4-1 And Still Nervous

Contributed by Dave Thomas
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4 – 1 and still nervous

We were away in Turkey for a week. Some friends have a villa there. Sometimes you just have to accept an offer to jet out to Kalkan. It would have been churlish to refuse especially as we had never been before. Alas it meant we had to miss the M K Dons Carling game and the Southampton game. I couldn’t decide if this was a bad or a good thing the way things had been going, although sausage and mash at the Tuesday game would have been tempting had we stayed. However, the thought of another Middlesbroughesque performance against Southampton might have had me investing in a blindfold.

As it turned out there was a win in the Carling and a very creditable draw against Southampton and the news on these games kept coming in texts from chums at the games. When the text came that said that Amougou had scored in the 89th minute to win the game against MK Dons I nearly fell off the chair and spilt my forkful of Arnavut Cigeri (tender pieces of lamb liver, breaded and deep fried, then tossed with seasonings) all over my new Turkish shirt. Actually when we got home I discovered the shirt was made in India.

The Sultan Rolls were good too (grilled chicken breast wrapped with sauteed mushrooms, green peppers and melted Turkish Kashar cheese) and a rung up the ladder from anything you can get at Greggs. We were at a place called The Aubergine on the Carling night, down by the harbour. When the first text came and said we were 1 – 0 down we feared the worst. But then there was a certain poetic justice to Amougou/Bikey’s late, late winner. In my ‘umble opinion I’ll be forever convinced that had he played more during the second half of the Prem season, we’d have had a far better chance of staying up. Then in comes young Master Eddie and ignores him. So when along came the spectacular winner from The Big Man, it was almost as if to say, huh, that’s for you gaffer.

What a frustrating player he is though. On his game at his best the guy is awesome. His passing skills can be fabulous and his strength and power stupendous. But with all that comes the downside; the lapses, switching off, and the casual dawdling; but then I suppose if he was perfect he’d be at Arsenal. He reminds me of two sorts of electric light bulbs. The first sort were the ones we all liked but can’t get any more, immediately switched on,bright, dazzling and powerful; the second are the ones that the ghastly EU insist we use; the ones that take an age to warm up, are a bit on the dim side, and have you tearing your hair out.

The place for a breakfast in Kalkan is a place called Fenners, right by the water at the end of the harbour. It’s just past the waffle bar. What a place to sit under a blue sky and warm sun and have a Full English with the papers and read up on the football. Just about every voice is English and at this time of year in the 65+ bracket. After the Southampton game we sat there with the Sundays. You can almost touch the boats as they glide in and out. Burnley were still just out of the bottom three, but when I looked at the Prem tables I was delighted to see two particular names down there at the bottom – Bolton and Blackburn.

It’s early days but in prospect is a Championship that might just include Bolton, Blackburn, Preston, Blackpool and Burnley. My time at Burnley started with a season when there were seven Lancashire clubs in Division One and every Saturday seemed like a derby day. The irony of Bolton Wanderers propping up the rest of the Division is delicious and it’s a fair bet that the Bolton mob will turn on the Blessed Messiah just as they did with Megson if they are still there for a few more weeks.

On the day of the Southampton game it seemed like we were going to hold out for the 1 – 0 win after Austins’s goal. We were lazing by the pool. But then another text came late on. I looked at the screen on pins wondering if it would say 1 – 1 or 2 – 0. I think I was already groaning before I actually read it. You just kind of knew that a clean sheet at Burnley was too much to hope for. Never mind, I thought, I’d guessed at 2 – 2 before the game and my texting chum had predicted a 4 – 1 defeat. Another 200 lengths in the pool before dinner will work up a nice appetite I decided. Bugger it, that’s enough I decided at 20.

Surrounded by dozens of exotic dishes I passed on the Kimyonlu Kofte (meatballs to you not a Bayern Munich centre back) and settled on an enormous thick fillet steak in a mushroom sauce with chips. The bottle of white slid down beautifully. A duo played gentle bossa nova. Romance was in the air. I thought about buying Mrs T a long stemmed rose from one of the guys who was hawking them round the tables. As it happened, I didn’t. But it’s the thought that counts.

There’s a barber on every corner in Kalkan so on the final morning I went in for a shave. What you also get thrown in is a head, face, neck, shoulders and arms massage.

“I take away the stress,” said the barber, Ilkan, in a mixture of pigeon English and sign language. With being a Burnley supporter, there is always stress. But the shave and the ten minute massage did wonders, albeit temporarily. His place, Lady Diana Kuafor and Barber, I love the word Kuafor, is on the second level of restaurants above the harbour, oppposite Akins restaurant another place where we ate. Someone had taught the maitre d’ a whole list of Yorkshireisms. We added to his vocabulary and taught him how to say “ba thi ‘eck that were fair tasty.”

