Cambridge Fans United

CFU

"Uniting Our Community"

AMBER NEWS

Special
'We Were Always Confident' Edition

November 2024

Opening Turnabout,



"If you don't like the road you're walking, start paving another one."
Dolly Parton

As I write, we have just won our fourth game in a row, having failed to win any of our first nine. The last Amber News predicted a much better season in League One and now it's beginning to look like we might well have one. Just last week a Habbin veteran



turned to me and said that we would finish twelfth .That is not what he was saying a month ago . Today James Brophy scored the winner. Over the last few weeks we have seen Okedina, Smith, Reyes and Kachunga praised to the skies, and rightly so. They and Brophy have had ridiculous and unjustified criticism before results improved so dramatically. We are told that football is a results business and that is absolutely true. Absurd as it sounds, in many games it was only the result that we didn't like. We deserved to win games. We didn't, partly because of bad luck, partly because of a loss of confidence and partly because all teams have bad runs. At times our play was pretty good and all this with nine of our first team injured. In fact we have yet to see some of the people signed during a very optimistic summer. There is time and reason for optimism still.

There is no doubting the spirit and determination in the team, particularly when Barry Corr is patrolling the touchline. Maybe the experiment of having Garry Monk in the stand, where he can see what's going on, and Barry by the dugout should continue? If I were a player , I don't think I would like to earn his displeasure. Social Media can create a sense of crisis which doesn't really exist. It's too easy to have a go at things when they are not going your way. No team wins through a sense of entitlement, not even Manchester City, beaten, to everyone's great pleasure by "little" Bournemouth today. Real fans of real teams get behind their team and encourage the players ,no matter what. Fans who boo, and I'm not just thinking of Wigan , aren't really fans at all. Real supporters do just what the word suggests. If I couldn't face the prospect of defeat, I would never go to another game. There are always two teams on the field as a number of league teams no longer in the F A Cup can testify.



It was great reading the article in the Times by their chief sports correspondent, David Walsh. He was amongst the 900 Cambridge fans at Stevenage when we won for the second time within days. He had never seen passion like it and felt privileged to be part of it. We've all felt like that. Our club means everything to us, not because we are on Sky or in the Champions League but because we were born to it. It is what we were born to do. Being a U is a privilege denied to most. David Walsh understood what he was seeing.

Finally, I felt very proud of the way Remembrance was observed at the Abbey. It always has been, apart from one year when a couple of IRA members very foolishly tried to interrupt the minute's silence in the NRE. They didn't stay there long. We are proud of our club and we are proud of our servicemen. And rightly so. When I asked the club to order pin badges with the poppy and club badge on it, they were happy to oblige. This is a club that listens. We may not always we agree with every decision but we know why they were taken. Because they tell us. Football clubs are not just about results, are they?

You will delighted to hear that the bucket collection taken before the Burton game raised £557 for the Royal British Legion. If the buckets had had QR codes or we had had sum up machines, we would have taken more. Once upon a time it was only the Royal family who didn't carry change, now it's all of us. Well done anyway. A great effort by all concerned.

Look out for some brand new CFU merchandise celebrating James Brophy's wonder goal yesterday. Did everyone go on the pitch? That would be telling.

Club Statements

These seem to have been coming thick and fast over the last week or so. I was sad to hear that Adam Webb will no longer be one of our owners, although I understand entirely that it is difficult to divide loyalties between two clubs and that Adam is now owner of St Johnstone. I am pleased that he will continue to take an interest in us and we will continue to take an interest in him. Certainly we wish him well in his battle against cancer, which seems to be going well.

The update on stadium redevelopment shouldn't really have surprised anyone who has tried to get planning permission for anything other than another totally unnecessary student residence . The process is complex and complicated but we should be glad that the ground is ours and that we are able to redevelop it. The original plan of course was that Grosvenor would build houses on it and we would have to move to a purpose built stadium somewhere away from the city. The improvements will happen .And they will happen to our Abbey. We will have a capacity for 12,000 people to be safely and comfortably accommodated. We will need that capacity as we become more successful.



The third statement concerned the badge and was always going to upset those who wanted to retain the old one. Having said that, the consultation process was wide and as democratic as these things can be . A year ago the Shadow Board felt that fans had not been consulted enough ,or very well, and suggested that it was vital that, whatever decision was made , the choice was made by a clear majority . The club can be pleased that the Shadow Board has scrutinised the process and endorsed the decision. That, after all, is its function-to ensure that the opinion of fans is fully considered and respected. I preferred the ball and book idea, without the shield, but, as with Brexit , I accept the decision of the majority. Time will tell how well the new badge will be accepted. Change sometimes takes years before its impact can be properly weighed up. Previous Boards changed our badge without consulting anyone. I am glad to see transparency valued as highly as it is now. It was not always so-was it?



Why is it that things on social media have suddenly become so black and white?

Last season according to social media you were either a ""Bonner In" or Bonner Our" fan. This season it has been "Monk in" or "Monk out". And if you supported the team by applauding at the end of a match when the team had lost you were a "Happy Clapper".
If I think the team has played well I will applaud at the end, regardless of the result.

The "Monk Out" argument was 1 point in 9 games, other clubs would have got rid of him with such a poor record. Can't argue with that!
The "Monk In" side countered that there were lots of injuries to key players, and he was trying to change the style of the team to a more modern passing and keep possession style, so it wasn't his fault. Can't argue with that!

My opinion is that managers/coaches are sacked too quickly. I can understand a quick decision if an untried person is put in charge, but when you know what you will be getting if you put an experienced person as manager you have to give them a reasonable time to do their stuff.

The sub-plot behind this was the recruitment, we seemed to be signing injury prone players which is apparently all the fault of Ben Strang. The other side to that is we have a relatively small playing budget, which limits the pool of players available.
In the past we have tried signing players with potential, some have worked, some less so. Andy Dallas seemed a good bet to go onto better things, but he is currently in League 2 at Barrow (on loan from Barnsley) having been around L2/Conference since leaving the U's.
Then there are the Paul Mullin/Sam Smith/Harvey Knibbs type who do well with us but we can't afford to offer good enough contracts to keep them, they can move to earn more and often with a signing on fee in their pocket. Of our current players Liam Bennett looks set for a higher level, will CUFC make anything should he move?
Signing players who have played at a higher level is nice but expensive, and those available are likely to have some injury history or other issues which make them less attractive but bring them within our reach.
Recruitment is very difficult. I have no idea what our playing budget is, I suspect we are in the lower 25% of League 1. In the same way that Ipswich/Southampton etc cannot compete with the big teams in the Premier League, CUFC cannot compete with Birmingham/Wrexham/Bolton etc.
Paying £10 million for someone to play in League 1 as Birmingham have is great for them, but madness to me. If they get promotion they will claim it was a good investment along with the other players they have bought in.
Then there is Wrexham, who supposedly get £0.5million for every episode of Welcome to Wrexham. It seems their Hollywood owners have put in very little of their own money, instead they are using their influence to persuade others to invest, or get big name sponsors such as Tiktok and United



Coming back to the original point there are lots of arguments one way or the other. It seems the option of "agree to disagree" doesn't work on social media!

