providing some good ammo from out on the wing but Corr and Woodrow kept contriving, with no defenders in sight, to challenge each other for procession. Accordingly some golden chances were wasted before, against the run of play, Casnewydd took the lead. A big punt forward led to Bentley advancing too far out of his goal. He then misjudged the ball's bounce upon an uneven surface, allowing it to slip into the path of a grateful forward who then planted it into an empty net.

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Gutting! We had started slowly, but once into our rhythm we had started to play some good stuff. Yet Route 1 football had just tossed all that groundwork into the shredder. Now, with the home supporters finally finding their voice and their team sheds loads of confidence, we faced an uphill task, both literally and metaphorically. Could our nursery take the strain?

For a while it did look bad as Newport, galvanised by the goal, began launching attack after attack. Aided by their mascot cum ball boy who eagerly not only retrieved the ball but also positioned it by the flag, corners were flying in (Are mascots supposed to become so involved in the game?). But with Prosser holding the line we gradually began to edge ourselves back into the game. Alas though we could no longer claim the driving seat. The match by now being far more even.

Then we got awarded a dubious free kick just outside the area as Hurst, looking to try and beat three defenders after his attempted cross had been blocked, fell to the ground. From our point of view it was a friendly decision by a referee who was officiating the game the way that it was meant to be. From theirs, it was rather a generous decision and they were probably right.

Coker didn't care though. Instead he focused upon the ball, calculated its projected flight, applied differentials to take account of factors like the wind, spin of the earth and probably also the balls' latitude and longitude before striking a dream of a free kick straight into the roof of the net. Given that he had to get the ball up and over a very tall wall before dipping it over the back of an equally gigantic goal keeper it was an incredible shot. Chances of it becoming the tv pundits 'Goal of the Month' ? ....zilch as he wasn't wearing the colours of Munch U or Chelski !

Such Premiership comforters weren't on our mind though as were far too busy celebrating. Almost every Southend player dancing around in front of their delighted supporters behind the goal. We might very well have been damper than Granddad, but who was having to watch the party from afar up in the kitchen?

With just a few minutes to go before halftime it was the perfect time to even the game up. Indeed some of the faithful even began heading off for their Bovril's' and pies in anticipation of the whistle soon being blown. Alas though there was still just enough time for Newport to launch another attack. Earning a free kick of their own, wide of the box, after Auger had pushed a player in the back. Even the ref on Tuesday would have seen it; such a silly thing to do. Especially in these special circumstances. But the kid is just that, and hopefully he will learn from the experience.

In fact it's probably a tad unfair to single him out for attention because the ball should and could have been cleared away from the resulting kick. But poor defending had only resulted in a corner kick. And ... well with our dire record of defending dead ball situations I don't really have to say anymore do I?

A.A Milne, in his darkest moments, could never have envisioned Eoyore as being as dour, downbeat and downright miserable as was now his namesake Boycie. Along with all the supporters behind the goal he had spent the first half standing up. But now he was sat down, slumped in his seat. Staring at the ground, his drawn face held between two bloodless hands, looking for all the world like a down and out who's just realised that his picked up fag end tasted like Toilet Duck. Not only was our team losing but now we also had one very depressed tribal elder upon our hands.

Shooting was probably the only cure but lacking, as we did, even an elastic band, we instead tried to cheer him up. We had been the better team for 15/20 minutes and created some great chances. Plus we were playing down the side of the valley in the second half, so surely getting a goal back wasn't such an impossibility. All to no vain though as, looking like he was sucking upon a month old prune, Eoyore refused to be comforted. Blues were in the Ryman League, Fossetts Farm was a shopping centre minus a stadium and Uncle Albert had still to learn to pick up peas with a spoon rather than through sucking a straw!

If Carlsberg ever get around to painting their version of 'The Scream' then they need look no further than Boycie for their model! But, barely eight minutes in the second half and there was Marlene sitting upon the casting couch too. Again a corner, again a lack of discipline in our defence and now we were 3 -1 down with a mountain to climb ahead of us.

