



**FARNBOROUGH OLD BOYS GUILD FC
VETERANS FOOTBALL MATCH REPORTS¹**

October 2008 – December 2020

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Edited by Colin Brazier

¹ Website records for Farnborough Old Boys Guild date from the 2005-2006 season. Most of the match reports in this collection can be accessed for individual seasons, on the website www.fobgfc.org using the More + and Archive Tabs

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Foreword



Farnborough Old Boys Guild have been playing Vets football since 1989. I started playing for them, for the Vets, in November 1996, after a chance conversation with a Guild player (Steve “Docker” Durbridge) on a local bus to Orpington station. With a young family at the time, anxious to carry on playing as my 40th birthday loomed, I was looking for a local team to play Vets football, and on Sundays rather than Saturdays.

Twenty-five seasons later, and in particular, after 620 games for the FOBG (Vets and Senior Vets) I am still playing for the Guild, just about. Vets football has prospered at the Guild, with a second Vets team created in the 2009-2010 season (easing my transition from the Vets to the Senior Vets).

Covid-19 has cut short this season, and the last. By the time the 2021-22 season starts, I will be 64 years of age and it is time, finally, probably, to honour the promise made, many times, to Mrs M (for the past decade or so) that *“this is my last season”*. For this, and other reasons, I have found myself in a reflective, nostalgic mood. As a lockdown vanity project, I decided to look back at the match reports I have written for Farnborough Old Boys Guild and to bring them all together in a single hefty document.

I cannot explain why it took me until October 2008 to start writing our match reports. Of course, I am not the only one who has written, or writes, FOBG Vets match reports. For quite some time, others were writing them, and still do. I have seen excellent reports written by Toby Harlow, Roger French, Toby Manchip, Chris Ponulak, Colin Mant, Colin Brazier, Peter Harvey, Phil Anthony and Mark Harrington. I have, however, written the greater number – around 350 to date, and over a sustained period. Once I started writing the reports, I must admit I enjoyed the process almost as much as playing; however, the memories captured in the reports owe as much to all the other characters involved, as to me.

Patrice Mongelard
March 2021

The Art of the Match Report

This piece was written in 2012, and first published in the programme for the FOBG First XI match against Snodland Town on Saturday 1 December 2012 (Issue No 7, 2012-13). FOBG published match programmes for three seasons – 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14.

With one hundred and twenty match reports for the Vets/Senior Vets written over the last four seasons Patrice Mongelard shares his recipe for a satisfying match report.

What is the point of a match report? Who is it for? The answer to the first question is “lest we forget”. The answer to the second is less simple. It is a proven scientific fact that the pleasure and enjoyment one gets from any activity is increased if one also reads about it. What if one also gets to write about it? That surely enhances the pleasure even more.

So, at one level I write match reports for myself. However, as football is a team game, I also write for my team mates. Of course, there is a wider audience for each and every game – the opposition, the referee, the fans, the supporting cast in the clubhouse and a wider circle of interested parties who read the Guild newsletters and visit its websites. So, I write for them too.

There are some basic ingredients for each and every match report. The match itself is the main course but just like a meal there are other elements - a starter, or a sweet, sometimes cheese and biscuits, or a coffee or liqueur thrown in. That is why it is important to reflect and capture what happens in the dressing room, in the clubhouse before and after games, the après-match hospitality, the weather, the facilities, the behaviour of the crowd, the journey to the ground, the condition of the pitch etc. These are all part of the rich tapestry and memory of a match, part of the “customer experience” and certainly deserve a mention.

My tricks of the trade are these:

- Try to have a headline settled in my mind by the time I return home after a game. This single clause should capture the whole essence of the game, its outcome, and provide a key to unlock the narrative.
- Get the match report done within 12 hours, or not later than 24 hours after.
- Mention every player in the action in the game.
- Keep to no more than two pages – with about one page given to the match itself, and the other page dedicated to the rest of the experience.
- Make sure to mention the opposition and in a way that is respectful, truthful and fair. Comment on their approach to the game, their style of play, their star players, their hospitality etc.
- Take a relaxed view. Yes, the scoreline matters, but the whole experience matters more. And hard as it may seem we should remember it is only a game – and it does not really matter (at our level and age) if we win or draw or lose. (Yeah, right - some of you might say) Inject a bit of humour in the report.
- Be honest about our own performance – if we play badly say so. After all, most match reports are written by third parties, or neutral observers – so as far as possible there should be an air of detachment that filters through.

- Provide context – there are usually some pegs to hang things on – e.g Remembrance Sunday, Mother’s Day, changing of the clocks. An obvious reference point is the name of the opposing team and some provide a rich source of inspiration: The Buff, Inter Vyagra, Met Police always add an extra layer of verbal artistry to match reports. Topical references to films and other events make reports more real. Once I managed in a single match report to use all of the one hundred words which football writers had deemed that Fabio Capello needed to manage the England team. Sometimes things happen on the day which will provide an extra dimension to match reports – for example I, and others, will never forget a presence in the showers which made Farnborough history in the 2011-12 season.
- Always have a bit of “analysis” – next to playing this is what footballers love most. After all we all talk a good game even if we do not play it.
- Use the language of football, an obvious point perhaps, but it needs to be real – so attacking moves, defensive play, midfield creativity, the rudiments of the game i.e. ball control, tackling, passing, shooting, field positions, set-pieces, the geometry of the pitch, the metrics of time and space etc. all need to leap from the page and draw the reader in and place them in the midst of it all.
- Have a familiar cast of characters – like favourite characters in children’s stories. Recurring references allow readers to get to know the team and supporting cast. For example if you follow the Senior Vets match reports you will get closer to the workings of Paul Bell’s digestive system (not that you’d want to); or sense when the red mist descends on Roger French (every game); or wonder at Andy Faulks’ services to water conservation; or share Toby Manchip’s strong views on the management; or feel the no-nonsense tantric refereeing of Mick Gearing; or feel Vic Farrow’s unique brand of Sunday morning bonhomie; or appreciate that Pam Shoebridge takes good care of us; or suspect I like a good bit of nosh after a game.
- Throw in a few stats from time to time like a sprinkling of extra seasoning. For added spice refer to things like “controversial decision”, “substitutions policy” or “losing the dressing room”. A dash of innuendo, a bit of alliteration, some foreign words will always add a bit of garnish but should not be overdone.
- Remember to mention the supporters – we do not get many – those that are present are there by choice (mostly).
- Always finish with a tribute to the Man-of-the-Match – usually something kind (but not always).

There are some difficulties to be overcome. The most important one is objectivity – it is not easy to write about oneself at the best of times but to have to do so in the third and first persons in the same piece adds to the suspension of disbelief that I require of my reader. A swollen head can result from this and the best policy is honesty – for example to record an atrocious piece of defending, wayward shooting, inept goalkeeping or a classy own goal - all things I have been guilty of, and duly reported.

Another difficulty (at my age) is to remember everything – only mental notes are made before, during and after games. So, distances can be approximate as can be the timing of goals or the build-up play etc. So, it is very welcome when factual corrections are made by others.

Some features are rarely used – for example dialogue or actual quotes will not really work in match reports unless they fit very well, or are particularly appropriate in the context of the game – such as a choice remark or pleasantry between players, a bit of advice from the referee – that sort of thing.

Subconsciously, favourite expressions will find their way into match reports. Every writer has their individual style. If I can I will always slip in terms like “brand of football”, “big unit”, “cultured left foot”, “Easter Island defence”, “taken roughly from behind”, “crisp finish”, “corridor of uncertainty”, to name a few.

And there you have it – the secrets of my art laid bare. I hope this will inspire others in the club to write more match reports. It is sad that so few FOBG matches are reported on, and unless more reports are produced it will not always be possible to find things that are left behind to unlock the memories that make older men happy.

Patrice

Season 2008-09

12 October 2008	Met Police Vets (H)	2-3	A brush with the law
19 October 2008	Welsh Tavern Vets (H)	4-4	Vets snatch draw from jaws of victory against Welsh Tavern
26 October 2008	Diamond Vets (H)	4-2	Farnborough Old geezers outshine Diamond
9 November 2008	Baltic Vets (H)	1-1	Remembrance Sunday spirit from Farnborough hands Baltic a draw
16 November 2008	Toby Vets (A)	1-3	Under-strength Toby's Vets lose to Toby Vets in woeful performance
7 December 2008	Wickham Park Vets (H)	4-2	Vets stun Wickham Park in second half to record a memorable victory, followed by a more questionable result in the clubhouse
28 December 2008	Wellcome Vets (A)	5-4	Vets close 2008 with a win in a 9-goal thriller in Beckenham, with a first half brace from Matt Wright and a razor-sharp second-half hat-trick from Peter Harvey
1 February 2009	Crofton Albion Vets (H)	4-1	Vets win in heart-warming performance against Crofton Albion
15 February 2009	Avery Hill Vets (A)	1-2	Vets go down in rare defeat after falling to Avery Hill
22 February 2009	Met Police Vets (A)	2-2	Daylight robbery foiled at the Warren as a Paul Tanton 'dribbler' in the 90 th minute nicks draw against the Met
8 March 2009	Santos Vets (H)	3-1	St Paul(s) of Farnborough Vets see off Santos
15 March 2009	Maidstone Vets (H)	2-0	Vets outplay Maidstone in uninspiring and gritty game to record 8 th win of the season
22 March 2009	Crofton Albion Vets (H)	4-1	Vets in routine win against Crofton Albion to keep Farnborough mums happy
29 March 2009	Orpington Vets (A)	4-1	Vets wind the clock back with 10 th victory of season in win against Orpington
5 April 2009	Lloyds Golden Oldies (A)	2-5	Vets innings not quite enough in defeat against Lloyds Golden Oldies
19 April 2009	Avery Hill Vets (H)	3-3	Vets almost make it a great week for football for manager, with draw against Avery Hill
26 April 2009	Cudham Vets (H)	1-4	Vets regress with defeat against Cudham
3 May 2009	Santos Vets (H)	6-2	Vets return to winning ways against Santos, with victory in sombre game in bright sunshine
10 May 2009	Diamond Vets (H)	3-2	Vets polish off season, and Diamond Vets, in close but relaxed game with 12 th and final win

**Farnborough Old Boys Guild FC
Vets XI, Season 2008-09**



Back row, left to right:

Steve Blanchard, Chris Bourlet, Craig Belgrave, Roger French, Gary Rosslee, Paul Smith, Trevor Stewart, Colin Ebdon, Mick Gearing

Front row, left to right:

Chris Ponulak, Patrice Mongelard, Paul Storkey, Ian Shoebridge., Matt Wright, Paul Tanton, Toby Harlow, Darren Mace

12 October 2008: Met Police Vets (H, 2-3)

A brush with the law

In glorious sunshine Farnborough took the field for the first of two difficult battles of the season against the Met. Police with: Gary Rosslee in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Matt Wright, Chris Webb and Steve Blanchard in defence; Paul Tanton, Paul Storkey, Simon Harvey, Colin Ebdon in midfield; George Kleanthous and Paul Smith up front. Behind the front line were Trevor Stewart, Chris Ponulak, Chris Bourlet and Toby Harlow.

The game itself was not an elegant affair. The Met play a direct and muscular brand of football. At times we matched them but we aspired to more than this. The Met went two up (two goals from set-pieces) before Chis Webb rose powerfully at the far post to head in a cross, swung in from a free-kick on the right, by Patrice Mongelard. The first-half ended with Farnborough greatly puzzled as to why we had not scored more – from free play we had fashioned three gilt-edged chances – two one-on-ones for Smithy and George and a free header for Smithy with the keeper stranded.

The second half was probably uglier than the first. Another set-piece goal for the Met. Two more glorious and inexplicable misses for Farnborough – a shot from Chris Bourlet, with the keeper stranded again, that went inches wide – and a ball that brushed Trevor's forehead in the 6-yard box after he had glided into the box stealthily as he now does upon coming off the bench. Surely, he'll get one before long. A highlight of the half was sadly an act of great frustration inflicted on George. To our surprise the referee did not reach for his notebook (and no there is no truth in the rumour that it was the out-of-date tax disc on his car that stayed his hand!).

It was left to Smithy to close the game with a touch of class – a 37.5 metre lob from the right wing which left their keeper clutching at thin air as it nestled inside the post. Our pride, and faith in our type of football, was restored.

Man-of-the-Match – and I am guessing here as I did not see the tally of votes – would have been either Gary for a couple of saves that defied gravity and his body mass index, or George for heart and endeavour. My vote goes to George as he had more bruises.

Next week – a more civilised affair and more cultured football beckons against Welsh Tavern at their charming ground at Horton Kirby.

19 October 2008: Welsh Tavern Vets (H, 4-4)

Vets snatch draw from jaws of victory against Welsh Tavern

The crowd got its money's worth today - 8 goals in a game of fluctuating fortunes played under overcast skies but with not a single bad tackle or angry word which made a welcome change for the referee Mick Gearing who also did last week's game.

The depth of our squad came in handy. Several heroes from last week were missing: Gary Rosslee, George Kleanthous, Simon Harvey, Matt Wright, Paul Tanton. Back were Peter Harvey, Roger French, Neil Connelly, Darren Mace and Ian Shoebridge.

We were even able to cope with the belated realisation (on Toby Harlow's part), or possibly relief, that Toby Manchip would not after all be making his return in goal. It was reported that Toby M was in fact in Barbados and (so Chris Webb surmised) staggering back from the rum shop, at the very moment we were pondering his whereabouts. With all the technology available to talk the two Tobies had not connected. After a very brief struggle with his thoughts Trevor Stewart announced that Darren Mace would make a fine keeper - which he did.

Farnborough lined up with: Darren Mace in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Chris Webb, Trevor Stewart and Steve Blanchard in defence; Paul Storkey, Neil Connelly, Colin Ebdon and Chris Ponulak in midfield; Peter Harvey and Paul Smith up front. Reinforcements were Roger French, Chris Bourlet, Ian Shoebridge and Toby Harlow. Welsh Tavern seemed to have an even bigger squad and some changes they made during the game took us by surprise.

Our start was very good – too good in fact - two up after 20 minutes and looking forward to a big score. We were dominant, quicker, sharper, and moving the ball well. Peter Harvey had smashed in the first after the keeper parried his first shot and Chris Ponulak got the second after advancing unchallenged to shoot from the edge of the box over the head of a not tall keeper.

There are many theories as to what happened to Farnborough in the last 15 minutes of that half: 'we lost our shape' was heard a lot, 'we stopped defending as a team', 'the midfield was not running back', 'we got complacent', 'they wanted it more than we did' - I think it is just that shit happens. A point-blank header from an innocuous cross and a speculative long-range shot brought Welsh Tavern level at half-time.

Playing against the wind in the second half we struggled a bit and were disjointed at times. Substitutions were made, rightly, to give everyone a run and we were still playing the more collective football. Ian Shoebridge brought a new balance to the team and more threat on the right. But I do not think we were surprised when Welsh Tavern took the lead twice in that half. There was a suspicion of off-side with the fourth Welsh Tavern goal but "honest Trevor" on the line said he could only give what he saw – but perhaps he was not looking.

Twice we came back – Colin Ebdon scored after a brief rest on the subs' bench which he felt had revived him and Peter Harvey scored a much-deserved equaliser after good work by Neil Connelly who moments earlier was nearly substituted by "Felipe" Harlow! The last ten minutes saw one-way traffic as we besieged the Welsh Tavern goal – a boxing match would have been stopped by now.

Numerous chances came and went for many of our players and Paul Smith nearly had the last word, again, with a crisp and firm low shot after a one-two with Paul Storkey inside the box. If we could have played extra time we would have. This is a game we would have lost a year ago but these days a draw is a disappointment.

Man-of-the-Match was Peter Harvey – for his two goals, selfless running and overall contribution (he was even to be seen at right-back at some point).

26 October 2008: Diamond Vets (H, 4-2)

Farnborough old geezers outshine Diamond

A sparkling performance from the Vets who mined a rich vein of form to register their third win of the season – and we are still only in October.

Once again, Farnborough had to dig deep to come up with: Darren Mace in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Roger “The Hulk” French, Steve Blanchard and Chris Bourlet in defence; Colin Ebdon, Chris Webb, Ian Shoebridge and George Kleanthous in midfield; Peter Harvey and Paul Smith up front. The subs bench was a bit bare compared with recent weeks: only Trevor Stewart and Toby Harlow (though Toby’s mind was really at Stamford Bridge – more on that later).

A very polished performance saw Farnborough take a 3-0 lead in the first-half and another 3 goals would not have flattered us – a couple of long-range shots from Peter Harvey were very easy on the eye. Two of the gems we scored in the first-half are worth treasuring: a 30-yard left foot shot with very little back-lift and deadly accuracy from Peter Harvey; and a 25-yard free-kick from Paul Smith that was equally accurate and which with great symmetry went in the opposite top corner (from the first goal). In between these two goals Ian Shoebridge had added to our score with a header that he made look difficult from a cross by Colin Ebdon. Darren was rarely troubled in goal in that half.

For a while in the second half, we feared that we would be pegged back again like last week even after Paul Smith had rounded the keeper to score our fourth, and his second. Twice Diamond scored – feeding on scraps outside the box. But we held our nerve and worked hard – all of us including Trevor who joined the fray with some timely tackles– to keep ahead.

The second half was a fractious affair – made more so by one miserable Diamond player who was intent on spoiling the game for us, and his own team, with a stream of bad-tempered remarks, niggly comments and all-round unpleasantness. This drew a robust response from our own rough Diamond - Roger “The Hulk” French. The ref, Mick Gearing, got in on it too – I witnessed this exchange:

Said Diamond player: “Ref, you are crap”

Ref: “Just like you are playing”

Paul Smith missed a real sitter in the second half after a cut-back from Peter Harvey (Peter suspects he may have to wait a while before Smithy reciprocates) – but I reckon Smithy must have realised that one more goal he would have had to get “De Beers”.

Man-of-the-Match were Peter Harvey and Chris Webb.

And back to Toby at Stamford Bridge – mixed fortunes for his two beloved teams today – the morning one had outclassed its opponents and the afternoon one had been outclassed. Sorry Toby - I have taken so much crap from you down the years I could not resist this one.

9 November 2008: Baltic Vets (H, 1-1)

Remembrance Sunday spirit from Farnborough hands Baltic a draw

It remains a mystery how we did not win this game against a very average Baltic side compared to recent years. Perhaps it was the surprise that the game was on but there is a feeling we never really turned up for this one- despite 80-85% possession, one-way traffic throughout and countless chances to put the game out of reach of Baltic.

Farnborough lined up with Toby "the unready" Harlow in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Chris Webb, Steve Blanchard and Matt Wright in defence; Paul Tanton, Chris Ponulak, Simon Harvey and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Peter Harvey and Paul Smith up front. Reserves were Trevor Stewart, Darren Mace and Paul Parsons. Referee was Mick Gearing who allegedly saw action in the Boer War.

When Toby Harlow announced that he was going in goal – two of the strikers in the team whispered that we would need to get a few goals today to win this one. Yet – Toby had at most three saves to make in this game. The defence was sound and provided a solid platform for a midfield that saw plenty of the ball and passed it around well. The team was well-balanced, confident, playing collectively and more than matching our opponents – but the final ball was never there. When Peter Harvey scored, from a lofted through ball which Chris Webb was adamant he meant, it was no more than we deserved – in fact, much less. The second half was equally one-sided. Darren, Trevor and Paul came on and things carried on as before. But unfortunately, Baltic equalised in that half. A tame lob of a 30-yard free-kick, which took a while to come down, aimed at the middle of the goal went through Toby's fingers with no other player within 5 yards of him. There is no other way to describe this in a polite or positive way. Sadly, this will be remembered more than anything else Toby did in that game- not very fair but there you are.

It is not the done thing to mention one's relatives in one's match reports – and after the trouble my granny caused last week, I was resolved not to mention her again – but by popular demand she is back in two different positions: up front where she would have scored the sitter missed by Paul Smith (from yet another unselfish pass from Peter Harvey) and in goal where she would have saved the Baltic free-kick that gave them their ill-deserved equaliser.

Man-of-the-Match – Steve Blanchard – who gets a kiss from my nan.

Talking of remembrance Sunday – best wishes from the team to an old Farnborough stalwart Glyn Farrell who was glimpsed pitch-side – looking 10 years younger, with plenty of sun-bleached hair and perma tan. We need a mid-season break to Spain, I think, far away from the Baltic to regain our scoring touch.

As they say in football, we are disappointed with our result. Better than being satisfied with it I suppose. This is our 4th consecutive undefeated game – something which was rare even in Glyn's playing days. So, let's put things right next week against Toby Vets. We'll have a few missing but a few are coming back also.

16 November 2008: Toby Vets (A, 1-3)

Under-strength Toby's Vets lose to Toby Vets in woeful performance

It is five weeks since we lost a game and we had begun to believe in our own hype – and I fear that as match reporter I have talked many of our games up. So, this match report will tell like it is.

Yes, we were missing a lot of players and we had players who were carrying injuries, some playing out of position, had one key refereeing decision that went against us for an off-side goal - but apart from that we were slow, sluggish, lazy, could not control, pass or cross the ball, missed sitters, gave away soft goals, lacked composure, became tetchy with each other and got what we deserved. We made an average opposition look good.

A depleted line-up consisted of: Toby “Gomes” Manchip in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Chris Webb, Steve Blanchard and Trevor Stewart in defence; George Kleanthous, Simon Harvey, Chris Ponulak, and Colin Ebdon in midfield; Roger French and Paul Smith up front. Reserves were Chris Bourlet and Toby Harlow.

The first Toby Vets goal was a farce; their left full-back ran 50 yards along the touchline, swung in a cross not far from the corner spot and Toby Manchip (a Spurs supporter) unchallenged in goal had a “Gomes” moment and the ball dropped into the goal at the far post. Soon after Roger French had a “Rosenthal” moment as he missed from 4 yards. To make matters worse George Kleanthous, our most mobile midfielder, had to come off with an injury. Shortly before half-time Toby Vets got their second as their lively forward was not given off-side and ran from just over the half-way line to round our keeper with great ease and walk the ball into the net. He sportingly helped Toby up from the floor on his way back.

We rallied in the second half – scored to get back into the game but as we were chasing the equaliser “Gomes” Manchip failed to hold on to a shot from distance in the middle of the goal and a quicker and sharper Toby Vet forward made it 3 to them. Another “Rosenthal” moment was experienced, this time by Chris Bourlet. We had Toby Vets rattled until their 3rd goal went in. Even after that we pressed them, ending with 3 forwards - Chris Webb, Toby Manchip and Paul Smith – all to no avail.

Only consolation: Paul Smith regained his scoring touch.

Man-of-the-Match: I left before the votes were counted but frankly, I think we do not deserve to award this to any one today.

Toby Vets visit Farnborough on 14 December. Let us hope there is a different result and performance to report for that game.

7 December 2008: Wickham Park Vets (H, 4-2)

Vets stun Wickham Park in second half to record a memorable victory, followed by a more questionable result in the clubhouse

If our 2-2 draw against Wickham Park a few weeks ago was a sign of our progress what then of this victory? Here too we came back from 0-2 but this time finished the job.

On a crisp, clear, cold, dry, still and sunny morning with a crunchy pitch under foot Farnborough Vets resumed playing football after a 3-week pause. The starting 11 were: Toby Manchip in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Matt Wright, Chris Webb and Trevor Stewart in defence; Paul Tanton, Chris Ponulak, Neil Connelly and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Paul Smith and Peter Harvey up front. Subs were Toby Harlow, Chris Bourlet and Colin Ebdon. George Kleanthous was also there but played the first-half for Wickham Park. Toby Harlow ran the risk of losing the dressing room with this loan but George had sportingly offered to hep Wickham out as they had only 10 players. I cannot remember the last time any opponent did this for us – and certainly not with a player of George's calibre. Anyway, George more than made up for this later.

The first-half will be remembered for two Wickham Park goals against the run of play. The first was a 30-yarder which according to Toby Manchip dipped, swerved, zig-zagged, stopped in mid-air and started again – and basically led to a "Gomes" moment. The second Wickham goal was even curioiser – a long range free-kick that came off the underside of the bar, hit Toby Manchip on the head, bounced out and as Matt Wright shaped up to clear it, he misconnected and it trickled into the goal off his standing foot. Not a pretty goal and one for the "what happened next" archives. Like George though Matt would redeem himself later.

We never gave up in that half, applying sustained pressure and raining crosses and shots at the Wickham goal but kept finding out how good the Wickham Keeper was. Paul Smith was tripped by my nan as he shaped up for a sitter in the 6-yard box as the keeper parried a belter from Neil Connelly. But like George and Matt – Smithy would redeem himself too later.

The mood at half-time was positive, some reflected – if only we'd offered them Manchip instead of George. Roger appeared with two little Frenchies to give advice and support.

Toby "Felipe" Harlow put his masterplan in action. Chris Bourlet and Colin Ebdon came on to give purposeful and energetic performances; George returned to the fold and Trevor went into the Wickham Park defence. As a keen observer of the game Paul Tanton noted that our performance improved greatly once Neil Connelly came off. A more telling change I think came when the Wickham keeper swapped places with his injured central defender. By then Farnborough were back in it. A powerful, low and angled shot from Matt Wright had induced a "Gomes" moment in the seemingly unbeatable Wickham Park keeper to bring the score to 1-2. This was all the more welcome as moments earlier the keeper had saved a point-blank diving header from Peter Harvey that brought back memories of Banks and Pele in Mexico in 1970. But our tails were up – two quick and almost identical close-range goals from George fox-in-the-box Kleanthous had given us the edge. Both goals came from good work down the left from Colin Ebdon and Peter Harvey. Wickham continued to rely on break-aways and errors but none came to anything. We remained solid and Paul Smith crowned the day with a brave header to make it 4-2 after (as we were reminded) yet more selfless work from Peter Harvey.

Now to what happened in the clubhouse: in a voting result that Robert Mugabe would have been proud of, Toby Manchip "won" the **Man-of-the-Match** award. It was rumoured the Christmas

lights would be coming on at Downe later to mark this. Yes, this was his birthday weekend (and he had the T-shirt to prove it) but I sensed a feeling in the air something was not quite right. Still, those who knew of the journey Toby had made to play in this game will not question his commitment – he even said that he had stopped drinking at some point in the evening before because of the game.

Next week – Toby Vets. We have some unfinished business with them.

28 December 2008: Wellcome Vets (A, 5-4)

Vets close 2008 with a win in a 9-goal thriller in Beckenham against Wellcome, with a first-half brace from Matt Wright and a razor-sharp second-half hat-trick from Peter Harvey

It is a long time since the Vets played a game between Christmas and the New Year and judging by the turn-out of 18 players this was a welcome game for the Vets, eager to play after a 3-week lay-off and too much turkey.

Farnborough lined up with Gary Crosslee in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Matt Wright, Chris Webb and Steve Blanchard in defence; Paul Tanton, George Kleanthous, Neil Connelly and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Toby Manchip and Peter Harvey up front. Subs were Toby Harlow, Chris Bourlet, Roger French, Trevor Stewart, Paul Storkey, Paul Parsons and Simon Harvey.

The goals came like this:

Wellcome	1-0	a dubious penalty
Farnborough	1-1	a shot from Matt Wright (after good work from Neil Connelly) that the Wellcome keeper surprisingly failed to hold on to and the ball trickled over the line.
Farnborough	2-1	a bullet header from Matt Wright after a precise corner from Peter Harvey
Wellcome	2-2	an ugly goal after a scramble in the box
Farnborough	3-2	a sweet connection from Peter Harvey to place the ball in the bottom corner after a low cross from the right by Paul Tanton
Wellcome	3-3	a loose ball in the box lashed into the top corner after Farnborough failed to clear the danger
Farnborough	4-3	a second identical goal from Peter Harvey again created by Paul Tanton
Wellcome	4-4	a farce of a goal as the referee failed to rule Wellcome off-side much to the chagrin of Gary Crosslee who had stopped play in anticipation of a referee's whistle that never came.
Farnborough	5-4	with less than 5 minutes left Peter Harvey was not to be denied as he controlled the ball in the six-yard box, beat two players and planted the ball into the top corner.

There was even time after that for George Kleanthous who had sprung the off-side trap to miss a good chance as he went for power instead of accuracy. And we must not forget the shot from Peter Harvey that rebounded off the post. There was also the sitter missed by Paul Storkey after yet more good work down the right from Paul Tanton. A shocked young Joe Storkey witnessed this and said he'd be having words with his dad for a long time about that miss and some shenanigan with Pat's nan.

There was no disputing that Farnborough deserved the win. We had played the more flowing and attacking football but Wellcome had been resilient and got the rub of the green, including the benefit of a referee that at times seemed to favour the home side and had forgotten football was a contact sport and blew for many needless free-kicks. But, in the end, we had the outstanding individuals that made the more telling contributions: Matt Wright and Peter Harvey for their five goals and also Paul Tanton for his intelligent and selfless running and the goals he made for others. Even after the game Paul was still making assists as he rang Vic Farrow back at base to give him the news and welcome tonic of our win.

I should record that mid-way through the first-half Toby Harlow had astutely (though Toby Manchip will dispute this – see below) moved Paul Tanton up into the attack, taking off an energetic but ineffective Toby Manchip, and moving Matt Wright into midfield from whence came his two goals. We should also note the welcome returns of Gary Crosslee who made some brave saves that told us his broken fingers had mended and also a rusty Paul Storkey after a long lay-off.

All the subs came on except Toby Harlow. Not many teams end up using 6 full-backs in a game but Farnborough did, and seamlessly so. One substituted player was not available to be brought back on. Toby Manchip, after much muttering along the sidelines “*You don’t know what you are doing Toby*” he kept saying as Wellcome kept equalising and I think he was not talking to himself), retired to the clubhouse depriving Toby Harlow of the opportunity to bring him on for an intended final flourish. It appears both Tobies have trouble with this rotation business but it is equally clear that we can register wins like we did today because we have a big squad. And as we close 2008, we must acknowledge the difference that our ‘youth policy’ has made to us this year: Neil Connelly, Paul Tanton, Matt Wright, Peter Harvey, Simon Harvey, Darren Mace and George Kleanthous have brought us much on and off the pitch, and long may it continue.

At year end a few facts from stato: Farnborough Vets started 2008 (on 6 January) with a 9-goal thriller against Erith Vets which we lost 3-6. And when we last played Wellcome Vets on 5 October, that too saw 9 goals with Farnborough winning 6-3. Stats do not lie – in the first-half of 2008 we played 11 matches – 7 defeats, 2 draws and 2 wins; in the second half of 2008 we played 13 matches – 3 defeats, 5 draws and 5 wins. We are better.

Next week – Erith Vets away and let us hope that in 2009 we avoid a repeat of the 3-6 score against Erith that started 2008.

1 February 2009: Crofton Albion Vets (H, 4-1)

Vets win in heart-warming performance against Crofton Albion

It was cold when we started and even colder when we finished but we had the warm glow of a job well done against decent opposition that have caused us difficulty in the past. And we were glad to get a game after so many weeks without one.

Farnborough lined up with Gary Crosslee in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Chris Bourlet, Chris Webb and Steve Blanchard in defence; Paul Storkey, Neil Connelly, Matt Wright and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Toby Manchip and Peter Harvey up front. Subs were Toby Harlow, Roger French, Simon Harvey and Darren Mace.

We opted to play against the Siberian wind in the first half. Conditions were tricky with the hard surface and strong wind. For a while this looked like a game with few goals with both teams tight and compact. But even though our goal-kicks struggled to get over the half way line we had a lot of decent possession and fashioned the better chances. There was good balance in the team - Matt Wright and Neil Connelly gave us a hard centre in midfield and Paul Storkey and Ian Shoebridge were willing raiders down the flank. Peter Harvey was lively. Toby Manchip was putting himself about. The defence were in control but watchful. Crofton were relying on break-aways and had the players to trouble us but we held firm and Gary had little to do in goal.

From time-to-time Toby Manchip will produce a moment of rare quality (usually in goal) but today he was up front - and so he did with Farnborough's opener. A left foot shot from the edge of the box with hardly any back-lift, too powerful for an intended cross we think, that flew in over the keeper's head, clipped the underside of the bar and dropped in the bottom corner. No more than we deserved but then we let Crofton back in after attempting zonal marking at a corner. But soon we had an even better left foot belter to remember from Neil Connelly that arrowed in - too high we thought initially and so did the Crofton keeper until he had to do something about it, failed to hold it, spilling it to Ian Shoebridge who had gambled and was ideally placed to restore our advantage.

We felt good at half-time knowing the wind was now behind us. Roger French came on as did Simon Harvey and it took us a little while to adjust but Crofton failed to profit. Peter Harvey got involved in one or two tasty incidents - but thankfully his brother was there to put out the fire. Some of the tackling against Pete was brusque (that adjective was once used to describe the introductory tackle from the legendary Liverpool defender Tommy Smith on Osvaldo Ardiles in 1978 - as a Spurs fan, Pete will appreciate the analogy I hope). The red bruise left by one such tackle (which Pete said was a good tackle if you are into irony that is) was high on the thigh for all to see in the dressing room. But by then Pete had had his laugh with a free-kick that swerved in, from a long way on the keeper's left, avoided all defenders and attackers, and crept in as the keeper was seemingly distracted by Matt Wright's failed attempt to connect with the ball. That third goal steadied nerves and we went on to record a fourth goal, courtesy of a cheeky back flick from Ian Shoebridge (just like Zola - purred the Chelsea fans in our midst - more on them later).

Back to the weather - as the game ended the snow started to come down and it was too cold for my nan today. The cold wind followed us in the showers, but we did not mind - and we all hope Toby can get us a game next week - as we strive to record more than 12 wins this season (which would be a club record for the Vets). Three wins on the trot now, unbeaten in December, January and February.

Man-of-the-Match was Ian Shoebridge for two goals, intelligent running, energy, and all- round vision.

The dressing room was swept by young Joe Storkey – and a fine job he did too. Pity his team let him down later in the day but he had the comfort of seeing dad regain his touch on the pitch.

15 February 2009: Avery Hill Vets (A, 1-2)

Vets go down in rare defeat after failing to top Avery Hill

Unaccustomed as I am now to reporting defeats, after the heights scaled by Farnborough Vets in recent months, this match was indeed an uphill battle. Avery Hill are a cut above many of the other teams we come up against. As a good passing side, they made the most of the big pitch as we tired in the latter part of the second half to equalise and then take the lead.

Farnborough lined up with Gary Crosslee in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Toby Harlow, Toby Manchip and Steve Blanchard in defence; Neil Connelly, Paul Tanton, George Kleanthous, and Colin Ebdon in midfield; Paul Smith and Peter Harvey up front. Subs were Chris Bourlet and Trevor Stewart. We knew we were missing a few: Matt Wright, Peter Storkey, Darren Mace, Chris Ponulak and a couple of others we did not know about initially.

Our close followers will have spotted the unfamiliar line-up with the two Tobies in defence. A hill seemed like a mountain when news reached the dressing room, and Toby's ears at the same time, that Chris Webb and Simon Harvey were no longer available. Yet what appeared like a makeshift defence kept Avery Hill out until the last quarter of the game. Toby Manchip discovered that it is just as much fun to defend as to attack and we discovered a useful defender with no small physical presence. Toby Harlow, despite reporting a heavy Valentine's night in Downe village was a rock on a hillside.

