

06) TWTD Issue 58, Nov 2001: "Raydon win league in controversial circumstances"

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Malcolm Baggio is here with his Ramblings shuttle launcher to blast you into the Athletic galaxy that is Raydon.

The fixture computer could not have created a more mouthwatering end to the 2000/01 season. Second-placed Raydon Athletic were pitted against top of the table Orford Castlers knowing that a win by four clear goals would see them win the championship on goal difference. Raydon seemed to have fallen out of the running with three games remaining. However, a 7-1 victory against Washbrook Wanderers and a 4-0 success Chattisham Chasers saw them sneak into the runners-up spot, one point ahead of third placed Elmsett Town.

There was an unfortunate incident during the pre-match warm-up against Orford. George Mnunga headbutted the goalpost whilst trying to psyche himself up for the crucial encounter. Unfortunately he aggravated an old near-fatal head injury* and had to sit out the encounter in intensive care at Ipswich Hospital. This meant that Dougie McManahammond - who had initially been sidelined with a minor lap twinge - was drafted in at the last minute to partner Saul Quan in attack.

Raydon were clearly fired up for the game, dominating possession and creating a host of chances. However, Orford took a shock lead against the run of play when their left winger beat Andy Slipper and floated a cross into the Raydon box. The ball bounced off the referee's head and looped over Gooseflesh in the Raydon goal. The Raydon players surrounded the referee but he waved away their protests. The notoriously hot-tempered Raydon manager, Roland Peters stormed onto the pitch, snatched the referee's whistle and hurled it into a field of Foot and Mouth infected sheep, adjacent to the pitch. Peters was restrained by his players before being ordered from the premises by the shell-shocked referee. A dejected Peters sauntered home leaving the referee to clamber into the field to retrieve his whistle. However, as he climbed over a fence, a local policeman, who happened to be watching the match, duly arrested him for ignoring the Foot and Mouth warning signs which prohibit people from entering the property. The referee was led away by the policeman leaving the players with nobody to referee the match. The only qualified referee available was Roland Peters. Therefore, Saul Quan called Peters on his mobile phone and asked him to come back to referee the game.

Five minutes later, Peters was back with his whistle, allowing the game to continue. His first decision was to disallow the Orford goal. There was uproar amongst the Orford players who stormed over to Peters to protest that there was nothing illegal about the goal. However, Peters stuck to his decision. He also booked four Orford players and sent one off for protesting too strongly.

Play resumed with a goal kick to Raydon, Gooseflesh hoofing the ball upfield allowing Saul Quan to nonchalantly volley home from 35 yards. The ball rocketed into the top corner of the Orford goal. It was a phenomenal effort from Quan and it proved just the inspiration Raydon needed. McManahammond added a second soon afterwards and Mansley Killorkney notched a third just before half-time. The second half was an edgy affair. A fourth goal with no response would see Raydon grab the title and mark heartbeak for the Orford players. Orford defended resolutely throughout much of the second half as Raydon battled for the all-important fourth goal. It finally came in the 90th minute when midfielder Jack Funtingdale rose to power home Andy Slipper's right-wing corner. The Raydon players and supporters were in raptures and there was a five minute delay before they had calmed down sufficiently for play to resume. Chairman Lionel Stubbs was so excited that he literally wet himself and had to retire to the dressing room to change his trousers and pants. He emerged to see the Orford Players celebrating madly having mounted a quick counter attack to pull a goal back, rendering Raydon's title challenge f*cked.

Roland Peters caused controversy, playing 25 minutes stoppage time despite there being hardly any stoppages. This backfired as Orford pulled the score back to 4-2 causing Peters to give up and blow the final whistle. As the Orford players celebrated, the Raydon players slumped to the ground in tears, devastated that they had thrown the championship away after being so close.

Orford celebrated with an aftermatch party while a shattered Raydon team travelled back to their club bar to drown their sorrows.

A week later, the Raydon and Orford teams were reunited at the championship award ceremony at a local hotel. However, there was unexpected controversy when the league chairman announced that, having read the referee's report of the Orford versus Raydon match, the league's board of governors had decided to deduct one point from Orford due to the conduct of the Orford players after the disallowance of their first half goal. Their decision was based purely on a recommendation in Roland Peters's match report. This meant that Raydon finished one point ahead of their rivals to clinch the championship after all. As Raydon players celebrated their success, the outraged Orford players went on the rampage, throwing over chairs and tables, smashing glasses and bottles and attacking league officials. Raydon manager Roland Peters had intelligently exited the hotel as soon as the announcement was made and the Raydon players swiftly followed. Peter called the police on his mobile phone and nine arrests were made. Six hotel staff were hospitalised and over £40,000 worth of damage was caused.

Following the shambolic scenes, each of Orford's players were banned from competitive football for life by the FA. In contrast Raydon players were left to bask in their success and look forward to the challenge of defending their title in the 2001/02 season.

* Mnunga sustained the previous near-fatal head injury after headbutting the post prior to a top of the table clash when playing for Abuja Rovers under 4s in his native Nigeria