

A BALANCED VIEW

IF THE KIDS ARE UNITED

Then we'll never be divided. So wrote a certain James Pursey circa 1978. Poignant lyrics indeed, given the FCUMUFC interface of late. Unconfirmed reports of a verbal disagreement (between two groups of previously long standing friendship) turning physical in a city centre hostel, internet forum squabbling continuing unabated and conflicting viewpoints being aired fanzine column-wise are all unwelcome and largely unnecessary events.

As has been well documented elsewhere, and with the certainty of repeating myself, it has been a long, hard few months of decision making and soul searching for many people. We gain nothing from continuing to decry each other's points of view, whilst the real enemy within are left to go about their business virtually unmolested. Uncle Malcolm (sic) and the Glazer boys will doubtless be delighted to hear word of infighting between friends and families instead of being confronted with a "United" front against their unwelcome intervention at OT.

I don't intend for this topic to be a recurrent theme of this column as I had hoped by now that we would all have reached a certain level of understanding and tolerance (call me an old romantic). However, it would be wrong to conclude these deliberations without highlighting two specific incidents of late, one more positive than the other.

Firstly, it was with no little sense of collective Red Army pride that I learned of the "Barnet Fans" insurgence into Main Stand (Century Radio, bless 'em). Whilst the identity of those banner-bearing combatants is largely unknown, it is safe to say that the operation was conducted with the backing and co-operation of several groups, drawn from all areas of the post-Glazer community. Congratulations to you all (whoever you are) on a job well done.

Secondly, on a much less positive note I'm afraid, news reaches us of at least two separate incidents of FCUM (and ironically enough, still OT attending Reds) supporters being subjected to verbal abuse and accusations against our club, its staff and supporters whilst picking up tickets for a forthcoming fixture. Whilst it should be stressed that the "agent provocateur" in question was not acting in any kind of official capacity, and was certainly not expressing the views of the host club in question, the embarrassment caused to the attendant social club bar staff was unsavoury enough in itself.

Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of these incidents was the fact that the accusations/opinions being aired came from a relative of a former OT member of staff, who seems to have entirely missed the point that those on whom he/she chose to unleash his/her vitriol used to pay that relative's wages and in no small part have contributed to the lifestyle from which this person may otherwise not have benefited. Only a sense of gratitude for the previous welcome extended to FCUM and its supporters at the ground in question, prevented those FCUM supporters present from allowing the situation to deteriorate further still. One wonders if these views will be aired quite so vociferously come the day of the fixture in question? It's not big and it's not clever, and more importantly it's not factual.

BREAKING ROCKS IN THE HOT SUN

With The Cardigans doing a 7 stretch (credit to George) at Warrington Young Offenders' Institute in a behind bars friendly, and at a total loss to find anything else to do on an FC-free Saturday afternoon, the decision was taken to mooch on down to the Park Road stadium in an effort to see what might have been without the intervention of officialdom. Destined never to see FC play there, following the relocation of the cup game to Curzon Ashton and the League game to Edgeley Park, the opportunity to witness first hand what Cheadle Town v Norton United had to offer was too strong to resist.

The first point to make is that it now seems as though the correct decisions were made in moving the respective games to different grounds. Whilst the Park Road stadium possesses an undeniable earthy charm, the prospect of in excess of 2,000 supporters making their way through the solitary turnstile (with more likely to attempt to gain access through the adjacent primary school playground) would seem to have rendered the idea impracticable to say the least!

The on-pitch goings-on (with the exception of a rather exciting ten-man brawl only minutes into the game) seemed to confirm a previously held suspicion; namely that playing in front of a packed MRE would be the catalyst for many a team to treat their visit to La Stade de Gigg as their very own cup final. The Norton that turned out at Cheadle was a totally different proposition to the team that took the points against us. Honest, workmanlike and enthusiastic enough, but strangely subdued as they battled for a hard earned scoreless point against an impressive Cheadle Town, who seemed buoyed rather than deflated by their cup defeat at Curzon (the influential "Frodo" performing admirably in midfield).

So the experience itself? Charming, welcoming, hospitable, funny and entertaining? All of those and more. From paying at the turnstile (where the nice old boy was adopting his own policy of two adults pay, one kid goes free) to perusing the countless match programmes for sale at 10p a go in the refreshment hut (from Oldham Athletic to Luton Town!?!?!), an anorak's delight!), we were treated in a manner all too rare in society nowadays, let alone in a football ground.

Despite the FC contingent swelling the attendance by more than 10%, there was ample opportunity to sample the delights of the SocialKabin, which also afforded the luxury of "corporate" facilities (i.e. a pint in view of the game, shhhh) during what was a rather blustery second-half weather wise (definite "Big Coat" time). The free plates of sandwiches (no prawns) and post match chat/banter with players/staff from both sides (who incidentally, to a man, passed on their thanks and enjoyment of playing in front of a noisy, witty and sometimes "cruel" (let him die) crowd such as ourselves) merely enhanced what was a most enjoyable day all round.

Personal highlight? Seeing the look of "oh fuck, here we go again" on the Norton Keeper's face as the FC contingent burst forth with "Who's the Stick between the Sticks?" **In conclusion, if one Saturday we're not playing in your Town, get yourself to a Football Ground!**

PLAYGROUND TWIST

Excellent to see the formation and inaugural meeting of the FC Juniors Supporters Group take place pre-match against Nelson (one hand clapping, I ask you!) with some 30 juniors being treated to a Q & A session with Margy and Powarrnghh ("Who takes longest in the shower?" There could only be one answer, eh Torpedo?). It reminded me of similar occasions when I was a youngster, where I used to attend Junior Supporters Group meetings at OT and spend my time quizzing The Shirts. Oh hang on, it didn't at all because it never happened, I only dreamt it! As a kid, I frequently cast a green-eyed look of envy over at the Junior Blues, who were involved with their Club to an extent that I could only

imagine in my most lurid fantasies (urggh, hang on, I feel a bit Left/Right (you decide) Side writing that!).

Anyway, it's heartening to see within the first third of the season that this group is up and running, bursting with ideas of ways to interact with the club and maintain the interest of future generations of Supporters. Their flag fund is already sizeable, with their choice "FC Children Of The Revolution" surely only weeks away from production!

Details of how to join should by now have appeared in the Match Programme, although if not there is a myriad of information available for supporters both young and old, at www.fcunitedofmanchester.co.uk. If you've not visited the website yet, take a look, it's like everything else about FCUM; by the fans, for the fans.

RM7

NAMED

- 3,808 (Well done to all)
- Tameside Branch hospitality (pre/post Curzon)
- FC Juniors – the future (it's in good hands)
- United United Day Flag bearers (a great sight)
- The Greyhound Ashton (cheers Jimmy & Barbara)

SHAMED

- Bar-room accusations and insinuations (pointless)
- Not buying a Bar Scarf (you know you want to)
- Missiles at Curzon (a shoe and a bottle, why?)
- Supporters Group Quiz "Cheats" (you know who you are!)
- Darwen/Flixton (no concessionary prices?)

A THONG FOR EUROPE (FEAT. JACKO)

*Adie Orr (Goal!),
Always believe Adie Orr,
He's got the power to score,
He's indestructible!
Always believe in...*

*Every Woman, every Man, join with Margy's Van of Love,
Stand up, stand up, stand up,
Every Player, every Fan, join with Margy's Van of Love,
Stand up, stand up, stand up,
They're your Brothers, FC Brothers don't you know,
They're your Sisters, FC Sisters don't you know,
Every Woman, every Man, join with Margy's Van of Love,
Stand up, stand up, stand up.*