We certainly had cause to regret not scoring more goals in a first-half which we dominated. There was a very dubious penalty decision that the Avery Hill player who refereed the game gave against us as Paul Smith was felled from behind in the box as he advanced clear on goal (all in the details - as I note later). Peter Harvey made many intelligent runs and received his usual quota of stud marks. Colin Ebdon seemed rejuvenated after his skiing holiday and made several Slalom runs - one of which very nearly brought us a goal. George was industrious as ever and as our fox-in-the-box came very close in a couple of one-on-ones. Neil Connelly and Paul Tanton were more than a match for the robust and mobile Avery Hill midfield. Avery Hill threatened a couple of times from corners - as they usually do but Gary had very little to do in goal. Our goal came after a close-range shot from Paul Tanton was palmed out by the keeper to Peter Harvey who was on hand to score and reach double figures for the season and give us a well-deserved half-time lead.

So, what went wrong in the second half - we had chances, not very clear cut but neither did the other team; possession was more even and the Avery Hill subs seemed to settle in more quickly than ours and they made the most of their assets. They won several corners - one of which saw a fantastic clearance from Toby Harlow from a powerful low volley to divert the ball over the bar with Avery Hill already celebrating in their mind's eye. We conceded a free-kick in a dangerous place and from the cross Gary could not climb as high as the tall Avery Hill midfielder who nodded into an empty goal. Minutes later Gary made a flying but vain attempt to stop a high shot that flew into the top corner from arguably Avery Hill's best (and at times over-physical) player. We had one last and very good opportunity to even the scores after good approach work down the right between George Kleanthous and Trevor Stewart but the final pass to a better-placed Peter Harvey never came and that was it.

This was a bitter pill to swallow but an honourable defeat. I suppose now we know how we have made some of our opponents feel this season.

One mountaineering success to report from this game is that Peter Harvey scored again to climb to the top of the goal scorers' chart.

Top managers say it is all in the details which we did not quite get right today: a referee that did us no favours, no oranges and no water at half-time – the sherpa who carried 12 empty plastic bottles out to pitchside could only have been suffering from altitude sickness. Dehydration may have had something to do with it as our oxygen levels ran low in the last 15 minutes. Avery Hill were better playing at altitude – and that is not just due to the high number of tall players – we understand they are mostly PE teachers.

After going up a hill this week for our next fixture we go down a warren where some rather fierce creatures await.

22 February 2009: Met Police Vets (A, 2-2)

Daylight robbery foiled at the Warren as a Paul Tanton 'dribbler' in the 90th minute nicks draw against the Met

After the eventful 2-3 home defeat against these opponents earlier in the season Farnborough Vets were determined not to go quietly this time. And what a game it proved to be. It had everything – overcast sky, tricky surface, early and late goals, refereeing that would vex a saint, a whiff of crowd trouble, fantastic saves, passion, pride, injuries, mates falling out, tackles with feeling, early showers - no wonder Toby Harlow required towelling down after the emotion of it all from the sidelines.

Farnborough lined up with Gary Rosslee in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Chris Webb, Matt Wright and Toby Manchip in defence; Neil Connelly, Paul Tanton, George Kleanthous, and Colin Ebdon in midfield; Paul Smith and Peter Harvey up front. Subs were Chris Bourlet, Paul Storkey, Trevor Stewart, Chris Ponulak, Simon Harvey and Roger French.

We were pleased with our start; one up after 5 minutes from a Matt Wright toe poke/punt. We were playing the more controlled football, with plenty of passing and composure, raiding down both flanks and competing robustly in the middle. We snuffed out anything that the Met threatened. Opta stats will show the Met did not earn a single corner in the first-half, normally a weapon of choice for them. One choice they had made was the referee – one of their players – and it proved a good one as we were denied not one but two penalties (which several Met players admitted in conversations with the tape switched off should have been given).

A few other highlights from the first half: George Kleanthous, who said he had been looking forward to this game more than any other for some reason, had unfortunately to come off with an injury to his ribs after 15 minutes – it looked like he had been hit by a (metaphorical) police truncheon as he gasped for air and was bent double. George missed the rest of the excitement as he went off to Farnborough hospital – and he has our best wishes for a speedy recovery. Toby “Roberto Carlos” Manchip – don’t ask me why, the hair maybe – had a storming run into the box, and hit a right foot volley that the keeper nearly spilled into the net. The Farnborough touchline support was vocal and numerous – all the above-mentioned subs, the manager, Ian Shoebridge, Keith Sollieux, Master Connelly & mum, Master Storkey, Master Manchip, Miss Bourlet, and a couple of others (whose names I apologise for not knowing) – and after several decisions from the home ref – words were exchanged and a frisson went through the ground. My gran put in an appearance too as Chris Webb put a free header wide from a corner.

Once again, we had cause to regret not scoring more goals in a first-half which we dominated. Several changes were made to give every one a run and we lost momentum and cohesion. The Met sensed a more even game and began to press. Your match reporter was knobbled by our own keeper – now I know he does come for crosses (serve me right for calling him Crosslee in some match reports – some subliminal message there I think) and he weighs at least 15 and a half stone. Soon after the Met had their first corner and promptly scored from it as we did a good impression of a police line-up in our box. By then we had begun to have a go at each other, what worked in the first-half was not working anymore, our passing got longer, laziness crept in and it was no surprise when the Met put together a couple of neat one-twos at the edge of the box and carried on unchallenged to get their second from close range.

To my embarrassment I have to say that in pain from my injury I retreated to the showers for hot water and deep heat. I apologise to the rest of the team for that – I should have stayed to the

end not only as a team mate but as your match reporter. I was not the only one in the showers – there were others who will remain nameless but will no doubt wish to express contrition next week.

But I heard the roar of our last-minute equaliser as years of frustration against the Met were laid to rest. As described to me it went something like this: Paul Tanton was playing from memory just like in the old days – as he went clean through from a Matt Wright pass (author of a goal and an assist), was surprisingly not ruled off-side by the Met ref and linesman (both would we assume have to help with enquiries later – abuse from his team mates caused the linesman allegedly to throw his flag to the ground and walk off to a lonely shower); decided not to cut the ball back (Peter Harvey said he saw something in Tanton's eyes which told him there would be no cut-back) and curled one in.

I had hobbled to the doors by then and saw there was just time for the ball to be placed back on the centre circle and the re-start and final whistle become one. Sweet.

Today was a great test of character and a team effort as all played a part– we were in danger of losing consecutive games for the first time this season until rescued by Paul Tanton's centre forward's selfishness and craft.

It is not known at the time of writing who won the **Man-of-the-Match** award – take your pick from Gary Crosslee (which pulled off several stupendous saves in the second half, including one before we had equalised when I was in the shower), Matt Wright, Neil Connelly to name but a few. After storming a warren this week next we have to tame tigers. Time to win again.

8 March 2009: Santos Vets (H, 3-1)

St Paul(s) of Farnborough Vets see off Santos

As befits a winner of the FOBG quiz you would expect me to know Santos is Portuguese for saint(s) and in this period of Lent we were certainly tested today but prevailed, our faith in our management and in ourselves intact.

Santos is also a well-known Brazilian football club – and sadly there were no Brazilian fans at Farnborough today but there were a couple of moments of samba football from Farnborough. Manager Tobinho Harlow (that's Portuguese for little Toby as we also have a big Toby) put out the following team: Gary Rosslee in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Chris Webb, Matt Wright and Steve Blanchard in defence; Neil Connelly, Paul Tanton, Paul Storkey, and (big) Toby Manchip in midfield: Paul Smith and Peter Harvey up front. Subs were Trevor Stewart, Chris Ponulak, Simon Harvey, Darren Mace, Colin Ebdon and Roger French – all of whom came on and played a part – and in some instances quite a memorable one - more on that later.

Our start was as bright and crisp as the weather – it felt like Santos did not touch the ball in the first 5 minutes. But gradually they made more of a contest of it – they appeared to have some rather young Vets and a few individuals of no small skill and shooting power, particularly with the left foot – not quite Rivelino or Gerson but you get the idea. They also had a giant of a centre half – nothing Brazilian or saintly about him – whose tackling was very agricultural and our own (St) Peter Harvey was sorely tried by him, as was (St) Matthew Wright in a by-line body check. The referee Mick Gearing had a job keeping things under control for a while.

Against the run of play Santos took the lead – we were overrun on the right flank, a good cross came in, our defenders and keeper could not cut it out and Santos bundled the ball in. Not quite a miracle but we were stung and we reacted. We forced several corners, we were playing with the wind in the first half, and we began to exert pressure. This culminated in an equaliser from (St) Paulo Smith of Brazilian quality – close control on the edge of the box, deceptive pace to go round the defender and a crisp shot with little back-lift that flew past the keeper into the corner of the net. Another (St) Paul – Storkey this time, claimed later he was available to tap the ball in – had Smithy passed to him (now that would have been miraculous). More chances came: (St) Matthew Wright hit the post with a header from six yards when the keeper was stranded; (St) Paul Smith shot narrowly wide after electing not to pass to an increasingly frustrated and grumpy (St) Peter Harvey in the box.

Half-time saw a number of substitutes come on as we played against the wind. We started playing on the break and soaked a lot of pressure. Santos began to shoot from distance, not always on target, but Gary Rosslee had to make a number of good saves. We were always capable of breaking down the flanks with Colin Ebdon (who can dribble like a Brazilian) on the left and (St) Paul Tanton on the right – and so it came to pass as we created a second goal that any Brazilian team would be happy to claim. It was silkily crafted in one-twos between Paul Tanton and Neil Connelly on the right culminating in an unselfish pass from Paul Tanton that gave Neil what looked like a tap-in but required balance and composure to convert from six yards.

One of the Farnborough substitutes that had joined the fray – Darren Mace – a graduate with honours from the Boris Johnson school of tackling – shook the ground as he attempted to round a Santos player that failed to get out of his way. Both took a while to rise up Lazarus-like.

It was clear that a third goal was needed as the Santos linesman claimed in an exchange with Tobinho that this game had 2-2 written all over it – what a false prophet he turned out to be. Our prayers were answered when (St) Paul Tanton turned his defender inside out and unselfishly rolled the ball across the box to (St) Paul Smith whose first attempt was blocked by the keeper but the ball rebounded off Smithy into the net. Alleluia.

(St) Simon Harvey created some chances from the right in the closing stages – one such passage of play resulted in a good through ball to Roger French roaming inside the box in vain search of a goal but there would be no miracle - Roger's first touch was so relaxed that he ended up horizontal. Roger felt that several devils in the blades of grass had tangled themselves around his studs. Others thought that my nan had made an apparition just at the moment when the ball reached Roger. Another explanation had something to do with not enough warming up, too many cakes from Jaffa in the holy land and the weight of that Christ-like beard that Roger is growing for Lent. Sadly, no one thought that Roger could have been injured in this contortion.

There was time for Simon to exact what may have seemed like some Old Testament retribution on the Santos centre half for (St) Peter Harvey's suffering but as usual in moments like this, all agreed he never touched him and got the ball.

Man-of-the-Match – (St) Matthew Wright.

Next week – away against Maidstone Vets - where I would not mind a small miracle.

15 March 2009: Maidstone Vets (H, 2-0)

Vets outplay Maidstone in uninspiring and gritty game to record 8th win of the season

The omens for this game got better when it was switched to Farnborough during the week. I for one have had too many long journeys home from Maidstone to ruminate on yet another defeat. Today it was Maidstone's turn and our journeys home, though short, will have been good, in keeping with the spring sunshine.

That same sunshine though seemed to turn some of us into dozy bumblebees, as we missed chance after chance and played without much urgency or intensity. This was not a memorable or pretty game and as I reflect back on it, I am getting twinges of writer's block which have got me reaching for my "Football Lexicon", Leigh & Woodhouse, Faber & Faber £9.99, for inspiration. Writing about this game against Maidstone is almost as hard as playing it.

Our starting line-up was: Gary Rosslee in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Chris Webb, Toby Manchip, and Toby Harlow in defence; Matt Wright, Paul Tanton, Colin Ebdon and Simon Harvey in midfield; Paul Smith and Peter Harvey up front. Subs were Trevor Stewart, Darren Mace, Roger French, Ian Shoebridge, and Chris Bourlet – all of whom came on.

As the game started the Maidstone keeper was heard to remind his team that he was not a keeper. He soon provided evidence that this was correct as he made a hash of a goal-kick and presented Peter Harvey with an easy chance to give us the lead. In a way that easy, languid goal appeared to set the tone for us as chance after chance was created - several of which were unchallenged close-range shots, but we missed them all.

In the midst of all this Maidstone played their usual brand of muscular snarling football – some of their tackling was late, some we felt had a hint of malice. Peter Harvey was taking a lot of punishment – he will now have stitches to his head courtesy of a boot (sadly requiring a half-time visit to Farnborough hospital), to add to the bruising (today it was like a Maori body tattoo the length of his arm from last week's game) and studmarks he usually displays. Although these are indeed badges of honour surely Pete cannot enjoy this and referees will have to give him more protection. No harm with the manager having a word with the referee about that before the game, instead of telling him about the free drink he is entitled to (which, whilst true, could be misconstrued in opposition quarters).

Talking of protection, we coped with the Maidstone attack without too much difficulty in the first-half though they were not without danger. Although we started with two Tobies in defence that did not last long as Toby Manchip succumbed to his urges to forage forward. Observers from the touchline talked of worrying acres of empty space at left-back. But I can testify that Toby (Manchip that is) was in our box at least once to make a very important headed clearance at one point in that half.

As is often the case now – we reached half-time wondering how we had only one goal to show for the possession we had enjoyed (well we have an idea about that – see end of report) and fearing that it may not be enough. Changes were made – Toby Harlow decided inexplicably that he would rather go and watch Chelsea and after all his first-half hints, Toby Manchip was put into the attack in place of hospital-bound Peter Harvey. Roger French and Trevor Stewart came into the defence to add experience and discipline. We cannot deny that Maidstone gave us a sterner examination in the second half – a combination of luck, poor finishing by them, good positioning by Gary Rosslee, and back to wall defending kept Maidstone out.

As we weathered the Maidstone attacks, we began to get the upper hand. Toby Manchip began to have influence. He burst into the box, got to the by-line and had a close-range shot come back against the foot of the post into the path of Paul Smith who failed to make the right connection. Toby's finest contribution came soon after in the form of a surprisingly intelligent reverse pass to put Matt Wright through to goal where he finished with the composure and accuracy others had lacked, to put the result beyond doubt.

2-0 up we decided to put a lid on things and put fresh legs on – Chris Bourlet, Ian Shoebridge and Darren Mace came on in the last quarter to help us preserve our advantage. It was good to see Ian Shoebridge back – to do his usual job of knitting our play together and making intelligent passes, now with improved vision. By then Toby Manchip had been replaced and promoted to caretaker manager – but thankfully only for ten minutes or so.

Not much happened off the pitch - at one point a large husky-type dog turned on its owner, and tried to eat another dog - it was not possible to confirm if this was the Maidstone mascot.

Man-of-the-Match – Chris Webb – for an unyielding, no-nonsense game in defence that gave us only our second clean sheet of the season. Others stood out – Matt Wright and a sober Paul Tanton in the centre of midfield in particular had to withstand much of Maidstone's physicality. Clearly the younger Vets made a difference – as one Maidstone player said to me ruefully.

Back to the malaise in the team – in particular in the forward play where we do not make the most of the situations we create. Selfishness is a virtue in centre forwards but it can also turn into a vice. There were many moments in this game where a pass to a better placed colleague would have yielded more and calmed our nerves. More of that and perhaps we would not have been puzzled (this week unlike last week) by the vote cast for Paul Smith in the man-of-the match stakes. I don't think it came from my nan or did it?

22 March 2009: Crofton Albion Vets (H, 2-0)

Vets in routine win against Crofton Albion to keep Farnborough mums happy

Another win for the Vets – our 9th this season, a third victory on the trot and a second consecutive clean sheet. Yet although we won today there was mild disappointment in the way it was done. I suppose it is a good thing that we care about that.

Our starting line-up was: Gary Rosslee in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Chris Webb, Toby Manchip, and Steve Blanchard in defence; Paul Tanton, Steve Ponulak, Ian Shoebridge and Simon Harvey in midfield: Paul Smith and Peter Harvey up front. Subs were Trevor Stewart, Darren Mace, Chris Bourlet, Colin Ebdon and Matt Wright – all of whom came on. Mother's Day duties deprived the Vets of Roger French, Paul Storkey and Ian Connelly. Chelsea blues deprived us of Toby Harlow, we think.

This was a scrappy game in sunny but blustery conditions and on an unhelpful pitch. We were never in danger of losing this game but the possibility of a draw could not be discounted as we made heavy weather of it. Several passes were too short or too long. The ball bounced up more than we liked, crosses went astray and the final ball was not quite there.

Before the game started several of us were concerned that our manager, Toby Harlow, a keen Chelsea fan, seemed not quite himself today. Perhaps it was the presence of so many Spurs and Liverpool fans in our team. The first sign that not all was well came when Toby wondered aloud about the colour of the Crofton Albion strip that was causing a clash with our all-red strip. That problem was resolved when Toby dredged out of the Farnborough vaults a daffodil yellow strip that last saw the light of day in the 70s.

We controlled this game well but laboured to convert our advantage into goals. We enjoyed a lot of possession and pressure and had several long-range shots, particularly from Peter Harvey. One such shot had to be retrieved by Paul Tanton (who was substituted early in the first-half in favour of Matt Wright) from High Elms and returned by bus to Farnborough. Our first goal when it came was not entirely unexpected but lacked definition. A long-range shot from Peter Harvey kept low and induced a fumble from the keeper and the ball trickled over the line.

Things were not well in the Crofton Albion goal keeping department. Even before we scored there was one surreal moment when their keeper walked off the pitch, his feelings very hurt by remarks from a team mate. He was persuaded to resume in goal but vowed this would be his last game, perhaps he meant in goal as he went soon after to play up front.

As with many of our second half performances there was a bit more for us to worry about after the break as our subs settled, a second goal proved elusive and Crofton Albion took heart from coming close once or twice. Those of us who have played for Farnborough in the difficult times that Roger French reminded us of last week will recall that games against Crofton Albion can be spicy affairs. So, it was again as Paul Smith and a Crofton Albion player had to be separated for reasons that were unclear at the time. It transpired that an accidental trip and being called a muppet (by Paul) resulted in a threat to life.

Our troubled manager made several changes in the second half. One such change saw Toby Manchip come off – a decision that he questioned not a little as he made vain attempts to suggest he should get back on the pitch in any position. Talking of vain attempts at half-time we had a feeling that we would have to win ugly today – yet were still not prepared for the 40-yard shot

that Toby Manchip put in the executive homes behind the Crofton Albion goal shortly before he was substituted and comfortingly poured himself into Peter Harvey's Spurs shirt.

Just when we thought we would not score again, one of the substitutes Trevor Stewart engineered a move from the space previously occupied by Toby Manchip which resulted in Matthew Wright bursting into the box, not unlike Steven Gerrard, to slide the ball into the net and put the result beyond doubt.

Perhaps a reason why so many teams want to play Farnborough was revealed when Toby Harlow asked the Crofton Albion manager as he handed over £30 in the bar for the privilege of playing us – "Did you enjoy that?" As this was Mother's Day there was quite a polite reply.

Man-of-the-Match, or mummy's boy, was Ian Shoebridge. His mother will be pleased and also glad that Toby Manchip's numerous nudges, winks, nods, raised eyebrows, and tics in the dressing room, shower and bar did not result in more than one inexplicable Man-of-the-Match vote for that individual.

Last thing: clocks go forward next weekend and we have a derby game against Orpington.

29 March 2009: Orpington Vets (A, 4-1)

Vets wind the clock back with 10th victory of season in win against Orpington

To add to the confusion which the changing of the clocks usually brings we also switched venue for this game quite late in the day to “Bladder” Sports Ground. The dressing rooms were by a long skidmark quite the worst we have experienced: poky, windowless, rubbish-strewn, corridors that looked like the nearby river had burst its banks overnight, with no drinking water available and what could only be described as stalagshites in the toilet bowl. We placed an order for hot showers back in Farnborough even before our game had started. The pitches were OK but had seen better days like the rest of the place.

Our starting line-up was: Gary Rosslee in goal; Trevor Stewart, Chris Webb, Matt Wright, and Steve Blanchard in defence; Paul Tanton, Steve Ponulak, Neil Connelly and Colin Ebdon in midfield; Paul Smith and Peter Harvey up front. Subs were Patrice Mongelard, Ian Shoebridge and (an unready) Toby Harlow. Toby Manchip was present. The Manager Toby Harlow mumbled something about resting some players for the top game against Lloyds Golden Oldies next week.

Our football, when it started, was not much easier on the eye than the dressing rooms. Now I know that a game from the sidelines can feel even worse than from the pitch – especially with the two Tobies shaking their heads, repeating the word shambles, and comfort-eating (more on that later). It took us twenty minutes or so to wake up. By then we were a goal down – a mistake at the back had led to a shot that we were expecting Gary to save – wrong.

Orpington surprised us with their bustle and had one or two players who could play a bit and our shaky back four and keeper made things awkward for a while. However, slowly we began to weave things together, win corners, apply pressure and create the chances. Peter Harvey was a constant threat, pacy and dangerous well-supplied by Neil Connelly, Paul Tanton and even Paul Smith. It was no surprise when Peter laid on our equaliser for Paul Smith from close range. We had several half chances, including a free-kick that came off the top of the bar from Peter Harvey. The Orpington keeper was about 18 stone and two ounces and we fancied our chances against him but did not get much opportunity in that half to test him.

Changes were made at half-time with Ian Shoebridge and Patrice Mongelard replacing Steve Blanchard (who clearly was not fit) and Colin Ebdon. Matt Wright moved to the centre of defence to shore things up. Orpington retreated and began to rely on breakaways. Our goals when they came were inevitable. 2-1 to us as Neil Connelly cleverly placed his shot along the ground from the edge of the box, to come off the inside of the post into the net. We had suspected that kind of goal could be scored against this keeper although he had moments earlier, to our great surprise, got down low to keep out an effort from Peter Harvey. The result was put beyond doubt with a close-range header from Chris Ponulak from an Ian Shoebridge cross (3-1).

With 10-15 minutes left we began to pour forward. Even Toby Harlow came on up front, fancying his chances after some “Laurel and Hardy” moments involving the two Tobies as they attempted to master that substitution. I think I have had cause in a previous match report to call Toby Harlow “Toby the Unready” before and he was certainly that today. It started when he was late at the club having overslept (surely, he has to be fined for this) and left his van in a pub car park, then and that was the main impediment in his eyes – he had no shampoo – (there is shampoo crunch in Downe village it appears), and no towel and no shin pads. But he now has 10 victories, more than any other team manager in the club – ha. Peter Harvey got his deserved goal to stay as

top scorer with a neat turn and low shot, from an Ian Shoebridge cross, as the keeper over-balanced (4-1).

Toby Harlow was heard to say that he had contributed to that fourth goal by “peeling off”. The only peeling off that Toby Harlow did was to peel the wrapper off mini-Easter eggs. But his Easter egg assists were well short of Toby Manchip’s. The facilities at the ground had caused Manchip to go to the nearest shop to get water but having decided to bring Easter forward by two weeks he came back with packets of mini-Easter eggs (and at least one large bottle of Peroni). Toby Manchip was rested partly as he reported he was unwell. The main symptom seemed to be a bloated feeling and possibly trapped wind (but not much could be done about that at the ground given the mineral formations mentioned above). I am not a doctor but, if I were, I would not prescribe the numerous stellas and packets of mini-Easter eggs that Toby self-administered. I am not a betting man either but from the torso he uncovered in the bar, to Des Fallon’s delight, the odds got shorter today on Toby Manchip being the first Farnborough player to have a gastric band.

Man-of-the-Match: Peter Harvey – whose football did most of the talking this time though he also had some choice words for his own team-mates, and some rather amusing remarks (including the gastric band reference) back in our good old and clean Farnborough club house.

5 April 2009: Lloyds Golden Oldies (A, 2-5)

Vets innings not quite enough in defeat against Lloyds Golden Oldies

On a sunny April morning at the Kent County Cricket Club in Beckenham we knew this would be a sticky wicket for Farnborough. Our last match against Lloyds Golden Oldies in September 2007 had resulted in a 6-0 defeat. But this season we have had many of our own golden moments and we were looking forward to a stern test of how far we have improved since then. As it turned out we have improved but even if the score flattered Lloyds a little, we could not shine as bright as they did in the end.

When I eventually arrived at the ground after allowing Toby Harlow to navigate our convoy there via the scenes of many of his electrical jobs – some still unpaid – “I’m still owed two and half grand from a job in that road” - the team that assembled there consisted of: Gary Rosslee in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Chris Webb, and Toby Manchip in defence; Paul Tanton, Ian Shoebridge, Simon Harvey and Neil Connelly in midfield; newcomer Craig Belgrave and Peter Harvey up front. Subs were Trevor Stewart, Darren Mace, Roger French and Toby Harlow (not all of whom came on as will be explained).

This was a hard, physical match on a pitch that could have done with a bit of watering before the game, against a team with a lot of skill, muscle and tactical awareness (which had been strengthened, as if they needed it, with the cream of several players from Wickham Park). However, we had the better of the early exchanges. Peter Harvey was full of running and Craig was mobile and strong. We came closest to scoring in that early period – Peter Harvey had a shot that missed narrowly after pressing from Farnborough had induced an error in the Lloyds defence with the keeper off his line. Paul Tanton and Ian Shoebridge were linking up well on the right side to give the Lloyds defence much to think about. But things were not quiet at our end either. Lloyds had two good and well-built centre forwards who were adept at holding the ball and linking up with bustling midfielders and getting at the end of searching long balls. Gary Rosslee pulled off a number of saves to keep them out – until about 25 minutes into the game, when the two forwards combined well at close-range to score.

We reacted well. Their keeper was probably their weakest link and we began to test him. One memorable close attempt came from the boot of Toby Manchip who controlled the ball on his over-sized page 3 nipples from 25 yards out and let fly. Then there was a cruel twist – a couple of minutes or so before half-time when Lloyds scored from a near post header at a corner.

No changes were made at half-time. We got back in the game early in the second half when a cross-cum-shot from Paul Tanton was spilled by the keeper and Craig Belgrave made sure it crossed the line with his first goal for the Vets on his debut. We failed to capitalise on this as soon after we were 3-1 down. There was a suspicion that foul play had yielded the goal-scoring opportunity and there were several free-kicks and off-sides given against us in that game that gave a feeling that we were playing on some sort of doctored wicket. 3-1 became 4-1 with a yorker of a free-kick from arguably the best player on the pitch – a long-haired import from Wickham Park, looking a bit like that bloke from Status Quo, who had clearly played at a higher level in days gone by.

That would have been the right moment for Toby Harlow to bring the subs on I felt. But perhaps what stayed his hand was our second goal as we got back in the game fairly promptly when Chris Webb’s clever lofted pass was gathered and lashed into the Lloyds net from close-range by Ian

Shoebridge. The over-exercised flag-raising linesman from Wickham Park was over-ruled by the umpire and the goal stood.

Before we could build on this long-haired bloke struck again, running through to get the better of our keeper in a one-on-one. Two of the subs Darren Mace and Trevor Stewart came on. Roger French was not brought on to his obvious annoyance and water bottles scattered like pigeons on the outfield disturbed by a well-struck boundary.

When the game ended, we returned to the dressing room – in a subdued mood, not helped by the sight of Roger's kit crumpled on the floor. He had left early, given away his wicket, even though there was still time to bring him on. The general mood in the dressing room was that all subs should be brought on, including Toby Harlow himself, to play a part. Yes, it is nice to want to win games and chase club records but not if it ends like this. A pensive Toby Harlow acknowledged this on the way home in the car as we returned to Farnborough by the quick route and our conversation turned to a second Vets team next year for the over 45s and our end-of-season meal at the classy buffet place REKU ZEN in Orpington.

Man-of-the-Match: Gary Rosslee for a 24-carat performance in goal – even though he was beaten five times – oh well 19-carat then.

19 April 2009: Avery Hill Vets (H, 3-3)

Vets almost make it a great week for football for manager, with draw against Avery Hill

Those who missed this game will have been spared the droning of our manager Toby Harlow, like an old gramophone with a stuck needle, reminding Liverpool and Arsenal fans and any one else within earshot - what a great week this had been for his club Chelsea. Yes – today Toby was the world president of the appreciation society for football club-owning Russian billionaires (Russian acronym is BASTARDS I think). He wisely left the Chelsea flag in the boot of his van. No doubt there will be a stampede to congratulate him when his club have won the FA Cup, the Premier League and the Champions League.

Anyway, back to what we'd like to think was the most important football game in Toby's calendar this week. It ought to be as we were reminded of Toby's affection for Farnborough when a rather genteel 20-year-old match analysis written with quill pen in a lined exercise book, was read out in the bar after the game, featuring a Toby Harlow who was "half the man" he is now (his words).

The team today was Gary Rosslee in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Matt Wright and Roger French in defence; Paul Tanton, Ian Shoebridge, Paul Storkey and Chris Ponulak in midfield; Craig Belgrave and Paul Smith up front. Subs were Trevor Stewart, Darren Mace, Chris Bourlet, Colin Ebdon and Toby Harlow (all of whom came on).

Although we had not played since 5 April when we lost 5-2, we were up for it and it was no surprise when we went ahead with a well-taken penalty by Craig Belgrave. Craig and Chris Ponulak were probably the first teacher-pupil combination to play for the Vets or any other Farnborough team. A case of Vets getting younger and older at the same time – if that is not too much of a riddle. As Chris sagely reminded his daughter Annie before the game "I used to teach him, now he is a man". I am not sure if Chris taught Craig any football but Craig certainly knows a thing or two about this game and he was a handful for the Avery Hill defence throughout. Gary Rosslee – coached from behind the goal by Toby Harlow, made a number of now customary good saves to keep Avery Hill at bay. He even brought his considerable weight to bear on the Avery Hill number 10 in a wince-inducing mid-air collision (I should know – my bruising from a similar contact with Gary 8 weeks ago has only just faded). Our joy increased when Paul Smith – hit an instinctive half-volley from the edge of the box – not unlike the goal Fernando Torres scored against Blackburn last week end - to put us 2-0 up. But 2-0 became 2-1 when Gary Rosslee made his contribution to a bad week for keepers (remember Cech, Reina, Fabianski) by inexplicably fumbling a shot from distance that he seemed to have well covered and appeared to pull into the net from the wrong side of the post. We shall never know if his gloves malfunctioned or if the advice from behind from Toby Harlow caused this aberration. But the goalkeeper's curse struck again at the other end when the Avery Hill keeper dropped an easy catch at Craig Belgrave's feet for him to poke into the net from close range, and restore out two goal advantage. Not a bad return for Craig with his third goal for the Vets in only his second game – our now joint top scorers Peter Harvey and Paul Smith will be glad the top goal scorer award is not decided on a goal per game average.

The second half brought a number of substitutions for both teams. Avery Hill also had the wind behind them and began to press us. Arguably their best player got them back into the game with a well-taken goal. He later informed Paul Tanton in one of those spicy asides that one often gets in closely contested games that he was, or had been, a Ryman's league player – if only we'd known we could have had a reporter from the local gazette there. He would have seen the same player get a third to make it 3-3, after our defence was outnumbered 2-4 when a promising

forward run by Matt Wright was ended with a stray pass and Avery Hill counter-attacked in numbers.

We tried vainly to win the game. Matt Wright pushed up. Toby Harlow came on to shore up the defence. Colin Ebdon had a shot cleared off the line. Trevor Stewart came on, and with his knack to be in the right place at the right time with his first touch, nearly put us ahead again with a close-range header which was kept out by the Avery Hill player with the largest surface area. Our desire to get something out of the game was very evident in a “Jonah Lomu” moment when Roger French re-located an Avery Hill defender in a “50-50.”

We knew from losing 2-1 to Avery Hill on 15 February that they are difficult opponents with a knack for clawing their way back into games. Then we led 1-0 at half-time. Today we led 3-1. In the end we were more disappointed than they were with a 3-3 draw, a fair result given the overall quality of our opponents, but we felt we had done particularly well because we were missing the spine of the team – Chris Webb in defence, Neil Connelly in the centre of midfield and Peter Harvey our top scorer up front. But we showed plenty of backbone. More of that will be needed against Cudham next week.

Man-of-the-Match: Matt Wright – in a close- run contest with Chris Ponulak who had probably his best game this season under examination from his former pupil.

Lastly, two unsung heroes who rarely get a mention in match reports – an omission I am happy to put right: Mick Gearing – the referee, stood up to the whingeing and backchat from Avery Hill who (perhaps because they are mostly teachers) are used to telling people what to do. Mick was robust and fair and appeared less of a “homer “ than the referee we had when we played Avery Hill in February and Vic Farrow who was, I could not help noticing, working alone to get right all the little details that we take for granted – the teas, the food, the tidying up etc. and could do with a bit of help on Sunday mornings - says someone who today swept two dressing rooms, took the kit home, and wrote this match report – and I had the Liverpool fan’s cross to bear as well, as Toby Harlow reminded me before, during and after the game.

26 April 2009: Cudham Vets (H, 1-4)

Vets regress with defeat against Cudham

Statistics do not lie. On 21 September 2008 we managed a 0-0 draw against Cudham, who arguably fielded a better team on that day. Our self-belief and confidence this season owed much to that game. Today all that drained away in the spring sunshine when so much effort was spent elsewhere on the London Marathon. And we felt the Farnborough of old had returned – lazy, sloppy, no cover for the defence, a fair bit of bickering and recrimination, low presence in the opposition box, ball given away, stray passes, poor tackling etc. This was not a very enjoyable experience for playing and reporting, and the best thing about the game was the sunshine.

The team on the starting line today was Matt Wright in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Chris Webb and Roger French in defence; Paul Tanton, Ian Shoebridge, Neil Connelly and Colin Ebdon in midfield; Craig Belgrave and Paul Smith up front. Subs were Trevor Stewart, Toby Harlow and Simon Harvey (all of whom came on). We were missing a few, in particular, our first three choices for the goal-keeping position.

The first twenty minutes or so suggested that there may be some truth in rumours that Cudham were not quite the team of old. We matched them but no team fashioned any clear-cut chances in that period. We attacked more and that tended to leave us exposed to rapid breaks and from one such moment came the first Cudham goal as a cross-cum-shot went in under Matt's body. Matt had been excellent until then. We became hesitant and Cudham took advantage with a second goal that owed more to us than to them.

Harsh words were said at half-time. Our Manager Toby Harlow talked of the worst first-half performance by Farnborough this season and we were sent out to enjoy our football. Toby's motivational technique, which includes not answering his phone to Paul Tanton before a game in order to "pump him up", seemed to work as we clawed our way back to make it 2-1. Even that goal though lacked conviction – as the keeper diverted a Neil Connelly shot into his goal. For the next quarter of an hour or so we gave Cudham much to think about as we threatened an equaliser. But some of the failings mentioned above returned as we conceded two further goals – the third Cudham goal was a great strike but we could not help feeling that we had contributed to it. When the final whistle came, we welcomed it more than Cudham and our mutterings carried on.

We were reminded before the game that 22 years ago Vic Farrow ran the London Marathon in 4 hours, 39 minutes and 3 seconds. Some of our players would still be running that marathon based on the energy levels they showed today. Nobody minds losing but it is the way it comes about that rankles.

Now that I have mentioned Vic Farrow I ought to mention our referee too – Mick Gearing. In particular, I should recall the moment when Mick put his body in the way of a pile driver on the edge of the box in the first half. We'll never know if that would have gone in but it will hurt in the morning. That moment apart it cannot be said that Cudham would have felt they were playing against twelve men. Mick was fair throughout as ever, if a little economical – he did at times seem to be practising what I'd call tantric refereeing – the whistle was in the mouth a lot but there was no blowing.