Agreed there had been a blatant foul upon Atkinson, but with the referee unsighted and thus no whistle blown, we should have kept our concentration. Instead, just as at the first, we had allowed ourselves to all be pulled towards the ball and, in this particular case, left three forwards queuing up, unmarked at the far post. Criminal Blues. Criminal!

The home team really had the wind in their sails now and we, well no way to disguise it, just wilted before them. So did our support. With nothing more to cheer than the odd ball booted desperately to safety over the halfway line, our drums and voices fell silent. The game was now no more than that of attack against an unorganised and panicking defence. Although Bentley did well to save some goal bound shots it was much more down to their poor shooting that a cricket score wasn't run up.

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We were terrible in the second half and although Brown used up all his substitutions trying to get his ship back on an even keel; it didn't work and so we floundered about. Just grateful that their shooting was as bad as ours! Of course a few of our players still played for the badge, Coker, Leonard, Bentley and Prosser. Woodrow too, until he was strangely substituted. Accepted that Corr was captain for the day but our loanee from Fulham was by far the most effective forward. Suspicions remain about Corr's real fitness levels and so, with his ball control today being pretty much on par with that of any eunuchs, Brown's decision to keep him on was rather odd to say the least.

Supporters, armchair don't count! of any team are a strange breed but especially so those I suggest who cheer on teams plying their trade in the lower divisions. I guess that we have all just experienced the 'impossible' happening too often to ever take things for granted. Accordingly it wasn't too surprising that it wasn't until the 85<sup>th</sup> minute that the home supporters began celebrating their victory.

In all truth they could have begun tuning up immediately after we gifted them that third. Because from that moment on we were basically just cannon fodder for them to run rings around. We made them look like Champions rather than the more common fare that they truly were. That's not sour grapes. Newport are what they are, an average Division II team, no more. But we, in our disorganised, school yard state granted them so much space and ball that each and every one of their players looked 10 foot tall and a challenge to Pele! Shameful Blues. Shameful.

Fortunately the game ended with them not adding anymore to their score. They could, and indeed should, have scored a hatful. So what was at fault? Had we simply put too much effort into Tuesday night when we played most of the game out with just 10 men? Were the conditions to blame? Or was it nothing more than our inexperience (Our average age could only have been that of around 22).

Everything crossed that it's the first. With our next game a week away, that can be solved. But if it was the conditions to blame then we've a very hard winter ahead. Yes the pitch was not in mint condition but neither was it a mud bath. We are going to face very much worse over the coming months and if that was the root cause of today's, oh so disappointing display, then we are in big trouble.

Inexperience, given our limitations with regard to the transfer market, is by far the most serious problem though. We have a gifted team, no doubts about that with the England manager already paying close attention to our keeper, and other players catching the eye nicely too. However the majority of our players suffer from a condition that only time can cure. And that's the million dollar question. Do we have that time?

The trapdoor out of the league is now both open and gaping. For a long time Accrington looked to have their place booked but recent results suggest they are beginning to raise a fist. Northampton have same amount of points now as Accrington, so surely there must surely be a few nerves jangling there? Most probably, and our safety net of 10 points is of some comfort. But look at how quickly Hartlepool have risen from the depths. Accepted that Scunthorpe have put their fantastic run to an end, but if the Monkey Hangers can do something like that, then so can so many more teams.

The return of White, Phillips and eventually Fred (Injured in training) will add welcome years to our team. Laird's return too will also provide a much needed boost. Julian Bennett is more of an unknown but his presence in the squad confirms that there is scope for us to add some badly required experience into the mix. But that's only when everyone is fit though! And just how long is that going to be?

Don't know, but, given Eoyore's morose expression as he descended from Thunderbird II back at a wet and windy Tracy Island, one thing is for certain. It's still likely to be well before he ever cheers up again!

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**Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2013**  
**Southend 3 Mansfield 0**



That was fun! Enjoyed this game which had almost everything, goals, sending's off, drama and best of all, another home win for Southend! Incredibly it also featured a decent set of officials. Although the linesman who was running the line in front of the Thunderbird eyrie did have a rather dodgy haircut. Styled by, and probably also cut by, Mum, he looked like a mod from the 60's. I'm too young to remember of course, but that was certainly the opinion of our tribal ancients.

