

33) TWTD Issue 93 Raydon On Tour in Hull

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Pizza chef Malcolm Baggio has prepared a lovely big news pizza with loads of Mozzaraydon cheese, topped with ramblings tomatoes and football chilli peppers. Would you like some? If so bite into the following slice of words…

Uppity isn't the word for Roland Peter's general mood following the drab end to the 2007/2008 season which saw Raydon finish in eleventh position in the table. It was the first time that Raydon had experienced lower upper mid table obscurity in many, many, many* seasons.

With no relegation, promotion or ludicrous twist on the last day of the season, users of the Raydon Athletic website unanimously voted last season 'the most boring for some considerable time' in an online poll (although the only two options in the poll were 'most boring for some considerable time' and 'most exciting season in the club's history').

Peters was relieved that the players injured in last seasons successful 'I'm a Raydon Athletic Player, Get Me Out of Here' - Dougie McManahammond, Sid Chopper, Mal Chipaway, Jack Funtingdale, Andy Slipper, Les Candlestick, Dave Mackinackie, George Mnunga, Ian Buffalo and Derek Diffydale - were all given a clean bill of health to join in pre-season training. All but one of the loanees who were brought in to replace them have been placed on a footballing 'birdtable' in the hope that a 'crow' from another team on the search for tasty football morsels will snatch them away and take them back to their footballing 'nest' (what I'm trying to say is they hope the manager of another club signs them) The exception was Welsh striker Dwyn Wynwynch who made an impact when on loan from Creting St Mary Cretins and has joined Raydon permanently.

In addition, Peters has signed talented left back Satan Greaves who has recently moved to the area. Peters said, 'Satan called me up out of the blue, told me he wanted to join a local football team so we brought him into the building for a trial and he blew us away.' (the trial consisted of dribbling a ball in and out of 4 cones lined up three metres apart).

Keen to ensure more excitement for the new season which is steadfastly striding towards us with a determined frown on its face, Peters decided a team-building exercise would help to generate an ambience of togetherness, unity, warmth and determination within the squad. In an email to the players, Peters announced that they were all going on a pre-season tour-cum drunken holiday to the Isle of Wight.

The idea, which he hadn't at that stage been run past multi-millionaire chairman Lionel Stubbs**, was to borrow his huge private yacht, sail to the Isle of Wight, docking at various places around the coast and hopefully finding some local pub teams to play friendlies against. The players were left to read between the lines that part of the reason for playing pub teams would be that they would have a pub on hand after each match to utilise for drinking sessions to help bond with their fellow players. In case players could not read between the lines, Peters gave his email the subject 'Pre-season P*ss-up';

Unfortunately when he did run the idea past Stubbs, he told him in no uncertain terms where to go*** leading to the plan being slightly adjusted.

Instead, Peters booked a holiday cottage in Hull and organised some matches against pub teams in the area. Although Stubbs had been unwilling to lend the squad his yacht, he did lend them his old Volkswagen minibus which had been sitting in a shack at the end of his estate untouched since 1984 (prior to that he had driven around 200,000 miles in it in two years). Peters organised a group of the more practically minded squad members to work on bringing the vehicle up to roadworthiness (which took 156 man-hours and saw 90% of the entire vehicle replaced)

It was a tight squeeze cramming 18 people into the minibus which had an official capacity of 10. None of the players were willing to drive as they all wanted to drink at any opportunity throughout the course of the trip. Instead, Raydon's biggest fan, Reg Shuttlebuck agreed to be the driver for free, just so he could enjoy the privilege of spending a time in the presence of his beloved Raydon players.

The journey was an extremely uncomfortable affair and was not helped by Shuttlebuck's reluctance to stop for a break because he "just wanted to bloody get there." Also the bus had a top speed of 50mph, there were horrendous traffic jams during the journey, it was the hottest day of the year, Roland Peters insisted that the windows remained shut as he suffers from hay fever and some of the players had been out for a curry the previous night and were emitting some seriously beefy trumps. The journey took 10 hours and to make matters worse, when they arrived at their destination, the doors of the bus were jammed shut. 15 of the party remained locked in the bus for an additional 2 hours while a locksmith was called who duly opened the door with apparent ease, told them the handle just needed a "damn good yank" and presented them with a bill for £50.

Despite their shattered, sweaty physical state the players didn't even unpack their bags from the minibus but headed straight to the local pub, the Garden Village Green, with Raydon due to play the local team, the Garden Village Idiots the next day.

Raydon players were revived by several pints of lager and were soon enjoying themselves, sitting about sharing footballing anecdotes with their Village Idiots counterparts. Roland Peters sat at a different table with the Village Idiots manager Peter Rolands playing snap for some serious money and Reg Shuttlebuck was sent back to sit in the minibus with a small packet of peanuts to look after the players' belongings.

At the end of the evening everyone had had a good time except Peter Rolands who'd lost £500 and his wedding ring to Roland Peters. The atmosphere between Raydon and the Garden Village Idiots remained friendly and Dwyn Wynwynch even asked the Idiots' captain to be the godfather of his first child which he plans to conceive with his wife later in year.

The players staggered back to the minibus parked outside their holiday cottage and under Peters' instruction, quietly removed their belongings from the minibus, so as not to wake the sleeping Reg Shuttlebuck. Peters had realised that there wasn't anywhere in the cottage for Reg to sleep so thought it best to leave him asleep.