We did see one of our missing keepers after the game: Toby Manchip breezed in for the sandwiches and a beer, his return to Farnborough from Manchester delayed allegedly by a night out with Rio Ferdinand and Jamie Redknapp. I think he mentioned that Rio would be having a routine drugs-test this morning. I reckon that if Manchip had one at the same time the presence of hallucinatory substances would be detected.

Man-of-the-Match was Ian Shoebridge who ran his usual half-marathon during the game. Two more games left this season: Santos next week. Let us pray that we can restore our faith in the team next week and produce some samba football. We need a good finish to the season as talk of running a second Vets team next season gathers momentum, and performances like today's do not help.

3 May 2009: Santos Vets (H, 6-2)

Vets return to winning ways against Santos, with victory in sombre game in bright sunshine

The 11th win for the Vets this season was achieved in rather muted circumstances. The two ambulances parked on the centre of the pitch for 20 minutes saw to that. Full credit is due to both to Santos and to Farnborough for resuming the game after that and putting on a spectacle for the neutral.

The team was Gary Rosslee in goal; Matt Wright, Patrice Mongelard, Chris Webb, and Simon Harvey in defence; Paul Tanton, Ian Shoebridge, Neil Connelly and Chris Ponulak in midfield; Peter Harvey and Paul Smith up front. Subs were Trevor Stewart, Paul Storkey, Chris Bourlet and Colin Ebdon (all of whom came on but not always for Farnborough).

Toby Harlow appeared briefly at the start to give the team selection – which he niftily adjusted when Steve Blanchard reported in with an injury, before going to Camber Sands for his daughter's birthday (and for better phone reception than in Downe Village). Roger French was on child-minding duty though appeared later with his two mignons morceaux (Isabelle and Thomas) to watch most of the game (and I am glad not all of it for reasons that will be explained). Toby Manchip was missing, reported injured, or in Southend, or both. Darren Mace gave support from the sidelines as did a number of former Vets who appeared during the interruption – Stuart Savage, Chris Alston and Steve Durbridge.

The first twenty minutes or so were all one-way traffic. Gary had little to do. The movement and passing were good. We were in control. There was a lot of running down the flanks and it was only a matter of time before we scored, we felt. The first goal when it came was not unexpected – what was unexpected (and I saw it with my own eyes too as I was in the box also) was the rare pass from Paul Smith in the 6-yard box to Paul Tanton who slotted home from close range.

But that could easily have been the second goal if Patrice Mongelard had made more of the one-on-one that he created with an overlapping run combined with a clever through pass from Neil Connelly. Yes – I was through but caught in three minds - chip the keeper, leather it, or pass to a team mate – in the end none of which happened. My nan tapped me on the shoulder and I put the ball in the conifers 30 yards behind the goal. Roger French did not see that miss so he would not be able to report if he were to do a match report. But he heard about it alright. Peter Harvey then had a shot that came back off the post and we threatened more goals until the injury to a Santos player. He fell awkwardly in the centre circle, dislocated his elbow and was in great distress. The goal that Paul Tanton scored in the immediate follow-up to this incident was rightly disallowed by the ever-fair referee Mick Gearing.

At times like this it is a good that that our ground is so near to a hospital though of course it would not do to do present this as a positive. For the first time in twelve seasons with the Vets I witnessed the sad sight of not one but two ambulances on our pitch – chrome gleaming incongruously in the sunshine. No footballer likes to see such things and fortunately such episodes are very rare, and we wish the Santos player a full and swift recovery. The next twenty minutes were strange and slow to pass – an odd juxtaposition of pain and pleasure as the Brazilian Socrates would have observed (and so would that Greek bloke with the same name) as ramblers went by, children and dogs enjoyed the sunshine and another game continued on the top pitch, and some dark football humour could be heard to comfort the injured player as the

paramedics gave pain relief and prepared to move him. There was even time for Matt Wright to make Master Connelly cry as they challenged for a ball.

When the game resumed – we skipped straight through to the second half. Colin Ebdon sportingly went to play for Santos, joined soon after by Paul Storkey (as another Santos player left early). Both players were to be given a torrid time down the right – by Peter Harvey, Ian Shoebridge and Patrice Mongelard. The latter's overlapping throughout the game as he searched for a goal, was kindly described in the showers by a connoisseur of the game as Cafuesque.

The goals came as we knew they would, though it is difficult to know how much the injury to their player unsettled Santos. Paul Smith got our second with a well-placed low shot after he had controlled an unselfish pass from Peter Harvey. Ian Shoebridge got the third with a neat chest control, swivel and shot from close-range after a short corner. The fourth was a belter, as Simon Harvey let fly from 25 yards – and produced quite a sight from the sidelines as the onion bag bulged. Matt Wright scored a trademark fifth with a vintage powerful run from the half-way line and composed finish to slot the ball under the keeper.

5-0 up and cruising – or so we thought. Then came two defensive errors in quick succession that were both punished from close range. Even though we were still winning by a handsome margin there were words exchanged about that between our defence and forward line which culminated in one defender loudly calling a forward a large procreating infant (well – the vernacular used would not get past the censor but I think you'll guess what was said). It was a good thing that we were not losing that game. It was noted, with not a little irony later, that the same defender threw his teether out of the perambulator, so to speak, as he exited the dressing room and club house, after a swift, early and perhaps solitary shower, in a rather brusque manner, voicing doubt about his availability next week, or next season. This was uncharacteristic behaviour from one who is normally a solid team player with a good sense of humour.

There was still time for Simon Harvey to get his second goal – with a close-range shot after confusion in the Santos box from a corner. Simon had waited all season to score and like the ambulances two came today – to earn him a well-deserved **Man-of-the-Match** award – (good to see the other Harvey get the goals for a change, though there would have been some brotherly envy, particularly after Paul Smith moved to claim the top scorer spot). And as we left the dressing room Toby was able to get on the phone to Vic Farrow from Camber Sands to get a quick match report.

Last game of the season next week – not against Welsh Tavern as initially advertised, but against Diamond Vets where we can now finish the game we started on 11 January.

10 May 2009: Diamond Vets (H, 3-2)

Vets polish off season, and Diamond Vets, in close but relaxed game with 12th and final win

In keeping with the cricket weather Toby Harlow put two teams up on the board today – one for each innings. The warm sunshine induced such a relaxed mood that we even allowed some of our players to play for Diamond Vets who only had 10 players (whilst we had 17). I should also mention the five absent ones from our squad today who have contributed in great measure to our season: Peter Harvey, Paul Tanton, George Kleanthous, Craig Belgrave (27 goals scored between them) and Darren Mace.

The two Farnborough teams lined up as follows:

First half

Gary Rosslee
Trevor Stewart
Toby Harlow
Steve Blanchard
Chris Bourlet
Matt Wright
Neil Connelly
Colin Ebdon
Paul Storkey
Paul Smith
Toby Manchip

Second half

Gary Rosslee
Roger French
Chris Webb
Steve Blanchard
Patrice Mongelard
Chris Ponulak
Neil Connelly
Ian Shoebridge
Simon Harvey
Paul Smith
Matt Wright

In the first-half Patrice Mongelard played at right-back for Diamond, as did, for the second half Colin Ebdon and (in part) Toby Manchip. The referee, Mick Gearing, managed to keep up with all these changes.

The first-half was an even and composed affair. Both teams were comfortable on the ball, there was a lot of passing, no great urgency and no real clear chances were created. But neutral observers would have seen that Farnborough had marginally more of the play. Paul Smith had a couple of 25-yard shots that were easy on the eye. Toby Manchip had a shot from close-range that was not so pretty to look at as “the ball failed to come down”. Toby huffed and puffed – but the same neutrals would have concluded that the Diamond full back on loan, Patrice Mongelard, had him in his pocket as they say and had probably his most comfortable first-half this season (the sort of not very searching examination that gets fans singing “Can we play you every week”). At one point, Toby managed to find a spot of moisture on the dry wicket that caused him to slip over in the right corner of the pitch. He looked like he injured his wrist in that fall and no doubt will be inconvenienced by that though he was able to wield a pen later in the Man-of-the-Match vote – more on that shortly.

It was no surprise that the first-half ended 0-0. The second half was a very different affair. Ian Shoebridge got our first (and his sixth for the season) when he converted, from close-range, a pass from Matt Wright who had broken down the left with a typical forceful run. One nil became two nil not long after, as Paul Smith put away a header from about two yards out from a measured cross by Simon Harvey. This was not the first time this season that a Harvey had helped Paul Smith score – this was Paul’s fifteenth goal (and he was not done yet with the goal net). The quality that was always there in Diamond’s play led to their goal and for a while at 2-1 we wobbled a bit. Toby Manchip had re-appeared on the pitch (this time for Diamond) and tried his best to

prove the “law of the ex”. “They are arguing amongst themselves” he said at one point – probably true as the argument we had was with his fanciful claims. In fairness, he did produce a towering header off a corner that went close. But then not for the first time Matt Wright steadied our ship with our third goal from a through ball by Ian Shoebridge returning the compliment. This was Matt’s ninth goal this season, not a bad return from one who played mostly in defence. There was time for Diamond to grab a second but not to deprive us of our deserved win. Ian Shoebridge nearly got us a fourth, from a sumptuous cross from Toby Harlow (who had re-appeared on the pitch to make sure of the result). It was noted that Toby Manchip failed lamentably to clear that cross as he crumpled in the box, on yet more moisture presumably.

And so, it ended. 25 games played – 12 wins, 7 draws and 6 defeats, or 1.72 points per game played, 70 goals for and 56 against. Could these figures have been bettered if we had played the additional 10 games that were cancelled due to waterlogged or frozen pitches or opponents not able to fulfil fixtures? You might think so, I could not possibly comment. Compared with previous seasons this was unquestionably a season of hope, and a triumph for our youth policy, as we contemplate the next one - with the prospect of a second Vets team, perhaps sponsored by Christmas Tree Farm - and hopefully they will not influence the formation we play next year.

The feeling that the season was now truly over was brought home when the goal posts (from both pitches) were lifted out and stowed away for the summer by a small group of players and club officials led by the two firemen in our midst. Prior to that, the goal nets were taken down by a group including, surprisingly but fittingly, our top scorer for the season Paul Smith.

Man-of-the-Match was Trevor Stewart – although it transpired that Toby (Mugabe) Manchip had proclaimed himself double Man-of-the-Match for both teams, for each half. Of course, the log book told a different story, though not before a reliable witness (a senior Met Police officer no less) witnessed Manchip shuffle his fingers (on his injured hand) and vote for himself twice, in a clear case of fabricated evidence exposed by the law.

Lastly – a reminder of the Vets end-of-season meal. This will be on Friday 29 May at Reku Zen in Orpington (bottom of High Street at the corner of Aynscombe Angle opposite The Best Kebab Ye). Table will be booked for 8:00 – meet at 6:30 - 7:00 in The Cricketers in Chislehurst Road.

Season 2009-10

6 September 2009	Orpington Vets (A)	1-3	Tough time for new management team as Farnborough Vets let half-time lead slip in defeat against local rivals Orpington
13 September 2009	Erith Vets (H)	1-3	More testing times for new management as Senior Farnborough Vets repeat last week's result in defeat against Erith Vets
27 September 2009	Sanco Super Vets (A)	1-2	Farnborough Senior Vets find that Super Vets are not so easy after all - in defeat by Sanco Super Vets in sunny Dulwich
4 October 2009	Old Albany Park Vets (A)	3-3	Farnborough Senior Vets snatch draw from jaws of victory against Old Albany Park
11 October 2009	Belvedere Vets (H)	0-2	Farnborough Senior Vets not a pretty sight in defeat against Belvedere
25 October 2009	Diamond Vets (H)	5-1	Farnborough Senior Vets turn the clock back to sparkle in win against Diamond
1 November 2009	Welsh Tavern Vets (H)	6-0	Vintage Paul Smith performance downs Welsh Tavern to give Farnborough Senior Vets their biggest and wettest win of the season
29 November 2009	The Buff Vets (H)	0-4	Buff spring chickens rule roost over Farnborough as Senior Vets go down
13 December 2009	Toby Vets (H)	0-5	Woeful Senior Vets hammered by chipper Toby
24 January 2010	Baltic Exchange Vets (A)	2-1	Farnborough artists come back at Baltic Exchange to win
31 January 2010	Crofton Albion Vets (H)	0-4	Woeful second half display from Farnborough Vets who go meekly to defeat by Crofton Albion
7 February 2010	Tiger Vets (H)	3-2	Farnborough cub tames Tiger in win and, at last, Toby Manchip is Man-of-the-Match
14 February 2010	Sanco Super Vets (H)	3-1	Roger & Co in delayed Valentine's Day triumph over Sanco
7 March 2010	The Buff Vets (A)	2-3	Farnborough turkeys lose to Orpington Buff
14 March 2010	Welsh Tavern Super Vets (A)	4-2	Farnborough Senior Vets please mums with win over Welsh Tavern
21 March 2010	Staplehurst & Monarchs Vets (H)	3-4	Senior Vets lose to artful dodgers from Staplehurst
28 March 2010	Orpington Vets (H)	2-6	Derby day defeat for Farnborough Senior Vets against Orpington
11 April 2010	Old Albany Park Vets (H)	3-8	Stroll for Albany Park as hospitable Farnborough Senior Vets slump to heavy defeat
18 April 2010	Cudham Vets (A)	1-2	Senior Vets restore their spirits with glorious defeat to Cudham
25 April 2010	The Buff Vets (H)	2-3	Senior Vets continue long run of failure against the Buff with defeat
29 April 2010	Sanco Combined Vets (H)	0-1	Farnborough Young and Senior Vets sans goal against Sanco Vets
2 May 2010	Staplehurst & Monarchs Vets (A)	2-2	Staplehurst & Monarchs nick last-gasp equaliser against generous Farnborough

Season 2009-10 (contd)

9 May 2010	FOBG Young Vets (H)	0-5	Farnborough Vets all winners as youth prevails over experience in win for Young Vets against Senior Vets
12 May 2010	The Buff Vets (H)	2-4	Farnborough Senior Vets given the bird by Buff Vets, yet again, in tame defeat
16 May 2010	Inter Vyagra Super Vets (H)	5-1	Sunday morning glory for Senior Vets who score five times against Inter Vyagra

6 September 2009: Orpington Vets (A, 1-3)

Tough time for new management team as Senior Farnborough Vets let half-time lead slip in defeat against local rivals Orpington

And so, began Farnborough's bold experiment with two Vets teams this season. Last year we had more than enough for one Vets team. This year we were looking to have sufficient numbers for two teams and, in a way, we did not quite manage that today – though to be fair there were a number of absentees we hope to see back next week.

The number who turned up for Vets training was not a reliable indicator, nor was the team sheet in the newsletter which included several no-shows. The mood of uncertainty was compounded by the absence of our helmsman for these past seasons, Toby Harlow and it fell to the new management team of Roger French and Patrice Mongelard to steer the ship today. Frantic last-minute efforts to find players had resulted in the bare 11 for the Senior Vets thanks to Toby Manchip and Vic Farrow drawing on their contacts. The young Vets had more than 11 players but the transfer window was shut.

For this first match away to Orpington at Mottingham Playing Fields, the Senior Vets lined up with Toby Manchip in goal; Roger French, Trevor Stewart, Steve Blanchard and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Colin Ebdon, Andy Faulks, Tom Smart and Sinisa Cracahin in midfield, Paul Smith and Ian Shoebridge up front.

These were mostly familiar names with new boys Andy Faulks (Manchip's mate helping out as he has done before), Tom Smart (age at less than a third of the oldest Vet in the team) drafted in through Vic Farrow, and new regular Sinisa – a tidy, efficient, robust midfielder who had a very good game.

Manchip had harboured hopes of playing outfield but with confusion surrounding the availability of the new keeper Manchip took one for the team today – well three actually. And it could have been four as Orpington “missed” a penalty although Manchip's role in that penalty miss was subtle to the point of non-existence.

Conditions for both teams were challenging: a hard, dry pitch, a light ball that was hard to control and keep on the ground, or indeed in play on the pitch, a stiff breeze that favoured the team playing with it. Both teams were evenly matched though playing with the wind Farnborough had the advantage in the first-half – Ian Shoebridge hit the post before Paul Smith scored after some good work down the right by Andy Faulks and Trevor Stewart. Paul deserved a second with a long range shot that came off the bar. And there was also a strong suspicion that Farnborough had scored another in that half as the keeper fumbled a shot from Paul Smith, and appeared to scoop the ball out from well behind the line but in the absence a linesman the defending side got the benefit of the doubt. We also failed to make the most of corners (unlike Orpington in the second half) with clear chances at the far post not anticipated. In fairness Orpington missed a penalty, harshly awarded by a referee that appeared to the neutral observer to not want to upset the home side.

As there were no substitutes the management team had no need to call on their vast experience (combined age almost 100) to make any tactical decisions at half-time. But now we were playing on the break and Orpington made the most of long throws into the box and forced a string of corners. Two of these yielded goals for them in quick succession as they posted a greater physical presence in the box. Twice we failed to clear the ball and were punished with scrappy

goals (with a hint of foul play as Manchip scabbled in the dust bravely to gather loose balls at the tip of flying boots). With five minutes to go as we pressed for an equaliser another Orpington corner gave them a carbon copy third goal. To give away one goal from a set-piece is unfortunate, to give away two is careless, three is criminal. After that, we ran out of time and the ball ran out of play too much – just as we'd run out of players even before the game started. In between all this in that second half we fashioned chances for Paul Smith, Ian Shoebridge, the youthful Tom Smart and at the death in a one-on-one Andy Faulks. A draw would have been a fair result but in the end, we had to accept defeat in a game played in good spirit.

There were some positives though: there were oranges and Jaffa cakes at half-time; Vic Farrow got the subs money; eight of us came back to Farnborough for a shower and a beer; Roger French brought his matrix approach to the administration of team affairs; the catering has been sorted for our home games; team spirit is high and there was no moaning amongst ourselves in spite of the defeat and we all enjoyed our football. And everybody had a full game.

Man-of-the-Match was Steve Blanchard.

13 September 2009: Erith Vets (H, 1-3)

More testing times for new management as Senior Farnborough Vets repeat last week's result in defeat against Erith Vets

After much effort during the week to find players, mostly by Roger French supported by Vic Farrow, we managed to field 13 players today. There were five new faces joining the eight who played last week. Clearly it will take a few weeks for the side to settle down but it was encouraging to see the new faces. We will also have to wait until next week to unveil our new high-definition kit – today due to a clash of colours we played in a changed strip.

Farnborough lined up with Steve Palmer in goal; Ian Coles, Trevor Stewart, Steve Blanchard and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Colin Ebdon, Toby Manchip, Chris Bourlet, Paul Bell and Ian Shoebridge in midfield, (and so it turned out) Andy Faulks up front. Reinforcements were Roger French and Danny Winter.

Conditions were overcast and the breeze made it feel cooler than for mid-September. It was not easy to warm up with only one ball between us. Erith had well over 13 players and are a good passing side that play a patient and not very pacy game. This suited us as it meant we could match them. They scored first at close-range from a cut-back in the box after we failed to clear the danger on the left. We reacted well but Toby Manchip and Ian Shoebridge were having to drop a bit deeper than we would have liked – which meant Andy Faulks ended up as the lone striker. Yet we exerted pressure, in particular from the flanks and from a resulting corner Toby Manchip (15 stone 5 lbs and 3 oz) arrived late in the box and delivered an equaliser to his expectant team mates. He promptly dedicated the goal to Oliver David Manchip who arrived earlier this week (8 lbs 4 oz). There was no truth in the rumour that this was an own goal.

Chances were few and far between and when they came for Erith, our keeper was equal to them - one particular save from a one-on-one stood in the mind (and was to be bettered in the second half). Failure to clear a ball down the left resulted in a well taken shot, again from close range, from Erith to restore their advantage before half-time.

The numerous second half Erith subs appeared to have more of an impact and we were forced to play on the break. We could all see that we needed more of a presence up front and in the box – but it is one thing to realise what the problem is and another to solve it. Despite valiant efforts by several of our players it is fair to say that we did not really create any clear-cut chances in that half as flick-ons, crosses, through balls and shots failed to yield anything. Erith were not creating too much themselves but when they did, they found a 'gritty' Steve Palmer in their way (and I do not mean from the pebbles in the new goal mouth top soil) – and he pulled off a memorable double save midway in that half that rightly drew sporting plaudits from Erith.

The second half also confirmed Roger French' commitment to the team as he put his crown jewels in the way of an Erith shot, and crawled off the pitch for relief. This was one of many dead ball situations that we failed to make the most of. Just like against Orpington last week, we were chasing an equaliser when Erith broke, outnumbered us in the box and scored their third goal with less than 5 minutes to go. This was harsh as was the final 1-3 score.

Roger recovered his poise later, thanks in part to Shirley's sandwiches which were miraculous. So good were they that we had a job keeping other teams away from them – and for a moment there it looked like Shirley was going to have to feed the proverbial 5,000.

The referee, Mick Gearing, had his usual economical and impartial performance, and had very little to deal with as the game was played in excellent spirit.

It was good to see Chris Webb among the spectators – and he kindly brought the teas in after the game.

Man-of-the-Match were Steve Palmer and Ian Shoebridge after votes were cast (and Manchip's 'Afghan' practices failed).

Next week it is Cudham – always a challenging fixture, and with some unavoidable absences we will need to dig deep again – it was even suggested that a creche at the club on Sunday mornings might help player availability. The mood in the team is good and despite losing we are enjoying our football.

27 September 2009: Sanco Super Vets (A, 1-2)

Farnborough Senior Vets find that Super Vets are not so easy after all - in defeat by Sanco Super Vets in sunny Dulwich

It is difficult to say what hurt most today - losing the game, or the manner of losing or having to accept that even super Vets sides will give us a tough examination that we can fail.

News that Toby Manchip had pulled out did not disturb us unduly. After all we had 15 players: Chris Webb was making his long-awaited return and the management team of Roger French and Patrice Mongelard were back after missing last week's draw. And it was a rather pleasant day for it. The pitch looked very good, if a tad on the hard side for studs once the initial surface moisture had dried, and the opposition looked like true Super Vets.

Roger "Zanussi" French had worked out various permutations to use the full squad but as often happens human nature triumphed over the appliance of science. Colin Ebdon was late for the start, having had to answer an urgent call of nature and we had to wait until the second half for any further movement on his part. As will be revealed later – Farnborough Vets will not see Colin in motion again.

Farnborough lined up with Steve Palmer in goal; Ian Coles, Roger French, Steve Blanchard and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Chris Webb, Chris Bourlet, Colin Brazier, and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Paul Smith and Andy Faulks up front. Substitutes – all of whom came on for the second half, were Colin Ebdon, Trevor Stewart, Paul Bell and Mick Ingram.

When the game started, we had cause to be optimistic. It seemed only a matter of time before we would score. If we had underestimated Sanco this was soon proved to be unwise as their keeper pulled off a triple save of great quality: first he parried a 25-yard drive from Sinisa Gracanin, got up in time to block the point-blank shot from Andy Faulks who had been first to the rebound; and then again, he got in the way to divert a Paul Smith shot from 2 yards onto the post. We continued to have a lot of possession without creating clear chances – Chris Webb hit the foot of the post from close range, Roger French came close with a 30-yarder and Colin Brazier was working hard down the left to prove the "law of the ex".

But then half an hour into the game – Sanco scored as their tall target man controlled a long clearance with his back to goal, turned and hit a clever shot that caught out Steve Palmer who had strayed a little off his line. That was the only shot of note that Sanco had in that first half. We huffed and puffed to no avail until the end of the half.

Our four subs came at the start of the second half as part of our policy to give all subs a fair share of the game. Sanco too made a few substitutions – and their subs seemed to settle down more quickly as we struggled to find a way back into the game. The main problem was that we were not putting any pressure on the Sanco back line. The penetration down the left had gone and we had difficulty holding the ball in the final third. In one of many overlapping runs Patrice Mongelard blazed a shot inches over the angle of post and bar to remind Sanco that Farnborough were not out of it.

Our equaliser when it came – was deserved but a bit messy as there was confusion in the Sanco defence, the linesman was indecisive, we assumed the ball remained in play and good work down the right by Paul Bell and a header back across the goal from Paul Smith resulted in a

close-range shot from a difficult angle by Mick Ingram that found the bottom of the net. To his credit the referee allowed the goal to stand and to their credit Sanco accepted it.

Encouraged by this we pressed on and were rewarded five minutes later with a penalty award as Paul Bell was bundled from behind in the box. The Sanco defender awarded Paul 10 for artistic impression. Another Paul (Smith) stepped up as he has many times to take the spot kick. However, the Sanco keeper proved once again that age had not dulled his reflexes as he provided the real artistic impression to make an acrobatic save. A few minutes later our set-piece nemesis came back to haunt us as Sanco scored from a corner with less than 5 minutes to go. We searched frantically for an equaliser but ran out of time.

The **Man-of-the-Match** voting was laboured - but eventually Sinisa Gracanin emerged as the winner (for the second week running I think).

Casting his vote for the last time was Colin Ebdon who was moved to announce his retirement at the end of the game.

So – on to next week against Old Albany Park Vets as we search for that elusive first win of the season. Not sure if the word “Old” means anything – as we found out today – if we lack quality and do not find a cutting edge up front - the age of our opponents will not matter.

4 October 2009: Old Albany Park Vets (A, 3-3)

Farnborough Senior Vets snatch draw from jaws of victory against Old Albany Park

The news from Vic Farrow in the Farnborough clubhouse was not good. Ian Coles had pulled out overnight as had our keeper Steve Palmer early this morning. By my calculations we were down to 12 but that was not the end of it as I was to find out when I got to the Old Albany Park ground in Sidcup. First though as I swung my car into the car park, I spotted Toby Manchip in a small knot of four Farnborough players - my relief was unmitigated and my joy unconfined – but there was more bad news as we heard that Steve Blanchard had picked up an injury playing yesterday and we were down to 10 (excluding Roger French who had turned up with Master Thomas French – a frite off the old block). We were not sure if Mick Ingram would turn up and a call was made which Nick Kinnear answered from Poverest.

A quick word about the pitch first – the home of Cray Wanderers - it seemed big, almost square, perhaps an optical illusion created by the all-round metal railing, and in serious need of a dose of herbicide. There was a stand which had seen better days and scrub land at the back of the goals (I am sure I have seen ponies there from the A20).

Farnborough eventually lined up with Toby Manchip in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Nick Kinnear, Trevor Stewart and Chris Bourlet in defence; Colin Brazier, Andy Faulks, Paul Bell and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Paul Smith and Mick Ingram up front. Roger French was our only substitute but had to keep a close eye on Master French, who put the empty concrete stand to good use on his scooter (more on that vehicle later).

This turned out to be an enjoyable and evenly contested game between two teams that let each other play – there was a lot of passing. It was played in very good spirit throughout – the weather might have had something to do with it. The big pitch also meant there was plenty of room for everyone.

The first-half was not as memorable as the second would turn out to be. Albany Park came close with a shot that came off the bar – Toby Manchip may have got a glove on that. The closest Farnborough came to a goal was when Chris Bourlet temporarily forgot he was playing against Albany Park as he made an extraordinary clearance from two yards in their penalty box thereby diverting a goal-bound free-kick from Paul Smith. Not much more to say about the first-half really – one ball went into the scrub land and took a while to be retrieved – a whole family, three generations wandering off to look for it in the end. Chris Bourlet managed to put a clearance into the Cray – over the stand.

The second half started with Roger French up front – with Mick Ingram taking over keeping an eye on young French on his scooter. And what a half it was. First to score was Farnborough from a penalty put away by Paul Smith after Paul Bell was fouled in the box as he swapped passes with Roger French and ran in on goal. It was good to see Paul Smith get this one after last week's miss from the spot. This stirred Albany Park up and for the next 10 to 15 minutes they put us under real pressure – suddenly they seemed faster, stronger, fiercer and more numerous than us. Toby Manchip pulled off a great save from a point-blank header only for the ball to rebound to the same player who forced it over the line. Another memorable save saw a ball rebound off the post and hit Manchip before going out.

Then came a Farnborough rally as we found our second wind. Paul Smith and Sinisa Gracanin combined well down the left – with Sinisa advancing into the box beating two players and hitting

a reverse shot into the bottom corner. More joy was to come with a Paul Bell goal as he got to the end of a low cross by Sinisa Gracanin from the right. Paul appeared to miss the chance to convert the cross but discovered he had a left foot after all which he used to put the ball over the line.

With ten minutes left Albany Park scored from a well-taken first time volley from the left that found the bottom corner even before Toby Manchip had moved. An even better goal was scored for Albany by arguably their best player as he hit an overhead kick from the edge of the box with his back to goal, and found the top corner in the final five minutes. And yet after all this there could have been another goal to win the game for us – Roger French turned his marker, was clean through but, unfortunately, he only uses his right foot to stand on.

In the end a draw was a fair result – not least given the quality of the second, and especially third Albany Park goals. But at 3-1 up with 10 minutes left we thought we had the game won. So, in a sense we felt we had thrown it away. Perhaps this was the reason why Trevor Stewart did not throw away the water from the bucket as we found out when Master French knocked it over on his scooter in the dressing room.

The **Man-of-the-Match** for the third week running was Sinisa “Sidney” Gracanin. Toby Manchip was very pleased with the one vote that he had – which was deserved.

Our opponents next week are Belvedere – an unknown quantity, just like the Farnborough team that will play next week. We need a few back next week as three of those who played today are not available. Come to think of it – five who played last week were not here today. If any of the Senior Vets are planning a Sunday off – best to wait until 18 October when we do not have a fixture.

11 October 2009: Belvedere Vets (H, 0-2)

Farnborough Senior Vets not a pretty sight in defeat against Belvedere

The word "Belvedere" comes from the Italian meaning beautiful sight. However, there was not much of the beautiful game played today. Once again, we were left wondering how we lost this game even though we were the architects of our defeat.

The already stretched squad was depleted further as news came that Trevor Stewart was indisposed – a dodgy Italian meal perhaps. As last week – an SOS call was made not long before kick off and Colin "I hate golf on Sundays" Ebdon came out of a short retirement to bolster our team.

Farnborough lined up with Toby Manchip in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Chris Webb, Rod Loe and Chris Bourlet in defence; Colin Brazier, Colin Ebdon Darren Tucker and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Paul Smith and Roger French up front. Mick Ingram was our first-half substitute, with Chris Ponulak expected after to arrive for the second half from church (though any prayers he may have uttered for Farnborough clearly went unanswered today).

The initial feeling which we had of getting something out of the game disappeared after 5 minutes. There are many formations and playing styles in football: the diamond, the Christmas tree, total football – in fact we played some of the latter today with three different goalkeepers. Today Farnborough Old Boys added a new configuration as we took up the Easter Island defence for the first Belvedere corner – and their centre forward barely rose, unchallenged, to nod the ball into our net. Worse was to follow as Toby Manchip clearly incapacitated by back trouble had to come off after 10 minutes – he put this down to poor weight distribution during the previous night's sleep on a non-orthopaedic bed.

To his enormous credit Colin Ebdon who received the call to play whilst still in (orthopaedic?) bed went in goal. He was 25 minutes later to let in the second goal before half-time after a further Farnborough tribute to the Pacific islanders' stone carving skills during another Belvedere corner. There is really not much more to say about Belvedere's goal chances in that half or the second one.

What about ours? Too many to recount really – though some recur in the mind like a bad dream. Soon after the Belvedere first goal Paul Smith produced a rasping shot that beat the keeper, came off the inside of the post, went across goal and out. Darren Tucker got at the end of many through balls and tried a few shots as did Roger French; we forced several corners but nothing came of it. We made changes at half-time with Chris Ponulak making a much-appreciated return to the team. Roger French went in goal - and we hammered at the Belvedere door. Their keeper made numerous saves from close-range as Paul Smith, Colin Brazier and Colin Ebdon produced much good work down the left. On the right Darren Tucker was getting through many times – including a one-on-one on the keeper that failed to yield the return we deserved.

Watching the game today were several of the players we hope to have back from injury soon: Steve Blanchard, Peter Storkey and Ian Shoebridge but still no sign of Toby "Lucan" Harlow though Roger French was briefly mistaken for Toby by one of the Belvedere management. In fact, Roger impersonated several people today – a bloke called Dave before the game, a centre forward in the first-half and a goalkeeper in the second – in fact the latter was his most successful role as he turned in a clean sheet and even said the goal keeping gloves felt like velcro. For a moment his old self and that red mist came back as he came off his line and chased down a

Belvedere forward to the edge of the box and beyond – and causing the forward to find it difficult to get back on his feet.

The referee was what we'd call a proper referee brought along by Belvedere – he checked studs, advised the taping up of wedding bands and played the advantage rule a lot. Not sure he blew his whistle any more than “tantric” referee Mick Gearing who officiated on the big pitch where the young Vets took on the Met Police. There were four Vets teams at Farnborough today as the bar takings will reflect no doubt. Shirley's sandwiches went down a treat.

The **Man-of-the-Match** was Chris Webb, back in defence and back to his old unyielding self – including Italian handbag at six paces with the Belvedere centre forward.

One silver lining from today was Rod Loe – a 60-something local lad and full-back whose performance for almost an hour belied his age – and he continued to contribute from the touchlines and in the club house. Indeed, he was even seen picking up litter before the game - good for the back all that stretching – maybe others should try it!

From our oldest recruit to our youngest who was in the end the only beautiful sight on show today - and that is the little bambino (with mum's looks) we saw in the form of Oliver Manchip. His contribution to the day's events was as great if not greater than his father's. And he seemed to have no trouble sleeping – as we will all do next Sunday morning as we have no game.

25 October 2009: Diamond Vets (H, 5-1)

Farnborough Senior Vets turn the clock back to sparkle in win against Diamond

This was a polished first victory for the Senior Vets who had been boosted this week by four old stars from the younger Vets side who responded to our call for players. In the end we had a starting XI that was not too dissimilar from the side that did so well last season with a mix of old and not so Senior Vets. We even had the good fortune of having Paul Smith and Sinisa Gracanin becoming available at a very late hour.

In the autumn sunshine which added to the general mood of optimism and expectancy Farnborough lined up with: Matt Wright in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Chris Webb, Stephen Blanchard and Roger French in defence; Neil Connelly, Paul Tanton, Ian Shoebridge and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Paul Smith and George Kleanthous up front. Mick Ingram, Paul Bell and Trevor Stewart were on the bench and so could have Rod Loe who sportingly and unselfishly stood down as our numbers turned out to be greater than anticipated.

This was a bright, fluent and confident performance that should have brought us more goals in the first-half than the one scored by Paul Tanton after good work by the lively George Kleanthous. Paul hit the post before that and we carved out many half chances. The passing was crisp, the defence was largely untroubled and we built a lot from the flanks with Ian Shoebridge and Sinisa Gracanin and the solid and energetic centre provided by Neil Connelly and Paul Tanton. Even Paul Smith was mobile – and more surprises would come from Smithy later.

The defence too fancied their chances – Chris Webb went up for two set-pieces and had good headers each time saved well by the keeper. Roger French tried a wild 40-yard shot with his wrong foot which drew a rebuke from Patrice Mongelard whose mood was not due to the fact that his team had lost the Farnborough OBG quiz the night before by one point to a team which appeared to have more members than allowed by the rules. Patrice put his mood down to some apprehension about events at his beloved Anfield later in the day – but as it transpired there was no need to be on edge about that, after all.