Terry Wilby
There is a lot of wit on social media and a load of toxic nonsense too. My view is simple. You either support a team or you don’t. If you only support a team that wins, you’re not really a fan so much as a hanger on.(Ed.)

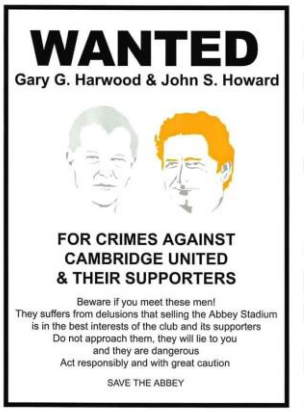
Football Governance Bill

First of all it is wonderful that the new government, having alienated many people already, have agreed to proceed with a bill originally supported by the last government .Indeed, the principle of reforming the working man’s game for the benefit of all seems to have been accepted more enthusiastically by Labour .We shouldn’t be surprised by

that. Lisa Nandy seems to have provoked alarm amongst the closed and cossetted ranks of the Premier League by claiming that the current arrangement of parachute payments causes, “significant wage inflation in the Championship and also increased debt in the Premier League.”

Currently many of the same clubs are relegated from the Premier League and then promoted again because other Championship clubs cannot compete with their budgets. This obviously stands in the way of fair competition and is a none too subtle way of preserving the status quo and keeping those clubs already doing well at the top or in striking distance of it .That’s corrupt in my opinion. Surely all clubs have a legitimate right to expect to challenge for a place at the top table if they are well managed, well-staffed and sufficiently lucky? The long term prosperity of the game depends on giving as many clubs as possible a realistic hope of progress. Supporters find the idea of three or four clubs winning everything season after season intolerable. The game’s authorities don’t seem to have much of an idea of what constitutes fairness ,which is why independent Regulation has become essential.





Sports Minister Stephanie Peacock claims that payments to relegated football clubs can’t be abolished but all these arrangements would be altered if evidence emerged that, “the system was destabilising and compromising financial sustainability .”It’s clear to most of us that it does, and so an Independent Regulator must be given the power to change this and to enforce the Fair Play rules. The Regulator will have the power to intervene on proposals to move grounds, the distribution of funds between leagues and clubs, on ticket prices and on Diversity and Inclusion. They will have a remit to nourish the grass roots of the game and to ensure its long term future by insisting on sustainability. Each club will be licensed to compete and will lose that licence unless financial stability can be guaranteed and proven . It should become impossible for rogue or irresponsible people to take over football clubs. Certainly no ownership which owes its wealth to institutions or countries with a poor record of human rights should qualify. But that’s enough about Newcastle…



No group of fans should lose the club they love because of irresponsible owners. No group of clubs or media moguls should get away with hijacking all the honours or wealth available for themselves, something which has been happening increasingly since the Premier League and Sky TV took control of a game which belongs to us all.

I hope that the Bill goes far enough, that the vast wealth generated by the game is distributed more fairly and evenly and that we can all dream with some expectation of beating the big boys at least every now and then.

My Ten Favourite United Games

It's always fun to draw up lists like this. Fun but impossible. Tomorrow the choices would be different. Some of them. Over nearly sixty years , many games have been forgotten or distorted. Some memories are so exquisite that they never fade and demand inclusion in any list. Where to start?



In the Southern League Premier Division in 1970….in the lead up to promotion to the Football League, I could pick out many games, particularly those against deadly rivals Chelmsford City but two that stand out are these;

I. February 18th. We beat King's Lynn 5-1. Eades got two. The Linnets were the first team I watched regularly when I was at school there. They were a good side then. Malcolm Lindsay came to us shortly afterwards and we looked at other players. Gerry Baker had recommended some to us. Anyway, we absolutely hammered them that day. As a 16 year old I decided that we were good enough for the Football League .It was up to the League Chairmen to see the increasingly obvious.



2. May 2nd we beat Margate 2-0. Champions at last. Now all we needed was to be elected to the league. George Harris scored and Bill Cassidy, two players who turned a good side into a very good side. The next 35 years would be quite the adventure.

3 April 11th 1984. We were already relegated when we beat Newcastle 1-0 in a very strange Second Division clash . They had Waddle, Beardsley and someone called Keegan in their side. We had no right to win. But we did.

4 26th May 1990…maybe my favourite. The first ever play- off final, which was held at the real Wembley. Cambridge United on the same pitch where England had won the World Cup Final 24 years earlier. The stuff of dreams. I didn't cry when the teams came out. No, really…. We beat Chesterfield 1-0 and then started beating nearly everyone. Thank you, genius of a manager, John Beck.

5 And into the nineties .October 1998. League Cup game Forest 3, Cambridge 3. I took my boys to see this late at night and in teeming rain. The stewards didn't know what had hit them as more and more sections of the away end were opened to

accommodate us .All 3,500 of us. We were 3-0 down. No matter. We brought it back to 3-3 and Forest scraped through on penalties. I lived and worked in Nottingham and wore my shirt with pride for weeks. As often as possible. Our fans were magnificent that night. And so were our team.

6 After relegation and financial meltdown in 2005 , it took us three goes to get our rightful place in the Football League back. Attempt one was in 2008 and involved play-off semi-finals against highly fancied Burton Albion. 2-0 down in the first leg , we drew 2-2 and beat them with relative ease at the Abbey. After the game I found myself on the pitch with thousands of other fans. It's a habit. I like it

7 In 2009 we played Stevenage Borough in the play-off semis. We were 3-1 down when the second leg was played at the Abbey. Scott Rendell scored a hat trick. On the pitch, drive back to Nottingham-lose again at the new Wembley. Against a fairly average Torquay. We just didn't turn up.

8May 18th , 2014 Conference playoff final at Wembley. We beat Gateshead 2-1, despite losing Ian Miller and playing the last-what seemed like eternity-with ten men. It was meant to be. Maybe it was the most important game in our history. We belong in the Football League. It had taken nine long years but when you consider the carnage of 2005, we would have taken that.

9 A couple of FA Cup games against Manchester United. February, 2015 Lois Van Gaal was rude about Groundsman Ian Darler's superb pitch . They played like nobodies at the Abbey and we outshouted the home fans at Old Trafford . We were proud of our team. One of those nights when nobody wanted to go home. We lost the replay 3-o after Elliott missed an open goal near the start. Josh Coulson might have scored a winner at the Abbey but we didn't really want him to. We wanted to go to Old Trafford and give that famous stadium something to remember.

