

Another Perspective – vs Cleethorpes Town

By Chris Alcock

As the sun beamed down onto our beautiful corner of Lincolnshire, the air was thick with humidity and renewed optimism. In what has become a wonderful tradition, Cleethorpes Town once again welcomed Grimsby Town to The Linden Club for a pre-season friendly. The fixture does seem to have a way of attracting the best of the summer weather with the event growing in popularity year after year, and after the events the world has seen over the past 18-months, the sight of a packed beer garden teamed with the sizzle of burgers and the hum from the ice-cream van was one that carried a thousand smiles. Ladies & Gentleman, football is back the way it should be, surrounded by fans.

Now of course we've all recently galvanized as a nation, temporarily retiring our stripes and trading three fish for three lions and watching on as England gave us another "oh so near". For me though, all it served to do after the last blast of the whistle in the Euro 2020 final was fuel the roaring fire that was already ablaze for my home club. Seeing the fans fill Wembley left me with a small sense of envy, but more a desire to be back inside Blundell Park, and Saturday showed me that I was not the only one.

As the fans filtered around the ground, it was so great to see so many familiar faces. The faces you normally only see inside our own hallowed grounds or perhaps on away days. The faces that since we toppled Scunthorpe back in March 2020, we may not have seen. The faces that for both Grimsby and Cleethorpes fans alike, shared something, a smile. Smiles were ripe around the Myenergi Stadium, and it certainly felt good. Never has the term 'Friendly Fixture' been more appropriate. Speaking with fellow Mariners, the feelings seemed to be all the same. The heartbreak of relegation as well the mention of certain names formally associated with the club were met with dismissive joy. With the names of Stockwood and Pettit instead installing that tone of optimism that has been missing from Grimsby voices for so long. The return of Shaun Pearson, the resurgence of Max Wright, the promise of more academy graduates and the thrill of casting the fans-eye across the squad of new arrivals was all anyone wanted to talk about.

The game began and it was not long before Cleethorpes took a deserved lead after some impressive build up play in the opening minutes. Even in a friendly, you never wish to witness your club concede a goal but seeing that shot deflect into the back of the net led to something incredible. Scanning across the fans situated around the pitch, locating everyone in Grimsby Town colours, and not seeing one head drop. Those faces still carried beaming smiles, even in the sweltering heat. The optimism building in the Mariner's hearts has the strength to carry our club so far this season.

Fast forward 90-minutes of game time and as Grimsby fans, our optimism on this day was rewarded. Four strong goals, some impressive debuts, rust flying off the end of everyone's boots, the pride of seeing McKeown step out for his testimonial season, and instead of watching players, we saw a team. For the lads we had not seen play for us before, we know there is more to come. Losing Ryan Taylor early on was awful for the player and hopefully his injury is only a minor one, but it gave young Edwin Essel a chance to show what he was capable of, and it did not take him long to find the back of the net. Another positive step forward for this wonderful club of ours.

The prospect of playing non-league football is one that nobody associated with the club wanted to see happen again, of course. With that said though, I do not believe I have ever seen a more collective feeling of excitement from the Grimsby faithful. The small and subtle changes our new owners have brought in from day one shows their commitment and their passion for our club; and I hope that on the 28th of August they have the opportunity to come on to the pitch before our first home fixture and let the fans show their appreciation.

So, a new season beckons, and it is going to be a tough one. We know how difficult this league is, and our manager knows it too, but we have the best possible tools we could have at our disposal to be a success this season. The greatest one we have though? The Grimsby Town fans, the bellowing voices of support for Paul Hurst's black and white army, and I cannot wait to see you all back at Blundell Park this season. Stay safe, stay positive and as always, UP THE MARINERS!