Shortly before half-time Stephen Blanchard was injured and made way for Trevor Stewart. The second half brought us the riches we deserved. Sinisa Gracanin hit a gem of a lob to give us a two-goal cushion early in the half. He was soon after to catch a Diamond clearance in the crown jewels and made way for Mick Ingram. Paul Bell also came on as we shuffled the pack. Our third goal came from Paul Tanton, this time benefitting from an unexpected pass in the box from Paul Smith. It would not be surprising to learn that Smithy was vaccinated against passing at an early age but today a more caring and sharing Smithy was on show – and he soon after laid on our fourth goal scored by Ian Shoebridge. Paul was to get a well-deserved fifth goal with a crisp and smart finish as he strove frantically to get his name on the score sheet in the final quarter of an hour. In between our fourth and fifth goals Diamond dashed Matt Wright's hope of a clean sheet as a Farnborough misplaced pass and lax marking led to a well taken shot to give Diamond a consolation goal.

It was good to see Toby Manchip supporting the team from the sidelines – he even ran the line for the second half all the while dispensing naïve advice and seeking to orchestrate the numerous substitutions which we were able to make. Toby is awaiting medical advice – not on his tactical acumen – but on whether he can resume playing in goal for us with his troublesome back. His future may well lie in an outfield position and the management team has made careful and grateful note of Trevor Stewart's willingness to play in goal.

Trevor is of course the generous sponsor of our new kit this season. The dressing room suspects that Trevor may well have modelled this kit himself before purchase – slim, sinewy Pinot Grigio-drinking Chelsea supporter that he is. Had the kit been modelled by say beer-drinking Liverpool supporter Darren Mace we might have found it more comfortable. The shirts are fitted according to Trevor, the shorts could do with a bit of gusset according to Rod Loe. As for the socks – the application of Vaseline to guard against blisters was mistaken as lubrication for socks which last season used to be for the Frodo Baggins Best XI but this season are for the Legolas Best XI.

Referee Mick Gearing had little to do – one or two rough Diamond players let their frustration get to them but the match was played in good spirit. Mick's refereeing may have something to do with the fact that National Health glasses were found in the pocket of his fleece which in a senior moment he left behind in the dressing room.

Farnborough 24-carat geezer (aka **Man-of-the-Match**) was Ian Shoebridge who was making his return after several weeks on the injury list.

Shirley's excellent sandwiches and nibbles added to the feel-good factor. Even Vic Farrow seemed relaxed though he does not do jokes on Sundays.

Roll on next week – once again the management team start the week unsure of numbers for next week and needing a few players to rally round. Time for the return of Lord Lucan perhaps.

1 November 2009: Welsh Tavern Super Vets (H, 6-0)

Vintage Paul Smith performance downs Welsh Tavern to give Farnborough Senior Vets their biggest and wettest win of the season

Last Sunday's autumn sunshine was a very distant memory as we gathered for this game. What looked like mist on the dressing room window was in fact a true reflection of what was beyond the glass. We came in one by one as if joining a Noah's Ark for men only. Welsh Tavern arrived a little late and for a moment there we feared the elements had got the better of this fixture. It is fair to say that in times past this game (and the one on the big pitch) would not have been played – and it is a tribute to the work done on both pitches in drier times that these games went ahead.

Whilst the conditions were atrocious there was never any thought in our minds and Welsh Tavern's that the game would not be played – at times we were like children having fun in puddles and paradoxically there was also something manly about facing up to the elements. When we have all packed it in, some sooner than others, it is games like this that we will remember in our hinterland.

“Warming up” was soggy, brisk and amidst expanding puddles of surface water. Two of our players warmed up in the dry, in the overcrowded stand by the big pitch.

In the heavy rain, wind and under dark skies Farnborough lined up with: Mark Edwards in goal; Nick Frost, Nick Kinnear, Toby Manchip and Roger French in defence; Patrice Mongelard, Chris Webb, Colin Ebdon and Paul Bell in midfield; Paul Smith and Andy “snake hips” Faulks up front. Mick Ingram, Rod Loe and a late arriving Colin Brazier were our three subs in a boat.

The rain Gods watching this game today would have seen some great goals and some good passing movements in spite of the difficult conditions.

We dominated the game throughout and Mark Edwards had little to do in goal. We brought a lot of pressure to bear on the Welsh Tavern defence and broke the dam four times in that first half. Twice Paul Bell found the knack to be in the right place to score from close-range (though these were not tap-ins). Paul Smith too found the net twice in that first half. Our second goal, Paul's first, was a screamer into the top corner from the edge of the box. There were numerous attempts by others to get on the score sheet – from Chris Webb, Colin Ebdon and Patrice Mongelard.

Clearly 4-0 up at half-time – there was no danger of losing or drawing this game and in fact the only concern we had was that we might not be able to complete the game (and the score would not stand). But there were signs that the rain was beginning to ease as the weather forecast had promised. In many ways we put even more pressure on the Welsh Tavern goal in the second half. In the feeding frenzy that ensued we lost our shape a bit as most of us fancied our chances to score. Patrice Mongelard nearly deceived the Welsh Tavern keeper who had to re-adjust his position to cope with a cunningly disguised 30-yard free-kick that to the untrained eye looked like a cross. But we managed only another two goals in that half – both scored by Paul Smith with some crisp, classy and cool finishing.

In keeping with the conditions our formation today was very fluid. Several players played in several positions. We made full use of the substitutes – not least because there were injuries. Andy Faulks was the first to go with a recurrence of an ankle injury – we hope this does not mean the only salsa he is getting next Tuesday night will be coming out of a jar. Nick Frost and Chris Webb also came off in the second half. Paul Bell, Roger French and Toby Manchip also made

way part of the time for the substitutes to come on and off. Indeed, there was even one memorable instance when Roger and Toby swapped positions and words as substitutes – from one end of the pitch to another, with the sound of the wind and rain drowning out the instructions. Rod Loe and Mick Ingram took to the full back positions like ducks to water. In Mick's case it was only today, after four or five games, that he disclosed to the management that full back was his natural position.

It was later confirmed that the Welsh Tavern team we played today were a Super Vets team. It is to their enormous credit that they played this game and in the spirit that they did. The temptation of sliding tackles was always there on this surface and the ball did get stuck a fair bit but there was not a bad tackle or any ill feeling in that game. It cannot have been easy – not only as a result of the conditions but the game was one sided. In fairness, we were not exactly far from the super Vets target of 501 years ourselves with five players Mongelard, French, Brazier, Ebdon and Loe making up a grand total of 267 years between them.

Man-of-the-Match was Paul Smith for his four goals. I was not in the clubhouse after the game but I am informed neither the name of our opponents, nor his deluge of goals inspired Smith to add to the flow of liquid. I blame the postal strike.

29 November 2009: The Buff Vets (H, 0-4)

Buff spring chickens rule roost over Farnborough as Senior Vets go down

If you watched Doctor Who a couple of weeks ago you may recall the Doctor saying "Water always wins". I think he added "especially when Farnborough Vets have a home game". No, it is not a case of K9 offloading on the pitch though that is one theory – it is instead those enormous cumulonimbus clouds that appear at the weekend from some distant galaxy, in every weather forecast that Roger French produces as part of his appliance of science to our games. Some of us call these clouds – ruefully and affectionately – "Vic Farrow" clouds because they inevitably result in an unwanted call from the man himself on Sunday mornings – as he has done for the last 3 weeks. A tough and unpopular job but someone has to do it. Still, we had an away game today so football won, even if we did not.

We drew 3-3 with the Buff a few weeks ago and were hoping for at least a draw today but the Buff had other ideas – and as well as arguably the Man-of-the-Match in Barry Grainger (with his hat-trick) they had three or four players in key positions who had hatched a little more recently we did. Their pace rather than malice resulted in some challenges not in keeping with a Vets game but in the end the match was played in good spirit and there were no ruffled feathers - even when one of their road runners accidentally tripped over my outstretched foot when clean on goal (well, scythed down from the back like some fledgling in a field, really – good thing the ref was one of ours).

Farnborough lined up with: Gary Fentiman in goal; Nick Kinnear, Toby Manchip, Steve Blanchard and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Chris Webb, Sinisa Gracanin, Andy Faulks and Colin Brazier in midfield; Paul Smith and Ian Shoebridge up front. Mick Ingram, Rod Loe and Trevor Stewart all came on in the second half.

Had the Doctor been watching this game he would have seen a first 20 minutes or so with Farnborough getting the better of it. In that time there were two memorable chances for Farnborough – Ian Shoebridge had a 25-yarder bound for the top corner that was saved by the Buff keeper (who made it look like he had wings) and Andy Faulks had a one-on-one that did not go our way.

But then the Buff had a purple patch. The next 20 minutes were theirs and, in that time, they put three eggs in our nest. First Barry Grainger was left with time and space to turn on the edge of the box and crafted an exquisite left-foot chip that beat our keeper. Five minutes later he hit a speculative shot that Gary shaped up to collect as it rolled to him on the ground but at the last minute it hit a divot, bounced off Gary's left shoulder and nestled in the top corner. Worse came soon after with a high ball over the defence that Gary looked favourite to clear until one of the Buff road runners appeared on the scene and managed to steer the ball into the net (meep, meep – and that was 3-0 to the Buff at half-time).

Changes were made at half-time with Rod Loe and Trevor Stewart coming on to give us a new right side. Nick Kinnear took over the referee's whistle from Rod Loe. I can almost hear Alan Hansen say that the worst thing to do when you are 3-0 down at half-time is to concede an early second half goal – and that is what we did. Another divot caused a defensive lapse (from yours truly) and Barry Grainger was through for an unerring finish. Oddly, this seemed like the only second half clear chance that the Buff had.

The last 10 to 15 minutes were as good a patch as Farnborough enjoyed in that game. We had some clear chances – one in particular on the goal line for Trevor Stewart that was inexplicably missed. Andy Faulks came back on and troubled the Buff defence. Paul Smith had a long range shot that looked goal-bound. There was even a moment when the Buff keeper had flown away from his perch and the empty goal beckoned but we could not get the ball over. The scoreline was harsh in the end but the Buff had the sharper players where it mattered.

It was all a bit of a damp squib after the game. The showers were more like bird baths. The mood was subdued in keeping with the weather. People drifted away rather quickly and there was not the usual social interaction and even a quip from Toby Manchip about having a serious talk with the “real management” about his best playing position fell flat. There was no after match drink or sandwiches. No match subs were collected (except from Sinisa). **Man-of-the-Match** votes were not cast – which was probably right, as we would probably all have voted for Barry Grainger. There was not exactly a rush of volunteers to take the kit home but, in the end, Nick Kinnear did the deed.

We have unknown opponents next week – Old Tamponians, and the opportunity to restore some confidence to the side. And Doctor Who, please note it is an away game. Next week will, we hope, see the return of Toby “Noel” Harlow – aka as Lord Lumiere of Downe, having completed the act of bestowing festive illumination on his grateful subjects, to add some much-needed lustre to our performance. And back too is Roger French to restore some proper management.

13 December 2009: Toby Vets (H, 0-5)

Woeful Senior Vets hammered by chipper Toby

Even now as I write this, a full eight hours after the game, it hurts. I can still hear the Toby Vets players arguing as to who had scored the best goal as they came off the pitch. After the five presents we gave them no wonder they were wishing us all merry Christmas in the post-match handshake. Good thing our Christmas presents do not depend on the performance we turned in today.

There has been a lot of moaning today, before, during and after the game, by players – some of whom should take a long hard look at their performances however long they were on the pitch, and club management. So, I will add my own. Today we looked tired, old, disorganised, unfit, slow to move, think and support each other, with no imagination, passion, pride, appetite for hard work and no team ethic. We made the other team look good – they were no older than us collectively, no particularly skilled individual stood out among them, but they worked hard, played like a team and relied on two mobile forwards who wanted it more. One of them was Colin Mant who had probably his best game ever on the Farnborough pitch, including when he used to play for us a few seasons back. I could sense him thinking “What a shambles Farnborough have become – I am glad I don’t play for this lot any more”.

We were missing a few players today and had to call on a number of “irregulars” but on paper at least we did not have a bad team. The young Vets had beaten Toby 5-2 earlier in the season and, whilst we did not exactly fancy our chances, we did not think it would be as bad as it turned out to be. Farnborough lined up with: Toby Manchip in goal; Nick Kinnear, Ian Coles, Rod Loe and Trevor Stewart in defence; Patrice Mongelard, Ian Shoebridge, Paul Storkey and Colin Ebdon in midfield; Paul Smith and Roger French. Mick Ingram was joined by Chris Ponulak on the subs bench and both came on at half-time.

The first 15 minutes were fairly even and we fashioned a couple of chances before Toby had a sniff - Roger French had a point-blank shot saved well by the Toby keeper (who turned out to be surprisingly good for his stature) and Ian Shoebridge could not lift his shot high enough into a deserted goal after the Toby keeper had ventured to the edge of the pitch from whence a dog was to join the game a little later – and even muzzled had more bite than we did.

The rest of the half belonged to Toby. Our own Toby started to come off his line to get to a very good one two that played the Toby forward in – hesitated, stopped and was lobbed with a powerful shot to give Toby the lead after 25 minutes. Toby was lobbed again five minutes from the end of the half to give us a two-goal deficit at half-time. You could say Toby Manchip had been chipped twice by Toby. Worse was to come.

At the start of the second half, we had a truly bizarre moment which defies explanation. The game was two minutes old when yet another Toby chip, from 25 yards, sailed over a disinterested Toby Manchip’s head to make it 3-0 to the opposition. Toby’s positioning seemed very odd – he appeared to be strolling back into his goal in a path parallel to the flight of the ball and waved it good bye as it passed him. Toby explained to everyone that he was not ready for the re-start of the game. (Note for Roger French: make sure to issue instructions for referee to check with our keeper when game starts, or re-starts). As Toby was to admit later in the showers to the opposition, he had been unhappy playing in goal and for the last 25 minutes he swapped places with Trevor Stewart and came out to play in an attacking midfield role. Trevor himself, once a

great white hope for the goal keeping position – fell to the curse of the chip, twice as Toby added their fourth and fifth goals.

In between we put some pressure on their goal – our best chance fell to Ian Shoebridge who had a good shot smartly saved by the keeper's legs. Roger French put the ball in the net twice from off-side positions.

Chris Ponulak was voted **Man-of-the-Match** – not bad for someone who had the least playing time of the 13 players who played today but oddly right, I think, as the longer we played on that pitch the worse we got.

We have to go back to November 1st for the last time we scored a goal. On today's showing we might have to wait until next November to score again. And next week we have Old Tamponians – a team unbeaten this season that by all accounts pass other teams to death. A repeat of today's performance will see me reporting double figures next week. I hope not – I hesitate to say wear the shirt with pride – especially when that shirt is so tight – another moan today.

24 January 2010: Baltic Exchange Vets (A, 2-1)

Farnborough artists come back at Baltic Exchange to win

At last, after weeks of cancellations we had a game and made our way (eventually for some) to somewhere on the other side of Biggin Hill to take on opponents who had beaten us 3-0 on 8 November. But today we felt we had a stronger squad and for the first time in weeks we had a recognised goalkeeper, in Steve Palmer, making a very welcome return to the team.

Farnborough lined up with: Steve Palmer in goal; Nick Kinnear, Steve Blanchard, Patrice Mongelard and Roger French in defence; Ian Coles, Toby Manchip, Sinisa Gracanin and Colin Brazier in midfield; Paul Smith and Ian Shoebridge up front. Rod Loe, Mick Ingram, Paul Bell and (after a little while) Andy Faulks were the subs.

The game started with a minute silence in remembrance of a Baltic Exchange player who passed away earlier in this week following a road accident. Watching from above he would have seen a tough but fair game, played on a heavy pitch with the outcome uncertain until quite late with his team giving a very good account of themselves against a Farnborough team regaining its self-belief after weeks of poor performances.

Generally, we struggled to have the same impact as Baltic in the first half. We had as much if not more of the ball, strung a lot of passes together but did not achieve the same sort of danger or penetration that Baltic generated. They were more direct, quicker in the midfield, their two mobile forwards stretched our back four which was often left exposed by our midfield. Steve Palmer was thankfully vigilant and rushed off his line to clear danger when necessary.

The Baltic goal when it came – 15 minutes or so in the game, was not entirely a surprise though we were disappointed with the manner of it. The cross swung in from their right did not look that dangerous until their centre forward muscled himself into a good position to get to the ball first and nod it in from close range. Baltic were to hit the post soon after and that woke us up. We pressed hard, forced several corners, had a few long-range shots and Patrice Mongelard supplied several crosses from the right. Toby Manchip produced a memorable header that came off the crossbar from one such cross. Less memorable was his tame 25-yard free-kick that should have been left to the dead ball specialists in the team. Although we finished the half 1-0 down, we sensed that by end of that half we had begun to gain the upper hand and could look forward to the second half.

And what a half we produced. Roger French and Nick Kinnear made way for Andy Faulks and Rod Loe. The first ten minutes or so were a little inconclusive as we adjusted to the new positions. Baltic could still threaten – and produced a lob from 18 yards that looked like it had gone in until Steve Palmer produced a contortion of great agility to tip the ball over. This was a good omen – our last match in December had been lost 5-0 with five chipped or lobbed goals. Paul Bell and Mick Ingram came on for Toby Manchip and Colin Brazier fifteen minutes into the half.

We found our second wind. Suddenly we were quicker to the ball, became more compact in defence with Patrice Mongelard taking on the role of the holding (and shouting) midfielder and we began to penetrate the Baltic box more often – from the flanks and from central runs in particular by Ian Shoebridge and Paul Smith. It was only a matter of time before we would score. When our first goal came it was a piece of great artistry carved out of the primeval mud – that would not be out of place in the other Baltic Exchange in Gateshead, as Paul Smith produced a

delicate chip from 20-yards that left the Baltic keeper rooted to the spot as he admired the arc of the ball taking it into the bottom corner.

Another exhibit for Gateshead – came ten minutes later as we went after maximum points. Andy Faulks had been lurking menacingly on the edge of the box and was there when he controlled a weak Baltic clearance on his chest and produced a dipping half-volley that looked like a goal, from the moment he struck it. It flew past the keeper and landed in the same bottom corner where Paul Smith's shot had a little earlier.

After that we could have made it 3-1 as Paul Smith caused more problems to the Baltic defence from the right and Paul Bell – a Geordie, narrowly failing to make his mark at the Baltic Exchange. There were a couple of final hairy moments in defence as we had to deal with some Baltic corners but in the end our win was well-deserved. The four Farnborough subs that came on today played their part in full and it is fair to say that for the first time in weeks we feel optimistic about future games – not least because of the confidence that Steve Palmer's return has brought us. We are unbeaten this year and hope to keep it that way.

The mood in the clubhouse after the game was good even after lukewarm showers – with well-filled sandwiches, sausages and chips. There were even a couple of Toby Manchip jokes – one about his early substitution being a ploy by the management team of French & Mongelard to deny him the **Man-of-the-Match** vote which by the way went to Ian “marathon-man” Shoebridge; and another about the outcome of the FA cup replay between Leeds and Spurs which I will not repeat.

31 January 2010: Crofton Albion Vets (H, 0-4)

Woeful second half display from Farnborough Senior Vets who go meekly to defeat by Crofton Albion

In the early morning kick-off Farnborough Vets won against Jack Frost and so this game came to be played. As we tarried to let the sun work on the tundra, we had plenty of time in the club house to prepare for this game.

First, we decided – in the absence of our kit sponsor Trevor Stewart, off on a skiing holiday, that we would play in a different strip. From the vaults came a strip which was ancient – so much so that it could only be glimpsed on the black and white photographs of past Farnborough teams. The old kit passed the Rod Loe abdominal test but it was then realised our opponents played in red which is our predominant colour. At times during the game, it looked like we were playing for the red strip but more on that later. So, we ended up playing in a grey/blue kit which made us look like the Star Trek XI. But whereas they were told to “boldly go” the advice we had from Vic Farrow was “Don’t f... it up”. This advice was for Toby Manchip, put in charge of the padlocks for the goal posts but it could have been general advice for Toby, or the rest of us.

Farnborough lined up with: Steve Palmer in goal; Nick Kinnear, Steve Blanchard, Patrice Mongelard and Roger French in defence; Toby Manchip, Sinisa Gracanin, Andy Faulks and Colin Brazier in midfield; Paul Smith and Ian Shoebridge up front. Rod Loe, Mick Ingram and Paul Bell were the subs. Apart from the absent Ian Coles, this was the same line-up as for last Sunday’s triumph – but the two performances were light years apart, particularly in the second half.

The first-half was an evenly contested affair with Farnborough ahead on the number of saves the keepers had to make. Andy Faulks had a left-foot volley that was easy on the eye and well dealt with by the keeper who had the knack of being in the right position each time. Paul Smith had what looked like an empty goal to aim for after the Crofton keeper had fluffed a clearance after venturing to the edge of his box. A pass to an unmarked Colin Brazier at the far post looked like a better option but then again it is Smithy we are talking about.

We looked and felt comfortable – and continued to play well, though without any real clear goal chances, even after Roger French had limped off with a twisted ankle after 25 minutes and been replaced at left-back by Mick Ingram. Later on, we came to realise what a good job Ian Shoebridge had done in that first-half by dropping deep and knitting play between midfield and forward line. The seeds of our undoing were sown in the cosmic dust when he left at half-time. That is not to say that Crofton did not pose questions in that first half. They were working hard, had crafty forwards, feisty midfielders, robust defenders and held their shape well.

But a neutral watching this game unfold would not have predicted the eventual score – 15, 30 or 45 minutes into the game, a different matter at 60 minutes. By then any hopes we had of clinging on for a draw was gone (and we had certainly given up on the idea of scoring). Paul Bell and Rod Loe had come on at half-time for Nick Kinnear and Ian Shoebridge. Unlike last week though we lost momentum and had trouble getting beyond the half way line except on the break. Crofton started winning corners and from one such set-piece came their first goal. A high ball in the area looked like it was a simple catch for Steve Palmer, who was unchallenged except for that huge and low star in the sky. The ball went clean through his outstretched hands onto the meaty forehead of a Crofton defender who had gambled correctly. We reacted, briefly forcing a corner of our own which saw Steve Blanchard miss a header in the six-yard box which could have restored our drive. There was one further half chance for Paul Bell but that was the sum of it

from us for that half. We sleep-walked through the rest as Crofton put their lasers on stun and scored three more goals. To add to our embarrassment, they played the last 15-20 minutes with ten players, which they could afford as they had plenty of help from our side.

Conditions were tricky – the surface unpredictable making the choice of footwear a bit uncertain – but the same for both teams. We cannot say they were younger than we were, or indeed more skilled. The difference between the teams today was team work, attitude, desire, pride, enterprise and tactics. The management team apologise for the dismal failure of the experiment that was playing Toby Manchip in central midfield – so he won't play there again. Next week we intend to see if Toby is the last piece of the puzzle that is our team – up front (you'd think the last piece of the puzzle would be the easiest piece to slot in, but not in football).

Paltry **Man-of-the-Match** votes were tied between Steve Blanchard and Andy Faulks but to my mind the winner was Ian Shoebridge who had travelled into the future and beamed up to a pub in Highbury at half-time.

Lastly, a word of thanks for Shirley who laid on the usual good spread after the game, there was plenty of comfort eating going on; and for the referee Mick Gearing who pointed out that our unbeaten record this year had gone. Things were clearly better when he wore that Farnborough kit I mentioned earlier.

Tiger Vets next week – let us hope we are the ones who burn the brightest in the cosmic night.

7 February 2010: Tiger Vets (H, 3-2)

Farnborough cub tames Tiger in win and, at last, Toby Manchip is man-of-the match

This was a strange experience which I find difficult to write about for reasons that will become clear.

The first sign that the day would not go quite as planned came when the Tiger Vets team did not materialise in full, out of the Dartford jungle. Whenever we have played them before they have appeared in large numbers but today only six turned up. It is to their credit that they did. Fortunately, Farnborough had 14 players + one special guest who would have quite a day. We wanted a game in what were almost autumnal conditions, compared with last Sunday – so we ended up with four of our players swapping stripes and playing for the opposition.

I have been saying for a while that some of our players have been batting for the other side, but today we made it official – with Patrice Mongelard, Roger French, Rod Loe and Chris Bourlet taking the field against Farnborough.

This left Farnborough with ten players and the special guest, as we lined up with: Steve Palmer in goal; Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Colin Brazier, and Mick Ingram in defence; Toby Manchip (*père*), Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Shoebrige, and Mark Perry in midfield; Paul Smith and Toby Manchip (*fils*) up front. Yes, there were two Manchips on the pitch for Farnborough Vets today (a father and son combo unusual for a Vets team) and two contrasting performances that should make for interesting dinner table conversations *chez Manchip*.

It also meant that the Farnborough team were without a manager but as it turned out this led to an inspired performance from Toby Manchip. Indeed, there was evidence today of Paul Smith passing to Toby Manchip (guess which one?). And to think we were contemplating tasking the ever-helpful Rod Loe to do Smithy's passing for him.

Make no mistake this was a competitive game. Both teams wanted to win it. There was not a lot of goal mouth action to be fair but plenty of effort and passing though defences were on top. Of course, the composite Tiger team lacked a bit of cohesion. Farnborough had a bit more fluency but no cutting edge. But they did eventually take the lead as Paul Smith spied the keeper off his line and fired a typical dipping shot that gave Farnborough a 1-0 half-time lead. By then Toby Manchip (*fils*) had caught the eye and come much closer to scoring than the other Toby Manchip who seemed weighed down by the cares of management. Tiger had threatened with Roger "Lino" French but the Farnborough defence looked comfortable as did Tiger's.

At half-time Ian Coles departed and this evened things up a bit – now it was 10 against 9 and a half. Goals came. The Tiger equaliser was laid on by Roger French in a rare upright moment. Toby Manchip (*fils*) betrayed his genes by missing a sitter when he headed over the bar from six yards unchallenged with the Tiger keeper stranded. But he made up for it with a sweet volley as he converted a right-wing cross from marathon man Ian Shoebridge by finding space between the keeper and the centre half. 2-1 became 3-1 as Farnborough overran Tiger and who else, Toby Manchip (*fils*) had a shot turned into the path of Ian Shoebridge who made no mistake from a yard out.

Tiger rallied, led by their very dynamic midfielder who was peppering the goal from everywhere. Eventually he scored direct from a corner as the ball was arrowed into the top corner – quite what happened is not too clear – the sound of ball hitting post was heard but the ball seemed to come

off the back of Mick Ingram's head as he attempted to clear or get out of the way. After that there was time for Farnborough to come close to increasing their lead from you know who, and Tiger came close to an equaliser but in the end the day belonged to Farnborough.

Man-of-the-Match for Farnborough was Toby Manchip – a clean vote this time – for a performance that the Farnborough Vets thought they would never see – intelligent running, positional sense, danger in the box, passing ability. In fact, they are still going to wait many more years for it, as the vote went to Toby Manchip (*fills*) for a goal, a nutmeg (allegedly), a goal assist, a shot against the bar, a penalty claim that would have been given if the age gap between him and the ref had been less than 60 years. And after all that - his dad would not even pay his subs – saving his money for next Sunday, no doubt!

Man-of-the-Match for Tiger Vets was their number 10 – Gary or Barry something (sorry I only met him today) who had half a yard on every one, could run with ball at great pace, dribble with both feet, shoot from anywhere with accuracy and power, was fit as a Dartford butcher's dog – but – and I say this as a neutral – wanted to win the game on his own. He did not because football is a team game but occasionally an individual stands out as he and Toby Manchip (*fills*) did today.

We host DG Sanco super Vets next Sunday when we hope to avenge a 2-1 defeat at their place in Dulwich last September. It will be Valentine's Day then but this is not expected to restrict the availability of our players. A word of advice though from an old head: get your partner a Terry's chocolate orange or something – it will help if you want a lift to the ground, or if it is your turn to take the kit home.

14 February 2010: Sanco Super Vets (H, 3-1)

Roger & Co in delayed Valentine's Day triumph over Sanco

Having followed my own advice in my last match report about keeping partners happy on this day I was in a good mood as I swung my lovemobile into the Farnborough car park and looking forward to a good game against worthy opponents who had beaten us 2-1 at their ground in Dulwich Village on a very sunny 27th September.

I knew we had a late kick off – after all I had seen many *billets-doux* about it during the week, but I was not prepared for the large number of cars in the club car park – which looked busier than the repairs Department of a Toyota dealership. I ended up driving over unfamiliar ground as I manoeuvred out to park the car in the main road in Farnborough village. That is when I noticed I had picked up a flat tyre. This punctured my mood a bit but I had to smile at my team mates' attempts at wit with references to tyregate, spare tyres etc.

We also had two rounds of applause for Vic Farrow – fishing for Valentine's Day sweet nothings – as he reminded us of all the hard work he had done, to make our game possible, how he'd fixed it with the referee (this did not come out quite right) and allegedly brought forward our late kick off to 11:00. I think he made that last bit up because when we got to the top pitch, we had to wait 18 minutes for the youth team game to finish.

When the game started – nearer 11:30, we lined up with Steve Palmer in goal; Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Roger French and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Sinisa Gracanin, Colin Brazier and Paul Bell in midfield; Paul Smith and Toby Manchip up front. Rod Loe and Chris Bourlet were the subs. Those of you who follow our team line-ups closely will not fail to notice that this was the same defence as for the team that lost 2-1 to Sanco on 27 September. Indeed 10 of our 13 players today played in that game. But two who did not were Ian Shoebridge and Toby Manchip – and that was quite telling in the end even though this was a much better collective performance from us – against a team which, if anything were more impressive than when they beat us on their excellent pitch, but they may have found our pitch a bit of a leveller (especially as the youth team had churned it up a bit).

The first 15 minutes belonged to Sanco – playing crisp one touch football, with crafty forwards very comfortable playing with their back to goal. They passed the ball a lot, moved well off it, but apart from a couple of corners were finding it hard to penetrate the Farnborough box. They did though score a very good goal after a quarter of an hour or so - as they got behind us with a couple of clever moves capped with a cut-back and very good close-range finish to wrong foot Steve Palmer in the Farnborough goal.

We reacted very well –Toby Manchip came close with headers twice and we kept creating chances. Paul Smith, Paul Bell, Colin Braxier and Ian Shoebridge began to ask questions of the Sanco defence, which creaked but survived until half-time. The mood at half-time was that we would not finish *sans* goal against Sanco.

Rod Loe came on for Roger French and we continued to maintain a solid defensive platform and we began to dominate the game, as Ian Shoebridge and Sinisa Gracanin got on top in midfield and our forwards and wide players began to find gaps in the Sanco defence and we forced several corners.

Our equaliser, when it came, was well deserved – after 60 minutes, as Ian Shoebridge headed a Paul Smith cross chipped in from the edge of the box. Chris Bourlet came on for Paul Bell and maintained the solidity of our performance on the right. 10 minutes later Toby Manchip turned on a pin head with his back to goal, sent his marker the wrong way and the whole of the goal opened up in front of him as he swept the ball in from 6 yards. This turned out to be his best move of Valentine's Day – more on that later - even though he did express great affection for the management team of French & Mongelard, who, in his view, had finally got it right today – several months into the season.

Sanco were not out of it; they forced a couple of dangerous free-kicks on the edge of the box, and one or two corners and had an optimistic shout for a penalty turned down. We had yet to apply the icing on our Valentine's Day cake and this came as Colin Brazier teed up Ian Shoebridge for an exquisite curled left-foot shot from just inside the box that came off the inside of the post to give us 3-1 advantage. There was time for a final flourish from the hard-working, but today unrewarded Paul Smith, as his shot came off the crossbar with about 5 minutes left.

This was probably our best performance this season. The keeper and defence were assured. Colin Brazier had his best game for us – they say ex (es) can cause trouble on a day like today and he certainly did to Sanco. Sinisa was full of running and positional sense. Our two subs brought muscle and resilience when they came on. But today's roses, chocolates, champagne moments, kisses, red balloons, Vanessa Peroncel products etc. belonged to **Man-of-the-Match** Ian Shoebridge who ran 13.1 miles during the game (I just made that bit up but it felt like that).

The large crowd, including many mums, that was there to watch the youth team game which preceded ours should have stayed behind for the (heart-shaped) treats we served up. There have been very few games when we have returned to the dressing room in such a positive mood with goodwill and compliments flowing freely and justifiably. During the game we were full of encouragement, praise, compliments for each other. I'd like to think this was not just because it was February the 14th. Paul Smith passed the ball and even brought in the Farnborough and Sanco cups of tea after the game – perhaps because he made Mrs Smith breakfast today.

A possibly less happy breakfast – and I am only guessing here – was *chez* Manchip – as Helen revealed in the club house that Toby had not followed the advice which I gave in my last match report, – and there had been no chocolates that morning, and that having a goal dedicated to her – even a very good goal – was deflating.

It was Valentine's Day today but there was no Shirley at Farnborough to provide the sandwiches – so the much-applauded Vic Farrow had rustled something up, much of it wolfed down by the young Vets - allegedly, which meant I was glad to have some Valentine's Day chocolates to get home to – unlike some.

Before I could get home though – I had cause to be thankful for the affection of my team mates as Ian Coles (principally), Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier, Ian Shoebridge, a club traffic cone and at the end Chris Bourlet on hand to direct traffic if required, helped replace the punctured tyre on my car in the main road outside the club. Thanks again lads – I owe you a drink, not chocolates, some mead perhaps after our game against Tudor Sports next week.

7 March 2010: The Buff Vets (2-3)

Farnborough turkeys lose to Orpington Buff

After two weeks without a game, we were glad to be back playing – so much so that some of us played for the other team. But it was also a return to old failings as I will explain shortly.

We knew it had been dry but we were not quite prepared for the conditions – a cold wind which blew away whatever warmth came from the bright sun and the contrast between light and shade (about several degrees C) was plain to feel underfoot as we stepped out of the dressing room into the shadow of the building. We also had to contend with a difficult pitch which made for a rutted, hard and bobbly surface. I'd like to say it ruined our passing game but that would be stretching things a bit. But we could not help wondering - later - what could have been if we had switched the game to our unexpectedly free pitch back in Farnborough.

We turned up, from the designated car park and the other one used by Toby Manchip who also went to the wrong dressing room initially, with 14 players and were able to add to the Buff flock which only numbered nine. The usual eve of match and morning of the game changes meant that the management team had to bring in option 3 and even that did not quite cover everything.

We lined up with Gary Fentiman in goal; Steve Blanchard, Patrice Mongelard, Steve Palmer and Colin Brazier in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Sinisa Gracanin, Toby Manchip and Paul Bell in midfield; Paul Smith and Paul Tanton up front. Mick Ingram and Chris Bourlet were the subs. Roger French and Mark Perry played for the Buff – as did Mick Ingram in the second half.

The first-half was not as exciting as the second but it had its moments. I recall making my usual move to let the Buff left-sided midfielder know “early doors” that I was there only to find out that it was our Roger French. The danger posed by the Buff was clear and we had to be vigilant. They came close to scoring when a shot from Barry Grainger came back from the keeper and only a splendid sliding tackle by Patrice Mongelard stopped a certain goal as Barry shaped up to put the rebound into an empty net. Another glorious chance went begging for the Buff when Roger French materialised in our six-yard box to get to the end of a cut-back and put a close-range shot well over the bar. We will never know if, at the last moment, Roger remembered which team he plays for, or he dealt with the ball to the best of his ability with his right foot, or it was that personal bobble that follows some players. Our highlight in that first-half was an uncharacteristic miss by Paul Smith from 10 yards when he had a clear shot at goal. He also put a cross in for Paul Tanton who asked for it at the near post but had failed to say on which pitch.

The second half was livelier – 5 goals – with Farnborough taking the lead twice from Ian Shoebridge. His first owed much to a feathery clearance by the Buff keeper. His second came from a pass by Paul Smith. There was also a volley from Toby Manchip that would have been even better if on target but it was worth a mention.