10 Beating Newcastle on their own pitch in the FA Cup was quite good. The wealthiest club in the world against the plucky minnows…. The script was already written. Fans live for moments like this. The noise from our end was unbelievable. Newcastle have as much money as they could ever want. They will never have what we have though. Our team is ours. We are no corporation or media construct. We play on the field of dreams and would have it no other way.



Hi Andrew

We haven't really discussed the matter, but we share a considerable amount of Cambridge heritage.

I never lived in Cambridge, until I went to Trinity College in 1966, but my father's family were long established in the town.

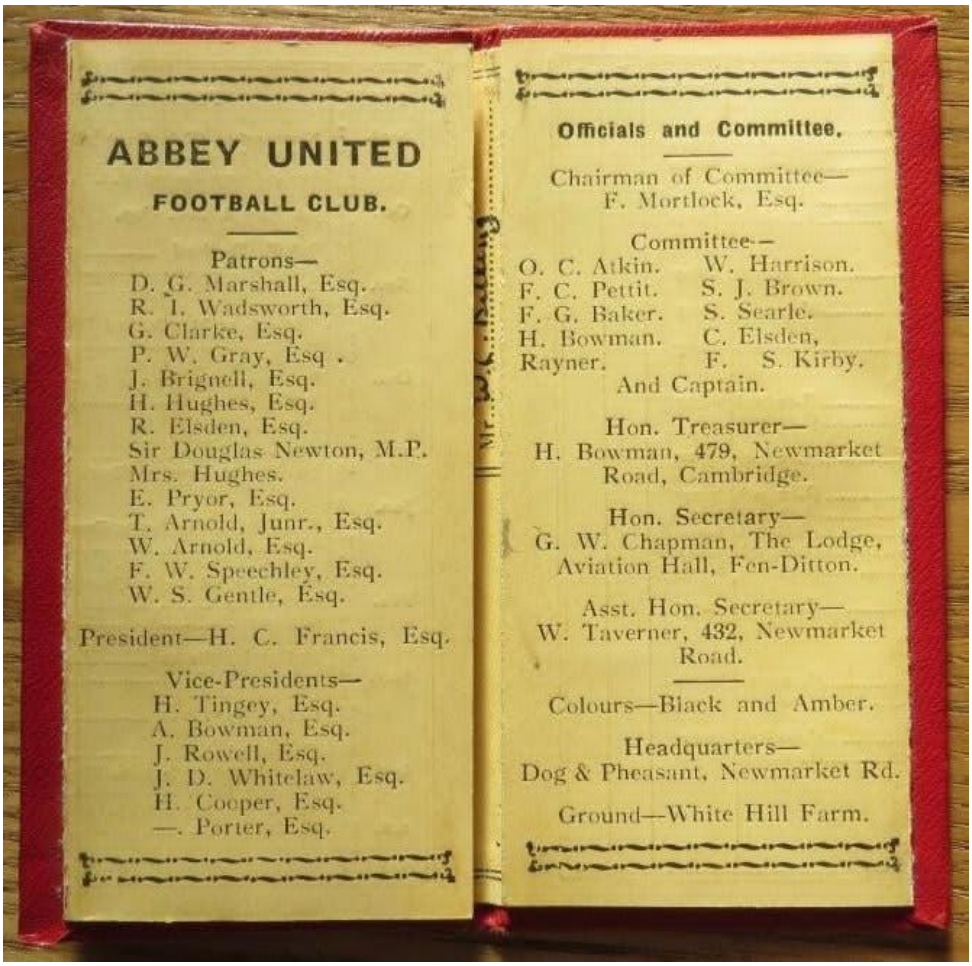
My father grew up living on the Gasworks which were on Newmarket Road, only a decent goal kick away from the Abbey Stadium.

My son, Jamie, uncovered the attached. I am virtually certain that my grandfather, Arthur Bowman is here listed as a Vice President of the club and his brother Herbert, my great uncle, was the long standing Hon.Treasurer. There are at least two pictures of Herbert on the 100 Years of coconuts website. He looks the image of Arthur.

Arthur married Clara Reynolds of the famous 'Reynolds the Rock Kings' dynasty…HQ a sweet shop on Newmarket Road…at the Abbey Church on Boxing Day 1902.

Apart from all that, I'll see you at KES tomorrow!

Peter



ABBEY UNITED

FOOTBALL CLUB.

Patrons—
D. G. Marshall, Esq.
R. I. Wadsworth, Esq.
G. Clarke, Esq.
P. W. Gray, Esq .
J. Brignell, Esq.
H. Hughes, Esq.
R. Elsden, Esq.
Sir Douglas Newton, M.P.
Mrs. Hughes.
E. Pryor, Esq.
T. Arnold, Junr., Esq.
W. Arnold, Esq.
F. W. Speechley, Esq.
W. S. Gentle, Esq.

President—H. C. Francis, Esq.

Vice-Presidents—
H. Tingey, Esq.
A. Bowman, Esq.
J. Rowell, Esq.
J. D. Whitelaw, Esq.
H. Cooper, Esq.
—. Porter, Esq.

Officials and Committee.

Chairman of Committee—
F. Mortlock, Esq.

Committee—
O. C. Atkin. W. Harrison.
F. C. Pettit. S. J. Brown.
F. G. Baker. S. Searle.
H. Bowman. C. Elsden,
Rayner. F. S. Kirby.
And Captain.

Hon. Treasurer—
H. Bowman, 479, Newmarket Road, Cambridge.

Hon. Secretary—
G. W. Chapman, The Lodge, Aviation Hall, Fen-Ditton.

Asst. Hon. Secretary—
W. Taverner, 432, Newmarket Road.

Colours—Black and Amber.

Headquarters—
Dog & Pheasant, Newmarket Rd.

Ground—White Hill Farm.

An ode to a covered terrace

Whenever it was, I cannot for sure remember,
It could have been a birthday so probably December.
My first time to view the splendour of the Abbey,
Clambering on a fence at the front of the Habbin.

It took a little while to take everything in,
The smells, the colours and the murmuring din.
Miserable old men in flat caps and scarves
Many looking like they should have drunk more than halves.



Come on you U's was the chant which stuck,
Followed by the groans of an occasional ruck.
My attention was drawn to a sea of fans,
Bobbing heads at the back and many raised hands.

The tune stays with me to this very day,
Animals going in two by two, hurrah, hooray!
On our way home I said to my old man,
Please Dad, tell me the name of that stand.

It's the Corona End, son, named after the pop,
And it's available at every decent local shop.
The big yellow vans start from behind that stand
Delivering all day to many Utd fans.