On the other hand, only a barber akin to Sweeny Todd, would have found anything to occupy his time should the referee, or indeed Denzil, have strayed into his shop. With not a follicle between them, they were two bald pates exchanging semaphore messages throughout the game! That's of course whenever Denzil looked up from playing with his pocket jewellery.

He wasn't the only one guilty though! Now that Boycie, Trigger and Rodney also have phones that do more than just the E.T thing, he has three amigo's to play with. And, with Uncle Albert chipping in the odd

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observation, at times it was more like a visit to The Car Phone Warehouse than a football match. Deny it as much as they most definitely will ... did any of the infamous four actually witness the events that led up to the first sending off?

It occurred in the 30<sup>th</sup> minute of a game totally dominated by Blues when a stag decided to take a kung fu style jump into Prosser. Incredibly his team mates surrounded the referee, proclaiming his innocence. It was a truly evil challenge and the only mystery was that the referee took so long over issuing the red card. Mansfield were now down to ten men and already a goal down!

It was scored by Straker, who sneaked in at the far past to put Blue's deservedly ahead, just five minutes before the sending off incident. Some great work out on the wing by Corr resulted in the ball flowing into the path of Hurst who glided a cross into the box to where Straker was lurking. A really fine goal that could, had Blues taken full advantage of earlier chances, easily have been our third.

As early as two minutes in, we served notice as Clifford stung the visiting goalkeeper's hands from outside the box. The keeper fumbled the ball and was obviously nervous. Blues scented blood and Will Atkinson's almost opened up the scoring in the 10<sup>th</sup> minute with a header that resulted from a cross from Straker. A player that hadn't, an hour or so before the game, even been in the starting line-up. Delays on the M25 (A lorry had parked itself across the central reservation) delaying both supporters and players such that Woodrow and Kiernan had to be dropped to the bench as precautions against their non-arrival.

This meant that manager Brown had to make some swift adjustments to a side that had been set up in training for the past few days. Leonard dropping into the right back position vacated by White, who in turn had moved into the centre of defence in place of Kiernan. The changes also meant that Timlin was given a chance to shine in midfield and boy did he come up with the goods!

Last season many people did not realise just how important this player was to the side. But his long absence through injury soon revealed how much he was being missed. Tonight he was proving it all over again. Putting in some fine tackles, winning key balls and supplying a very grateful front line (It must have seemed like a flood after a drought) with some great feeder passes. With the very welcome news that Laird is once again fit enough to take part in proceedings, Phil Brown is going to have some very interesting decisions to make over the next few weeks regarding the construction of his midfield.

He was helped in part by the referee's decision to send Clifford off for a hard challenge in the 40<sup>th</sup> minute. Years ago, before the panty liners took control over a man's game, such challenges would have been brushed off. But now his opposite number lay on the ground wailing for Mummy. The ref, un-surrounded by any posse of barrack room lawyers in Blue (Just how disciplined is our side!) hesitated though not a jot before issuing a red card. Now both sides were down to 10 men. A novel situation, but given most club's finances in our division, perhaps a cost cutting exercise to be considered?

Such jests were trumped by one of the oddest goals ever witnessed at the Hall of Dreams. Some fine play by Blues had resulted in the ball flowing out wide to Leonard on the right. Following the tradition established early in the match, he then swung over a ball into the box towards where Corr was awaiting in a very predatory mood. The ball flying both high and true, was unfortunately, (Or so it seemed at the time) intercepted by a defender who was retreating back towards his goal. Not really prepared though, he let the ball bounce off the back of his head in a gentle loop that, at the Oval, would have had everyone cheering a catch. However we were all completely stumped when the Mansfield goalkeeper, instead of simply advancing off his line to catch the ball, retreated. At silly mid off such actions are generally forgiven. But, judging by the very harsh looks directed in his direction by his team mates, this particular player will be buying the rounds for many years ahead as, although he caught the ball, he only did so in the back of his own net! Lubbly Dubbly !!