The Buff had had a couple of corners in the first-half that troubled us – and these were a warning we failed to heed as we found to our cost. Soon after we scored our first goal, they had a header that crashed against the bar. And, inevitably, their two equalisers came off corners expertly delivered by Barry Grainger. In previous games I have had cause to refer to our “Easter Island Defence” at corners and there was a bit of that creeping back into our game today. The Buff winner also came from a static defence and felt harsh after we had wasted so many chances.

On the whole our forwards did not really play well today or maybe the Buff defence was just (too) tough old birds. Finishing was the difference between the two sides today. It is telling that both our goals came from a midfielder. Even Paul Tanton – so assured a goal scorer and a late addition to our squad following the cancellation of the young Vets home game - failed to deliver. That failure was no more apparent than when he missed a one-on-one and also inexplicably crossed to no one when clean through and only 6 yards from goal. By Paul's usual high standards this was a paltry performance from him.

Toby Manchip lost his way a little before the game and did not really regain it during the game, so much so that he took himself off in the second half, and said he deserved whatever would be written about him in the match report. Well – it is punishment enough that his local is the Buff, and they are not likely to want him to play for them after today, but I will note that, in an act of atonement, Toby led the way in purchasing a Farnborough badge – he should have bought one for everyone in the clubhouse.

Yes, we had come back to the clubhouse – for the food which Vic had kindly laid on and also, for some of us, to have a hot shower. We had forgotten how basic the Norman Park facilities were. I have seen bird baths that had more water than those showers and were cleaner. The warm radiator could not make up for that.

Much of the damage inflicted by the Buff today came from two of their players - Barry Grainger and another big bloke that won everything in the air and on the ground - both former Farnborough players I understand - a case of chickens coming to roost? Barry even came back to the club to share in the sandwiches that Vic had made – just as well there were no chicken ones.

Well, at least three of our players were on the winning side. This is our third game against the Buff this season, and my second one, and we have yet to beat them. It is a good thing there were no questions about the Orpington Buff in the Farnborough Football Club Quiz last night – otherwise I might not have won it.

Man-of-the-Match was Ian Shoebridge for two goals and for one of the few good things about our performance today, with Sinisa Gracanin not far behind in the pecking order.

14 March 2010: Welsh Tavern Super Vets (A, 4-2)

Farnborough Senior Vets please mums with win over Welsh Tavern

It was about 10 degrees C warmer than last Sunday as we set out in a 4-car convoy from Farnborough to somewhere just shy of the Dartford Bridge. It was a bit breezy but the sun was out and those of us who had looked after our mums, mums-in-law, mums of our kids, today and for the rest of the year, and were allowed to go out to play, were looking forward to a good game against a nice bunch of blokes we last played water polo against (almost).

We lined up with Steve Palmer in goal; Steve Blanchard, Nick Kinnear, Mark Perry and Rod Loe in defence; Patrice Mongelard, Colin Brazier, Sinisa Gracanin and Paul Bell in midfield; Paul Smith and Ian Shoebridge. Mick Ingram was our solitary sub today.

Toby Manchip had welched on his mates – after, allegedly, visiting too many taverns the night before to celebrate some other team's win. Thankfully, the tactical acumen of today's care-taker manager, Patrice Mongelard, in Roger French's absence, was up to the job of re-jigging the side into Option 4 – and in some ways that job was made easier with Manchip's absence.

It was apparent very quickly that this would be an open game with both sides looking to play a bit and in a good spirit. We had more possession – partly because the muscular and mobile presence of Sinisa Gracanin and Patrice Mongelard dominated the midfield. It looked like a matter of time before they would put one of our forwards and overlapping wide midfielders through.

It was a rare bit of skill from Welsh Tavern that gave them the lead, to our surprise, as their forward with the cultured left foot found the top corner from 20 yards – it may have looked like a toe poke but it was meant all right and found the spot. We rallied and Patrice Mongelard put Ian Shoebridge through to round the Welsh Tavern keeper after some confusion in their defence and bring us level. But once again Welsh Tavern surprised us as they cleverly exploited a rare gap on the right side of our defence and unerringly lobbed our keeper to restore their lead. We had dominated the game but two well executed pieces of technique had reminded us that possession counts for nothing without goals. We pressed harder and were able to end the half level at 2-2 after Paul Smith placed a low shot beyond the keeper's reach into the bottom corner of the net, after good approach play by Ian Shoebridge.

We feared the second half would be harder with the wind against us but we were able to pin Welsh Tavern back and then have many goes at breaking through. They were reduced to the occasional break but without penetrating our box. In fact, Steve Palmer's hardest save in that half was to stop an own goal from a Steve Blanchard header. Steve must have been just rehearsing because with about twenty minutes left, he got his head at the end of a cross from Paul Smith to give us a lead for the first time in the game. It looked like the Welsh Tavern keeper fumbled the ball, misjudging the flight of the ball in the breeze but it was no more than we deserved. Ten minutes later Paul Smith had a tap-in to make it 4-2, after Ian Shoebridge had done all the hard work and unselfishly squared the ball. And that was that – and we were left to walk back to the dressing rooms with quite a spring in our step.

This was a good all-round performance against a team that matched us in the first-half but faded in the second as we pressed for the win and had more running in our legs. At times we tried to walk the ball into the net but there was a lot of passing today and a good deal of space to pass into particularly down both flanks. This was one of the wider and truer pitches we have played on. The surface was firm but much better than last week. Mick Ingram came on at half-time for

Paul Bell, who himself returned for the last twenty minutes in place of Mark Perry. Mick played his part – and afterwards in the Welsh Tavern noticed some Farnborough badges on show – and wittily wondered whether he deserved a club badge for taking all that feedback from Patrice Mongelard for a misplaced pass.

Yes, we were playing a pub team today but certainly not in that sense of the word and they had some good technical players on show. After the game we re-assembled in the Welsh Tavern for a drink and some grub. Sadly, I thought the grub was a bit rare and left early, only to hear later that sausages, chips and samosas, were just waiting for me to leave before making their copious appearance, to Colin Brazier's delight.

I was pleased to get back to Farnborough with a handsome win and with the three new match balls that Vic entrusted me with. I could not help notice the deep quarry that was alongside the pitch – good thing it was not behind the pitch. I, for one, would have put several balls in that place today with my shooting, from inappropriate distances. As it turned out I only hit some sort of poultry house behind the goal – surely that should have been in last week's match report. But we had left behind a leaky bucket and the new magic water sprayer (not sure why we had both).

Man-of-the-Match was Rod Loe, in spite of some dribbling in inappropriate areas as I reminded him, for a solid and quietly effective display over the full 90 minutes – and he took the kit home, and on Mother's Day too.

21 March 2010: Staplehurst & Monarchs Vets (H, 3-4)

Senior Vets lose to artful dodgers from Staplehurst

Not many people know this but Staplehurst was the centre of police enquiries in 2006 in connection with the Securitas Depot robbery, and Charles Dickens was a passenger on the train that crashed in Staplehurst in 1865. And today in 2010, on the first day of spring, we had not quite daylight robbery but Farnborough pockets got picked today – and we asked for it – as we left the gold watch on show, the keys in the ignition and the back door open.

We felt this would be quite a useful side as they all filed in impressively in their red tops. Their organisation, discipline and resilience gave them a win that we thought was harsh on us, given the amount of possession we had and the chances we created. We had a 10-to-15-minute senior moment in the second half that we never quite recovered from as time ran out.

Our line-up showed some changes from last week: Paul Commons appeared in goal; for the first time (for Farnborough and for many years); Steve Blanchard, Nick Kinnear, Patrice Mongelard and Toby Manchip were in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Shoebridge, Mark Perry and Paul Bell in midfield; Paul Smith and Andy Faulks up front. We had four subs – of which three came on – Roger French, Rod Loe, Colin Ebdon, and Mick Ingram.

The early exchanges left us in no doubt that this was a very useful team, that could play a bit and it took us a good ten to fifteen minutes to assert ourselves. We steadily began to ask more questions of the organised and packed Staplehurst defence. We passed the ball well and got behind them several times and forced a few corners. Their keeper stood out with two or three very good saves from Mark Perry and Andy Faulks in particular. Andy drove a pile driver into the heart of the Staplehurst defence which whoever stopped it did well to stay upright (like a staple - the old saxon word for post) but will hurt in the morning.

It was no surprise when we took the lead – what was surprising was the scorer. From our third or fourth corner Ian Shoebridge flicked on a header which Toby Manchip nodded in with precision at the far post. Toby had been moaning about not being able to get up unlike the other full-back Patrice Mongelard and on virtually his second foray in the box found himself in the right place at the right time. This was vindication of the management team's refusal to accede to Manchip's exorbitant secret demands during the week, made in return for going in goal: club captain for life, penalty taker for the next ten seasons, freedom of Farnborough, free beer for every month with an "r" in it. This was not the only good decision by the management about Toby today as we will find out later.

Just when we were looking forward to a second goal – Staplehurst nicked an equaliser as we failed twice to deal with successive corners. They had reminded us a couple of times of the danger that they posed. They had two artful forwards that needed a bit of watching as we were to find out to our cost in the second half.

After reading runes, playing snakes and ladders, frustration and fiddling with an abacus – according to Manchip – the management team of French & Mongelard made changes for the second half as Colin Ebdon and Mick Ingram came on for Mark Perry and Paul Bell. I would like to say that these half-time changes knocked us back a bit as we lost shape and rhythm, but that would not quite explain how we took a 2-1 lead after 10 minutes or so. Patrice Mongelard did what we often fail to do and that was to get into the box to follow up on a shot by Paul Smith anticipating the keeper would not gather it. The ball was parried to the edge of the six-yard box

from whence Patrice crossed it back and this led to a fantastic volley from the edge of the box, by Andy Faulks as he adjusted his crab-like stance to blast the ball into the net.

What followed was Dickensian in its horror as Staplehurst got three quick goals in about 12 minutes – first we were overrun on our left and the ball was nodded into our goal at close-range from a seemingly innocuous cross; this was followed by a missed opportunity to gather the ball in a one-on-one which left the Staplehurst forward with an empty net to steer the ball into. Worse was to come in the form of an own goal as Nick Kinnear stretched a leg to cut out a cross and directed the ball into his own net.

We reacted – much to our credit, and put the Staplehurst goal under even more pressure. Patrice Mongelard had a glancing header saved on the line and then put the rebound over the bar from a yard out. Colin Ebdon eventually started to get the ball into the box and we started to get back into the game. Roger French came on for Nick Kinnear and immediately proved the wisdom of Staplehurst players wearing shin pads (they had had the good sense to borrow a pair from Farnborough before the game) – but before you get the wrong impression this game was played in excellent spirit throughout. Patrice Mongelard dropped back into the centre of defence and was on hand to put in saving tackle to stop Staplehurst getting a fifth. Toby Manchip was moved to right midfield and from there proceeded to register his second goal, our third, with a belter from 20 yards following a pass from Paul Smith. There was a hint of a deflection but this was an impressive strike – which Toby hopes may have been spotted by a Cudham talent scout in the bushes. In the end we ran out of time – though not before a tantalising moment when referee Mick Gearing put his whistle to his mouth when a Staplehurst arm connected with the ball in the box with about two minutes to go but Mick was up to his old tantric trick again and did not blow.

Man-of-the-Match was Toby Manchip, honestly, for two excellent goals, and for proving the management right to play him where we did, and for pinning the Farnborough badge on Oliver Manchip – probably the youngest person ever to wear the Farnborough badge who was able to look across the room at Vic Farrow - probably the oldest person to wear the Farnborough badge. I make it there were about 75 years between them. In spite of our defeat today we had not dishonoured the badge.

Deserving of mention also are Shirley for the usual excellent fare which we hope Staplehurst can match for the return fixture in a few weeks time and Rod Loe who opted to not come on at half-time but put the flags out, hoovered the club house, ran the line and helped with the goal posts.

28 March 2010: Orpington Vets (H, 2-6)

Derby day defeat for Farnborough Senior Vets against Orpington

The score flattered Orpington but this game was over by half-time and those who see half-full glasses will say we drew the second half – those who see half-empty glasses will say that if this had been a boxing match it would have been stopped when Orpington went 5-0 up.

At half-time, I could only think of words like dismal, dire, dreadful. After the game as we sat in the clubhouse and put our beer goggles on, the 3-Ds softened to disappointment, disillusion and (possibly) delusion.

Compared with our recent performances we went back today as the clocks went forward. Yes, we were missing some players – like our two goal scorers from last week, and several Orpington players, particularly the goalkeeper, looked younger than we remembered from the last time we played them in September. As the clock keeps ticking it seems it is not just policemen that get younger.

Once again, our line-up showed some changes from last week: Gary Fentiman in goal; Steve Blanchard, Nick Kinnear, Roger French and Mick Ingram in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Patrice Mongelard, Colin Brazier and Paul Bell in midfield; Paul Smith and Mark Perry up front. Chris Ponulak was to be our one sub – and arrived from church midway through the first-half; and resisted the temptation to go home as the first-half unfolded, or to go into the tent that served as a dug-out for Isabelle French and stay there. It looked like those tents in Himalayan base camps. We certainly had a mountain to climb at 4-0 down at half-time.

How did we get ourselves into such a mess? The first fifteen minutes were goalless but the warning signs were ominous: we lacked penetration, there was no forward drive, the midfield was overrun, the defence tentative – the passing was on the wrong side of abysmal. Pundits talk of hunger, desire, commitment – we had none of it.

One or two apologists for our performance pointed to the blurring effect of grey shirts and navy-blue shorts playing against black and white stripes with black shorts. This interesting theory does not explain why only Farnborough players had problems with this optical juxtaposition.

The Orpington goals came in quick succession as did the errors from us that led to them: after 15 minutes one of the two lively Orpington forwards, initially with his back to goal was able in rather confined space to spin and squeeze the ball past the keeper at close-range. Five minutes later, our soft centre was exposed as Orpington came through the middle to register a second. We threatened briefly as Patrice Mongelard burst through from midfield and the rather youthful Orpington keeper was able to come off his line and parry the shot at the edge of the box. The rebound fell to Paul Bell, with an empty net and a horizontal and stranded keeper. Paul claimed that he tried to pick out Paul Smith at the far post. But we all know it was his pathological fear of scoring against a team in black and white stripes that got the better of him. There was to be clearer evidence of this in the second half. Moments later Paul Smith crafted a clever lob from the edge of the box that would have had the beating of most Vets keepers, but not the lad in the Orpington goal. Orpington were to add two more goals in the first half: the third from what looked suspiciously like an attempted cross; and the fourth from our customary failure to clear corners.

It could have been worse – we were spared a penalty against us when the honest Orpington forward involved declared that Roger French had tackled him fairly from behind in the six-yard

box when he was clean through on goal. In my view he deserves not just the fair play award but the Nobel peace prize - Roger has form I am afraid with this kind of thing, as he was to show in the next half with two similar tackles as a forward, one of which took players from both teams out.

At half-time Chris Ponulak came on to bring some much-needed midfield craft and composure to our game. We did have a better second half even if it did not start too well with a long-range shot adding to the Orpington lead early on. Slowly we began to come back in the game and deservedly scored twice with well-executed shots by Paul Smith after lay-offs from Mark Perry. We missed a couple of other good chances when Chris Ponulak put a close-range shot over the bar from a corner; and an unchallenged Paul Bell contrived to put a pin-point cross from Patrice Mongelard anywhere but on target from the penalty spot. Old failings returned in the last minute as Patrice Mongelard and Roger French failed to clear a cross and the honest Orpington forward got his reward with a close-range shot that was parried onto the underside of the bar and over the line by our keeper.

Man-of-the-Match was Mark Perry for his part in our two goals, and for steady improvement from game to game. Votes were generously sprinkled through the team. I cannot confirm whether an under-age vote was cast by Mademoiselle French but papa was pleased with his tally.

Also deserving a mention: Shirley for the impressive spread and the table linen that came out for the 4 Vets teams at Farnborough today; our two refs Rod Loe and Mick Gearing – well, Mick had been down to do our game but was asked late in the day to cover the young Vets cup game and Rod Loe stepped in, after he'd hoovered the club house (again). The two Vets games yielded 15 goals between them, but were played in very good spirit despite the Farnborough Vets teams letting in 4 times as many goals as they scored.

11 April 2010: Old Albany Park Vets (3-8)

Stroll for Albany Park as hospitable Farnborough Senior Vets slump to heavy defeat

Football is a game of two halves they say. Well not in this shorter than usual match report for, having been urged to accentuate the positive as I left the clubhouse in a pensive and morose mood, I have decided to airbrush the first half out of Farnborough history and leave no record of it for future generations to laugh at our expense. At 5-0 down at half-time, I confess the ineptitude of our performance would probably have defied description anyway.

For the statisticians among us Farnborough lined up with Steve Palmer in goal; Steve Blanchard, Nick Kinear, Rod Loe and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb, Mark Perry and newcomer Ian McCaw in midfield; Paul Smith and Andy Faulks in front. Roger French ran the line in the first-half – getting fierouser by the minute, and Mick Ingram turned up as our second sub midway through that half. Both Roger and Mick came on at half-time and could, I suppose, claim that they were undefeated today.

Interestingly, seven of our thirteen played in the 3-3 draw against Albany Park on 4 October and we were leading 3-1 with ten minutes to go in that game. So, we were probably not expecting the very different Albany Park proposition we got today – I would venture a guess that they had probably no more than 3 players from that October game.

So, when the second half kicked off with two new full-backs in Roger and Mick having come on – we were dreading the worst and could not bring ourselves to utter the often-heard words “It’s only 0-0” – after all it could have been 8 or 9 nil to Albany Park if they had taken all the chances that fell to them in that half. Dark humour and bright sunshine do not really mix I find. Suddenly though we found that we were holding our own and began to string some passes together and start to deny Albany Park room. They had complained before the game that their dressing room was on the bijou side but I heard no complaint about the amount of room we gave them in the first-half all over the pitch and particularly in our six-yard box.

To cut a long story short - we drew the second half, as we, like Albany Park, scored three goals. And what goals we scored: there was a superb brace from Paul Smith with two wonderfully-executed and well-placed powerful shots from distance. Sinisa Gracanin got our third when he burst through midfield after a couple of one-tuos, and got his reward for what was at times a very frustrating and lonely battle against an Albany Park midfield quarter that was the best we have faced this season for finesse, skill, hunger, balance, running and shooting power. And their two forwards could play a bit too.

Ian McCaw came close to adding a fourth for us with a clever lob that nearly beat the not very tall (and not very busy) Albany Park keeper. Surely, Ian went home wondering what sort of outfit he had just joined. Andy Faulks had a quiet game today up front, not a patch on his recent performances, but I am sure he will regain his effectiveness soon. We even had a bit of luck in that second half as an angled clearance was placed on the bar by Mick Ingram and Steve Blanchard played a one-two with the post before clearing the ball.

Man-of-the-Match were Steve Palmer for keeping the Albany Park score to single figures with some fantastic point-blank saves that deserved much better, and Paul Smith for giving us some pride back with two great strikes.

Roger French would have had two Man-of-the-Match votes if Isabelle and Thomas French had turned up today to watch Papa but as Roger would no doubt agree as a responsible parent some things are best not seen by those below the age of consent – like our first-half performance.

Albany Park did not stay for drinks and sandwiches – having reasoned perhaps that we had exhausted our hospitality on the pitch today. Pity - as Shirley laid on her usual impressive spread (with extra finely-sliced white onions). Mick Gearing did his usual sterling job with the whistle, in what must have been a painful experience for the old Farnborough campaigner – I think he took pity on me by not awarding what seemed like a good penalty to Albany Park in the first-half, for once I was happy with his tantric refereeing.

Thanks are due also to our groundsman, Keith Beston, who was glimpsed pitch-side, and will have no doubt noted how well the pitch played today (with a hint that the time had come to switch to mouldeds – doing so when the clocks go forward seems like a good rule of thumb I find). I must admit though that at half-time it crossed my mind that a waterlogged pitch today might not have been a bad thing after all, but that heretical thought quickly drained away as a game is better than no game no matter what the score.

After the 6-2 drubbing by Orpington on 28 March, and today's mauling a worrying pattern seems to be developing, whereby we start playing only at half-time and several goals in arrears, so it will be very welcome if we can reverse this next week.

18 April 2010: Cudham Vets (A, 1-2)

Senior Vets restore their spirits with glorious defeat to Cudham

Late on Friday we had the unwelcome news that our scheduled opponents for today at home had pulled out and we were left with an unexpected, and rather daunting fixture away against Cudham Vets. There is a bit of history between Farnborough and Cudham you see. We have suffered some heavy defeats against them in the recent past – and what with our current form, we thought we would do well to keep the score to single figures.

We had a number of “Cudham virgins” in our line-up and like lambs, they must have wondered if there was a better way of spending such a splendid spring morning, than waiting for the chop. Farnborough lined up with Steve Palmer in goal; Nick Kinnear, Rod Loe, Patrice Mongelard and Ian Coles in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb, Mark Perry and Ian McCaw in midfield; Toby Manchip and Andy Faulks in front. Roger French, Mick Ingram and Chris Bourlet were the subs – and all came on at half-time.

We had taken the precaution of grabbing a spare kit from the club house – as we rightly surmised that Andy Faulks might be late arriving to his local ground. Friends spoke of a very late Saturday night spent searching for a bird with a play station, and a relaxed attitude to funny business (and I do not mean washing the Farnborough kit as his mum did that, and folded things up very nicely).

The pitch was a pleasant surprise, the lush grass taking away the hardness that can cause blisters at this time of year. Cudham were not a surprise – keeping to their tradition of hard, robust, muscular, direct football, playing to their aerial strengths and physical presence all over the pitch. Perhaps to our surprise and a little bit of luck, we weathered the first 15 minutes or so and then had the temerity to score first. Toby Manchip – a handful for Cudham throughout the game – played a delicate through ball that bisected the defence and put Andy Faulks through to beat the keeper. From where I was, I have to admit there was more than a hint of off-side, but as we were to find out later when the referee gives a goal, it stays given.

Oh, why did you have to go and do this - as one would say to a boy poking a wasps' nest. The Cudham riposte was swift and typical - with the nippy forward setting up a bullet header from six yards for Cudham to equalise. We braced ourselves for more Cudham goals and they had more chances but we held out until half-time, and caused problems of our own – with Patrice Mongelard hitting 60-70-yard goal-kicks down the flanks that Toby Manchip and Andy Faulks were willing to get to the end of. We had as many corners as they did in that half and when it ended our mood was very good (relieved like that little boy that the wasps had not stung him).

The second half was as tough as the first one, if not tougher. Cudham had more chances than we did but they also missed more than we did. 10 minutes or so into the half Cudham were awarded a penalty which came from a shoulder-to-shoulder encounter in the box between Patrice Mongelard and the nippy Cudham forward who went down like a sack of maris pipers. More Cudham misses were to follow – a notable one when their player put the ball over an empty net from 10 yards. Deep Cudham crosses into the box continued and it seemed like a matter of time before we would let one in – but we held firm. There were a few hairy moments down the flank where Rod Loe was running the line, but as the referee's watch ticked, we scented a memorable draw. We even had a couple of chances from free-kicks and a through ball that saw a good low shot from Andy Faulks flash past the post.

Then with less than five minutes to go, something happened which I suppose adds to the history of matches between our two sides. Our keeper Steve Palmer raced off his line to clear a long ball, came into contact with the Cudham forward who went to ground on the edge of the box – a little theatrically perhaps. Having put the ball into touch I was expecting a throw in to Cudham but it appears the referee, who looked young and inexperienced and who until then had had a blemish-free game (I even forgave him the penalty award), inexplicably gave a free-kick to Cudham. Some say that Rod Loe had flagged for the free-kick. Others that the referee was persuaded by the impression made by the Cudham forward showing a bit of bruised thigh.

Anyway, the free-kick was taken, the Cudham forward who had earned it sauntered into the box and made his contribution to the goal that followed. I cannot be sure if it was his hand that controlled the ball for one of his team mates to blast it into the net from 3 yards out after Steve Palmer had made a fantastic point blank save. In spite of vigorous protests, the referee stood by his decision, having given the goal. The red mist descended upon Roger French who soon after vaporised from our left-back position into the Cudham box on the right and came into contact with arguably the one Cudham player whose pint you would not want to spill – he had exchanged pleasantries with at least two of our players and in one case looked like he wanted to shake them warmly by the throat. The game ended with Roger still horizontal – and he was sportingly attended to and helped up by one Cudham player who had himself twice taken Manchip roughly from behind.

The game ended on a sour note as words were said about not playing that lot again – the rather primitive changing rooms did not help, even though to their credit one or two of their players were making conciliatory noises (unlike one or two of their fans).

The philosophical question I was left to ponder back in the Farnborough clubhouse where we had all repaired to lick our wounds (partly because the Cudham club house was out of bounds) was this one – would a Farnborough player have owned up to the hand-ball and invited the referee to re-consider, if the situation had been reversed? After all, Thierry Henry did not against the Irish, and I suppose to the Cudham player in question - today's game was as important as that one in Paris. I suppose the Farnborough answer is probably yes, but against another club.

Man-of-the-Match today were Toby Manchip and Chris Webb: Toby for a spirited performance, one not without punishment, which probably ended his fancy about a transfer to Cudham (with young Toby Manchip thrown in as a Buy-One-Get-One free offer that might appeal to someone like Harry Redknapp); and (as a happy Spurs fan) for lifting the mood of the team even before the game had started – Chris for a combative and energetic performance that matched the physicality of the Cudham play as he supported both attack and defence in good measure.

In fact, there was a double figure score for a Farnborough Vets team today – as the Young Vets put 11 past Avery Hill without reply. Still, maybe the young Vets will have their glorious moment for this season – against Cudham Vets next week. For us, we are to have a fourth attempt to knock the Buff off their perch.

25 April 2010: The Buff Vets (H, 2-3)

Senior Vets continue long run of failure against the Buff with defeat

We will not be sending runners ahead with news of a great victory for Farnborough today. In fact, we had something of a Greek farce at times, particularly in the first half. On a day when we could draw on our young Vets whose game against Cudham Vets was not taking place – we managed (a verb Toby Manchip would dispute with the management) to start this home game with 10 players (and no linesman) and by the time we had 11, the race had been run, so to speak.

Farnborough lined up with Gary Fentiman in goal; Nick Kinnear, Rod Loe, Steve Blanchard and Ian Coles in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb, Patrice Mongelard and Toby Manchip in midfield; Peter Harvey up front on his own. Ian McCaw, Mick Ingram and George Kleanthous joined the race later. Andy Faulks never started – a runner brought news at half-time that he was stuck in Brighton, I think he meant the place on the south coast.

It dawned on us in a flash that this Buff side was built for sprinting rather than long distance running – with 3 or 4 very quick players, who were blessed with very youthful looks, as well as pace. The ancient Buff Manager assured us they were Vets – by some peculiar Greek calendar perhaps, or there must be something in the beer at the Buff (though it does not seem to have had the same rejuvenating effect on Toby Manchip – not yet anyway). This said, in fairness we had two good young Vets of our own, in Peter Harvey and, for the second half only, George Kleanthous.

The game was barely ten minutes old when the Buff took the lead, as we were overrun on the right of our defence, and Gary Fentiman was beaten at close-range by quick feet and thinking from the Buff. We feared worse as the Buff had the bulk of the possession and pressure (with the wind to assist their sprinters) and we failed to string passes together to get out of our half. Our full backs were always in danger of being left behind and the Buff running from midfield and the movement of their players gave them a fairly comfortable first half. Ian McCaw had joined us midway into the first-half but it was as if we played the rest of that half thinking we had only ten players on the pitch. Greek farce almost turned to Greek tragedy as Toby Manchip tackled one of his own players, Peter Harvey, in the centre circle in a 50-50 (though really it should be called a 100-0 perhaps) that left Peter nursing an ankle that was already sore from the attentions of the rugged Buff defence.

The Buff keeper was barely tested in that first-half – one memorable moment came from a shot from Toby Manchip from the edge of the box which went close, as it fizzed low past the post – but it was not until the second half that we were to find out just how good the Buff keeper was. Still, it was only 1-0 at half-time – partly due to some excellent saves from Gary Fentiman and some wayward finishing from the Buff who searched hard for a second goal, ably prompted by Barry Grainger. Rod Loe and Nick Kinnear made way for George Kleanthous and Mick Ingram.

It is fair to say that we gave the Buff a harder time in that half, with the wind behind us, and their keeper was called to make some very good saves from Peter Harvey, George Kleanthous, Ian McCaw and Toby Manchip and we forced several corners. Inevitably, the abundance of pace in the Buff side was put to use as a through ball lofted over our defence doing its impression of Greek statues saw not one but two Buff roadrunners clean through to lob Gary Fentiman.

In spite of this we kept going forward and managed to get a goal back from Peter Harvey's sweetly-struck left foot curler into the far corner from an edge of the box throw-in. As often happens, the team chasing a goal was then caught out as another of the Buff spring chickens

burst through the centre to latch on to a clever through ball from Barry Grainger, and coolly finish past Gary Fentiman. There was time for Farnborough to get a second, from an even better strike from Peter Harvey into the top corner this time. We finished the half strongly but ran out of time in the end. We will run out against the Buff again in one of the mid-week games next month – after we have all voted, even the Buff lads, and then maybe we will have news of a great victory to convey.

Man-of-the-Match today was Gary Fentiman in goal – with the Buff keeper a close second.

A few clubhouse titbits to report: Ian Shoebridge was spotted by some amongst the marathon runners bearing news of another Farnborough defeat. Vic Farrow was sporting a medal awarded to him on 20 April by the mayor of Bromley for services to the community. If you ask me – he deserves a medal just for putting up with some of the tripe we have served up in some of our games and listening to us talk it all up afterwards as we tuck into Shirley's grub (excellent again today) and wash it all down (though, sadly perhaps, not from a barrel from the Buff).

Toby Manchip changed young Oliver Manchip's nappy – a rather fuller load than usual I hear, reflecting our first half. Roger French had two Man-of-the-Match votes – a well-formed number 1 from a well-taught demoiselle, and another less assured digit from an even younger hand. Lastly, I can confirm that young Oliver Manchip has not yet been signed up by the Buff Manager (like his father who has not yet been guillotined by Roger French, contrary to Toby's fantasies, fuelled by nectar from the Buff barrels).

29 April 2010: Sanco Combined Vets (H, 0-1)

Farnborough Young and Senior Vets sans goal against Sanco Vets

This is all a bit new – my first midweek game Vets match report – but not my first Farnborough Vets midweek game, but somehow the sad sight of the ambulance on the pitch last Thursday induced a severe case of writer's block. This week – although we lost – I feel the whole, more positive, experience deserves recording.

Apart from the novelty of a second consecutive mid-week Vets game we were also experimenting with the side we put out – a mixture of young and older Vets; and it showed – against a Sanco side that has had years of practice at this kind of thing. At times all the Farnborough players had in common was the kit, and even that was a bit of a mixed bag.

Farnborough lined up with Gary Fentiman* in goal; Patrice Mongelard*, Tony Simpson, Ian Coles* and Colin Brazier* in defence; Matt Wright, George Kleanthous, Robin Lipscomb and Toby Manchip* in midfield; Peter Harvey and Andy Faulks* up front. Rod Loe*, Chris Ponulak* and Peter Storkey* were the subs. [* older Vets asterisked].

Sanco too had mixed their Vets up – but it was clear very quickly that they had a smoother blend (sorry that's kenco but you know what I mean) - more composure, more collective play, more patience and care of the ball, knew each other's names, nobody out of position, fewer stray passes - that sort of thing. We hung on and whilst we were not really penetrating their box, and our final killer ball was not hitting the spot - it would have looked like an even, well-contested game to a neutral observer, with Sanco showing a tad more menace.

I do not recall the Sanco keeper having much to do in that first-half – Gary Fentiman was the busier keeper – and was the one who had to pick the ball out of his net after a very good cross from the right eluded him, and was met by an equally good header into the top corner to give Sanco a deserved lead – twenty-five minutes or so into the game. After that Sanco controlled the game without looking like they could score a second. We continued to huff and puff, and made substitutions without coming close to get an equaliser. Our forwards were well-policed and starved of service, our midfield was finding it hard to get hold of the ball and keep it.

When the second half started Sanco enjoyed even more possession and had quite a bit of joy down their left where their quickest player was operating. It is fair to say they could have scored one or two more goals in that half but for last ditch tackles and resolute defending from Ian Coles, Tony Simpson, Patrice Mongelard and general alertness from Gary Fentiman. We tried harder too, with George Kleanthous and Peter Harvey putting more pressure on the Sanco defence that held firm – and we never really tested the Sanco keeper – bar some tame long-range shots.

At times Farnborough tempers shortened with each other, tantric Mick (the ref) and Sanco players, but at no time was there any danger of things getting out of hand. It was just not that kind of game, and certainly that kind of team, or fan, involved, on both sides.

The good spirit among both teams was carried over to the Change of Horses where we gathered for a beer or two. I even saw a Sanco Chelsea fan and a Farnborough West Ham fan (George Kleanthous) getting on well – and a Farnborough Spurs fan (Colin Brazier) exchanging pleasantries with a Sanco Gooner. The Liverpool game was on – even if it provided the one discordant note of the evening for me.

The time in the pub reminded me that football has a social side that is often forgotten amid the Sunday morning hurly-burly. And – having watched the Barcelona v Inter Milan game the previous evening when I saw science triumph over art, our own modest game reminded me that football was more than science or art.

For me it also meant a dirty kit to take home (again). I am not sure how, but that's two out of two for me with the kit for the two Thursday evening Vets games we have played. Still as Roger French told me – it means that I am now, with four kit washes for the season, the front runner for the Dot Cotton award at the end of the season.

We were not able to use the club house this week – a more genteel and serious-looking crowd had occupied it - there was not the usual après-match housekeeping, Toby Manchip wit, and no Man-of-the-Match votes were recorded. This said – football won today and there was a clear sense that these mid-week games are a good idea – and should continue, especially against opponents like we had today. There was a generally more relaxed mood among the players, and the management (even Vic Farrow seemed mellow) and it was good to catch up with old friends – after all we had only one Vets team last year.

2 May 2010: Staplehurst & Monarchs Vets (A, 2-2)

Staplehurst & Monarchs Vets nick last-gasp equaliser against generous Farnborough

Although we have played Staplehurst & Monarchs Vets only once before we should have realised that history has a way of repeating itself, as once again they would have been happier with the result than we were, and the manner of it.

The Jubilee Sports Ground in Headcorn Road in Staplehurst is I think the furthest we have travelled this season. It felt like we travelled back in time too as the temperature peaked at 6 degrees centigrade (that is fourteen degrees lower than in Orpington the day before), and the rain was biblical for hours. Still, it made for a pitch that could take a stud and the lush grass provided us with a true and very good playing surface that suited a passing game, albeit on a greasy surface. The facilities too were excellent – with spacious dressing rooms, modern showers and two spotless toilets (well until Toby Manchip rendered one of them temporarily unsafe).

The squad was a bit depleted this week but we managed to get 13 players to make this trip: Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Nick Kinnear, Steve Blanchard and Mick Ingram in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb, Colin Brazier and Mark Perry in midfield; Toby Manchip and Gary Magnus up front. Tom Osbourne and Rod Loe were the subs.

We proceeded to have one of the most enjoyable games we have had this season in spite of the rain, played in excellent spirit and refereed fairly, and with a smile. Even our opponents would agree that we had the better of the first half-hour or so – with many fluent passing moves, though Staplehurst & Monarchs were not without danger. In fact, Gary had to pull off a great save low to his left, to divert a goal bound header past the post before we took the lead. And what a goal it was: I counted a string of six passes before Chris Webb lofted the ball (a bit like a golf shot) to the far post where Toby Manchip timed his run to perfection to nod the ball past the keeper. This was no more than we deserved. Gary up front was Magnus the magnificent – with clever runs, close control and always available.