Hardly a cathedral, not really a beauty spot,
But for my generation it has had the lot.

Steelwork from Mackays with plenty of bricks,

Oh what a year that was, in 1956.

How many strikers have netted at that end,

So many heroes, any omissions would offend.

Still fresh in my mind is when heaven on earth beckoned,

The halcyon season that was 76/77.

It's 2022 now and things are moving on,

Many a thing we've cherished will have by now gone.

The Corona still sits there as resplendent as ever,

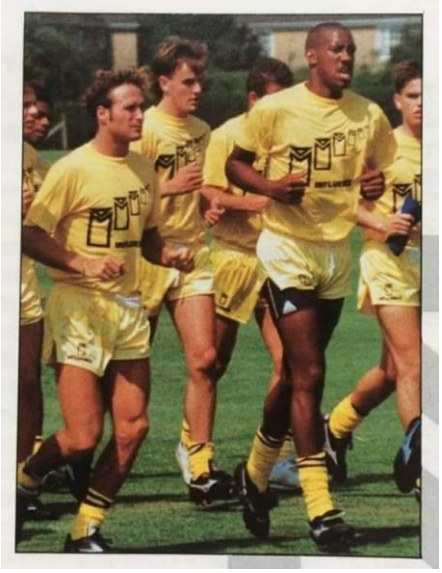
An occasional lick of paint managing to combat all weather.

Now the ground is all but ours, big decisions await,

Without question parts of the Abbey are in a shabby state.

I fear for my Corona End and know that there are plans,

Some comfort for us ol' boys that we should be in good hands.



An ode to the Corona End was far from my mind,

But some things in life need preserving in time.

In the meantime the old beauty stands there proudly,

Hail the Corona End, sing and sing loudly.

*In memory of Aristotelis Savalas(1922 - 1994) - "Every bubble's passed its fizzical".

My first ever poem, and I think it probably bloody well shows!

Andy F.

Hot off the Habbin

[programme articles]

Blackpool

"If you want more luck, take more chances."
Nick Cummins

It's impossible not to admire Blackpool . A cursory thought about players who have worn the famous Tangerine shirt throws up the names of Stanley Matthews , Emlyn Hughes, Jimmy Armfield and the incomparable Alan Ball , a vital part of England's only World Cup winning side. They were also lucky enough to feature one Wes Hoolahan , who made such a great contribution to our progress, although he was in the twilight of his career. Despite their pedigree and our humble origins, we won our first three fixtures against them 3-2. Who could have predicted that? And who could have predicted that when we meet on Saturday in our third game of the season, we would have played the same two opponents? Neither side so far have covered themselves in glory, despite high expectations and yet both clubs have good players and have been playing well. Certainly, against Crawley , we could have scored 2 or 3 times before half time. All it takes very often is a change of luck. Certainly we have played well for long periods and when our injured players return and we are fully used to Monk's new system, we will be a handful. I'm sure that our very astute manager is doing all he can to secure the services of an effective number 9. That is a signing which could transform our season.



I have yet to forgive Blackpool for thrashing us in the LDV trophy final. We had a fine side then, although we struggled to stay in the second division, as it was at that time. We would love to have Wanless, Kitson and Perez in our team now. I suspect that Garry Monk would have made better use of them. John Taylor was a brilliant player for us but wasn't as good as a manager. We were desperate for our hero "Shaggy" to succeed but great players very often don't thrive in management ,which requires very different skills. Blackpool have had their struggles too. Their ground is very impressive now but became semi derelict at one stage. If you want to upset Blackpool fans, mention the name Oyston. The atmosphere in and around Bloomfield Road became so toxic at one time that many devoted fans boycotted matches for some time. Proof that fans have to be part of the club's vision. As we know, without fans there is no point .U's fans saw the future of our club jeopardised by poor and irresponsible leadership once. We know only too well how desperate that feels. However great rivalries between clubs might be, as fans we know how much our clubs mean to us. It's what we have in common.

There was a predictable outburst of pessimism on social media after our defeat to Crawley .Like everyone, I'm inclined to sulk for a bit after a defeat but I accept it as part and parcel of supporting almost any football club. Whatever happens, you don't abuse your own players. No one has a bad game on purpose and most players thrive on encouragement. Anything else encourages your opponents and achieves nothing else. No club, including Manchester City, has a divine right to win games and no fan should feel entitled to one triumphant season after another. Not knowing how things will turn out is part of the joy of it. We have tasted glory and disaster. We have to accept both and the ever turning cycle of Fortune . The next game is always the most important.

Up the U's!



Lincoln City

"Optimism isn't a belief that things will automatically get better, it's a conviction that we can make things better."
Melinda Gates

Some of the cheery chappies who stand with me on Habbin North have wasted no time in reminding me that matches against Lincoln have from time to time been the prelude to the sacking of United managers who have been under fire for disappointing results. One of them is now riding high as Manager of the Month for League Two. This, as a famous local commentator might say, shows the capricious nature of football. We live in an age where people demand instant results but many a famous manager has come within one game of the sack before tasting unparallelled success. Alex Ferguson is one who simply needed a change of luck on the way to becoming one of the all time greats. We have five players who would be in our starting eleven if they weren't injured .There are other important members of the squad out injured as well. I have never known a season like it, although the last two weren't great. Despite this, we have actually been playing well with little reward. Admittedly, one or two defensive howlers have not helped but with more continuity and less disruption to team selection, these things would be less likely. We have been short of luck and all teams need a fair slice of that as well as all the other essential ingredients. And our luck will turn.


LUCKY FOREST SURVIVE SUDDEN-DEATH PENALTY SHOOT OUT

Beasant spares Reds' blushes

Forest VERDICT

By IAN LADYMAN at the City Ground

LAST night's events at the City Ground provided onlookers with a stark contrast.

TAKE THAT: Marlon Harewood fires in Forest's third goal

Match FACTS

FOREST 3, CAMBRIDGE 3 (aet), FOREST WON 4-3 ON PENALTIES

Tuesday, October 27 City Ground

We may need some against the Imps, currently playing well under manager Skubala, who will no doubt be reminding his team that they beat us 6-0 at Sincil Bank, alias the LNER stadium last season. He is destined for higher things I suspect but he has Lincoln playing very well and we will need to be at our best. Our records against each other are very similar and have often been close affairs. We beat them 5-0 once and they have scored heavily against us twice. Otherwise, there have been many 0-0 draws or 1-0 victories. I'm not sure what to expect today but what I will say is that football is rarely predictable, unless you include Arsenal's gamesmanship or Haarland's petulance. It will be hard fought and no doubt a certain Conor McGrandles who did well for us on loan will be trying to make a point.