The talk in both dressing rooms during halftime must have been very interesting. Much less so the discussions taking place amongst the T'Bird glitterartsy who once more had their pieces out on display. Their gang leader, Denzil, was patiently explaining to his acolytes how to send things like text messages when Boycie, (Never all that good at concentrating and now that he is in his dotage ...), spotted something that looked suspiciously like a football score displayed upon his master's jewellery set. Well, talk about children on Christmas morning! Total mayhem set in as they all wanted to load the guilty app onto their toys too. But why? The only game in town was ours and, presumably, they knew the score. But there again, perhaps that's what being retired does to you.

If Mansfield's manager was hoping that his team would come out all guns blazing in the second half he was soon disillusioned as we quickly once again took over control of the game. A free kick, taken by Coker (Surely the signing of the season) announced that we were resuming business as usual and the goalkeeper was only just able to prevent him repeating his success at Newport. A series of swift home attacks followed and, driven to desperation, our visitors began trying strong arm tactics. As a result the referee was soon building up his own team sheet as Mansfield player after player received a caution. Indeed so keen were our visitors to be in his team that one later applied again and so got a red card as an award. Their second of the game But as it



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didn't occur until the 90<sup>th</sup> minute it still was a game between two evenly numbered teams. Blues though were most definitely in the driving seat.

So their frustrated manager turned towards bullying tactics; replacing two of his more gifted players (They could describe a ball) with a pair of thugs whose appearance suggested that they could only recognise such objects if they were attached to leg irons. Route 1 football was obviously now going to the order of the day as far as our visitors were concerned. And so it proved to be.

Balls now started raining down upon Blues area but, with no yellow shirt in attendance, our defence had few problems dealing with them. However our players were beginning to tire and this, taken together with the introduction of Mansfield's fresh, if swollen, legs, meant that the team from up the M1 were becoming more involved in the game. Fortunately though, the pair of grunts trampling around up front from them were about as clueless as Rodney faced with a bra clip.

Accordingly they fumbled around, evil intent beaming out of their faces but lacking the necessary skills they experienced little success. So eventually their patsy's got bored; leaving them with no resort other than to become even more physical. Poor Prosser, already the victim of one vicious attack, now was subjected to another. Being thrown to the ground so strongly that he looked to be unconscious for a considerable period. After a few worrying minutes though he was able to unsteadily regain his feet and so be guided off the pitch in order to be substituted. His assailant, employing the cunning ploy of playing possum, deceived the ref and escaped a card.

There was enough time for us to score a third though. Just! The whistle already hovering in the referee's mouth as the ball burst the back of the South Bank net. Hurst, picking up the ball just over the halfway line had struck a powerful shot goalwards that appeared to have the stricken goalkeeper so mesmerised that he was barely able to get an arm in its way. An action that only helped an already goal bound shot find its target. Goooooooooooooooooooooal.

The players were applauded off the pitch by a very happy home crowd. The home manager was equally impressed by his sides display. You could see him enthusiastically congratulating players like Timlin and Coker who had played such a big part in making it so. Following such an enjoyable game it's of course hard not to get too carried away. But with experience returning to the side in the shape of White, Timlin and Laird we look in good shape to take on whatever the winter might throw at us.

Of course we are missing big players like Eastwood, who's out for three weeks. Accordingly, although we created a net full of chances, only three (Ok, two) were actually taken. Therefore doubts about the strength of our frontline persist. That said, we've already contributed towards a week that is going to be full of fireworks, and statistics say that we must beat Morecambe sometime. So with the prospect of a cash generating F.A cup run ahead it really is again a case of ... Come on you Blues !!

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**Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2013**  
**Southend 2 York City 1**



I bet Blues marketing department just loved this one! Three goals, two sending's off and a last minute winner. The script might have been written by Carlsberg. Yet for all that excitement, doubts remain over the ploy of letting in the hoi polloi for just a fiver.

For example getting an atmosphere generated in the West Stand was nigh on impossible. Too many people were gawping around; waiting for some invisible TV commentator to tell them what to do. And this meant that our team came out to comparative silence. The clapping and cheering of the loyal drowned out by the murmuring of the confused.