But then we gave the first of our two gifts to Staplehurst & Monarchs today as from a corner, Mick Ingram crafted an own goal for them. From what I remember he was on his own at the far post, under no pressure from the opposition, with a clear view of the ball which he went to clear but instead managed to slice off the side of his good foot and impart backspin to and cause to trickle over the line behind him. To be fair Staplehurst & Monarchs had the last 15 minutes of that half as they put pressure down our left mainly.

Tom Osbourne and Rod Loe came on at half-time for Mark Perry and Mick Ingram and we continued the game in the same vein – with our opponents playing on the break. We forced several corners and came close to scoring more than once. Gary Magnus had a shot that came off the cross bar. Toby Manchip attempted a lamentable Berbatov-style bicycle kick that came out as quadbike kick as the ball went for a throw-in. But more Spurs-inspired technique came later as Colin Brazier headed the ball (a bit like Alan Gilzean he thought but with more hair) into Toby Manchip's path, to give us a 2-1 lead with about 15 minutes to go.

We held that lead until 44 minutes and 47 seconds of that second half. I see it now in my mind's eye, in slow motion. Staplehurst & Monarchs had fired their last bolt (so we thought) – gathered safely by Gary Fentiman diving forward. But as he fell to the ground the ball squirmed out of his cold and wet grasp and frantic attempts to claw it back only succeeded in putting the ball in the path of the one lucky Staplehurst & Monarchs forward who had gambled correctly. He was

surrounded by two Farnborough defenders who had switched off and were looking in the other direction in anticipation of a goal-kick. This was very harsh on Gary who until then had coped with everything that Staplehurst & Monarchs had thrown at him, in the air, on the ground, from close and from distance. 2-2 and with just enough time to take the ball back to the centre circle and it was all over. Farnborough pockets picked again by artful dodgers from Staplehurst – for those of you who remember the first match we played against them.

After the game eleven of us made our way to the Kings Head at the top of the hill in Staplehurst High Street. The monarch on the pub sign looked like Henry VIII – ironic I thought that he kept his head, while several of his wives did not – and in a way we too failed to keep our head and close the game out today.

Man-of-the-Match was Toby Manchip who feels that at last in May he has sent the management a strong and clear message about his best playing position. I cannot confirm this but I think I heard it said that Toby had been up all night putting up Vote Manchip signs in the Staplehurst area. I thought the signs said Vote Helen Grant but I may be wrong. Still, I do not see the good Staplehurst folk voting for Manchip seeing he has scored four times against them in two games. They could, I dare say, vote for a Mick Ingram-Gary Fentiman dream ticket though.

For the second time in a few days, I found myself in a pub after a game of Vets football for Farnborough, with friendly and sociable opposition, and Liverpool on the box (same result I fear). And, at the risk of miffing our Shirley, I should say Staplehurst & Monarchs' hospitality more than matched our own as a steaming vat of turkey curry, parsley-flecked rice and chunky chips appeared. Whilst I was in the wrong position to stop the Staplehurst equalisers, I was in the right place to do justice to the curry. As I tucked into my third helping – one of the Staplehurst & Monarchs management team asked how many players called Pat were on the pitch for Farnborough as he heard that name often during the game. All the Pats tucked into the curry – after all Roger French, Mark Perry and Mick Ingram said I could have their share. As I made my way home in the rain, I could not help look forward to playing this team again next season – no matter what the weather.

9 May 2010: Farnborough Young Vets (H, 0-5)

Farnborough Vets all winners as youth prevails over experience in win for Young Vets against Senior Vets

This could have been a meaningless game between two injury-ravaged sides, after a long season, with nothing to play for, but instead it turned out to be quite a good game as both Farnborough Vets sides managed to muster 23 players for an end-of-season curtain call.

Rumours of a coalition between the two Vets sides to mix and match their players to make for an even game were just that – although one older vet Steve Viner did cross the floor, to allow both teams to start with eleven players. When we started, we were still expecting Chris Bourlet to arrive on the scene for the older Vets – which he did midway through the first-half. Andy Faulks was expected but there was a ring at some point to say he was otherwise engaged.

Mark Edwards – a trainee referee, got the game going in overcast but not unpleasant conditions. The pitch was on the firm side but could take a stud with a bit of vaseline. The older Vets line-up consisted of Steve Palmer in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier and Rod Loe in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb, Mark Perry and Paul Storkey in midfield; Gary Magnus and Toby Manchip were the front pairing.

I could name the young Vets side but I shall leave that to their own scribe, Gary Roslee, who might well be tempted to give his varnished account of the game, for reasons which will become obvious shortly.

I do not think anybody would disagree with the view that the first twenty minutes or so were quite even. Of course, there was more menace, energy and movement amongst the young ones but the old ones just about coped. And yes, Steve Palmer was the busier keeper – in fact I do not recall Gary Roslee making a single save in that first-half– different matter in the second half though.

The first goal was a bit scrappy. The ball had come in from the young Vets left wing where Neil Connelly was being quite effective (against a defender old enough to be the father of an older vet). Paul Storkey was less effective in clearing it, and the ball found its way to foxy George Kleanthous in the six-yard box who scuffed his shot and got the ball to scuttle past Steve Palmer. It may have been the manner of the goal, or the discomfort of scoring against Farnborough but George's celebration was muted. A second goal followed soon after but not before Steve Palmer pulled off an outstanding point-blank save to keep Neil Connelly out. But Neil was not to be denied, as he latched on to a clever diagonal through pass from Peter Harvey to cross the ball, rather delicately, into the net over Steve head.

Our chances of getting back into the game suffered a massive blow when Toby Manchip pulled a muscle (not a mussel at the sea food disco as he pointed out later), chasing a killer ball from Sinisa Gracanin which he claims was halfway down the hill to the dressing room when he produced that ill-fated and rare burst of pace. Colin Brazier was drafted into the attack as Chris Bourlet joined the defence (with the same instructions as Colin it seemed).

2-0 at half-time was a fair reflection but not without hope we felt. We had, however, forgotten though just how good a keeper Gary Roslee could be as he was to remind us several times in that second half – as Colin Brazier, Gary Magnus, Paul Storkey, and in the latter stages Chris Bourlet twice, were to find Gary impossible to beat from close range.

Although the younger Vets scored three more times in that second half – they could have had more as we were stretched down the flanks with alarming regularity, but we deserved at least one goal, if not two. Neil Connelly was to get a second goal, again with an exquisite left foot chip that merely looked like a cross but was not. His hat-trick came late with a jug-avoiding toe poke. In between those two goals we were able to admire the coolness of Gary Roslee scoring a penalty after the pace of Peter Harvey had drawn a clear, but not malicious foul, in the box from the covering Chris Webb. We had thought the referee's training had not yet covered penalties when he failed to give us one, after Paul Storkey was felled in the box, but maybe Paul just fell as he ran out of oxygen.

There were some other memorable moments in that second half. Rod Loe putting a last-ditch clearance against our cross bar; Toby Manchip pacing our technical area and asking the referee if he had completed his training; Patrice Mongelard stopping Peter Harvey dead on the edge of the box with a well-timed tackle, and later foiling George in the six-yard box; young Joe Storkey, whose father is an old vet, and who had come on for the injured younger Vets right-back – beating the old man down the left.

Our **Man-of-the-Match** today was Chris Webb. The poll had failed to produce an outright winner but after some late voting, Chris had a clear majority.

The mood in the club house was a bit subdued after this family affair, and in some ways too there was a realisation that, sadly, the season was coming to an end. We also wondered whether French would get his hands on a trophy – that's Thomas French by putting the ball through the glass of the trophy cabinet. The last word, as often, belonged to Toby Manchip, the clown prince of Farnborough, who rather amusingly, and some may think rather perceptively, compared the French-Mongelard management team to Statler and Waldorf. I know we have played like muppets at times this season but today was certainly not the case.

12 May 2010: The Buff Vets (H, 2-4)

Farnborough Senior Vets given the bird by Buff Vets, yet again, in tame defeat

Once again, this season – I have last count – we have come up short against the Buff. And the reasons are the same, for those of you who have followed our earlier failed attempts.

Farnborough lined up with Gary Rosslee; Patrice Mongelard*, Tony Simpson, Ian Coles* and Steve Blanchard* in defence; Sinisa Gracanin*, Chris Webb*, Colin Brazier* and Robin Lipscomb in midfield; Peter Harvey and Ian Shoebridge* up front. Rod Loe* and Mark Perry* were the subs at the start of the game; Mick Ingram* bobbed up a little later, unexpectedly, to add to our bench. [* older Vets asterisked]. We had one or two absentees: Andy Faulks was pursuing a different kind of match of his own with a (buff) bird. And Toby Manchip was probably perched in the Buff at the time hydrating his torn hamstring.

The Buff side was the usual one as far as I could make out – if not stronger, buoyed by the presence of a large brood of fans, despite the weather.

We had great trouble making our mark on this game. And it was noticeable how quiet we were throughout the game – like a team of trappists - with the shouts of growing frustration from our technical area all the more audible. The pattern was set early doors – most of the game was played in our half, the more incisive passing and greater pace came from the Buff, their defence was not very troubled and it was merely matter of time before they would score. They did so from a corner by Barry Grainger – as they have in previous games. Gary Rosslee came for a high catch, misjudged the flight of the ball, which landed on the biggest and best header of the ball in the Buff attack and that was it. We rallied briefly and quickly as a dangerous cross whipped in by Peter Harvey was headed into their own net by the Buff. I do not recall the Buff keeper having to make any save of note in that half – except for a 25-yard free-kick from Patrice Mongelard that was destined for the top corner until it was plucked out of the air. The second Buff goal duly came – from the same mix of ingredients as in previous matches – indecisive defending, fast Buff forward who charged down a poor clearance and arrowed into the box to lift the ball over Gary Rosslee. Somehow, we managed to prevent the Buff from going further ahead.

The second half was even more difficult – as all our three subs came on and there was more pressure applied. It was a bit of a surprise when we equalised as Peter Harvey latched on to a headed through ball from Chris Webb to lob the keeper. The Buff keeper had got a bit cocky as he played most of that half on his 18-yard line. Still the direction of migration was towards the Farnborough goal and there were numerous near misses for the Buff. Around the 70th minute the Buff finally got their reward as Gary Rosslee elected to punch a ball he could have caught. He may have been off balance at the time as his clearance travelled all of 5 yards, and sat nicely for a Buff midfielder who had the freedom of the Farnborough box to pick his shot and restore their lead. Ten minutes later their fourth goal arrived from an area that had been vulnerable to quick breaks. The final whistle was a welcome relief.

For Gary Rosslee in our goal – I could not help reflect that this may have a game too far, and that he should have quit while he was ahead and ended on the high which he achieved on 9 May. That day he registered a clean sheet, great point-blank saves, and that treasured thing for keeper - a goal. Instead, he tarnished his 100% record against the Buff, picked the ball out of his net four times, and provided assists for two of the Buff goals. To be fair the score would have been more severe today but for two or three very good saves. Gary also seemed to have

an assistant with him in goal – A. Post – who was called upon three times in quick succession as the Buff pecked at our goal, in that second half.

Peter Harvey had a frustrating evening, isolated up front and coming up against a flock of defenders each time – no wonder feathers were a little ruffled as he and the Buff “ginger bullet” puffed their chest out at each other after an altercation which was quickly snuffed out by wiser birds around.

It was good to have Marathon Man Ian Shoebridge back – after an absence of several weeks – and he looked and felt a bit leggy. I am not sure what excuse the rest of the team had. I could say it was the playing surface or the cold but it was the same for both teams. I cannot blame the referee, Mark Edwards, either, as he assured me after a polite enquiry, that he had completed his training.

We need to reflect on whether to continue these midweek games (and mixing players from two Vets sides for them) – we have not had a lot of luck with the three games played. On 22 April there was a broken leg; on 29 April we did not have the use of the clubhouse; on 9 May whilst there was only wounded Farnborough pride, and we had the use of the club house, we had to cope with reduced TV facilities following a break-in. And we also experienced the downside of having disturbed the Wednesday evening routine of Vic “snake hips” Farrow who had itchy feet and his mind elsewhere.

Man-of-the-Match was Steve Blanchard – fittingly, a defender.

I would be lying if I said that we were not already thinking of next season. There is much to ponder: return of former management, players whose contracts would not be renewed, transfer targets etc.

Lastly, a word of thanks to Shirley for hot sausages, especially welcome, on what was not far from the coldest 12 May evening in Farnborough since records began.

16 May 2010: Inter Vyagra Super Vets (A, 5-1)

Sunday morning glory for Senior Vets who score five times against Inter Vyagra

And so, it ends – a long and hard season climaxing in a 5-1 win for the older Vets. The score may suggest a soft encounter but it did not feel like that throughout the game. While we always had the greater penetration our opponents were proud, demanded respect and were good enough to profit from any mistakes we made. The average age of the team fielded by Farnborough today was 48.3 years – though our opponents, a true Super Vets side, were probably on the other side of 50, but up for it.

Farnborough lined up with Steve Palmer in goal: Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Rod Loe and Robin Lipscomb in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb, Patrice Mongelard and Paul Bell in midfield; Paul Tanton and Ian Shoebridge Lipscomb. Mick Ingram was our twelfth man, fitting really on a pitch in a facility now geared for cricket – a reminder that this was, sadly, the end of the football season, (and with a wicket now doctored by scooter).

The early morning sunshine had vanished by the time this game started in overcast conditions. There was a noticeable breeze that made the ball difficult to control and many passes went astray in the first fifteen minutes. There were no clear-cut chances until Paul Tanton broke through on the left of the box and squared the ball for Patrice Mongelard to register his first strike for the season. Not quite goal-of-the-season but I have seen chances like that missed, (at Wembley yesterday in fact) and the hardest part was to make the run to be in the right place. I did think at the time, as I thrust forward, that if I missed this then I would have to write about it.

1-0 became 2-0 when a cross from Patrice Mongelard led to a shot from Ian Shoebridge that Paul Tanton cleverly re-directed into the net. We continued to dominate without finding the right final ball. There was a bicycle kick which looked good and was on target from Chris Webb, at the end of a cross from Patrice Mongelard. Paul Bell threatened to get at the end of one or two moves and contrived a diving header in the six-yard box that deserved better.

Patrice Mongelard produced a 40-yard burst of pace down the left wing, which surprised his team mates, to get to the end of his own chip. “Like Andrei Kancelis” purred Paul Tanton. Inter Vyagra had their moments and were not out of it, making good use of the flanks and the most of their target man (Craig) who was having a good game and giving hope to his team. We needed to be on their toes and erect the right sort of defensive barrier.

Mick Ingram came on for Rod Loe at right-back for the second half. Even though we scored three more goals in that half I think we had a stiffer examination from Inter Vyagra, who created chances and put more pressure on our defence. One of their forwards had a “Solomon Kalou” moment from two yards out as he put a rebound from the keeper against the post. Early in that half, Patrice Mongelard stretched for a half-volley in the box from a corner. The significance of that attempt was not how close it was to going in as it brushed against the post, but rather it was attempted with the left foot. This resulted in stiffness in the groin area that restricted Patrice’s movement for the rest of the half though he was instrumental in two more goals.

Our third goal came from a passing move inside the box which saw Paul Tanton lay the ball into the path of Paul Bell who had cut inside from the left and had the whole of the goal open up in front of him, to place his shot into the bottom corner to beat the pumped up Inter Vyagra keeper. Our fourth goal followed not long after that as a clever dummy from Patrice Mongelard released

Ian Shoebridge on the right and his near post through ball was volleyed into the top corner by Paul Tanton.

Ian Shoebridge was soon to set up the Inter Vyagra goal as he attempted to cushion a ball and ended up rolling it nicely into the path of the Inter Vyagra forward (Craig) who placed a low left foot shot inside the bottom corner. This was no more than they deserved. There was time for Ian Shoebridge to get our fifth goal in the last five minutes as he got his head to a pinpoint cross from the right from Patrice Mongelard, to steer the ball through the keeper's legs at the far post.

I am pleased to report this game was played in excellent spirit – we were all conscious of the unfortunate happening when we last played this team and we hope their player continues his recovery well. The closest we came to an injury was when Steve Blanchard bounced off the big unit that is Robin Lipscomb and almost went limp.

French and Mongelard unveiled their Statler and Waldorf collection of T-shirts from Rookers Risque Rags - more products may follow. It will, of course, come as no surprise to Mrs French and Mrs Mongelard that their husbands are grumpy old gits. But after today's game they had a smile on their faces.

There were other reasons why the management were pleased. We had come through an experimental season with a second Vets side that had held its own. Excluding the abandoned game against Inter Vyagra on 22 April – we had come through 27 games – winning 7, drawing three and losing 17 – with 54 goals scored and 78 conceded. Over the season we used a total of 43 players, including 9 different goalkeepers. We got through 135 oranges, produced detailed match reports for every game, and never had less than 11 players for any game. In fact, we averaged 13.3 players for every game (and needed to call on our younger Vets on very few occasions). So yes, we can – and we are looking forward to next season.

Man-of-the-Match was Sinisa Gracanin – and without any votes from his number one fan – Thomas French.

Season 2010-11

5 September 2010	Orpington Vets (A)	4-1	Farnborough surprise Orpington, and themselves, with derby win
12 September 2010	Erith Vets (H)	0-1	Back to earth with Captain Manchip, in Farnborough defeat to Erith
19 September 2010	The Buff Vets (H)	5-3	Sunday roast for Senior Vets as Farnborough tame Buff
3 October 2010	Old Albany Park Vets (A)	2-3	Statler & Waldorf double not enough as Farnborough Senior Vets suffer narrow defeat to Albany Park
10 October 2010	Belvedere Vets (A)	3-1	Maximum points for Farnborough, winners against Belvedere, on 10/10/10 day
17 October 2010	Inter Vyagra Vets (A)	5-2	Senior Vets win in limp performance against Inter Vyagra
24 October 2010	Diamond Vets (A)	3-4	Senior Vets lose sparkle against Diamond with defeat, despite half-time lead
7 November 2010	Baltic Exchange Vets (H)	3-4	Senior Vets nose in front of Baltic Exchange with first clean sheet of season
14 November 2010	Belvedere Vets (H)	4-2	Day to remember for Andy Faulks who bags all four Farnborough goals in Senior Vets win against Belvedere
21 November 2010	Met Police Super Vets (H)	2-3	Daylight robbery at Farrow Fields: inside job suspected as Met Police nick win against Farnborough Senior Vets
2 January 2011	Senior Vets Club Game (H)	8-2	Football wins as Senior Vets do it for themselves in 10-goal thriller
9 January 2011	Diamond Vets (N ²)	4-3	Farnborough stars twinkle on astral turf in win against Diamond
16 January 2011	Inter Vyagra Super Vets (N)	3-2	Farnborough come from behind to overcome stiff opposition
23 January 2011	Baltic Exchange Vets (A)	0-3	Senior Vets short-changed by a youthful Baltic Exchange side in defeat
30 January 2011	Crofton Albion Vets (H)	2-4	Senior Vets in a sorry state as Crofton Albion pull a fast one to win
6 February 2011	Edenbridge Vets (A)	3-1	Senior Vets find their way again with win against Edenbridge Vets
20 February 2011	Catford Wanderers Vets (A)	4-0	Senior Vets win but Manchip & French let Catford Wanderers off the hook
27 February 2011	Princes Park Super Vets (N)	7-0	Senior Vets turfed out of Farrow Fields, but do it on astroturf – to win against Princes Park Super Vets
6 March 2011	Staplehurst & Monarchs Vets (H)	1-0	Senior Vets leave it fashionably late to nick win against Staplehurst & Monarchs
13 March 2011	Riverside Wanderers Vets (A)	3-0	Senior Vets slope off to Eynsford to win against Riverside Wanderers

² N stands for neutral ground, occasionally required when the designated home team's usual pitch is not available, often because of frost or waterlogging.

Season 2010-11 (contd)

20 March 2011	The Buff Vets (H)	0-1	Senior Vets wings clipped by Buff Vets in defeat
27 March 2011	Prices Park Super Vets (A)	5-0	Good times return for Senior Vets with win over Princes Park Super Vets as clocks go forward
3 April 2011	Catford Wanderers Vets (H)	8-1	Mother's Day delight for Senior Vets in win against Catford Wanderers
17 April 2011	Avery Hill Vets (A)	2-2	Senior Vets come through searching examination by youthful Avery Hill Vets, to record first draw of the season
24 April 2011	Ditton Vets (A)	0-2	No Easter eggs for hot, cross Senior Vets after frustrating hunt ends in harsh defeat to Ditton Vets
1 May 2011	Staplehurst & Monarchs Vets (A)	2-0	Senior Vets pull off Italian job in away win against Staplehurst & Monarchs
3 May 2011	Edenbridge Vets (H)	4-2	Extra topping for Senior Vets with delivery of hard-fought win over Edenbridge
8 May 2011	Riverside Wanderers Vets (H)	6-2	Senior Vets' own wanderer returns to sink Riverside Wanderers with hat-trick, in win for Farnborough
11 May 2011	Riverside Wanderers Vets (H)	7-0	Senior Vets shrug off goalkeeping crisis to overpower plucky Riverside Wanderers with deadly strike force, in another big win under Waldorf's management
15 May 2011	FOBG Young Vets (H)	0-4	Youth triumphs over experience, as Farnborough Vets football festival finishes vintage season

**Farnborough Old Boys Guild FC
Senior Vets, Season 2010-11**



Back row, left to right:

Mark Perry, Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Roger French, Toby Manchip, John Tallis,
Patrice Mongelard, Ian Shoebridge, Mick Gearing

Front row, left to right:

Nick Kinnear, Danny Winter, Leo Maccioni, Mehmet Bozyigit, Eric Johnson

5 September 2010: Orpington Vets (A, 4-1)

Farnborough surprise Orpington, and themselves, with derby win

Let's face it: our unbeaten run rarely lasts beyond our first game, and some of us will have replayed, in our minds, last season's corresponding opening fixture against the same opponents, at the same ground, when we lost 3-1 after leading 1-0 at half-time. The omens were not great - some missing players, three new players on show (two in defence), a late pull-out, Roger French up front, and one no-show.

Farnborough lined up with Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Trevor Stewart, Leo Maccioni and Mehmet Bozyigit in defence (we are quite an international outfit these days); Ian Shoebridge, Sinisa Gracanin, Mark Perry and Jerry Cogotti in midfield; Gary Magnus and Roger French up front. Rod Loe was our only substitute, as Andy "Compo" Faulks never showed - perhaps too much summer wine, and pulling a Nora Batty look-alike at Beavers last night.

I am not sure we had all touched the ball by the time Leo Maccioni got our first goal, two minutes into the game, with a firm, well-placed, and free downward header from the first corner of the game. I cannot recall a quicker goal for the Vets in my almost 350 games. This certainly helped us settle down. Ian Shoebridge and Sinisa Gracanin anchored the centre of midfield where Orpington were robust and lively. We threatened more, in particular down the right where Mehmet Bozyigit and Mark Perry were combining well. Our defence was not greatly troubled but we had to be vigilant against two tall, fast and energetic Orpington forwards only too happy to run at, and behind, us. We had to guard against being caught square, or short at the back and Gary Fentiman was quick off his line when he had to be. We had most of the play but neither side created real goal-scoring chances for most of that half. It was noticeable that in the last ten minutes of the half, Orpington applied a bit more vigour down the right and through the middle. Eventually a pass got through and a powerful shot from inside the box was parried by Gary Fentiman but he could not divert it over the bar and that was the Orpington equaliser with one minute left to half-time.

Trevor Stewart made way for Rod Loe at half-time and the first twenty minutes of the second half were fairly even though the neutral spectator would have concluded we had more of the ball. The youthful Jerry Cogotti on the left of our midfield was finding more space and threading passes through. Mehmet Bozyigit was more wing-back than full-back; Mark Perry was completing a lot of his passes and Roger French nearly got to the end of one or two things in the box. Gary Magnus was full of clever runs that stretched the Orpington defence. Orpington were playing a more direct and muscular football but the light ball travelled too quickly for them to Gary Fentiman in our goal, and there was always a Farnborough body part, usually belonging to Leo Maccioni or Patrice Mongelard, in the way.

Then came our break-through midway through the half: Sinisa Gracanin picked the ball in the middle of that corridor of uncertainty between the edge of the box and the half way line, drifted past two players, all the while moving to his left and just when we thought he did not really have a left foot, surprised everyone with a low shot from same peg, into the bottom corner that the hitherto always well-positioned Orpington keeper was powerless to stop. Our relief was enormous and our appetite greatly stimulated, as goals number three and four followed in quick succession. Mark Perry produced an equally unexpected and well-struck twenty-five-yarder that sailed over the keeper's head to give us a more comfortable 3-1 lead. Mehmet Bozyigit's overlapping runs down the right were then finally rewarded as his quick and clever footwork created a space for him to score from six yards to make it 4-1.

There was time though for a sting in the Orpington tail as they brought a point blank save from Gary Fentiman and an even more treasured penalty save, after Rod Loe had interposed himself between an Orpington forward and the ball, inside the box. The penalty award was the only disputed event in the whole of that game, which was played in excellent spirit throughout by two teams which both wanted to win this long-standing and traditional opening fixture.

Man-of-the-Match today with the lion's share of the votes, even after Rod Loe's vote was re-assigned, was Sinisa Gracanin.

But we could not help think what a good all round team performance we had produced with several of the new players making their mark in such a positive way. Despite the absence of a bar and Shirley's sandwiches after the game the mood was very positive. The future looks bright, well, until next week at least. The players returning next week have a lot to live up to.

12 September 2010: Erith Vets (H, 0-1)

Back to earth with Captain Manchip, in Farnborough defeat to Erith

Dear Reader – I may have hyped up last week's game a tad, in the light of today's match which ended our unbeaten run and marked a fallow home debut at Farrow Fields for the Farnborough older Vets. And there is much to ponder after a frustrating and sobering experience, as I left the ground in philosophical mood.

Farnborough lined up with Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Trevor Stewart, Chris Webb and Ian Coles in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Sinisa Gracanin, Paul Bell and Mehmet Bozyigit in midfield, Leo Maccioni and Toby Manchip up front – and had the luxury of three substitutes - Roger French, James Maidment and, eventually, Andy "Compo" Faulks.

Being a bit of an anorak, I looked up last year's corresponding match against Erith Vets on 13 September 2009 – then our second match of the season as today's – and lo and behold, today, as last year, we had 5 players who did not play in our first match. The result was slightly different and better than last season's 1-3 defeat, but there were some disturbing similarities. Last year I wrote "what was needed was more of a presence up front and in the box" and "we did not really create any clear-cut chances". Who says history does not repeat itself? I think we probably made history too, with the substitution of today's captain - Toby Manchip at half-time.

The recent rains had certainly helped the pitch which looked not too bad, after Bunny Beston, and bunnies, had worked on it in the summer. If anything, like most lawns in the area - it could do with a cut, but of course, it was the same surface for both teams today.

With Erith playing in yellow, we had an opportunity to play in our "new" away kit at home – and a maroon and black number was dredged out of the Farnborough vaults, sponsored by a business that was probably no longer viable. After today's performance maybe that is not such a bad thing. To say we had about 75% of possession would not be an exaggeration – and to say we would not have scored a goal if we played for another day would be equally truthful.

Erith were superb. They were fit (as we saw from the post-match warm down), organised, patient and dogged. They defended in numbers, passed the ball well, took up excellent positions, used their better players to good effect, always seemed to have an outlet, particularly at the back where we never troubled the last defender or the keeper. The Erith keeper looked like a stand-in keeper but since we never tested him, we'll never know. After the first twenty minutes we thought we would win this game given the amount of possession we had. But somehow, we could never find the telling last pass, or the shot on target, or the cross that created real danger. Erith played on the break and made the most of the first corner they had midway into the half to score with an unopposed header in the six-yard box. They nearly added a second ten minutes later after an ill-advised pass from Patrice Mongelard was intercepted and the resulting one-on-one saw a shot go over the bar when a goal looked likely.

For our part we huffed and puffed; probed down the right and the left, had many throw-ins on the edge of the box, forced numerous corners, had several mostly under-hit shots from outside the box, even some from inside the box. As the half wore on, we got over-anxious, and rushed things. One Toby Manchip airshot defied description.

At half-time three substitutions were made as Roger French, James Maidment and Andy Faulks came on for Trevor Stewart, Paul Bell and Toby Manchip. These were not entirely successful

substitutions but in keeping with the policy of the management to give everyone a decent run out (and in the hope of getting that in return).

James was playing his first match in six years and he will be the first to agree that it showed. By his own standards, Andy will have been disappointed with his performance today, which was as much of a contribution from him as last week's. It was reported later that his fiancée had witnessed some of the game – and she would not have seen him at his best, on a football pitch at least. We can only hope she is around to see him play better, in another game. Toby's substitution, which would have come as a surprise to him, not least as he scored our solitary goal in last year's match against Erith, was made after his captain's rallying talk at half-time. He was able to spend more time with his family, in particular young Oliver, a year old this week, and to dispense heavily disguised encouragement to his team mates from the side lines – before coming back on for Mehmet Bozyigit for the last quarter of an hour.

The second half was even more frustrating than the first and I'd rather not tell you more about it. Erith grew more confident as they realised the game was theirs to lose. They generated one or two moments of real danger as we repeated the first half's, and last year's, performance. It hurt more this time after the promising start we had made to the season last week.

Post-match drinks and Shirley's sandwiches were taken outside in the autumn sunshine, as art came to Farnborough today in the form of an exhibition of paintings by a local artist. There was not much art on the Vets pitch, which was a grim study in still life at times. Mick Gearing, refereed with his customary economy and subtlety. So understated was he, in fact, that his own grandson seems to not have registered that pops was a referee. Vic Farrow, of Farrow Fields fame, clucked over his new water bottles and fretted over missing corner flags, and exhibited his usual bonhomie. Shirley polished her new tea urn which made a cracking brew. Young Oliver Manchip, a year older, looked livelier than the old man, who is the proud owner of an eco-friendly roof, but could do with some shooting boots.

On the way home I could not help reflect on some football truths – possession means nothing without a goal; goals win matches etc. I was even reminded of the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre who said *"In football everything is complicated by the presence of an opponent"*. I could add to that *"or the presence or absence of a team mate"*. Discuss.

After philosophy this week – next week some ornithology perhaps, as we face the Buff. Play like we did today and we'll be stuffed like dodos, now's there's a bird I know something about but that's for another match report.

Man-of-the-Match today was Chris Webb.

19 September 2010: The Buff Vets (H, 5-3)

Sunday roast for Senior Vets as Farnborough tame Buff

At last, we can report a long-awaited win a game against the Buff – our failure to beat them over numerous attempts had begun to feel like there was an albatross round our necks (rather than a buff). And what a handsome win it was to lift the curse. The manner of it was just as pleasing as the final score.

Pre-match nerves were such that Vic Farrow had to phone for emergency supplies of toilet paper as there had been a run on it. After the now customary frisson of uncertainty over who would turn up, late or if at all, or unexpectedly, and some late transfers - Farnborough lined up with Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Trevor Stewart, Steve Blanchard and Mehmet Bozyigit in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Sinisa Gracanin, Jerry Cogotti, and Mark Perry in midfield; Andy Faulks and Colin Brazier in attack. The sharp-eyed among you will have noticed the absence of substitutes. Technically this was not entirely true as Roger French and James Maidment swapped their Farnborough kit for the Buff blue as our opponents did not have a full flock.

This was the first game of the season for Steve and Colin, and also the first time that Andy Faulks had turned up on time. It was a first too for us on the big pitch this season which had unexplained small circles of greener grass dotted around in many places. No, not evidence of aliens in Farrow Fields – but simply evidence of the sprinkler system used to water the pitch over the summer – and not many people would know that. Pitchmeister Keith Beston appeared and had plenty of reason to be pleased with all his hard work on the pitch which was excellent. It certainly felt there was a lot of space out there and not just because the Buff had 10 players until Farnborough nemesis Barry Grainger was summoned from his perch midway through the first half. I realise now that we made the space.

It was very clear from the early exchanges that both teams had opted for a passing game with the Buff relying on their compact defence and excellent target man supported by at least one road runner. For our part, I can honestly say that I have never witnessed so many Farnborough passes to feet and such confident play. Sinisa Gracanin and Ian Shoebridge anchored the midfield and linked up well with wide players, defence and attack. Jerry Cogotti was making telling forays with pace on the left whilst Mark Perry and Mehmet Bozyigit were making Roger French wish he had kept his Farnborough plumage on.

Yet, as is often the case in football, the first sign of real danger came from the Buff as a long-range shot dipped and swerved before coming off the top of our cross bar. Midway through the half the Buff took the lead after Steve Blanchard attempted a clearance on the edge of our box, a little off balance and the ball spun back in the path of a Buff forward who also had the good fortune of a now out of position keeper – and proceeded to roll the ball into an empty net. This was against the run of play – and the score could only be explained by our determination to walk the ball into the Buff net.

Before the half was over though we had restored balance in the universe with two very good goals. The first came from Mark Perry who swivelled and hit a left foot shot high into the corner of the net from the edge of the box, after picking up a clearance from one of the many corners we won. The second came from the trusty left boot of Colin Brazier who latched on to a through ball from Sinisa Gracanin to round the keeper and slot the ball in. The Buff threatened with one

or two set-pieces and Barry Grainger's cultured left foot but on the whole we deserved our half-time lead.

More goals came quickly in the second half. Andy Faulks bagged a brace. First the Buff keeper fluffed a clearance and Andy had the predator's instinct and poise to shoot into an empty net from 35 yards. Then Andy ran on to a through ball from Mehmet Bozyigit and lifted the ball over the oncoming keeper to give us a comfortable 4-1 lead. I say comfortable but it did not feel entirely that way as the Buff forced several corners and gave as good as they got, with the wind in their favour.

Then in relatively quick time 4-1 became 4-2 and 4-3. 4-2 came from a Patrice Mongelard own goal of some quality even if I say so myself. The dangerous Barry Grainger burst through the midfield to get at the end of a through ball in the box – I had a nanosecond to compute whether Gary Fentiman would get to the ball – decided he would not and opted to help it towards him as I stepped ahead of the on-rushing Barry Grainger. The trouble was that Gary was no longer where I thought he was and I ended up producing a delicate side-foot into the bottom corner. 4-3 followed soon after, as our fallibility at corners returned.

Through all of this we kept our composure and continued to pass and move. With 5 minutes left a sweeping move down the right, bamboozled the Buff left-back Roger French and ended with Ian Shoebridge curling a left foot shot into the corner of the net where James Maidment had taken over the keeper's gloves as the Buff threw players forward to get an equaliser. This was a goal made in Farnborough, and soon after the final whistle came, sweet as birdsong.

For such a high scoring game there was not a single bad tackle or spicy moment. Referee Mick Gearing had an even quieter game than usual. In fact, the closest we came to an incident was in the first half, when Roger French and Patrice Mongelard had a come together over a 50-50 ball, won by Farnborough, in a "clash of the muppets" which could have wiped out the older Vets managerial talent in one move.

The mood in the club was very good today. There were balloons and decorations but not for the footballers – although we deserved it. I understand that not one of the club's eight teams lost a game this weekend and many long overdue victories were recorded. Perhaps that is why Vic Farrow felt able to open the condiments cabinet to release the Branston pickle for our cheese and ham rolls.

As I left the ground, refreshed with something from the Shepherd Neame brewery and Shirley's sandwiches + Branston, I saw the arrival of a christening party. I wondered briefly if they would be interested in a tale of the ancient footballer and an Orpington Buff – perhaps not, but it was a reminder that there are other things good for the soul on a Sunday, apart from football.