In the past Tom Champion , who also played for Lincoln, did really well for us. Stuart Bimson less so. Further back, of course our first ever League game, in 1970, was at home to Lincoln City. The line ups were interesting to the game's historians. Playing right back for Lincoln City was a certain Graham Taylor who mangled the English

language but had enormous success as a manager. Unless you're talking to Gary Linacre . We had Trevor Roberts in goal , a wonderful keeper tragically cut down before cancer before achieving what he certainly would have. Up front we had Malcolm Lindsay newly acquired from King's Lynn, who never quite made it and Peter Legget who would have made it if he could have bothered. Colin Meldrum scored our equaliser after we had been outclassed by City for most of the match. A Bill Leivers side was always resilient and without him we might never have got this far. At least we won't have anyone booked before kick off as Carlo Corazzin was in this fixture many years ago. Let's hope for our fair share of fortune today.

Rotherham

"It's never too late to be what you might have been."
George Eliot.

I have always loved this quote and tried to put it to good use on occasions where I have felt discouraged. When I was teaching, I had a quote from Winston Churchill on my classroom wall which said, simply ", Never, never, never give up." It was a simple statement but, faced with year nine last thing on a Friday afternoon, it was perfect advice. You may remember it from Darkest Hour. When things seem to be impossibly difficult, we all have two choices . We can give up and accept abject failure or redouble our efforts and at least see what we can do, even if we fail in the attempt. Our home game against Lincoln didn't show us enough of the fight which we as fans are entitled to expect . We can accept defeat providing we feel that everyone has done their best. Some did, notably Reyes , Brophy and Njoku but everyone has to join in or that effort will prove fruitless as it did. Reyes has the makings of a really good Goalkeeper. He reminds me of Dimi, and that is a real compliment. Brophy must be one of the most underrated players we've ever had but every crowd likes a scapegoat. Njoku, like Barton is being asked to do too much.



Of course our squad has been ravaged by injuries. Stevens and Okedina are low on confidence and we really haven't had the rub of the green. Football can change in the blink of an eye. In Loft we have someone up front who is excellent in the air. Surely Liam Bennett would keep him supplied with what he needs? I hope that Barton wont

be out for too long. Like Jobe, he has gifts far beyond those of most players at this level. We need nerve. I hope that Monk will be given time and that we revert to the way we were trying to play before hoofball reappeared against Lincoln. We are better than that. I didn't think that Lincoln were wonderful. They were constantly at the Referee, trying to get players booked and their theatrical falling over was pitiful at times. The celebrations of the forward who scored their first goal and taunted the Habbin were not worthy of a sportsman. That kind of football does not deserve to win matches but it often does. We need to find a way-and we will.

I don't think we will expect much football from Rotherham. Steve Evans is not known for stylish and expressive football. He and ex United player Paul Raynor are well schooled in the dark arts and know how to get points. Having said that, they haven't won away yet this season and were very disappointed to only draw at lowly Shrewsbury on Saturday. We haven't done particularly well against Rotherham since getting back into the league but we did beat them 6-0 in 2000 . I always used to enjoy trips to Millmoor, although losing 3-2 there in May 1991 wasn't much fun. We had been winning 2-0 and losing seemed to put us out of the title race. George Reilly was standing behind me and he was fuming. On the way home on the M1 we were passed by a car load of Southend supporters who were laughing at our misfortune. Soon afterwards, their team threw away the title by losing at home while, with the pressure of expectation taken off, we cantered to victory and the title. It is pressure which makes players underperform but one result is all it takes to transform a season. We can be all we might have been.



Up the U's!

Wigan Town

"Hope is the most exciting thing there is in life."
Mandy Moore

Last week I was soaking up the sunshine in Valletta and congratulating myself on avoiding the Arctic conditions apparently sweeping the mother country . Naturally I was sporting the latest and very summery items of Cambridge United leisure wear when I was assailed by another Cambridge exile whose brother, like me, is a season ticket holder on Habbin North.

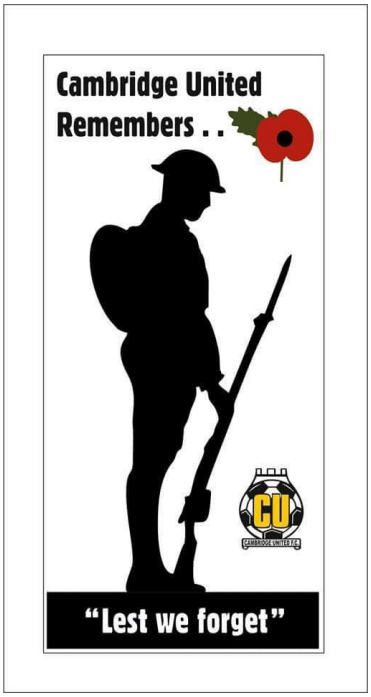


There was no talk of our dreadful season, injuries, touchline bans, badges, relegation or better hopes for next season. Instead we celebrated what we had in common. The love of a football team which survives humiliation at the hands of Hayes and Yeading or, worse still, Histon. It is a way of life which embraces two Wembleys, the real one and the unlovely corporate one , Eastbourne and Old Trafford , St Albans and St James' Park, Newcastle. Wherever we go, we meet each other, pin our hopes on a great performance and, win or lose, start thinking of our next game. We have no sense of entitlement. We are not conditional. We are fans and support our team, whatever.



Those who do nothing but moan on social media are not the same. Real fans don't take their ball home when they are disappointed. I'm sure you see where I'm going with this.

I was hugely depressed to see that Manchester City had won a case which, seemingly, will allow them to continue to flout rules designed to ensure fairer competition. The need to have an independent administrator to run football becomes ever greater. They need to have real power, more at least than the bodies which supposedly run football at the moment. We and Wigan have suffered relegation, success, financial crises, irresponsible leadership. Both clubs emerged from non-league and did far better than anyone ever expected. Actually we've done it twice but without the financial muscle of a Dave Whelan which more or less guarantees success for some and a hopeless task for others .Like everyone, I have been frustrated by injuries, bad luck and poor results but I see no lack of effort from our players. Similarly, I don't buy the idea that Garry Monk doesn't care, given the way he got himself booked after the Rotherham game. That was another game we might have won had we not been desperate for points. We needed the luck which has eluded us all season but I am sure we are due some soon. Perhaps it will be today.



We have drawn half our matches with Wigan who have won more of our fixtures than we have but anything is possible on the day. The day begins with a walk in memory of Robert Osbourn which will raise funds for the British Heart Foundation. He would have been pleased and would no doubt be urging us to get right behind the team. Wigan fans will have fond memories of John Filan who, I believe, was the finest Goalkeeper I ever saw play for us. They have shown that, with belief , anything is possible. When they were finally relegated from the Premier League, they won the F A Cup in the same season. They beat serial winners Manchester City who would not have expected that. The game must be about more than money mustn't it. It is about hopes and dreams. It is about aiming high and overcoming disappointment.