During the game itself it was even worse. Isolated groups making brave attempts to get one chant or another going but, islands in a sea of indifference, they soon sunk without a trace. Only behind the North Bank goal, where Blues Voice had ventured on a day trip, was support for the Blues really evident. Praise too must be offered in the direction of the East and South stands who, unusually for them, also managed to make themselves heard at times.

Financially then, did Southend benefit at all there? The biggest gate by far this season suggests that they did, but divide it by two thirds (Thus accounting for season ticket holders) then divide by four to take account of the price cut, and do the figures still look so healthy? Rough maths I agree but, accepting that the queues for food etc. looked very healthy, our actual takings must have been just about par for a normally priced league game.

Also, returning to those queues, just how much planning went into this event? Having to stand in line for a long period of time waiting for a warming cuppa on a cold day was hardly an experience to bring people

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rushing back. So why were not more people to hand behind the bars and inside the hot dog emporiums? It was certainly a positive move to ensure that every such outlet was open but, lacking the required number of staff, things soon came to a standstill. Incidentally did anyone else spot the amount of white smoke that poured out of the one serving the away supporters at the junction between the North Bank and East? One could be forgiven for thinking a new Pope was being announced!

Whilst a few more programme sales might have occurred than normal, such amounts surely must have barely covered the cost of hiring the Blue Belles, let alone the geezer with a guitar who belted out homilies before the game.

Urban rumour, eagerly nourished by either Uncle Ron or his henchman Steve Kavanagh, has it that Southend United are run by a bunch of astute businessmen. So something less obvious than atmosphere and profit must be behind their cunning scheme. But what?

Sowing seeds is the only answer that I can come up with. In an attempt to generate plough shares for the future, the club let everyone and their brother into this game for basically free. The hope being that they enjoyed the experience so much that they will return again. Only this time paying the proper admission fee. And thus, or so goes the plan, our gates will gradually improve to the point where more cash can be released for Phil Brown to improve the size of his squad.

Admirable stuff! But did it actually work? Let's examine the evidence and find out.

## **Exhibit 1: The Product**

Tough one this because I guess, to try and see things through our virgin supporters eyes, this game has to be treated as a one off. All evidence from previous games being null and void. So simply stating that we played better or worse than last week/month just won't cut it.

For the majority of people inside Roots Hall this was simply a game of football between two teams. One in holy Blue, the other in rubbishy red. Possibly some knew the teams names, most probably didn't care. Instead, the litmus test for them, was, how did actually going to a game compare with sitting at home watching one live/recorded on TV.

And, given that such games probably featured the 'supposedly' most skilled players in the word that was quite a challenge for us to address. However we did have something in our favour though. Poor though the atmosphere undoubtedly was, it was still a million miles above listening to John Motson mumble away about some non-entity that was currently rolling on the ground, apparently in his last death throes, after breaking a fingernail.

This was real football, played by real men. No thespians' were on stage today. Just honest journeyman plying out their trade. Professionals, proud of what they do and trying to do it to the best of their ability (Before you get overly concerned, I am not referring at all to the officials here!) For sure there were very few Pele's or Moore's on show, but what was out there was football as it should be played. It was a match between two fairly even sides, not Money Bags XI v Beggars XI, and so its outcome couldn't be cited with any certainty. Yes we are putting a good run together, but York are no mugs.

## **Exhibit 2: The Experience**

Blues kicked off attacking the North Bank whose population was evenly split between home and away supporters. Blues Voice occupied its right, an impressive, and vocal, 200+ York supporters the left. In midfield Laird was making claim to his throne after a long absence through injury. It was at the expense of Leonard, one of our most improved players this season, who had suffered a leg injury in training. And it was going to be interesting to see how much our team play would be affected by the introduction of a defensive minded midfielder against one who harboured more offensive ambitions. Upfront, Corr too was another change, in for young Woodrow who had opened up his league account last week down in Exeter. The Fulham loanee probably has more speed, but Corr would certainly be looking forward to winning a lot of the ball in the air.