The Nottingham Forest game, the day after we got back, even with a 5 – 1 win was still not without anxiety and the effects of the massage had certainly worn off. Burnley must be the only club where you can be 4 – 1 up and still feel nervous. At 4 – 0 you thought this surely must be a clean sheet. But no, yet again a few seconds of switching off and Forest pulled one back. As it happened it turned out to be academic when Burnley scored a fifth making it a night to remember. Hines might have made it six but his effort was cleared off the line.

The portents for this game were good. In recent seasons Tuesday night games have been kind to Burnley with the last defeat, someone thought, being way back in 2007, possibly the defeat to Hull City that lost Steve Cotterill his job. This latest Tuesday night began with one of those fabulous red and purple skies above the Bob Lord and then behind the Cricket Field Stand. The floodlights on a perfect night after an Indian summer’s day brought everything out in HD definition. A night game under floodlights is pure theatre when there is a 5 – 1 performance. It was a night when all of us went home happy, especially the kids and teachers from St Leonards who put on a wonderful halftime, vibrantly colourful spectacular display. I can’t remember anything quite so astonishing. The perfect weather and halftime scoreline put the whole crowd in party mood.

Pre game at The Kettledrum it was goodbye to things like Osmanli Sac (a meaty thing) and Imam Bayaldi (aubergines n stuff) and back to the old trusty Cumberland Sausage with a fried egg on top. A few scurvy-looking, decidedly shifty looking Forest supporters were in there with no idea of what was in store for them. It was a shirtsleeve crowd outside the Turf. The display against Southampton must have doubled the optimism levels making it one of those nights when you could feel the buzz and the anticipation. It was also a must-win game with Forest one of the poorer teams.

And so they were. You can only beat what’s put in front of you, as the saying goes, and this was a Forest side that was one of the most shambolically inept I have ever seen at Turf Moor. Having said that they spurned three glorious chances and hit the woodwork twice in rare moments when a bit of Forest football broke out.

The scoreline maybe was also a reflection of something deeper than Burnley’s rampant victory. The five goals plus the clarity of the Chairman’s programme notes indicated that indeed there is a strategy that might well bear fruit over time; and a strategy that surely contrasts with the shambles that is Nottingham Forest with their high profile manager and what is known as the “player acquisition committee” headed by the smarmy David Pleat. They appear to have little money, some decidedly dodgy players, others who are well past their sell-by date, disgruntled fans and no clear direction. It was a game between two clubs, one of which has a definite policy and a nucleus now of young exciting players; and on the other hand another club that seemed to be in total disarray. Burnley’s grand plan might well be short on players, has had us furrowing our brows at the speed of the player exits, and chewing our finger-nails and on occasions scratching our heads; but it does seem that there is one. I came away thinking I prefer the Burnley blueprint to Forest’s. Blueprint in fact seemed to be the word of the night.

There may well be hiccups along the way in future games but this was a performance that gave hope and must surely have doubled confidence levels. Burnley players in this game moved at a pace that might well have won Olympic gold. Sure they lost their way a bit in the second half as Forest had a dominant 10 minute spell but they could still have added a couple more to the five goals scored.

McCann, scorer of goal three, was back to his best and powered forward all night. Bartley controlled the midfield, Trippier rampaged down the right, Rodriguez pillaged in the 6-yard box grabbing two goals. Wallace teased and tormented and intercepted a horrendous Forest pass enabling him to run forward 40 yards and fire home. Stanislas skipped and danced down the left providing two superb crosses that demanded goals – and got them. In all it was a difficult night to pick a man of the match. There could have been several. But Bartley could well turn out to be a giant of a player.

McLaren sent Forest back out at half-time into the naughty corner for extra practice. They couldn’t do much because the St Leonard’s kids had kidnapped the pitch. There is surely something quite humiliating about a manager sending a whole team back out. The display was something to do with saving the planet. The Forest supporters would have settled for saving Nottingham. Brollyman would probably settle for saving his job – unless he’s had enough already. Who on earth would want David Pleat as a consultant behind your back, or whatever he is there?

The newspapers on Wednesday and SKY after the game focused on McClaren’s discomfort and situation as manager. The Nottingham websites were in meltdown. Mrs T and me drove back to Leeds well pleased. What a difference a week in the sun, a Cumberland sausage with an egg on top, and then a thumping win makes. Mrs T wanted to get last minute tickets for Millwall. I said no (masterfully), but I did get them for Barnsley.