It is about loyalty to your team no matter what and supporting them through thick and thin. That's what I think.

Burton Albion

"Believe you can and you're halfway there."
Theodore Roosevelt

No one is under any illusion about how crucial this game is. They all are but in the fight



to get out of the bottom four winning games like these is essential. No doubt the team which remains calmest, most focussed and most determined will come out the winner. After beating Wigan we would be foolish not to be feeling optimism. I have rarely seen a United team play with more passion or effort. The game was a pleasure to watch and the performances of Okedina , Kachunga and N'Lundulu's performances in particular really stood out. Korey Smith is beginning to show us why Derby County fans were so depressed when he joined us. He is a quality player. There is plenty of quality in the squad and when our injury crisis passes, it will be even more obvious .It was great to hear the applause at the end of the game. Apart from the points , the crowd loved the attitude of the players. Real fans, and I mean fans that actually go to matches and support the team, always recognise commitment and determination. Whatever the result, it's what they want to see. Talking to Wigan fans after the game, they felt that their players had been complacent and lazy. No fan forgives that.



We have much in common with Burton, apart from a vague clash of colours. We competed in the mid-sixties in the Southern League Premier Division, long before Albion moved to the Pirelli Stadium which so many of us are familiar with. It has a vast car park, amiable stewards and, in my experience, can be the coldest place on Earth causing a number of our fans to watch games on television underneath the away stand in the Bar. I remember being there when Paul Carden made an unexpected debut for us in a game we won. We didn't win many there, largely because Nigel Clough worked miracles with his budget and with his players. For a time, as Burton were promoted from one league after another his dad Brian would watch games and, I have no doubt, pass on honest advice. He was a pretty good manager too.

Perhaps our most memorable game was the play off semifinal in Burton when we were



2-0 down. The bar emptied as Lee McEvilly was brought on to bring the scores level. Interestingly Darryl Clare scored against us as he often did. When we signed him, he achieved very little, in fact he didn't appear very often. Something to do with a sore finger. I'm sure that Burton fans remember him more fondly. One player we were glad to acquire from the Brewers was an 18 year old called Ian Hutchinson . He was quick, good in the air, agile and hugely courageous. He also had an extended spine and double jointed shoulders which meant that he could throw a ball further than anyone ever thought possible. He went to Chelsea where he made a real name for himself before having to retire through injury at the age of 27. He was my first hero when he came in 1968. A lot has happened to both clubs since then.

Finally , the annual Poppy Collection will be held during this game. It is a reminder to us all that some things are more important than football. I am sure that both sets of fans will be generous as we remember what we owe to our brave servicemen.

Match Reports

Didn't Expect That

Despite the undeserved and disappointing home defeat to Crawley, the build up to the Blackpool game had been full of promise. Despite being hamstrung by a ridiculously unlucky number of injuries, United had been playing well. Had they taken some of the



many chances they had been creating, fans would have been quite content- we could have concentrated on the fact that we have been good on the eye. We like good results though. Predictably enough, the keyboard warriors have been demanding the head of Garry Monk and the sacking of the recruitment department. We have only signed 12 new players, two of who, Stokes and Longelo arrived this week. Both players are highly rated and rich with promise but of course we have failed to sign a prolific number nine. We had one last season but Charlton paid over a million for him. We can't and we don't spend that kind of money-which is partly why a club's coalition called Fair Play described us as the best run club in the EFL. The survey is extensively and expertly researched and this conclusion shows how far the club has come and suggests even more reasons we

can be proud of it. We are well run, sustainable and there is strong fan and community engagement. It has not always been so and we should be really pleased that all the work that has been done in recent years has been demonstrated and recognised.

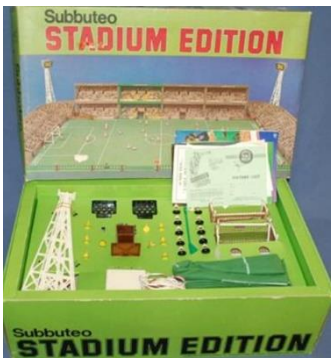
We all wondered, as we kicked off in teeming rain, whether we might start scoring goals, that ,seemingly, being our main problem. Nobody expected what they saw.



Blackpool scored after five minutes from a corner. Blackpool, who have been in crisis, cannot have expected such generosity. The scorer was more or less unchallenged. We scored but the goal was, apparently, offside. We scored again and waited to see if this one was ok. It was. We would surge ahead now. Except we didn't. A second goal, more or less identical to the first was scored. Where was the defence? Then a third scored after the vaguest attempt to win a tackle. We weren't playing badly but Blackpool seemed quicker, more switched on and more gifted in the dark arts department. The Blackpool fans were singing, "Is this a library?" We weren't singing at all. Dan Barton was struggling to get into the game, Brophy was marking giants at corners and Liam Bennett seemed strangely hesitant. I hope his mind is not on travel.

At half time, we felt that if we could score early we had some kind of a chance. Some were talking about damage limitation. If heads went down, it could turn into a thrashing. Should we be playing tippy tappy on a wet and unpredictable pitch? Should we adjust to the fact that Blackpool seemed to be a team of giants and inclined to arrive late for tackles? Should we perhaps use speed and subtlety rather than simply hoofing it at times? The Bar was full of highly qualified coaches and alcohol informed wisdom…

I began to regret sitting in the Main Stand as the fourth went in. No way back now surely. Fans began to leave. Blackpool supporters sang loudly. We were stunned into silence. The Ref's performance became ever more bizarre, a fact that Garry Monk pointed out more than once. Blackpool's giants were happy to roll about to "win" soft free kicks while the man in black missed a clear case of retaliation and a stamp. From where I was sitting all these things were clear to me. Stokes and Njoku arrived- and the game changed .Mr Miles awarded a free kick instead of playing advantage but a wonderful piece of bluffing about who was taking the free kick resulted in Danny Andrews scoring an absolute pearler. Balls hit beyond the defence for Brandon to run onto caused panic in the Blackpool defence and a number of lumbering defenders were booked. Njoku scored……surely the miracle wouldn't happen? The Blackpool fans were hushed. Ours weren't. Manny Longelo took the field and immediately caused more problems. Man of the Match and former Tangerine, Shayne Lavery equalised and an incredible fight back was in danger of becoming the most unlikely win imaginable. Blackpool kept bringing on subs and we might perhaps have scored again but no matter. What we saw was extraordinary. I have seen United play



hundreds of times but never witnessed a fightback like this. It had seemed so easy for Blackpool but they will have gone home grateful for a point. We are the best run club in the EFL but our team must have the strongest mentality. Sack Ben Strang? Sack Garry Monk? Leave when your team are 4-1 down with half an hour left? No, No and No. It's never over till the fat lady sings, if I'm still allowed to say that. And real supporters stay to the very end. Whatever comes.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS-LINCOLN CITY