Man-of-the-Match today was Steve Blanchard – but half a dozen players earned votes today, including yours truly, and not just for the quality of the own goal!

3 October 2010: Old Albany Park Vets (A, 2-3)

Statler & Waldorf double not enough as Farnborough Senior Vets suffer narrow defeat to Albany Park

After the inevitable changes from one week to the next, and the midweek uncertainties as Roger French leaves no stone unturned to get a side out, we made our way to the Albany Park pitch – home of Cray Wanderers in Sidcup Hill, which a sign in the car park proclaimed to be the second oldest football team in the world. The ground certainly has a faded grandeur about it but the pitch was very good, a tad on the lush side, but with all the rain that had fallen and was continuing to fall this was a very good surface to play on.

Farnborough were out on the pitch very early in the mist, or so it seemed as Albany Park took ages to trickle out – perhaps in a ploy to delay the start while they waited for players. It gave us time to take in the surroundings and feel the aura of the place as ponies grazed the scrub land behind the goals (a timeless scene from the days when the team was founded before the motor car, I thought).

When the game eventually started Farnborough lined up with Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice (Waldorf) Mongelard, Ian Coles, Nick Kinnear and Danny Winter in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Mark Perry, Chris Webb and Mehmet Bozyigit in midfield; Ian Shoebridge and Roger (Statler) French in attack. Trevor Stewart was our twelfth man. There would have been a thirteenth, in the form of Chris Bourlet – but he was conscripted to enforce the laws of the game – an occupational hazard for him I suppose, but it was fortunate he appeared for the first time this season as Albany Park were not able, as home team, to provide a referee. They did though acquire substitutes as the game progressed and I could not help noticing how good their subs were. In the end Chris had an easy game to referee played in excellent spirit, in spite of the real competitive edge.

The early exchanges confirmed that Albany Park were a good passing side with three or four ball players in strategic positions that needed watching. Our own passing game was in evidence and there had been no serious goalmouth action when Albany Park got their first goal 15 minutes into the game. Their dangerous left winger cut inside our full back and hit a powerful low shot across the goal which evaded Gary at full stretch and rebounded off the inside of the post to travel to the opposite corner and nestle in the net.

We reacted very well and pushed them back. We forced several corners and engineered some neat moves, particularly down the sides, that faltered at the final ball mainly due to a lack of movement in the box. We had several shots from long to medium range that disturbed the ponies. Ian Shoebridge flashed a ball at full stretch past the post from the edge of the six-yard box. On the whole the two defences had the upper hand. Albany Park put on one of their subs who promptly crashed a header against the post. Danny Winter came off midway through the half injured and Trevor Stewart slotted in at left-back while Nick Kinnear switched to the right. Our two wide midfielders, Mark Perry and Mehmet Bozyigit, swapped wings. All these changes checked our momentum, and Albany Park rallied to finish the half strongly. Just when we were looking forward to half-time, Albany Park got their second, and it was an equally classy finish as Gary was lobbed from the edge of the box, having been tempted slightly off his line by some hesitancy in the defence to clear a ball.

Unlike Albany Park, we had no subs to bring on at half-time (and the water bottles seemed to have been carried empty to the well-decorated stands) but the oranges were nice as Ian Coles'

two supporters will confirm. However, in a mildly ironic moment, Albany Park asked to hurry up and curtail our half-time rallying talk, in view of the late start.

We realised quickly that the second sub from Albany Park was a very good and lively forward we had come across before who was going to take some watching. We held our own, Chris Webb and Sinisa Gracanin were unyielding in the middle, we anticipated and covered well at the back, Mark Perry restored to the left was a usually unmarked outlet, and gradually we began to take heart and feel that even at 2-0 down we were not out of it and deserved something. Then we got our reward, 15 minutes into the second half when Roger French scored.

There are two ways of looking at Roger's goal. The prelude was the same: A glancing header from Chris Webb was picked up by Ian Shoebridge on the right, who cut in, beat two defenders and advanced to the edge of the box before playing a through ball which bisected the Albany defence.

A: Roger had somehow anticipated the pass, moved smoothly inside his marker, cushioned the ball on his left instep and moved it to his right with an instinctive touch and strode forward to strike the ball unerringly with his right foot, low into the corner against the bottom of the post and into the net – or

B: Roger showed surprising movement in the box, mis-controlled the ball, put it on his weaker right foot and with a scruffy toe-poke was lucky to hit the inside of the post and score.

You decide which version is closer to reality. I know which one I favour. But there is no denying the importance of that goal and its timing. We now pressed on looking for the equaliser. Gary made a great point blank save to keep us in it and we began to push Albany Park back. Then with 10 minutes left – disaster struck, or so it felt given the intensity and desire that we were playing with. Nick Kinnear chased down a through ball in the corner, got in front of their forward, was in total control of the situation, shielded the ball for a moment, paused, cogitated and then decided to attempt an ill-advised back heel in an inappropriate area. The ball was back in Albany Park possession, quickly transferred to the dangerous left winger who once again used his right foot to curl a delightful ball inside the far post beyond Gary's despairing dive. We had conceded three quality goals, but then managed to score perhaps the best of the lot, even if I say so myself.

The last goal was worth waiting for. Trevor Stewart had advanced far forward, retrieved a clearance by the corner flag, rolled the ball back to Chris Webb, who dummied it cleverly (have you noticed how dummies are invariably clever in this game) to Patrice Mongelard who controlled the ball, took two steps forward and from 27.5 yards out, lashed the ball into the top corner. There was no time to re-start the game. Some mischief makers claim that Chris Bourlet blew the final whistle simultaneously; others say that the whistling they heard was the sound of the ball entering the goal's atmosphere. It ended the game on a very positive note for Farnborough, but added to the disappointment of not getting a draw in a game where we had 60-65% of possession.

Man-of-the-Match today, with over half the votes cast, was Patrice Mongelard.

10 October 2010: Belvedere Vets (A, 3-1)

Maximum points for Farnborough, winners against Belvedere, on 10/10/10 day

This was our first trip to the Belvedere ground which we all found by various routes, most of us looking brighter and sharper than a couple who will remain nameless but were clearly a little dehydrated and dishevelled. This was by far the biggest pitch we were to play on and the size of the Belvedere squad – 19 players, matched the pitch.

Farnborough lined up with Toby Manchip in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard and Mehmet Bozyigit in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Mark Perry, Chris Webb and Jerry Cogotti in midfield; Ian Shoebridge and Leo Maccioni in attack. Roger French and Colin Brazier were our reinforcements. Trevor Stewart's Merc was also severely dehydrated and he was not able to join us in the rather smart but snug dug-out. We also had, briefly before kick-off, a substitute goalkeeper in the form of a wheelie bin, until another large presence, also in green, returned into goal after doing the captain's duties in the centre circle.

We knew from last season's home defeat against Belvedere that this would not be a stroll in the autumn sunshine. The size of the pitch was helpful to our now customary passing game, perhaps too helpful at times as *Arsenalitis* crept in. It is true to say that Toby Manchip had not very much to do in this first-half – there was one shot of note that he was well-positioned to deal with and I also recall a cross that was fumbled, but apart from that it was only his kicking that caused him a bit of disquiet in the long grass.

Farnborough had the better start and were playing the more composed football. The defence snuffed out any danger from the two robust Belvedere forwards fairly easily, and they did not really get behind us to put crosses in. We were doing plenty of that ourselves and we had relatively little trouble taking the game into the final third around the Belvedere box. But their defence was rugged and muscular and there was always a last defender to nullify our final ball. Just when we were getting a bit impatient with ourselves, our first goal came 25 minutes into the game. Mark Perry combined with Mehmet Bozyigit on the right and was able to swing a low cross in to Ian Shoebridge's feet. Ian turned his marker smartly, and laid the ball into the path of Leo Maccioni's who advanced unchallenged into the six-yard box to tuck the ball away. This was no more than we deserved and soon after Leo had a golden opportunity to make it 2-0 but completely lost his co-ordination 3 yards out with the Belvedere keeper having been bamboozled by an Ian Shoebridge cross.

Sensing that we needed to press our advantage, and still basking in the glory of last week's thunderbolt, Patrice Mongelard began to move into that corridor of opportunity between 30 to 35 yards from the Belvedere goal and was able to unleash two powerful shots in quick succession – the first one was five yards wide but the right height, the second one was not wide but a foot over. Colin Brazier was filming some of the game but his camera may not have been fast enough to capture these moments.

We were quietly pleased to be 1-0 up at half-time and looking forward to playing with the not inconsiderable slope. Colin Brazier came on for Stephen Blanchard and restored a bit of balance on the left side of defence and Ian Coles moved into the centre of defence. We ought to acknowledge that Belvedere surprised us a little in that second half and seemed to have more of a threat even against the slope, and curiously a breeze had sprung up to help them. They must have brought on 3 or 4 substitutes and suddenly we had some mobile, rangy and hungry forwards to deal with. However, we were able to silence the crowd as they say with a rather quick second

goal ten minutes into the half as Leo Maccioni played a through ball for Ian Shoebridge who calmly lobbed the keeper. The next 20 minutes were fairly even. Belvedere created some dangerous moments, two or three corners, even had the ball in the net but from an off-side position after Toby Manchip had pulled off a very smart save. We lost a bit of cohesion in the midfield and whilst we had a lot of possession did not do much with it. A couple of crosses from the ever-busy Mehmet Bozygit and Mark Perry on the right nearly led to goals. Colin Brazier was finding the new Belvedere forward quite a handful on the right and his 90 minutes yesterday and late night were beginning to take their toll and Patrice Mongelard and Ian Coles had to put in good covering and saving tackles – one from Ian was particularly good as the Belvedere forward was pulling the trigger. Roger French came on for Jerry Cogotti for the last fifteen minutes, we thought to bolster the defence, but after his goal last week went up to do his “sniffer” French thing in the box.

Relief came with about 10 minutes left. A long goal-kick from Patrice Mongelard found its way to Ian Shoebridge on the left wing – he skinned his marker, advanced into the box, ignored Roger French hoping for a cut-back, opened his body and placed a low shot into the bottom corner. Moments later Patrice Mongelard advanced forward, picked up a loose clearance from a corner and let fly from 25 yards – only to see the ball flash six inches above the bar, the closest of a trio of most satisfying shots. With a couple of minutes left, we lost our concentration, Patrice Mongelard and Chris Webb contrived to allow one of the afore-mentioned Belvedere forwards to place a shot low under the despairing Toby Manchip, very cross for not being able to post a clean sheet as captain today. And that was it – a well-deserved away victory against a useful side who probably win more games than they lose or draw. We are now in that happy state ourselves with our fourth win of the season to set against our two narrow defeats.

The mood was good after the game, helped further with some rather good sandwiches, hot potato wedges and sausages in a cosy bar and a friendly bunch of opponents. The trip home was on the long side but in bright sunshine, with the temperature rising up to 21 degrees centigrade – which made Toby Manchip’s chilling tale of igloos all the more, harder to take in.

Overwhelming **Man-of-the-Match** today, was Ian Shoebridge, with 10/10 from the judges.

17 October 2010: Inter Vyagra Super Vets (A, 5-2)

Senior Vets win in limp performance against Inter Vyagra

In the end there was satisfaction for Farnborough but this game will be remembered more for the frustration than the relief.

Farnborough lined up with Toby Manchip in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Nick Kinnear and Trevor Stewart in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Colin Brazier, Chris Webb and Paul Bell in midfield; Ian Shoebridge and Mark Perry up front. Roger French arrived as the game kicked off becoming our twelfth man (and would be doing some kicking off of his own later). We were missing a few from last week and also the explosive shooting of Andy Faulks, who went for a drink in Chislehurst last Monday and woke up in Corfu, so I gather.

After the first 10 minutes Ian Shoebridge got our first goal – a close-range volley from a knock down by Mark Perry. By then we were feeling we should be 2 or 3 goals up – as Inter Vyagra struggled to get into our half and we had no difficulty penetrating their defence, and lining up shots, or crosses, more or less at will. So, we got complacent and sloppy and Inter Vyagra walked through our defence to score an equaliser – after Toby Manchip had parried the first shot but the ball found its way to the far post for a tap-in by an unmarked Inter Vyagra player. The feeling that we were being mugged increased as Inter Vyagra hit a post from a free-kick after Toby Manchip misread the flight of the ball and only desperate defending by Nick Kinnear prevented them from scoring from the rebound. They should have gone ahead when the centre of the defence parted again to let their forward in and only Toby's fortuitous positioning for the ensuing shot saved us.

Our mood was not great and words were being exchanged all over the pitch as we continued to enjoy 80%+ of possession but without any outcome, until our second goal arrived after 30 minutes or so as Mark Perry got to the end of a through ball, managed to prod the ball past the keeper's grasp for Paul Bell to tap it into the net. This was no more than we deserved and we pressed on, even if we played a little too much down the left where we compressed the play. From that sort of area Sinisa Gracanin produced a long range shot that hit the post – on the adjacent rugby pitch. Soon after Chris Webb delivered an up and under that bounced awkwardly for the not tall Inter Vyagra keeper who had two goes at it – and was put off by the close attentions of Ian Shoebridge and the ball found its way to Trevor Stewart arriving in the box to tap-in our third goal. You might think it churlish to ask what Trevor, our left-back, was doing up there given that he had scored but this moment was symptomatic of the way we had played, all eager to score like teenagers, and not always keeping our shape, discipline and patience. But we were 3-1 up at half-time.

And we thought that we would score again even though we were now playing against the slope. Roger French joined the fray – and some tactical changes were made to enable him to go up front, with Trevor Stewart taking over child-minding duties on a flat surface, on the touchline. What Trevor saw in the first five minutes would not have been pretty as Farnborough went all soft and Inter Vyagra scored a goal which, in the interests of historical accuracy, I really ought to describe as a Toby Manchip own goal. A cross was allowed to be put in from the left. Toby reached for it, grabbed the ball and in one swift movement placed it on the laces of the boot of an incoming and grateful Inter Vyagra forward to make the score 3-2. Some say that Toby was distracted by the thought, or sight, of a small man from the Indian sub-continent cruising down the road in a Ford motorcar. I do not know what goes on that mind of his but he would have been disappointed with that episode, and his kicking, throws and movement off his line was that

of a man with a troubled mind for most of the rest of the game – except for a very smart save diving low to his right later on which troubled the Inter Vyagra player who had the shot – and who was still disbelieving later on in the bar.

We had let Inter Vyagra back into the game and they were up for it as moments of indecision in the defence (which includes the goalkeeper) threatened to cause us more embarrassment. Things were not much better up front, where Roger was having a tough time – no service, over-hit through balls, not much end product for his flick-ons, passes and shots. The straw that broke the camel's back, took the form of a shot from Chris Webb from 15 yards out which went over the bar when Roger was expecting a pass. I think that shot hit the cricket sight screen behind the goal (which meant we hit the bar, the rugby post and the cricket sight screen today). Anyway, furious words were exchanged and Roger advised his team mates to shut up as they were treading on very thin ice, and we could see wisps of that red mist in a few tackles in the next few moments but thankfully it seemed to have dissipated by the time the match reached its last ten minutes and we had begun to pass the ball, and speak, to Roger again.

I was asked in an aside by an Inter Vyagra player to confirm the score as he, understandably, thought that this was not normal behaviour for a team that was winning. I'll be honest with you – I cannot recall if by then we were 4-2 up or not. Chris Webb had eased the pressure with a firm header into the Inter Vyagra net from an Ian Shoebridge corner.

We continued to lay siege to the Inter Vyagra goal: Ian Shoebridge hit the bar with a shot, we had several corners; Patrice Mongelard got behind the defence and fizzed a cross-cum-shot that went narrowly wide; Paul Bell and Ian Shoebridge got to the by-line in quick succession but could not cut the ball back to unmarked players.

There was some light relief: Nick Kinnear offered some advice to Mark Perry only to be told to worry about his own game; Nick almost revealed his managerial potential when he substituted Paul Bell, clearly knackered after a late night and we hear three bottles of Argentinian wine on the train back from the Newcastle game yesterday, and brought Trevor Stewart back on. But then – soon after Trevor went on a run and then suddenly stopped and fell to his knees as if his battery had run out.

All seemed well in the last 5 minutes as Ian Shoebridge scored our fifth, and his second, goal with a 20-yarder that sailed over the keeper's head into the net. But this had not been a convincing display compared with recent games – we could have done with some performance enhancing substance at times. There was a fractious and tetchy mood in the team that brought apologies and handshakes later. It would have been a lot worse if we had lost but as it is this was our fifth win of the season from seven games. I suppose when a team become used to winning, they can develop a collective anxiety about their performance and we suffered from that today, and forgot to enjoy the game.

We had a fine pair of **Man-of-the-Match** today in Ian Shoebridge and Colin Brazier.

24 October 2010: Diamond Vets (A, 3-4)

Senior Vets lose sparkle against Diamond with defeat, despite half-time lead

Yes - for the disbelieving readers among you that was how this game turned out; but there is an even more cruel twist – the Diamond winner with 5 minutes to go was scored by one of our players Paul Bell, a ringer in a Diamond shirt.

Farnborough lined up with Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Mehmet Bozyigit and Trevor Stewart in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Colin Brazier, Ian Shoebridge and Paul Bell in midfield; Andy Faulks and Eric Johnson up front. Roger French was our twelfth man. It was good to see Andy on time for the start of the game – he declared himself in good shape after having had only a small Indian last night. I think he meant that he did not order any naan bread or onion bhajis. The other point to note about our line-up was the presence of Eric Johnson – a US business man.

We had a thirteenth man in Toby Manchip but he ended up playing for Diamond as we are sporting opponents who lend our players to the opposition when they are short – as Diamond had only ten geezers, including an under-age vet. Roger French later admitted that his first instinct had been to play for Diamond himself – but then changed his mind partly because this was his 150th game for Farnborough. Well - he'll have plenty to remember from today although he will probably wish he could forget our second half, or had trusted his instincts.

We were surprised by how difficult it was for us to get into a rhythm in the first quarter of an hour, after our recent performances. Diamond were quicker out of the blocks, sharper and revealed some key strengths particularly on the left where their two best players operated. We certainly had to work hard to maintain any possession and penetration was hard. A neutral observer would have felt that Farnborough took the lead against the run of play – as Andy Faulks was quick to tuck the ball home after the keeper had failed to hold on to an Ian Shoebridge shot from the edge of the box. Diamond had their moments – mainly long-range shots that Gary had little difficulty claiming. We even coped well with the two or three corners which Diamond earned. I recall only one moment of danger when Toby Manchip climbed above Ian Shoebridge in the six-yard box to get to the end of a cross but produced an ineffective header. Our second goal came on the half hour when Paul Bell surprised everyone – opponents and team mates – with a shot of no small technical merit to put the ball into the bottom corner of the net past the Diamond keeper who for once was motionless. Five minutes later – following a 30-yard free-kick from Patrice Mongelard which the keeper saved at the expense of a corner – Andy Faulks produced a cross which Eric Johnson converted into a goal with a smart header from close range.

At half-time we felt confident, and although the score was probably flattering, we had neutralised Diamond and Gary Fentiman had had relatively little to do. So, what changed – I hear you ask, apart from Roger French coming on for Trevor Stewart (and going upfront – with Eric Johnson dropping into midfield and Colin Brazier going at left-back). I have been mulling this over – mindful of not being too negative, or harsh on ourselves. These changes did take some energy out of our game but credit must be given to the resolve that Diamond showed. It helped that they scored 5 minutes into the half – from a left-wing cross that was volleyed instantly into the ground and beyond Gary Fentiman by their nippy under-age vet. This was an ominous sign as we were to struggle again to cope with the cross-field ball from the left. The next twenty minutes were difficult: Diamond were emboldened, we huffed and puffed but failed to produce a telling final ball, passes went astray, shots were poor and Diamond began to put more pressure on the defence. The second Diamond goal came from the left again as poor marking from a corner

allowed their most dangerous player with a very good left foot to put in a low diagonal ball that somehow eluded several defenders, Gary Fentiman and Trevor Stewart on the goal line. By then Trevor had come back on. Toby Manchip, after an inconsequential 70 minutes or so, had departed and Paul Bell had come back on and uneasily swapped his Farnborough shirt with Toby for a Diamond one. In term of its effect on the game this was Toby's most telling move.

Even at 3-2 up we had chances – there was a poor header from an unmarked Ian Shoebridge in the six-yard box. Andy Faulks had a one-on-one that was saved very well by the Diamond keeper who was rallying his team-mates even though he loudly called them onanists after a Farnborough chance went begging. At the other end Gary Fentiman produced a double save of great quality to keep us ahead. But inevitably the diamond drill got through, so to speak, as another left foot cross was volleyed into our net to produce a gem of a deserved equaliser.

Worse was to come, as we made a total shambles of defending a corner, and the bell tolled for Farnborough, as Paul Bell scored the 4th Diamond goal. Soon after Paul was through on the Farnborough goal and we'll never know if he scuffed his shot or was overcome by remorse. The rest of the Farnborough team were overcome by embarrassment and frustration.

This game was yet another reminder of how much we miss Paul Smith up front. I was in fact asked about him by a Diamond player in the showers. Paul scored many goals against Diamond in past seasons – 11 goals in the last six games he played against them. We have not replaced him, even if we average over 3 goals game and already have 15 different players on the score sheet.

After the game we missed our home comforts again – no clubhouse and no food. This was our 5th consecutive away game and we have one more away game before we return to Farrow Fields on 7 November. A number of us made our way to the Bulls Head public house in Chislehurst for our post match analysis. I suppose there was some symmetry in this – we had spent the game producing a lot of what comes out of the other end of a bull.

Finally, I leave you with the observation that what happens at big clubs also happens at Farnborough. This week for example we have had an American businessman come to look at the cows in Farrow Fields, to see if they can produce stuff good enough for Rafa's pinta. But instead, he will have seen a lot of fertiliser produced, which probably means that American ownership of Farnborough is not imminent. And after today's performance, I can see a few players thinking the Senior Vets lack ambition and holding out on new contracts, or wanting transfers.

We'll have to bounce back quickly from this but at the time of writing it looks like we might not have a game on 31 October because ex-Farnborough man Richard Cawker has let us down. Pity - as we had other teams wanting to play us, and it is plain daft to have a free Sunday in October when the pitches are in such good condition.

Farnborough **Man-of-the-Match** today was Gary Fentiman. The Diamond player of the match should be Paul Bell.

7 November 2010 Baltic Exchange Vets (H, 1-0)

Senior Vets nose in front of Baltic Exchange with first clean sheet of season

It has taken us 9 games to register our first clean sheet of the season, and today we returned to winning ways after waiting two weeks to put things right after our last match.

Farnborough lined up with Toby Manchip in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles and Chris Webb in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Shoebridge, Mark Perry and Mehmet Bozyigit in midfield; Andy Faulks and Leo Maccioni up front. Roger French, Paul Bell and Trevor Stewart stood ready to exchange places at half-time.

We were expecting a close encounter based on the results of our matches for the last five seasons against Baltic, and today's result bears this out, although a second goal would not have flattered us. In the end it did not matter that we did not get the insurance of a second goal but we almost lost our composure a couple of times in the second half, when Baltic threatened.

We settled very quickly in our now usual rhythm of 5-yard passes – even the referee Mick Gearing noted how much our passing game had come on since he stopped playing for us. He even accused me, in a nice way, of having changed my game but we now play a more collective game. I am not sure we have mastered the art of patience yet as we imposed ourselves clearly on Baltic and put their goal under enormous pressure. Their mobile and youthful looking keeper caught the eye as he got in the way of a string of crosses and shots in front of a packed defence where the proverbial team bus had been parked. They certainly managed to frustrate us as we probed wide and deep, forcing several corners.

It took Baltic a good 20 minutes to force anything resembling a save from Toby Manchip. The long period of inactivity may have dulled Toby's sharpness as he came out to claim a cross but allowed the ball to roll off his nipples and almost into the path of a surprised Baltic forward. Soon after, he provided a bit more excitement by sticking out a hand and changing the direction of a Baltic shot that was heading for the corner flag. But on the whole the defence was on top and Toby's distribution and coming off his line ceased to be a cause for concern.

Back down at the other end, we were made to wait for our breakthrough. It came about 25 minutes into the game when the keeper surprisingly failed to hold on to a Mehmet Bozyigit corner and the ball fell invitingly for Ian Shoebridge to show composure and round a defender before shooting the ball high into the net from 3 yards out. For the rest of the half, we kept Baltic bottled up in their area but failed to add to the score despite numerous attempts. A missed header from 3 yards out from Leo Maccioni stands out in the memory.

At half-time, the three substitutes all came on with Roger French and Paul Bell forming a new axis on the left and Chris Webb pushing up in midfield with Patrice Mongelard moving to the centre of defence and Trevor Stewart moving to right-back to receive plenty of feedback from Patrice Mongelard. Paul worked hard to put right his big mistake of two weeks ago, and Roger put himself about in the Baltic box in usual fashion. It is fair to say we lost a little bit of momentum but the direction of travel remained the same, although Baltic seemed more able to break down our flanks. Chris Webb did a great job helping the defence out and we were having to be patient and learn to defend a 1-0 lead. We weathered the first twenty-five minutes of the half quite well before bringing back on the three who had been replaced made way at half-time (as Mehmet Bozyigit, Andy Faulks and Stephen Blanchard made way for the last twenty minutes). We continued to enjoy 75% of the possession and to force corners but Baltic could pose a threat at

set-pieces as we gave away a few free-kicks around the box. From one such free-kick Toby Manchip took one for, and from, the team as Ian Coles got his head to a cross which skimmed off his head to smack Toby Manchip full on the nose. Toby was dazed for a bit (do not ask me how I could tell) but had begun to smell a clean sheet and he was to come off his line to make a smart save at the foot of a Baltic forward soon after. This was Toby's first clean sheet since the age of 5 as he was to tell us proudly later and that's including the back garden. And so, we savoured our first clean sheet of the season, and our sixth win out of nine games.

At this rate, there will be no calls for taxis for the management team of French and Mongelard (unlike for Mr Maicon at White hart Lane during the week) – whose success is beginning to stand out like a priest on a mountain of sugar. The secret is the appliance of science – as Roger French applies powerful computer programmes during the week to analyse our performances. This week he came up with the figures of 53-44-33 which he claims is an ideal set of figures for the Senior Vets. *Entre nous* I think these are also figures for Ann Widdecobme (allegedly) and I understand that Roger's frantic voting all last night has borne fruit.

After struggling to get the nets down, with the Farnborough vintage step ladder locked away, some of us were glad to return to the dressing room to enjoy our home comforts – including a cup of tea that was very welcome as the air had begun to freshen. Shirley put on a most impressive spread with honey-glazed free-range and organic chicken legs, crusty rolls with breaded ham, crusty rolls with mature Somerset cheddar; atlantic prawn and wild salmon sandwiches on brown and white bread, rare-breed cocktail sausages and gourmet mini- sausage rolls.

Farnborough **Man-of-the-Match** today was Chris Webb for no small part in shutting Baltic out.

14 November 2010: Belvedere Vets (H, 4-2)

Day to remember for Andy Faulks who bags all four Farnborough goals in Senior Vets win against Belvedere

Those among us with a memory for such things will have recalled that this same weekend last season (on 15 November to be precise) we lost our first fixture to the weather. Thankfully history did not repeat itself today, but the rain did have a bearing on the match, and après-match.

First though before kick off - we observed a minute's silence in the centre circle, just enough time to make a mental note that Belvedere had 18 players to our 14. But we also had 4 supporters from the French and Coles camps in the bus shelter. And "Chief Super" Chris Bourlet was today's referee, with commander Gearing presumably on cenotaph duty.

Farnborough lined up with Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles and Chris Webb in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Shoebridge, Mark Perry and Mehmet Bozyigit in midfield; Andy Faulks and Toby Manchip up front. Today's reservists were Roger French, Paul Bell and Nick Kinnear.

The pitch was greasy, and in places pace-sapping as Toby Manchip was to point out more than once, but on the whole it was possible to pass the ball well – as we, and Belvedere proved. We dominated the early exchanges even if the cutting edge was not quite there. After a quarter of an hour, we registered our first goal as Andy Faulks blocked a clearance and chased the ball into the box and slipped the ball past the keeper. Andy then had a great opportunity to make it 2-0, but after rounding the keeper in a one-on-one, shot against the last defender on the line. We were eager to get forward, in particular our two wide midfielders Mark Perry and Mehmet Bozyigit who were causing Belvedere a lot of problems. Mark Perry was slow to get back from one such foray to prevent the Belvedere right-back from scuffing a cross into the far corner of Gary Fentiman's net to make it 1-1. The defence had to be watchful for a while as Belvedere rallied but Gary had not much to do for the rest of the half as the defence managed to pass their way out of trouble with a composure that was pleasing on the eye.

Toby Manchip had a golden opportunity to make it 2-1, as he found himself unmarked at the far post with what looked like a simple tap-in that my granny might well have put away. But it appears the surface was churned up, the ball had some spin imparted to it, Toby's forward momentum had shifted his centre of gravity (i.e. his nipples) etc. etc, and the score remained 1-1 (and it was time to call for a taxi for Toby).

We restored our lead with a goal which owed much to Ian Shoebridge as he blocked a telegraphed pass from the Belvedere centre half, raced into the box and rolled the ball towards the empty goal – for Andy Faulks to make sure with an emphatic tap-in.

Roger French and Paul Bell came on for the start of the second half with Patrice Mongelard and Sinisa Gracanin making way. Patrice Mongelard had turned in what many may have felt was the best left-back performance for the Senior Vets in a first-half this season - and the management will have to reflect if they have at last found the last piece of the proverbial jigsaw. Sinisa seemed glad to have the opportunity for a rest, and to bond with his number one fan (Thomas French) in the bus shelter, before disappearing to the rest room for an emergency. Rumours that Sinisa had been out until 4 in the morning in bad company – seemed to be well founded with his unusually late arrival, and some of the hospital passes he sprayed around were

atypical. It transpired later that Sinisa had been delayed by a bout of tantric yoga, which would explain why he is always so calm.

The same cannot be said about Roger French who was clearly not touched by the armistice spirit today as he proceeded to make his mark on the game, and his opponents in the second half. Roger becomes the inaugural winner of the “Joey Barton” award – but there is no truth that a condition of his restraining order is to spend the week at the house of today’s captain Toby Manchip. The vegetarian diet would not be to his liking. Roger’s muscular approach earned an impeccably logical reminder from referee Bourlet that it was difficult to make a legal tackle when one was no where near one’s opponent. But one legit tackle from Roger that we were all thankful for, is when he put his body on the line and blocked a goal-bound shot in the 6-yard box after Gary Fentiman had failed to hold on to a shot.

Before that point though – we had once again been surprised by the quality and number of our opponents at the start of the second half. Seen from the vantage point of the bus shelter – it was clear that Belvedere had brought on reinforcements and pinned us back into our half, and the Farnborough defending got more desperate as the barrage mounted. It was no surprise when Belvedere equalised to make it 2-2. We were outnumbered, outfought and outfoxed in the muddy trenches, and a smart turn and shot from close-range brought matters to a standstill with Belvedere emboldened.

We were fortunate, if truth be told, to regain our lead quickly after that. A long punt from Gary Fentiman was missed by the Belvedere defence – and Paul Bell accompanied by Andy Faulks were both clean through bearing down on goal. It looked like Paul Bell had overrun the ball as the Belvedere keeper came out but this was a ruse as Paul feinted to shoot and slipped the ball sideways to Andy Faulks to roll it into the empty net. Belvedere cried off-side but they were not helped by their own linesman keeping his flag down. Five minutes later Andy Faulks sealed his memorable day as his close-range shot from a one-on-one came back off the keeper to rebound off his legs into the net to make it 4-2 to Farnborough.

Patrice Mongelard and (a little later, but lighter) Sinisa Gracanin came back on to steady the ship and see the game out, as Steve Blanchard left the fray and Toby Manchip caught his taxi from the bus shelter. Nick Kinnear declined the opportunity to share in the glory as he had, unlike Sinisa, really been out with bad company the night before.

Only the fact that this was our 7th win this season, and against good quality opposition, made it just about bearable that we did not have any tea, or food after the match. We were left with only a remembrance of last Sunday’s feast laid on by Shirley. Today the master of Farrow Fields had given Shirley the morning off as he was genuinely uncertain as to whether the game would be played. All that remained was for Roger to pass on his apologies that we had not been able to reciprocate the hospitality which Belvedere had graciously extended to us a few weeks ago (and for one or two of his tackles possibly).

Farnborough **Man-of-the-Match** and our tallest poppy today was Andy Faulks.

21 November 2010: Met Police Super Vets (H, 2-3)

Daylight robbery at Farrow Fields: inside job suspected as Met Police nick win against Farnborough Senior Vets

We were expecting the usual tough game against these opponents who fittingly play in black and blue. And even though we left behind plenty of incriminating evidence behind, this was not a fair cop. To cap a plodding performance, we gave away three goals – more on that later. Nine-tenths of Farnborough possession was not enough against the law today.

Farnborough lined up with Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Chris Webb, Trevor Stewart and Roger French in defence; Mark Perry, Robin Lipscomb, George Kleanthous and Mehmet Bozyigit in midfield; Andy Faulks and Leo Maccioni up front. Waiting round the corner in the van were Paul Bell and Danny Winter. Ian Shoebridge came to watch the game – wisely deciding to protect his bruised ribs from the Met.

The Met had a full team – reinforced with two underage Vets (one was less than half my age I was to uncover later) and they also nabbed “I’d do anything for a game” Rod Loe, loitering with intent in the clubhouse, to bulk up their numbers.

I suppose we found the opening exchanges too easy as we laid siege to the thick blue line and fashioned a string of half chances that we could not convert. We had no trouble getting behind or through them, and had them kettled inside their half, bar the occasional break. This said I cannot really recall a clear chance for Farnborough in that half, as many crosses went begging, many shots were off target, cut-backs inside the six-yard box went astray and we lacked composure in the box. The Met were happy to concede free-kicks outside, sometimes inside even. And Mick Gearing was showing great economy with the whistle – even though there were plenty of laws being broken. He would not have lasted long on the beat, in the old days, with his attitude to whistle blowing. Ironically, it was the Met players who wanted him to blow his whistle more. The Met keeper made one good save from a Patrice Mongelard free-kick and that was it.

At the other end Gary Fentiman was wasting police time. Midway through the half we gave the Met help with their enquiries so to speak, as Roger French left the back door wide open, and one of the younger Met players, on-side, to advance on goal and slip the ball under Gary’s body to put the Met 1-0 up. The linesman on that side was our own Paul Bell who kept his flag down – until that time I had put out of my mind that Paul’s employer is in fact the Met. I was to be troubled again by that thought later on, in the second half. What made it seem worse was that it was so much against the run of play, and so easily avoidable with a bit more alertness and energy at left-back. Soon after, Trevor Stewart was injured and Danny Winter came on at right-back without breaking our pattern of play. Our attempts to get even continued to fail and the Met side were starting to believe that this was their day after all. I am not sure which side was more relieved when the half-time whistle came. Mick Gearing came off the pitch in heated discussion with a Met player about the vices and virtues of tantric refereeing.

At half-time Mark Perry made way for Paul Bell and we carried on where we left off. More chances went begging. George Kleanthous and Robin Lipscomb kept being fouled, sometimes noticed by the referee, sometimes not. We kept trying to walk the ball into the net against the tight ranks of the Met defence. One horrible slice off the right boot from Andy Faulks stood out in the memory – after he was teed up by George Kleanthous. Today Andy could not buy a goal and after bagging 4 goals on remembrance Sunday – he’ll want to forget today’s game. But before he was substituted Andy was able to set up our equaliser as he peeled off his marker,

advanced on goal, and the save from the keeper landed at George's feet who calmly lofted the ball into the empty net. This was no more than we deserved but a false dawn.

