

Season Review 2002-03

The editor asked me to do the usual end of season thoughts for the last edition, but I never got around to finishing mine, which is great, because now I get to do my review knowing we've won the league. Yippee! The question of course is how on earth did we win it? All I seem to remember is crap games and loads of sitting around in pubs saying well that's it we've definitely blown it now. But you know, I quite enjoyed this season. It was nice in a masochistic way, to go to games with a knot in the stomach of anticipation and fear. The crashing despair of things like losing at City were balanced by the elation of hammering Liverpool (4-0) Newcastle (6-2) and even Juventus (3-0).

Trying to remember what happened last season, I got my fixture list out as an aide memoire which is French for I've got a memory like a sieve, so if it ain't written down it didn't happen. I couldn't believe the list started with Chesterfield. Was it really less than a year since we stood in the blazing sun watching half the team, while the other half strutted their stuff at Bournemouth? They might have had Ríó, our expensive (overpriced?) new centre-half, but we had Choccy managing the team at Chesterfield. He would go on to his own glory as he led the youth team to win United's first Youth Cup since Phil Neville's class of '95.

That's one of my stranger memories of the season - we played a full strength team in the Worthless Cup but a load of kids in the European Cup. We won neither, but I can see a pattern, so I'm expecting Robbo to be drafted in for next year's Worthless and Romeo Beckham to lead the midfield in Europe.

While the team still had their pre-season friendly heads on, there was a tricky Euro qualifier against Zala-thingy. More tricky for the hardy few hundred supporters who had to remember how to get to Eastern Europe after so many seasons of playing the same old teams. It was quite exciting to have unknown opponents and we dusted off the maps and looked up Zalaegerzeg, having at least learnt to spell it, if not pronounce it. Our reward for 5 hours on a rickety Eastern European train with no beer or scrán was a 1-0 defeat, so it seems the team, like the fans, are going soft on a repetitive diet of Spain, Italy, Germany.

Eventually, the proper season kicked off in August, but unfortunately the team decided to continue in pre-season mode until after Christmas. We fans got an early taster of what would become the two main themes of the season, stupid kick off times and no loyalty for away tickets. Chelsea away on a Friday night was ridiculous enough, £40 for a ticket was taking the piss, but then my mates and I all got Chubbed and you didn't know whether to laugh or cry. No one ever knew what the old loyalty system was, but we knew it worked and in previous seasons we'd have been stitched-on certainties for Chelsea briefs in those circumstances.

So began a season long odyssey of scrabbling for tickets and making travel plans for daft kick-offs. I'm amazed that I haven't yet missed a game because I turned up at the wrong time or the wrong day. The changes are made so late, even the tickets are often wrong. I've got a Spurs away brief that clearly states the game was at 3pm on Saturday 26 April, but it was actually 4pm Sunday 27th. Another gem in this season's kick-offs was the Zalaegerzeg home game that kicked off at 8.10 because of Eastenders. In fact, across this season we've had all the following kick off times: 12.00,12.15,12.30,1.00,

2.00, 3.00 (amazingly) 4.00, 4.05 (what's that about?) 7.45, 8.00 and 8.10, plus we've played on every day of the week.

So have I got any particular memories of the season? Not a lot, just some random thoughts:

Keano twatting that annoying scouse bastard McAteer, he deserved it and more.

Warming to the idea of 4-5-1

Ole is a better right winger than Becks?

EOS Video – Boyle

Giggs goals taking 2 attempts

Barthez's saves

A preponderance of TLAs (Three Letter Acronyms) – JOS, RVN, OGS, JSV

And now it's close season blues, missing fellow Reds, waiting for the new fixture list, watching naff TV. Roll on 2003-04.

Portia Vale