We came in hope rather than expectation yesterday, knowing that home defeats to the Imps saw od Derry and Mark Bonner, although the die had already been cast. Lincoln had begun the season well and they thrashed us twice last season. Add to that the fact that we have yet to win a game this season and the odds were not looking good. Strangely, given our poor performances, there was another big crowd present. The potential for this club is huge, providing performances on the pitch match what the club does in the community and its ambitious building plans. There was some relief on the Habbin when we seemed to be riding the storm, although it was clear that the good football we had been playing, without much luck, had been abandoned in favour of enthusiasm and kick and rush. These are desperate times but I did feel that it was worth persisting with the new style of play which had been producing good performances without the results it deserved. In time a corner would have been turned but there were signs of panic here. Okedina, rather like Jack Stevens seems to have lost his way and his confidence. Bennett and O'Riordon are out of favour but, more than anything, we don't know what our best team is yet because most of our best players are injured and now Dan Barton seems to have joined that list. A real shame because he has obvious star quality.



There was a touch of inevitability about Freddy Draper's opening goal after 26 minutes. Reyes had already saved well from good opportunities and Draper was only on the field due to a very unlucky injury sustained by Ben House early on. Draper's distasteful celebrations and taunting of the Habbin didn't help to endear the away side to the Abbey faithful. Time wasting, theatrical rolling about and surrounding the Referee to get opponents booked are facets of the modern game which none of us want to see. We may see more such antics on Tuesday night when sporting gentlemen Steve Evans and much loved Paul Raynor are in town. Shudder.

We had a couple of good chances, when the Lincoln keeper saved really well from Dan N'Lundulu's deflected shot. Michael Morrison really should have scored in the second half. In another sort of season he probably would have but luck seems to have deserted us for the moment. The second goal, which clinched things probably should

have been cut out by Okedina but he looks very discouraged now. So were the others after that. Heads went down, except for Dan Barton who showed real class before what looked like a very painful injury. We must hope that it doesn't keep him out for as long as some of some of our star players. Gardener could make a difference. Jobe and Watts certainly would and all our forwards will feed off Lofts ability in the air. Loft conversions as ,regrettably, I said yesterday.

I was relieved when it was over to be honest. Another day beckons. I think we should give Monk time to turn it round, certainly until we have more of his chosen players back. We should go back to playing football and we must fight for every ball. Lincoln players, acting skills apart, looked more committed and Rotherham will be the same. If we lose, we lose. If we go down-so be it. But we have a right to expect our players to fight to the end. It has to change some time. Doesn't it?



DIDN'T EXPECT THAT- DID YA?

"The mind is everything. What you think, you become."
Buddha

Other than an incredible come back against Blackpool, there has been precious little to celebrate at Cambridge United this season. On the surface anyway. Gates have been buoyant, massive improvements to the stadium are in hand and, despite an appalling list of injuries, we have been competitive and, apart from our home game against Lincoln, we have played some good stuff. We have also been very unlucky and waiting for a sign that your luck can change. Opposition managers have praised our quality too but, sadly, in this day and age, many fans seem to feel that they can demand constant success. When they are disappointed they whinge and wail like petulant children. Like many of the Wigan fans did yesterday. We were bottom, they were unbeaten in six. Once they were Billy Bigboots in the Premier League with a wealthy owner. You'd think they would give us a hammering without breaking sweat. But sport isn't like that, even if Manchester City, FIFA and Sky TV would like it to be. And real fans who have seen it all stay loyal, no matter what. Season after season they turn up. Sometimes we have great seasons. Sometimes they are disastrous but

our team is our team and we encourage them and get behind them because we love them. Even when they disappoint us.

However low I get I think of the football under John Ryan and Ken Shellitoe and remember that we got over those fairly unpromising times.

The day began well with the walk in memory of Robert Osbourn and in support of the British Heart Foundation, an event given greater resonance by the saving of a man's life on the Habbin during the early part of our game against Rotherham. The medics were wonderful but the highest praise must go to the Steward who got to him first. He like many of the stewards had learned how to use CPR. What an endorsement of that training and of the message Gary Aytes and the BHF are desperate to get across. Because of this training people are alive and with us now who would not have been without people prepared to use their knowledge and expertise. The walk itself took place in dreadful Monsoon conditions but it also took place in high spirits and a sense of common cause. No one gets anywhere without either of those things. Sadly, due to needing to get to a Shadow Board meeting, I had to leave my compatriots behind at Jesus Green and power walk to the stadium where I dripped loudly throughout a very good meeting.



We missed an early chance and I thought we might not get another but after four minutes we were ahead. There were a couple of deflections maybe but who cares? Those things have been going against us for long enough. And we were ripping into them like demons. Should we keep Garry Monk in the stand every match? Should we have Barry Corr pitch side revving up our players for always and always? I'm not sure I've seen the side better motivated than they were today. For the entire game they chased every ball, harried their opponents and won possession with pure effort. Wigan appeared to strut around a bit, doing a passable imitation of England as the ball went sideways backs, sideways and backwards again. Must be a developing trend. Kachunga was a revelation. He might have scored again but he was everywhere at speed, bristling with determination and showing what a skilled player he is. My man of the match certainly. Some of the keyboard experts must be questioning their judgement. I hope so. Toxic criticism doesn't help any player who has been searching for confidence. The same could be said for Jubril Okedina who might have scored twice. Maybe his new haircut had inspired him but he too never stopped running or looking for the action. Surely he must stay with us now?

When we scored a second, there was a tangible sense of astonishment around the ground. And we might have had more as we piled into a side which looked increasingly shocked and bad tempered. They seemed to bring on subs at regular intervals as if some of their players had developed unsuspecting faults. I enjoyed N'Lundulu's exuberance in attack and defence and Korey Smith finally showing us what a good

player he is. No wonder Derby fans didn't want him to leave. Reyes had a fine game in goal. He has always been a good shot stopper but the way he comes off his line to catch high crosses would be good coaching material for Tottenham's Vicario…

It was good to heat Wigan's manager congratulate Cambridge on their mentality which, I think was the difference. Had we lost yesterday, making up the deficit would have become very difficult. As it is, if we continue in the present form and get a couple of players back from injury, we will be out of the bottom four by November. This is a big week for us. Good results against Stevenage and bottom side Burton would have things looking very different. I am delighted that the club have continued to support Garry Monk who, I believe, will lead us to better things. We have made a start anyway.