The opening six minutes of the game were all Blues. York apparently bewildered by our swift ground level passing and off the ball movement. We had a couple of chances. That's all they were, but in normal circumstances they would have served as appetisers to get the Roots Hall roar going. Today though they were greeted with almost uniform silence. With no TV generated excitement to respond too, most of the audience simply slumbered in their seats.

Some of them were jumping out of them though as the game entered its seventh minute. Some fine play by Blues had led to a corner, and that resulted in the ball finding its way out wide to where Hurst was lurking upon our right flank. The winger immediately struck its goalwards and it flew right across the front of the box before nestling in the bottom of the far corner of the net. What a shot and what a goal!

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Fears harboured before the game that Blues, faced with a big crowd (It was over 9,000) would do their usual vanishing act evaporated, as the team, and some in their audience, celebrated. York had barely had a touch. Carry on in this vein and we would be considering ourselves to be honorary (If such a term be applied to a criminal colony ?) Aussies , such would be the score line.

Then occurred one of those incidents that at the time appear trivial, though not for the player concerned of course, but have game changing effects. In stretching to put the ball out for yet another Blues corner a defender had injured himself such that the game was delayed for several minutes whilst he got carried off and substituted. Up until that point the game had been so one way it was almost embarrassing. But during this enforced period of delay, York's manager was able to provide some instruction to his side and as a result things became much more even.

Bentley, until then a mere observer of events began to have a more active part in the game. But even he could do nothing about a fine shot that fortunately hit the far post rather than the back peg. York were beginning to ask difficult questions and we were experiencing more than a little trouble in answering them.

The problem was Laird. No, don't get me wrong, the player himself was having a good game, breaking up play and making some important tackles. No instead the issue lay in the fact that he naturally plays ten or so yards further back than the more adventurous Leonard, and this gap in midfield was not being covered. Accordingly York were using this space to good advantage in order to get at our defence.

Both teams therefore were creating chances. So for the 'chickens' amongst the observers it was an exciting, interesting game. For the 'pigs' though it was a much more serious state of affairs and many a knuckle was being chewed at each end of the field as the game swayed up and down the pitch. For the uninitiated (The Thunderbirds who refused to listen to Mike's explanation, amongst them) the terms 'Chicken' and 'Pig' are used to reflect an individual's commitment to a particular project, using the simile of an a traditionally fried breakfast. The pigs are truly committed to the meal whilst the chickens have only limited interest!)

Halftime arrived with Blues still hanging onto, just, their lead and both managers were obviously going to be employed to the full during the break. The Thunderbirds too had things to do. With visitors over from Europe, Germany to be more exact, we had been practising a number of German phrases that we could employ at key stages during the game. An entertaining and simple to execute plan you would have thought, except for one critical detail. We had entrusted Deniz, yeah him with all the Maff's books, with the encryption.

Things, we had thought were going well, but then Cassandra's laughter became almost hysterical. She had stolen one of our crib sheets and was reading through the phrases it contained. And one particular word, 'foul', had been translated by our modern day Einstein, not into football terminology, but more into terms of a usage that's commonly seen at many a sports ground i,e 'Please do not let your dog's foul the ground" ! Boycie who had spent all week learning his German was not at all impressed.

York piled on the pressure early in the second half and one particular spell of play; following a fantastic save by Bentley, saw the ball break to a player on the penalty spot who made no mistake in scoring their equaliser. In all truth they deserved it. They had pushed us onto the back pedal and now they had taken full advantage of it. One half of the North Bank was now in total rapture.

Then, just a couple of minutes later, we got reduced to 10 men. The dismissal raised the question of just what a state has the game of football come to when a player gets sent off, not for trying to cripple another player, not for downright cheating, but instead for over celebrating a goal? Hurst had earlier been cautioned when he exorbitantly joined the crowd after scoring his goal. Scored in the Premiership and it would have been upon every news programme in the country; scored on a second division pitch and a media blackout mysteriously occurs. Nevertheless it had been a quality piece of play that fully merited the player's expression of joy. The authorities,(Read small minded ref) saw things differently though and so a yellow card had been the result.

