



A VIEW FROM THE BLUE SEATS

WALTON CASUALS v FOLKESTONE INVICTA

Saturday 31st October 2020

How awesome was Tuesday night here at The Home of World Football? A tight first half that we just about shaded was followed by The Stags throwing off their shackles and oozing invention, flair, audacity and much more. 45 minutes to absolutely savour, culminating in our fans behind the goal singing "Can we play you every week?" to Met Police and the Wife moaning in the car outside the ground whilst she waited for me afterwards. "I might have guessed you'd won because you're always the last to leave the ground", she tut-tutted, not understanding why my 15 year old son and I had to stay and fist-bump all the players, hug Galey (social distance style) from behind the goal, then walk round to the players tunnel and pretty well do it all again as they made their way off into the dressing room.

Following our wonderful Casuals is more pulsating and topsy turvy than a trip to Thorpe Park. It is indeed, the roller-coaster of all experiences – beating the (then) unbeaten Old Bill at their place, then following it up with a 3-2 classic at also (then) unbeaten Gosport Borough before conceding 10 goals in two games and then following it up with what transpired to be a comfortable victory over The Rozzers on Tuesday night. It was so good, even the Walton and Hersham team who were finishing their training session on the back pitch halfway through the second half, stood and watched in awe (many of them, of course, were part of our promotion winning side in 2017/18).

It was truly a memorable occasion, in some respects because it was, I think, our first home

league win since well, I can't remember. Almost a year, methinks. For all our completely unpredictable form since the start of this season, there have been glimpses of brilliance and some really enjoyable stuff and if you weren't excited enough at the final whistle, you'd have been hyperventilating if you'd heard the post-match interview with Anthony Gale online in which he told us that Cole Brown and Shaun McAuley are both in contention for today's game – such strength in depth! Let's not forget though the performance of those who helped us overcome Met Police, everyone played fantastically. A word though, for Taureen Roberts who it was great to see returning in a Casuals shirt – this time on loan from Woking. I don't think I've seen a leaner, fitter and hungrier Taureen and heaven knows how many miles he covered on the pitch but he was zipping all over the place and ran their defence ragged on the left in the second half. Such a character and so good to have the maestro back!

Onto today and another chance for us to hone in on Wembley glory as we welcome Isthmian Premier side Folkestone Invicta. It makes me feel a bit envious seeing our opponents as like many Casuals fans and officialdom, we'd all rather, I imagine, be in their league than having to trek towards the Atlantic Coast for so many away games. We're also devoid of local derbies – okay, so we have Met Police, but it's hardly Rangers v Celtic or Arsenal v Tottenham? Besides, they're an Institution's club and don't really seem to have any fans. Even though they get crowds a bit less than Casuals, they seem

to consist of family and friends of the team and curious observers or ground-hoppers. I'd love to see us in the Isthmian – give me Leatherhead, Corinthian Casuals, Kingstonian and Carshalton any day. Folkestone may, in reality, be as far to get to as many of our West Country games, but psychologically it feels closer and more appealing.

Talking of away games, we do actually have an appealing one next Wednesday and it is at Farnborough. I'm getting quite excited about this one – I've not been there before and if you look at footage of the ground online, it looks like it is up to Championship standard. There's one humungous stand behind a goal and even when the hundreds of Casuals fans descend on it, I suspect they'll still be plenty of seats to go round, so that they won't need to open up another section of the stadium for us. Farnborough of course is not far away – only 26 minutes on the train from Walton on Thames, albeit a bit of a walk or short cab ride from the station on arrival. It could be a cracker, so why not come on the road and join Anthony Gale's barmy Black and Orange Army? Hopefully Gale will be wearing that dapper, enormous grey scarf that he adorned on Tuesday. It's our new lucky mascot.

Anyway, enjoy this afternoon's match. There should be a decent crowd as Folkestone have a good following. How folk can choose to stay indoors and watch soulless Premier League football in empty stadiums on television dumbfounds me when there is such invigorating, friendly and all-round enjoyable spectacles as non-league football. We've all made the right decision to come down to The Home of World Football – win, lose or draw, it's a guaranteed great afternoon out.