Listening to the response of the crowd after the final whistle was music to my ears. The applause went on for many minutes. That is what it means to us.



Home Against Bottom Of The Table Brewers- What could possibly go wrong?

"Those who have succeeded at anything and don't mention luck are kidding themselves."
Larry King

After nine games with only a point to our name we had more or less forgotten what optimism looked like . Then we win two in a row, get a lovely write up in the Sunday Times and discover a centre half pairing to compare with the best in our division. Could we expect three wins in a row? We were after all playing bottom team Burton Albion.

They had just sacked their manager and our team are full of confidence. Ticket sales were up, the Sun was shining and the Abbey was in expectant mood. And yet we were wary. Football is a funny game. Burton were winless, we were on a roll. All runs come to an end. Any football fan knows what happens next, don't we?

The afternoon began well with another very moving act of Remembrance. The two captains laid wreaths , Michael said the immortal words of tribute with real feeling and the Last Post was played beautifully. The minute's silence was observed immaculately by both sets of fans as we knew it would be . Most fans are traditionalists and all have a story of relatives involved in war and the enormous and selfless sacrifices made. My brother and I heard a number of these as we sold poppies in Habbin North.

As we kicked off I noticed that many of the Burton players were somewhat….burly.



They clearly lacked confidence, employed a fairly basic style and didn't really threaten our goal. They did threaten Liam Bennett , who was obviously and correctly identified as a real threat . Their Mr Bennett stopped him on a run with what looked like a clear and deliberate elbow causing so much damage that the Referee changed his mind and booked the aggressor. In any other context the foul would have been described as assault. It should have seen the offender sent off. Indeed he fouled Liam again in the second half, wasn't booked and was substituted by a very grateful Burton Bench. We could see that Burton were committed and that they had come for a point.

We had very little room to play in and N'lundulu in particular seemed to have a defenders arms around him for most of the match . He never gives up though, although the service he received in this game wasn't the best. For all our possession, we looked leggy and tired. Not surprising perhaps given the astonishing physical efforts of our last two games. The Burton fans, about 200 or so made an astonishing noise. All credit to them. Whenever I have been to the Pirelli Stadium it has always seemed unnaturally quiet . Maybe because our away support is always very loud . The game was proving tough, to play in and to watch. An early goal would surely cause their heads to drop and our confidence to soar. It never came. Usually, when this happens, I slope off to buy a coffee and when I'm outside we score. Indeed a number of Habbinites asked me to do just that. Or maybe they just don't like me. Anyway, that didn't work either. There were glimpses of dominance and pressure but our passing was not as good as it had been and the ball was in the air too much. As the half ended , we accepted that Burton had played as their desperate position demanded. They had chased everything, slid in and , sometimes, indulged in some of the dark arts, not something I have associated them with. Maybe if Gareth Ainsworth becomes their new manager, as many are suggesting, their



approach will change. Whoever gets the job will need to be successful as their owners change managers quite frequently. I believe that 23 new players arrived during the Summer. Some were expensive. What I think that shows is that you need continuity to ensure progress in football. It takes time for players to adjust and playing styles to evolve. I am so glad that our owners didn't axe Garry Monk when some of the moaners were demanding it. We have been unlucky with decisions and injuries but luck always changes over time. No one has a monopoly of it and we have had a few things go our way this week. We just needed one more in the second half perhaps.

To be entirely truthful, we were dreadful in the second half. Any pattern to our play disappeared and even playing towards the NRE failed to inspire the team. Burton sensed that they had ridden out the storm, began to enjoy more possession and started to pass the ball around. Some of the players began to look quite good. Not the all in wrestler ones but players like Vancooten and Sweeney, stylish and very busy defenders. We brought on subs on to counteract tired limbs but we were beginning to think the unthinkable. Would this be another Rotherham? Did we deserve to win? 6 points out of 9 wasn't too bad was it? Then, just as this dizzying optimism was shaping into mutual comforting on the Habbin, we scored. It was one of Monk's inspired substitutes, Jordan Cousins, who knocked in a free kick which had rebounded from Burton's Goalkeeper, Crocombe. Danny Andrew's free kick was excellent but the keeper shouldn't have spilled it. His actions here last season had verged on the obnoxious. The NRE reminded him of it once the roars of delight had subsided.

The Sunday Times article concluded with the observation that those moments of delight are ones you never forget. That is why we come year after year. We take the biggest disappointments the sport can offer because the joy we feel sometimes can't be matched by anything else. Well, not many things.



To top it all, Having bumped into a Cambridge fan in Valletta, I met his brother on Habbin North after the game- as he said I would. He reads the Amber News and was as excited as I was that he'd recognised me from his brother's photograph. He runs a record shop in Soham and his friends call him Vinyl Steve. I hope he played Coconuts last night. We've waited a long time to feel like this.

and finally….

"Fortune and love favour the brave."
Ovid

How good it is to see James Brophy getting the credit he so clearly deserves. He has been one of our best players for some time although parts of the crowd don't always seem to understand the role or roles he performs. He is skilful and unselfish and has now shown he can score a spectacular goal. I hope that he will feel encouraged to shoot more often and that some of our other players follow suit! A win away at Peterborough would be ample compensation for our abject defeat there last season.



I was very sorry to see the parting of Phil Mullen from the Walking Football sessions run by the Trust. Many people, including me, owe him a great deal for getting us involved in sport again and for introducing us to so many people who have become friends. It is no exaggeration to say that he rescued many of them.



How wonderful that ,having bumped into an enthusiastic Cambridge fan in Valletta, that I should meet his brother, as promised, on Habbin North. He goes under the nickname of Vinyl Steve on account of running a record shop in Soham. A picture was taken on the Habbin but I don't seem to have the corresponding one taken in Malta. If anyone knows Steve or his brother, it would be nice to have. I remember meeting Cambridge fans at a cricket match in New Zealand in 2015. It's always a pleasure to meet fellow fans, especially when and where you least expect it. It's another of the great benefits of having a passion in common with others. In many ways we are a giant, worldwide family.

Finally, an unashamed plug for my new book, "The Story In Your Eyes", due out on Amazon before Christmas. It is my third, but this one has some chapters on our city and on Cambridge United. It is autobiographical and considers what we inherit from our ancestry. Supporting a football team is very much part of our inheritance. I, my sons and my grandchildren could never have supported anyone else.

Long may our unbeaten run continue!

Andrew

We will try to create a memorable Christmas Edition. Perhaps it will feature some James Brophy goals in it.



Make a difference and join CFU.
Your opinions and contributions are always gratefully received: acstephen@hotmail.com

[Deadline for next newsletter- **15th Dec 2024**]
United in Endeavour