Now a second was being issued for another innocuously event. Yes, a foul had been committed, and, as it was outside of either penalty area, it was duly noted with the award of a free kick. That should have been the end of the story but the referee, away on his own planet, interpreted Hurst's challenge as something approaching manslaughter and so issued two cards, a second yellow, closely followed by a red. It released the shackles upon Boycie though, and soon, very soon, the German word for foul was resounding around the Hall in good old fashion Anglo Saxon!

Ridiculous. But that is exactly what the game is in danger of becoming. A side show, where temperamental ballerinas get away with their temper tantrums, and sly gouging whilst honest players get ordered off the pitch for merely performing their profession as a man.

It also meant that now we were really up against it. Cheered on by their supporters, York turned the screw up a notch and many an eye was turned towards the bench expecting some sort of response. But nothing was happening there; Brown having enough confidence in his men to expect them to see this period of pressure

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through before applying some of their own, And so it proved to be, Blues weathering a tempestuous storm before beginning to create a few gale sized storms themselves.

## **Exhibit 3: Pure Theatre**

Blues down to 10 men; the game on level terms at 1 – 1; the opposition launching attack after attack. Pure Hollywood. And then the ball breaks to an away forward inside the box, he draws back his leg and let's fly a thunderbolt of a shot. The York fans are leaping towards heaven as it flies towards the back of the net. Hearts are sinking everywhere else around the packed ground. And then, just as all hope has been lost a super hero, dressed in all white, leaps to the rescue, somehow, miraculously getting his body in between the ball and its target. We can all breathe again. Thank you super Bentley!

But the drama doesn't stop there. The press box, already feverously writing down deathless prose to describe Bentley's tremendous save, now have to rearm their pens (Ok, touch boards) because yet another player is receiving his marching orders. This time the victim bear a York badge; his crime? A sliding tackle upon Prosser. In any game, in any league prior to the turn of the century it would have been no more than a case of a few shaken hands and job done. Today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it was viewed as being akin to a band playing as it marched into Poland.

Now with both teams reduced down to 10 men the 'chickens' began to crow. The whole Hall resounding with the roar of our support and it was really was something to hear. So sad that it had not began, as it should have, in the early minutes of the game but it was here now and, possibly, perhaps, could be, it also signalled that a few chickens were smelling the ham!

Our team responded and when young Woodward, on for the off form Straker, broke free with only their goalkeeper to beat in the 90<sup>th</sup> minute we all thought our prayers were about to be answered. But alas he shot too soon allowing the goalkeeper plenty of time to see the ball before saving it. The crowd, up on its feet with excitement, once more sunk down into their seats. The singing and cheering continued though and, for this special moment in time, the emergent pigs could fly.

And then the whole ground simply took off as, from a free kick, late, late into injury time, Blues did the impossible and scored! That atmosphere, already electric, became a maelstrom of delight as supporters, both new and old, went absolutely ape. Everywhere you looked people were jumping, shouting, yelling and expressing fantastic amounts of sheer joy. Out on the pitch our wonderful, brilliant, team were doing exactly the same. Prosser, who had headed home Coker's cross, being buried under a pile of his teammates. And this time, not even this referee, dared show a card.

Even that famous football film 'Escape To Victory' would not have dared to include such a dramatic last five minutes. It was simply beyond belief, but as a way to send folks home wishing for more ...

## **Summary**

Personally I think this was a brave idea by Blues but poorly timed. With Christmas on the horizon parents have tough financial choices to make. And by the time they can afford to make them in Blues favour, this game will have been long forgotten. Both by them, and more importantly, certainly for our long term future, their kids too.

The game itself was 'average'. Blues certainly having played better this season and, but for the excitement and passion of its closing minutes, would have been eminently forgettable. Just one in a long list of games to forget.

Fingers therefore must be crossed that any seeds that were planted will indeed lie dormant over the festive months, only to sprout and grow as the sun begins to ride higher in the skies. Both of these events though are in the laps of the gods. And long before then we have our position of being fifth in the table to consider and also the visit to Portsmouth to contemplate.

Come on you Blues !!

29<sup>th</sup> November 2013