The game the next day was a marked contrast to the previous evening. Peter Rolands had fired his side up after an ear-bashing from his wife about losing his wedding ring and had struck a bet with Peters that if Raydon lost he had to give the ring back and if they lost he'd have to fork out another £500.

The game was a cagey but open affair, remaining 0-0 until the final millisecond of the match when Idiots' goalkeeper allowed a routine 30 yard thunderbolt from Andy Slipper to fly into the top corner of the net. The dejected Rolands handed over £500 to the Raydon manager who took pity on him and gave him the number of a good divorce lawyer.

Pleased with the workout, Roland Peters gave his players the rest of the afternoon off to look round Hull and after a quick shower and a very brief glance at a local tourist guide they decided to go to the Cottingham Cottage Pie pub whose team, the Cottingham Cottagers were Raydon's next opponents.

The reception in this pub was also friendly with the Cottagers having organised a photo opportunity with the local newspaper so they could hand over a pennant to Raydon. Peters was somewhat embarrassed that he hadn't thought to bring anything himself so offered them Reg Shuttlebuck's scrapbook of press cuttings about Raydon which he'd lovingly collected over the past thirty years. Not entirely oblivious to Shuttlebuck's feelings, Peters did offer to pop round the corner and photocopy the scrapbook at a newsagents before handing it over, at Shuttlebuck's expense.

Another night of drinking and merriment followed, with the Cottage Pie Landlord organising a night of Karaoke to break the ice. Roland Peters stole the show with his rendition of Stand by Your Man. Ian Buffalo and George Mnunga also did a memorable duet of the theme from Home and Away.

The Raydon squad turned up a little bit worse for wear the next day, with Peters deciding to employ a rotation system so the players who had drunk the least the night before started the game. With the Cottagers also suffering, the game was a turgid affair with both managers agreeing the game should be split into five minute spells of play separated by 15 minute breaks. As a result the game never really got going and ended 1-1, Raydon's goal coming from a speculative rebound from 1 yard by Satan Greaves.

A concerned Peters ordered a post-match warm down consisting of his players being sent back to the cottage for a cup of tea (made by Shuttlebuck) and a snooze.

Predictably, 7pm on the third day of the tour found the players and Roland Peters in the third pub of their tour. This was the Humber Bridge over Troubled Waters, home to the Humber Humbugs who were the strongest team the team had faced so far. The reception the Raydon players met in the Humber Bridge over Troubled Waters was decidedly more frosty than in the previous two pubs.

The Humbugs, who had finished top of the Northern Rock Premier league were particularly arrogant and regarded the game against Raydon as merely a chance to get in some finishing practice and improve fitness.

The Humbug players showed no interest in socialising with Raydon, and the landlord had even asked a member of his bar staff to act as bouncer to keep them away from the table where they were playing dominoes. The bar staff in the pub were also decidedly unfriendly and a fight nearly broke out when Mal Chipaway was accused of being a 'hoodlum' when a beer mat stuck to the bottom of his glass and fell on the floor. Peters calmed the situation down by threatening to punch the landlord.

With their heckles well and truly raised, Raydon turned up to the game the next day again determined to give a good, professional account of themselves, despite being hungover again. However, the superiority of the Humbugs shone through and they stormed to a 4-0 lead at half time with four of their players literally not breaking a sweat and having to be warmed up with blankets during the interval despite it being July.

The final straw for Raydon was the Humbugs manager Lionel Nought offering to play his youth team in the second half to make a game of it. Peters refused and after an inspirational team talk during which he threatened to make the team walk back to Suffolk and flared his nostrils so much the players could see his tonsils through his nose, his team took to the pitch determined to give the arrogant Humbug team (or the Humbuggers as they are known locally) a run for their football.

They got back into the game through a very dubious penalty. George Mnunga fell over in the opposition box grabbing a Humbug defender by the ears and hauling him down. However, it was Mnunga who got the decision and he himself scored.

Fired up, Raydon went on to score three more goals through Funtingdale, Wynwynch and Diffydale. The game ended bizarrely when Andy Slipper got angry with the humbugs' keeper for time wasting and pushed him out of the area whilst still holding the ball. The referee - a local greengrocer who had been chatting to Peters at half-time - sent the keeper off for handling outside the box. From the resulting free kick Satan Greaves looped a really really nice free kick round the stand in keeper to make it 5-4 and Raydon wildly celebrated by running over to the Humbugs manager and gesticulating unpleasantly.

As the full time whistle went full-scale fisticuffs broke out between the two teams which was only broken up by the referee offering everyone a bunch of grapes to calm things down.

With no broken bones but several bruises and painful private parts, the players spent the journey back to Suffolk reminiscing over their exploits and easing their aches and pains away with a few cans from an off-license just outside Hull and eating their way through three large crates of over-ripe fruit Roland Peters had agreed to buy off the greengrocer referee.

Although largely pointless from a footballing point of view, and very damaging from a fitness and health point of view, Peters was pleased with the way his team bonded**** and came together to overcome adversity and deemed it a useful exercise.

* Data provided by Dave's Data

**Stubbs recently topped a list of most richest men in the Wenham, Raydon and Capel St Mary area and is believed to be worth around £1.000001 million. Second in the list was local postman Rupert De' Bearre who won £3,000 on premium bonds in 2004.

*** He told him to 'f**k off';

****Although a full scale argument broke out on the way home as players became agitated and grumpy in the boiling hot, cramped atmosphere of the minibus. None of the players have communicated with each other since.