

19) TWTD Issue 73, Aug 2004: "Fancy dress match V wives"

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Farmer Baggio has harvested an impressive yield of Raydon crops in his special Ramblings-harvester and, having processed the yield in his news-mill, here his is to shower you with info-flour.

On the final day of last season Raydon secured the Championship on goal difference by just one goal following an 18-0 victory over Pettaugh Palace. The game was an emotional affair for legend Jack Crankleshank, marking his final appearance in the purple and tangerine of Raydon.

It was a miracle that Crankleshank was on the pitch at all against Pettaugh, having suffered a series of massive heart attacks in the previous six weeks, which had limited him to only a light dusting of appearances. Crankleshank was determined to make one final contribution though and he played through chronic chest pain and intense palpitations to turn in a staunch performance at the heart of the Raydon defence. Rather fittingly it was Crankleshank who scored the crucial 18th goal in the 95th minute with a classic 90-yarder to clinch the title.

Crankleshank's central defensive partner Mal Chipaway also hung up his footballing career after his doctor diagnosed him as suffering from faulty chromosomes. Fringe players Colin Muggles and Ronnie Twigg also departed, unhappy at not being unable to command regular places. Muggles joined Sporting Wattisham and is currently on their gruelling 18-match pre-season tour of North East Hertfordshire. Twigg has moved several rungs down the footballing ladder, casually kicking a ball around in his back garden with his young son on a fairly regular basis. Raydon manager Roland Peters said, "If they're going to have a bee in their high horse about not getting in the team it's no skin of my monkey."

Peters strengthened the squad with three quality signings. He managed to prize veteran midfielder Sid "Chopper" Chopper away from Wenham Wanderers where he had not missed a single minute of a first team match for the last 23 years. (He did miss 90 seconds prior to that to receive treatment on the touchline for a split face, or it would have been 28 years)

He was nicknamed "Chopper" by his Wenham teammates due to his slight interest in aviation, including helicopters at times. The fact that his surname is Chopper is a total coincidence and his team-mates had actually forgotten this fact when they gave him the nickname. Peters said of the acquisition, "Chopper is an old head on old shoulders on an old back. He's like a trusty old Volkswagen Beetle – not particularly practical or reliable, it stalls occasionally but you wouldn't be without it." Peters has always driven Toyotas.

Peters's second acquisition of the summer was the homeless Fitzroy Fitzphillips. He noticed Fitzphillips in an Ipswich back-alley kicking an empty Carlsberg Special Brew can around with aplomb, despite being totally inebriated, and instantly recruited him.

Peters made a further signing after a dinner party at a friend's house at which a fellow diner told him a rumour he had heard from an acquaintance of his who had visited America earlier in the year about a "fantastic" player called Kyle Undershepherd. Undershepherd played for Chicago Stanley and according to the rumour was "the bee's bollocks." Keen to strengthen his weakened team and having had nearly 6 pints of wine at the time, Peters was on the phone booking a ticket for the next flight to Chicago before dessert was served. After sleeping his hangover off on the flight, Peters had difficulty remembering why he was on a plane at all. He had to check with an air-hostess to ascertain exactly where the flight was heading and when he arrived at Chicago he had to phone his wife to clarify exactly why he was there. Peters caught a cab to Chicago Playing Field feeling slightly annoyed at himself at having forked out £800 on a flight to check out a footballer he had never spoken to, especially as he was hardly likely to persuade him to move the UK to play for a Sunday morning football team if he was any good.

This soon proved immaterial when Peters arrived at the Playing Field. An Under-4s Football match was taking place and after speaking to some of the spectators, Peters deduced that Kyle Undershepherd was one of the players. He was only 3-and-a-half-years old. After toying with the idea for a split second of trying to recruit him into Raydon's youth team, Peters flew into an irrational rage and had to be restrained by several off duty FBI officers as he attempted to remonstrate with Undershepherd's Mom and Pop. Peters eventually calmed down and was ordered to watch the second half 20 yards back from the touch-line (there was no stand).

Instead he decided to take a look at an adult match on the adjacent pitch in the hope that he could identify some decent players and salvage something from his trip. He couldn't and before the full time whistle had blown Peters was comfortably installed in his seat on the next plane back home sipping a large glass of duty free gin and impatiently waiting to take off.

The next day Peters offered a contract to 26-year-old rhino-like defender Buster Davonhaddock from Brightlingsea-Siders. Peters had been carefully following his progress for nearly two years and Davonhaddock hungrily snapped the offer up like a crocodile in a sun baked African riverbed snapping up a large fish. Peters was very pleased with this

signing as he had gone to painstaking lengths to keep his interest in Davonhaddock a secret from other managers. He had even hired a private investigator to attend matches and report back to him at regular secret meetings at an as yet undisclosed location*.

Peters later successfully claimed expenses back for the trip to Chicago from millionaire Chairman, Lionel Stubbs, cunningly claiming that it was all part of the elaborate bluff to secure Davonhaddock's signature.

Raydon played their usual showpiece charity friendly against their wives to raise money for a local charity. This year the chosen beneficiaries were Pumps for Pubs, which aims to help struggling local drinking establishments to replace scabby pumps. As this game has been a one-sided farce in previous years in which Raydon's superior quality results in a victory by 20-plus goals, they agreed to play in fancy dress to level things out this year. It also helped to attract a big crowd with nearly 200 people turning up to witness the merriment.

Incidents of note throughout the match were mostly linked to the innovative and bizarre costumes worn by the Raydon Players. Sid Chopper was dressed as a clown and was on stilts. He had several nasty falls, including one where he lost balance, fell over the crossbar and became entangled in the goal net by his throat. Fortunately the ball went out of play a minute or so later and his fellow players were able to disentangle him seconds before he would have been horribly strangled to death. Chopper was able to continue after gargling some TCP.

There was an amusing incident shortly afterwards when Babs Chopper fired a shot goalwards. Raydon's one-armed keeper, Ian Buffalo was dressed as a pirate and in an attempt to intercept the shot, he inadvertently pieced the ball with his hook, the ball becoming impaled on the end of it. All players agreed that it would ruin the fun if Buffalo was to remove the hook and play continued with Buffalo agreeing to try and avoid piecing the ball again. Two minutes later, Buffalo faced a one-on-one situation with his wife Ingrid and as she skipped passed him, he dived at her feet and accidentally scraped his hook down her leg causing a 20-inch gash. After this, the referee ordered Ian Buffalo to cover up the hook and he reluctantly placed a small piece of cork over the tip. The wives were down to ten women for fifteen minutes as their physio, Sylvia Stubbs got through 4 bottles of Dettol attending to Ingrid's leg. She eventually returned with about 20 metres of bandage covering her injury.

Strikers Dougie McManahammond and Dave Mackinackie decided to dress up as their favourite strikers - McManahammond in an Everton shirt as Wayne Rooney and Mackinackie in a Manchester United shirt as Ruud Van Nistelroy. This had an adverse affect on the "fun" spirit of the game with both of them feeling that in order to give a totally accurate portrayal of the players they should be 100% committed. This paved the way for some wholehearted challenges and a frantic, bustling, no-nonsense performance from both players. They both scored six goals but not before defenders Yasmin Mnunga and Sandy Slipper had left the field in tears after a violent goalmouth scuffle mid-way through the second half. Lyndsey Candlestick also had to play the rest of the game in a neck brace hastily fashioned from an old tyre.

Despite the hindrance of their costumes Raydon sailed to a 15-1 victory, although perfectionist Roland Peters locked his players in the dressing room for an hour after the game, giving them a rollicking over the goal they conceded.

There was a surprise when they finally emerged from the dressing room. Theobold Lucas-Onions, the head of Raydon Parish Council had arrived at the ground to make a special award to Roland Peters. A Raydon stalwart for the past 25 years, Peters was handed an honorary GCSE in PE from the local high school in recognition of his services to football in the village. Peters was visibly surprised and shocked to receive the award. After composing himself, Peters said, "This is my proudest day in football this week. I'm totally chuffed. I never actually passed any O-Levels or anything so this will go on my CV and be vital if I ever decide to go on and manage a better team."

Some of the other costumes on display in the charity match that have not yet been mentioned were:

Andy Slipper - A dalek

Derek Diffydale - A hedge

Saul Quan - A knight in armour on horseback

Buster Davonhaddock - A resident of Northern England

Les Candlestick - Harold Shipman

Jack Funtingdale - A plasterboard partition

Roland Peters - Mrs McCluskey from Grange Hill

* The undisclosed location has been revealed as Peters's local, The Punnet and Kiosk.