Andy's substitution had led to a change in formation as Roger French went up front, Paul Bell dropped to left-back and Mark Perry came back on at left midfield. Doubts about the wisdom of this move grew in my mind as the game went on.

Then we cracked under the pressure and, I confess, tempers began to fray even more. A shot from a Met Police forward hit Paul Bell in the box, on the hand from no more than 3 yards away. Mick Gearing saw fit to award a penalty that was put away to make it 2-1 to the Met. Paul Bell's assist will have pleased his employer – but it was harsh (particularly on Paul who scored against Farnborough in our last defeat). Mick Gearing assured me afterwards that the tax disc on his car in the Farnborough car park was not out of date. I had to point out that he missed at least two blatant penalties in our favour – one in particular when George Kleanthous “lost his footing” with a Met defender very close by as Mehmet Bozygit was about to cut the ball back to him – I say about to because in the end Mehmet opted to blast the ball over the bar, not for the first time today.

Amazingly Farnborough was to have a hand in the third Met Police goal a few minutes later as Robin Lipscomb squared the ball to a Met Police forward on the edge of our box, with just the right amount of pace and on his best foot, to lash the ball into the Farnborough net.

Soon after there was a spot of GBH committed on Gary Fentiman in the box and things really threatened to get out of hand as Roger French nearly got into trouble with the police for his protest. Roger was asked by a Met player to step outside rather than aside – not quite standard Met procedure I thought.

With the minutes ticking away – Roger French got our second goal. From where I was standing it looked like a mis-hit but Roger assures me it was a cunningly disguised shot that deceived the keeper. There were too few of us in the bar afterwards to take a vote on it. Yes, Roger scored but I do not think we played our best football when the formation was switched. Then we ran out of time and that was it, we'd been mugged by the Met.

The mood was sombre in the club house afterwards. Vic Farrow seemed more meldrewish than usual as there was not much help available to him with all the chores around the club. He even had to unblock the boot-cleaning sink but was tooled up for the job. It was suggested to him that he cheers himself, and others, up by getting a Brazilian au pair to help out on Sunday morning. Who knows, she may have relatives who can play for the Senior Vets, particularly up front.

Farnborough **Man-of-the-Match** was Chris Webb who stood out in the identity parade.

2 January 2011: Club Match (H, 8-2)

Football wins as Senior Vets do it for themselves in 10-goal thriller

Earlier in the week it looked like our winter break would run to yet another Sunday as Erith Vets failed to honour their fixture against us. But having last played on 21 November, we were gagging for a game and decided that as we already had 16 players available for the match, we would put out a call for some extra bodies to get to 22 and have a bit of a run out. And so, we did (with Ian Clarkson joining the fray midway through the second half). We also got Mick Gearing to drive to Farrow Fields in his Christmas present, a shiny blue Toyota, to referee the game (more on that later).

Club records will show that the two Farnborough Senior Vets teams today lined up as follows:

Senior Vets (Waldorf's XI) in maroon

Gary Fentiman in goal; Nick Frost, Steve Blanchard (sr), Nick Kinnear, Steve Blanchard (jr) in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Paul Bell, Mehmet Bozyigit, Patrice Mongelard in midfield; Dave Huxley, Andy Faulks up front.

Senior Vets reserves (Statler's XI) in yellow and red

Toby Manchip in goal; John Tallis, Ian Clarkson, Trevor Stewart, Paul Parsons in defence, Mark Edwards, Chris Webb, Colin Ebdon, Roger French in midfield; Ian Shoebridge, Ryan Shoebridge up front.

On paper these looked two well-matched teams, devised by the Farrow Fields Senior Vets boot room, on what turned out to be a very good day for football – catching up with old friends, dry, no wind, a good pitch and a little nip in the air.

The first goal was not long in coming – as Gary Fentiman presented Ryan Shoebridge with a belated Christmas present as his attempt at a tight pass out of defence rebounded off Ryan's foot into the goal. By then we had been playing for about five minutes and the Senior Vets had yet to appear in their opponents' box. Anyone betting on the outcome of the game at that point would have lost money.

Slowly though the Senior Vets began to trouble the other team. Our equaliser was a Christmas cracker of a goal – as Mehmet Bozyigit cut in from the right and let fly. The ball whistled past a frozen Toby Manchip, and went in off the post. Our pressure told soon after as Paul Parsons put in a tackle in the box which the referee saw as man + ball rather than the other way round, and the only legitimate penalty of the game was awarded. Patrice Mongelard found traces of the penalty spot, and belted the ball past a diving Toby Manchip, against his outstretched hand, into the bottom corner. The Senior Vets third goal followed soon after as Toby Manchip dived smartly to palm a low shot away but Patrice Mongelard got to the loose ball before Trevor Stewart could clear it, and cut it back for Paul Bell to slot home from a yard out.

Ian Clarkson joined the fray at that point and this released Roger French to yet again try his luck up front. He must have been highly excited at the thought of scoring, as the ball broke to him unmarked, on his right (left) foot into the box five yards out – but the score remained unchanged.

We then had an unscheduled stop so that the “Alan Hansen” cut on Dave Huxley’s forehead could be seen to. He had banged heads with Paul Parsons as he headed a cross over the bar. I am glad to say after initial reports of “a lot of claret” that Dave was fine, once washed, vaselined and plastered, and he resumed the game soon after.

Even at 3-1 at half-time the game was finely poised, but then Toby Manchip swapped shirts with Chris Webb, and the tide turned slowly at first but then quickly – as the goals came. I cannot quite remember the sequence but I think Paul Bell got his second after a well-worked move down the right ended in a cut-back from Mehmet. 4-1 became 5-1 as Andy Faulks scored with got a deft header from yet another cross from the right.

Patrice Mongelard put a free-kick on the outskirts of High Elms – before Paul got his hat-trick – drifting in from the left to put the ball high into the net from a central position just inside the box. Thinking back on it now - such was the direction of play that I cannot recall our two wide midfielders, Paul Bell and Mehmet Bozyigit being in our half of the pitch – other than for re-starts after goals (and I think Mehmet was not back in his half for two of these). The referee missed that - just as he was remiss in awarding a dubious penalty to Roger French whose pass had clearly bounced off Patrice’s Mongelard’s chest in the box. If Roger thought this was not a penalty, he kept his thoughts to himself – and proceeded to score low into the bottom corner. I think by then Gary Fentiman had swapped shirts with Nick Kinnear – making it five goalkeepers between both sides today – talk about strength in depth!

There was time for Trevor Stewart to become the third keeper for the Senior Vets reserves but to no avail as Patrice Mongelard got his second goal to make it 7-2, after the Senior Vets reserves’ defence was yet again breached on the right. Soon after Dave Huxley got a well-deserved goal (I think after having one ruled out for off-side). And that was it – a most enjoyable game, snatched from the jaws of inclement weather and unreliable opposition, by tenacious and football-mad management. The icing on the cake came in the form of delightful sandwiches from Mrs Shoebridge.

Man-of-the-Match – all twenty-two players.

9 January 2011: Diamond Vets (N, 4-3)

Farnborough stars twinkle on astral turf in win against Diamond

A little bit of Farnborough history was made today. It was not that this match yielded seven goals, as the previous match between these two sides this season – but this time with Farnborough on top. No, it was that this fixture was played on AstroTurf. The Senior Vets co-manager Roger French, who knows a thing or two about insurance – surmised, rightly, that the risk of this game not being played at hydrophilic Farrow Fields, was too great after the Orpington monsoon season started this week.

Not many people know this but Astro Turf was invented in 1965, and in 1999 Real Madrid became the first European football club to purchase an Astro Turf system for their training pitches. And in 2011 Farnborough Senior Vets.....

And so, it came to pass that Farnborough Senior Vets found themselves, back at school, in the vast boys changing rooms of the Priory school, a specialist sports college, in the London borough of Bromley, in Tintagel Road, BR5 4LG. There was a lot of PE kit lying about that would be in the lost property office on Monday.

In the bright low winter sunshine, against a blue sky, and in a crisp breeze, Farnborough lined up with Gary Fentiman in goal; Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Toby Manchip and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Mehmet Bozyigit, Chris Webb, Ian Shoebridge and Jerry Cogotti in midfield; John Tallis and Andy Faulks up front. At the back of the class in red shorts, were Roger French, Paul Bell and Trevor French – waiting for their name to be called.

The game started a little slowly as both sides had to come to terms with the unfamiliar surface, to take more care with their passing, to judge the bounce and pace of the ball in the glare reflecting off the “pitch”, and to adjust to their formations. For our part, we were getting used to having a new target man up front in the form of tall Tallis. Toby Manchip was finding out what happens at right-back – and was the first to admit that it was not in his astral chart to play at right-back, versatile though he is.

The first 10 minutes or so were evenly contested but with no clear chances being created. Diamond scored first, from a corner that we would not have conceded on grass. We failed to clear the incoming corner and it was headed into the goal just where a right-back would normally be standing. 1-0 to Diamond

This was a wake-up call and we began to string passes together, and in particular to get to the end of flicks and headers that John Tallis kept winning for us. The timing of our movement also improved as we sought out gaps in the Diamond defence. Our equaliser was a bit of a gem - John Tallis threaded a through ball to Mehmet Bozyigit, who got behind the Diamond defence, and squared the ball across goal for Ian Shoebridge to tuck away neatly. 1-1.

It seemed only a matter of time before we would edge ahead and it was doubly surprising when Diamond got their noses in front again. A cross from the Diamond left wing was shinned high towards goal from just outside the box. As the ball dropped towards the top-corner we were fully expecting Gary Fentiman to reach up for it, but the ball seemed to clip the bar on its way down, and the subtle change of pace direction, in the blinding sun in Gary's eyes, was enough to cause the ball to slip through his outstretched gloves into the net. 2-1 to Diamond. Gary's disappointment was great but redemption would come soon.

Once again, we had to polish our performance and we replied with incision, to score twice in quick succession with two clinical moves. First, Ian Shoebridge was played in by Andy Faulks, and advanced on the goal. His shot was parried by the Diamond keeper but had enough momentum to cross the line. 2-2. Then, Patrice Mongelard swung a pass from the left into the heart of the Diamond defence, which Andy Faulks had somehow anticipated, controlled and carried into the box to beat the Diamond keeper from close range. 3-2 to Farnborough. In between those two goals we had a moment of (sadly now rare) sportsmanship when the Diamond players put the ball out for a corner after the referee, blinded by the sun perhaps, failed to award Farnborough a (second successive) corner.

John Tallis, Toby Manchip and Patrice Mongelard came off at half-time, to make way for Paul Bell, Trevor Stewart and Roger French. The plan was to bring all three players back but management wires got crossed, and the second half team was in the end unchanged. Toby Manchip, though, put in an equally effective performance as linesman, in that second half.

As is often the case the opposition started the second half better than we did and exerted great pressure. This said, five minutes after the re-start, Chris Webb played a 24-carat pass to unlock the Diamond defence and Andy Faulks rolled the ball inches past the Diamond goal. The cushion of another Farnborough goal was sorely missed as Diamond equalised some 10 minutes into the half, when their nippy forward picked his way through the Farnborough "Easter Island" defence to lash the ball against the bottom of a post into the net. 3-3.

We then had to weather some difficult moments, particularly stemming from the right of our defence, and were reduced to play on the break. Gary Fentiman pulled off a string of great saves from corners, close-range and long-range shots which gave the team a lot of heart and we began to create some dangerous moments at the other end, especially from the adventurous Mehmet Bozyigit on the right. One overlapping move saw him square the ball back to Ian Shoebridge who hit the crossbar from 15 yards out. Five minutes later though after yet another right-wing move, the ball was collected on the edge of the box by the stealthy Andy Faulks (who seemed the most comfortable Farnborough player on this surface) and guided into the Diamond net. 4-3 to Farnborough.

There was time for Andy Faulks to shoot high over the fence from a decent chance and for Paul Bell to cause a frisson in the right penalty box this time, as he turned to shoot low on target. In the end this was a deserved win – to reverse the self-inflicted defeat by the same score which we suffered against this team in the autumn. We remain unbeaten in 2011.

Man-of-the-Match – two sparklers - Ian Shoebridge and Gary Fentiman

16 January 2011: Inter Vyagra Super Vets (N, 3-2)

Farnborough come from behind to overcome stiff opposition

For a second consecutive Sunday Farnborough Senior Vets defied the rain gods, with the goodwill of our opponents, to play a football match – again on astro turf, but this time on the Darrick Wood school pitch – personally tested by the management team during the week – and found to be a softer surface. But there was nothing limp about today's game which as a robust, well-contested affair, with the outcome uncertain right until the end.

Farnborough lined up with Gary Fentiman in goal; Steve Blanchard, Chris Webb, Robin Lipscomb, and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Mehmet Bozyigit, Ian Shoebridge, Sinisa Gracanin and John Tallis in midfield; Andy Faulks and Leo Maccioni up front. Roger French, George Kleanthous and Mark Perry were the ball boys.

The vigour and solidity of Inter Vyagra took us by surprise, quickly knocking out the small amount of complacency we took into this game. Once again, the surface took some getting used to, and the passing had to be crisp, slightly under-hit, and accurate. The slightly narrower than regulation pitch compressed the play, and attempts to play on the flanks often ended in throw-ins. In spite of all this both sides knew their business and set about to establish an early advantage. Farnborough had more foreplay while Inter Vyagra were more direct.

The first goal, to Farnborough, was not unexpected – as Mehmet Bozyigit broke through on the right and lifted a cross onto Leo Maccioni's forehead in the six-yard box, for him to beat the keeper almost at point-blank range. What was unexpected was how quickly Inter Vyagra equalised. Patrice Mongelard played a back pass to Chris Webb, and a combination of the pace on the ball, Chris's distance from it, and an on-rushing big unit of a forward who shot surprisingly early from the edge of the box, made it 1-1.

This shook us more than it stirred us, and for ten minutes or so we were uncertain and struggled to retain our composure and territorial advantage. Patrice Mongelard had to produce a sliding tackle (at the cost of a badly grazed left knee) to block a powerful shot from a lively Inter Vyagra forward who was airborne for a bit. The rest of the half was ours in terms of possession as we fashioned a number of half-chances – the best falling to Leo Maccioni in the six-yard box from a delightful cross from the left, this time by Mehmet Bozyigit. We also forced corners and one of these saw a half chance headed over by Chris Webb from Ian Shoebridge's cross. The compact defence erected by Inter Vyagra proved difficult to breach and whilst we dominated the play, the half-time whistle came with the score at 1-1.

Roger French, Mark Perry and George Kleanthous came on for John Tallis, Robin Lipscomb and Ian Shoebridge to start the second half.

A growing sense that this might not be our day after all was heightened when Inter Vyagra took the lead – exploiting a little hesitancy at the back as Gary Fentiman was lured to the edge of his box and we lost control of the ball which was rolled into an empty net. Five minutes later Gary produced the save of the match – a one-handed point-blank serve, which proved a turning point. From then onwards with about half an hour to play, we threw the kitchen sink at the bus parked in front of the Inter Vyagra goal. Farnborough chances began to come - and be missed with regularity. The delivery from our set-pieces was very good, from corners, and two floated free-kicks from Patrice Mongelard, and led to dangerous moments in the Inter Vyagra box.

With 25 minutes left – John Tallis, Ian Shoebridge and Robin Lipscomb resumed the fray, as Mehmet Bozigit, Steve Blanchard and Andy Faulks paused. Robin proceeded to put in a muscular display at right-back, with Patrice Mongelard pushing up into the right side of midfield to help the forward momentum now in our favour. John Tallis stabilised the back as we began pushing forward, and Ian Shoebridge's eager and intelligent running, and Roger French's crosses from the left, began to worry Inter Vyagra.

Eventually the pressure told with 15 minutes left – Mark Perry made a rare foray into the Inter Vyagra box and from this move the ball found its way to Sinisa Gracanin to beat the Inter Vyagra keeper – with a fierce low shot. 2-2. With ten minutes left Andy Faulks returned to replace Leo Maccioni – and by then the Farnborough pressure was relentless - and the question in our minds was whether this would be our first draw of the season.

The answer, five minutes from the end, came like a thunderbolt – as the ball was headed out of a packed Inter Vyagra box into the zone that lies 35 yards out – dead center of the pitch, and into which rushed Chris Webb out of our defence – to leather the ball through the crowded scene, over the keeper's despairing hands into the roof of the net. What a climax.

And there nearly was another Farnborough goal – as Patrice Mongelard beat the off-side trap to follow a deft pass from Robin Lipscomb into the box. Dear Reader – as I penetrated the six-yard box, I was overcome by the excitement, and shot wide, prematurely. What an anti-climax.

Given the proximity of our home ground to today's pitch – several of us, returned to our clubhouse – after ascertaining that Darrick Wood school has not yet mastered the art of recycling rain water for the showers.

From the clubhouse we witnessed the rather interesting scenes of a "tasty" cup game involving our Sunday side, on our big pitch being abandoned with three minutes of extra time left. I could not help thinking, after the initial frisson wondering if things were about to kick off – that you would not get this sort of thing with the Vets.

A word of thanks to the referee Mick Gearing, his first time on astro turf, refereeing that is, who had a game of few fouls to manage – such was the spirit in which it was played, competitive but fair – and who did well to add time for the many instances we had to retrieve the ball behind fences and razor wire. We lost a pair of balls in that game, to add to the cost of Farrow Field cancellations.

A word of thanks too – for Shirley who laid on a superb spread – not a crumb was left as cheese rolls, ham rolls, prawn and brown bread sandwiches, cocktail sausages, mini-sausage rolls and crisps all went. It was also one of those rare occasions when the Branston pickle was released by Vic Farrow, to accompany the cheese and ham rolls. It was good to see what looked like the entire Inter Vyagra team back in the clubhouse.

Man-of-the-Match – Chris Webb, for releasing our pent-up frustrations with probably as good a winner as ever scored on that pitch, and a contender for goal-of-the-season.

23 January 2011: Baltic Exchange Vets (A, 0-3)

Senior Vets short-changed by a youthful Baltic Exchange side in defeat

This was a bitter pill to swallow: our heaviest defeat (out of five, alongside ten wins) and only the second game this season that we have failed to score a goal. And to think too that our only clean sheet this season came in the narrow 1-0 win against Baltic on 7 November. As often happens in football the score does not tell the story of this game, which left us feeling ill-tempered and bruised, a bit like after a tangle with Roger French.

Today's pitch at the Post Office Ground in Trenham Drive, Warlingham could be reached in a number of ways from Farnborough, some taking longer than others, and between us the Farnborough team must have tried them all – given the staggered arrivals. Even the kit took its time to get there, and after we survived the toilets, après Paul Bell, and had changed we were still short of Roger French and the all-important management charts and team options.

So, Patrice Mongelard, co-manager, after a brief moment of tactical thinking changed by Sinisa Gracanin's arrival, advised that Farnborough would line up as follows: Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles and Mehmet Bozyigit in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb, Mark Perry and Toby Manchip in midfield; Ian Shoebridge and John Tallis up front. Roger French, Paul Bell and Nick Kinnear stood ready to exchange places at half-time.

As always against this side, we were expecting a hard game and we quickly realised that compared with the side that played us at Farrow Fields on 7 November – this Baltic side had seen rather fewer birthdays, and included several fresh faces, including a giant in midfield ideally suited to the oval ball we thought, as confirmed later. The referee was also an ex-Baltic player, doubling up as team manager as he orchestrated their tactics and substitutions.

The opening 15 to 20 minutes were brisk and evenly contested. The Baltic tackling was muscular but they had three or four players with no little skill, and we had to work hard to deny them (including one who looked a lot like Eric Cantona's little brother and who could play a bit) - any goal-scoring opportunities. Then we gave away a goal as one of their forwards was able to drop off, control a cross just outside the box, and put in a shot across the goal that Gary Fentiman tracked, called for, caught, clasped to his body only for the ball to slip out of his hands and rest in the Farnborough net.

To our credit, we did not let this disappointment trouble us too long as we put the Baltic goal under pressure forcing several corners in succession. Two of these saw a header from Chris Webb turned onto the bar by the Baltic keeper and another header, this time from Mark Perry, cleared off the line. At the other end, Gary Fentiman made a smart save low to his right to divert a ball travelling towards the bottom corner.

At half-time we felt we deserved to be level, given the amount of play we had had in the Baltic half. Patrice Mongelard and Mark Perry made way for Roger French and Paul Bell. If anything, we were to have more and clearer opportunities to score in the second half and this makes the final score harsh to take.

Baltic threatened early in the half but after two great saves from Gary Fentiman and stout defending from Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, and Chris Webb (who was mistakenly taken for a rugby player by an afore-mentioned Baltic player) - we began to create opportunities. Toby Manchip swung a dangerous cross from the left which Ian Shoebridge controlled neatly in the

six-yard box, turned, with his body now facing the goal. And with only the keeper to beat, and with no Baltic defender near him, Ian rolled the ball wide. Another great chance fell to Mehmet Bozyigit who had once again gone on an overlapping run but he shot narrowly wide from six yards out.

At the other end we were putting in some meaty tackles of our own, notably from Roger French. And Gary Fentiman was, as they say, keeping us in the game with some very good saves which made the aberration of the first Baltic goal even harder to comprehend. One low diving save was made as Baltic cheers were going up for a goal. Nick Kinnear came on, and Mark Perry returned for John Tallis and Toby Manchip – as we re-shuffled the side to increase the number of Farnborough players in and an around the Baltic box in our search for an equaliser. For a brief while it looked like it might work.

Well - as commentators often say, the next goal was to be the crucial one. Baltic broke into the box from the right side of our defence and a tricky dribble ended in bodily contact with Ian Coles. The penalty was awarded and scored, despite protestations which left the referee unmoved. Ian Coles, at that point having reached incandescence, decided to vacate the field of play, and John Tallis returned to the centre of defence. Toby Manchip rushed to the dressing room partly to offer counselling to Ian - but mainly to open the locked door, to prevent damage to Post Office property.

That was not the end of it, far from it. A third Baltic goal followed – a messy affair in the box as a series of sliding tackles failed to clear the ball and it was poked over the line in a scrappy passage of play. We then had an incident that could have boiled over in a red mist. Roger French and a burly but skilful Baltic midfielder tangled, indulged in afters, and compared handbags. Fearing it was all about to kick off (and this after I thought last Sunday that this sort of thing does not happen in Vets games) I quickly ushered Master Thomas and Miss Isabelle French in their shelter – there are things that children should not witness. But it all calmed down.

There was even time for the referee to award us a penalty – it had taken a while to come, but sadly, Ian Shoebridge put it wide of the top corner. This was a bad day in the office for one of our most reliable performers (and the scorer of our goal when we beat Baltic at home).

Afterwards we sat in the bar and analysed the game as players normally do, and all felt a bit hard done by. The Baltic referee brought us sandwiches and cold sausage rolls, and a jug of Fosters. The beer was a nice (and clever) touch.

So, our unbeaten run in 2011 has ended, and we now look forward to three consecutive home games (and Shirley's warm sausage rolls), and Mr Manchip in goal for our next two games we hope.

Farnborough **Man-of-the-Match** today was Steve Blanchard for a performance that deserved a lot better than this score.

30 January 2011: Crofton Albion Vets (H, 2-4)

Senior Vets in a sorry state as Crofton Albion pull a fast one to win

If last week's game was a bitter pill to swallow, then what of today's harsh medicine? No doubt about it, the Senior Vets are an ailing, moribund, sickly, lethargic, out of shape, and sorry lot. We played without intelligence, solidarity, hunger or desire. We should all be asking ourselves if we are fit to wear the shirt. Are we approaching our games with the right tactics, formation, frame of mind, physical condition, and are we, each and every one of us, letting our team mates down?

On my way up to the pitch I got talking to the Crofton Albion No 9, who had a fresh complexion unlined face, clear eyes, and not a fleck of grey in his luxuriant coiffure. He assured me that he smoked, and had a young child, and so felt he was old enough to play Vets football. He played us alright – more on that later.

Crofton Albion could only field 10 players today and for some reason we could not persuade any of our two subs to swap our shirt for theirs. Odd that – but the odds against us had already been cast. In an oddly prophetic moment Andy Faulks had altered Toby Manchip's name on the notice board in the dressing room, to something that will remain between us – well same number of letters but with an s and a t.

In dry crisp weather and without a breeze, or sunlight, Farnborough lined up as follows: Toby Manchip in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles and John Tallis in defence; Chris Webb, Ian Shoebridge, Mark Perry and Mehmet Bozyigit in midfield; Leo Maccioni and Andy Faulks up front. Paul Bell and Nick Kinnear ran both lines until they could come on later.

The first ten minutes were deceptively easy – and perhaps therein lay the problem. Chris Webb hit the post in that time. We had most of the possession – and most of the play was in the Crofton Albion half – in fact, that was not to change throughout the game. Our first goal was scored with relative ease – Mehmet Bozyigit broke through on the right, cut inside, and spotted Chris Webb's darting run behind the defence, played him in, and Chris finished coolly with a well-placed goal.

Our lead lasted ten minutes or so. During that time Chris Webb had a great chance to make it 2-0 but shot narrowly wide. By then the Crofton Albion weapon of choice was clear, long through balls to No 9, who was balanced, two-footed, very quick, and with a good eye for goal – almost unplayable. Spotting the danger is one thing - dealing with it another as we failed to double up on him, went flat at the back, and paid the price. When he broke through on the left there was another 40 yards to our goal; and as he advanced Ian Coles and Patrice Mongelard converged on him. By then he had spotted that Toby Manchip had ventured off his line, unnecessarily, and showed him where to put the ball, over his head into the unguarded net.

No worries we thought – we'll go and get another one. We tried, Andy Faulks had two one-on-ones, both fluffed. Leo Maccioni made space in the box more than once but shot tamely. Mehmet Bozyigit came very close with a low shot that fizzed across the box. All these missed chances were to prove costly. "We're going to pay for that" – shouted Toby Manchip – using the royal "we".

Then Ian Shoebridge carried the ball into the heart of the Crofton Albion defence before slipping it to Leo Maccioni who shot emphatically from six yards out. 2-1 to Farnborough.

A calamitous 10 minutes followed for Toby Manchip and for Farnborough. I never thought I'd say, or write this, but I felt sorry for Toby Manchip, as two goal-keeping blunders cast a huge shadow on the game and put us in arrears that we never recovered from. A 35-yard punt towards the goal saw Toby doing a rather good Marcel Marceau impression as he locked his knees together, splayed his legs, opened his palms outwards in front of his chest, and then either misjudged the flight of the ball, or took his eye off it, or was distracted by a UFO, as it dipped and went through his legs into the net. 2-2. Five minutes later, Crofton Albion took the lead as a shot from distance, which we failed to close down, 30 yards out, dead centre, was not dealt with as it should have been by you know who. 3-2 to Crofton Albion. Whatever shreds of confidence we had drained out of the team. We persuaded Toby to continue in goal and refused to consider his transfer request. Paul Bell came on at half-time for Mark Perry.

Ten minutes into the second half – Toby Manchip pulled his hamstring, and was replaced in goal by Patrice Mongelard, who had somehow managed to get to the head of the crowd vying for the position. Nick Kinnear came on at left-back and we carried pretty much as before. The pattern of the game continued. We had most of the possession. Crofton defended in numbers, robustly and with confidence, playing themselves out of trouble more than once – always seeking to unleash the torpedo up front, by then policed by Ian Coles who had swapped places in defence with John Tallis. For a while this worked – and when it failed, Patrice Mongelard was able to make saves to keep us in with a chance to equalise. We came close – Andy Faulks had a goal ruled off-side, and Paul Bell had a shot pushed against the cross bar. But that was it. We failed to make the most of the extra player, we failed to find the killer pass, we failed to stay on-side many times, and we failed to get back when we lost the ball.

The fourth Crofton Albion goal had an air of inevitability to it. Ball over the top to quick youngster, who outstripped the defence, drew the keeper and squared the ball to extremely belligerent teammate who was unmarked, and the ball was rolled into the Farnborough net.

It could have been a lot worse were it not for three good saves from Patrice Mongelard. I'd like to think Toby Manchip would have saved them but I cannot be certain about that any more, as I watched Toby drop his gloves on the way out of the club, after he'd swept the away team dressing room (and collected their Man-of-the-Match award). But we are a loyal lot at Farnborough and if Toby survives the transfer window, I shall be happy to have him in goal again – it is not a job I fancy, and Toby has done many good things in the past for the team.

The odds against us playing this team from the Kidbrooke area again, next season, lengthened considerably today – Toby Harlow please note. No - it was not that they played a 20-year-old, without apology, but more the way they played this match. There was a nasty undercurrent to it, caused by one or two individuals but enough to poison the well. Mick Gearing as referee, as fair-minded a septuagenarian as you could wish for, to his great credit, came through constant nagging, backchat, abuse and pressure, and some of their tackling was late and spiteful.

Shirley's sandwiches helped to comfort the dispirited team as we recorded that the Farnborough **Man-of-the-Match** today was Chris Webb, for unmatched spirit and endeavour, with votes also cast for Ian Coles, Patrice Mongelard, John Tallis and yes, in the best tradition of gallows humour and ironic twists, Toby Manchip. Next week we are up against a pub team in Edenbridge - a tough lot recalls Colin Brazier. Just what the doctor ordered.

6 February 2011: Edenbridge Vets (A, 3-1)

Senior Vets find their way again with win against Edenbridge Vets

After two successive defeats, with feelings of penance and contrition, Farnborough Senior Vets took the long road to redemption with an away fixture in the depths of Kent, against an unknown team in Edenbridge Vets. Getting there felt like a pilgrimage to some of us – who got lost twice.

In dry but overcast and very windy conditions, Farnborough lined up as follows: Toby Manchip in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Chris Webb and Nick Kinnear in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Shoebridge, Roger French, and Mehmet Bozyigit in midfield; John Tallis and Colin Brazier up front. Paul Bell was the 12th disciple.

Having lost the toss, we were playing against the gale as the first-half got under way. Not surprisingly we were penned back in our half as Edenbridge hustled and probed. Toby Manchip was called to make a very smart save after only 5 minutes – and from then on, we took great pleasure in frustrating Edenbridge. Whenever they nearly broke through there was always one of us in the way. Some of it was last ditch but it kept us in it. Nick Kinnear and Steve Blanchard twice got involved in some 6-yard box pin ball, once with the aid of a post – the longer this went on the more confident we were of weathering the storm.

We were not without danger ourselves. John Tallis was like a Kentish oak in the wind as he got his head to throw-ins and goal-kicks – one of the many features of Toby's game that worked well today, held the ball and brought others into play. Mehmet Bozyigit was particularly prominent on the right of midfield with his direct running, changes of direction and pace, that brought some heavy tackling his way, without complaint. On the other side, Colin Brazier was equally energetic, tracking back and closing down. In the centre of midfield, the return of Sinisa Gracanin brought some graft and craft to our play and Ian Shoebridge was supporting John effectively and threatening to score.

Then as away teams like to do – we silenced the crowd and the border collie – with a trade mark goal from Mehmet Bozyigit - as he latched on to a through ball from John Tallis, cut in, advanced at speed on the Edenbridge central defender who hesitated, was bypassed as Mehmet poked the ball behind him, ran round and did the same to the keeper. This was more against the wind than against the run of play, and well-deserved.

Predictably, Edenbridge stirred and went looking for an equaliser – mainly down our left side where Roger French and Nick Kinnear were coming under increased pressure. This is not a good idea with Roger as he blew his lid when the referee awarded a free-kick to Edenbridge just outside the box. As a member of the defender's union, I could see why this decision could be disputed but I was not prepared, even after all this time, for the force with which Roger chose to take the matter up with the referee. I must commend the referee for the saintly way he handled the next couple of minutes (and the whole game in fact) as he called Roger and Farnborough captain du jour, Chris Webb, to him, for a wise word. To the sin of anger Roger was in danger of adding that of stupidity as Chris pointed out to him that getting banished from the garden of Edenbridge would not be helpful. I cannot confirm the rumour that the referee was the spitting image of the bloke that did the MOT on Roger's car earlier in the week.

Anyway, the free-kick was taken and Edenbridge equalised as the edge of wall parted like the red sea and the wind and a powerful left foot shot did the rest. Roger was still simmering down,

we think, when minutes later, he attempted a 40-yard volley with his right foot which became an up and under that Nick Kinnear did well to cope with, five yards behind Roger.

At half-time, we felt that the tide (or should that be wind) would turn the game in our favour – and so it came to pass. Nick Kinnear made way for Paul Bell, as Roger dropped back into the defence – from where he proceeded to have a more composed display. From left midfield, Paul was to become involved in several near misses and I suppose it was a compliment when the Edenbridge right-back with the hard tackle took him from behind, roughly.

Mehmet showed his bristling intent only five minutes into the second half as he flashed a shot inches over the bar. He was to give the Edenbridge defence a hellish time and take us to paradise, I suppose. He laid on the goal that took us to 2-1 with a cut-back to Ian Shoebridge that was placed low into the bottom corner. Ian had come close to scoring already in the game but this time got the pace and direction of his shot right. With the wind behind us, we had more of a presence in and around the Edenbridge box, and the supply from midfield and defence was now more regular and more purposeful – with John Tallis an effective target man.

That is not to say that Edenbridge were entirely edentate. Three times Toby Manchip was asked a question from close-range and three times he denied them. After the hellish torment of last week – today's game brought heavenly feelings for Toby – not that we had lost faith in him.

The third Farnborough goal was the best saved by Mehmet until about fifteen minutes from the end, as he glided past defenders, with quick feet and quicker brain, to poke the ball past the keeper from close-range – almost as Paul Bell was getting ready to poach the goal. There was even time for Steve “duracell” Blanchard to find himself in the box more than once – to “run off some extra energy”.

This was a tough match – not only in testing conditions, but against a robust, muscular yet fair team that gave no quarter but played without malice. In the end we prevailed as we re-discovered our touch, and returned to what served us well earlier in the season - short passing, care of the ball, collective endeavour, solidarity, energy and movement and a compact shape with players in their best positions.

As all twelve of us sat in the Crown public house – as pilgrims on their way back might have done in times past, there was an air of inner peace and hallowed contentment about us. All was well again, Eden regained, the trespasses of the past forgiven and washed away.

Ye Old Crown – an Elizabeth II screen informed us – had been there since the Edward III days. The open fire place, the low oak-beamed ceilings had an air of authenticity about them and to add to the atmosphere Paul Bell produced the sort of noxious smell that took us right-back to medieval times. I understand that some tourist attractions like the London dungeon do this with chemicals. As I put a log on the fire, I could not help thinking that Paul ought to lay down some logs of his own. Still, that did not put us off the prawn, roast beef and mustard, and cheese and pickle sandwiches that were laid in front of us by the roaring fire.

Man-of-the-Match today – or should that be mem of the match: Mehmet Bozyigit for two goals, an assist and an overall performance that was as smooth and strong as Turkish silk – (with Toby Manchip, deservedly, the only other player that got votes today).

20 February 2010: Catford Wanderers Vets (A, 4-0)

Senior Vets win but Manchip & French let Catford Wanderers off the hook

As this was an away game, the chances of it being played were good and so it proved. The chances of Farnborough having a full complement of (fit and alert) players were less good, as this was the morning after Compo's (Andy Faulks) birthday – and so it proved too.

Catford Wanderers used to play under the name of Red Barrel and some of us may recall rather feisty encounters with them in our "youth" - but today there was none of that – not on our pitch anyway.

Farnborough lined up like this: Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles and Danny Winter in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb, Mehmet Bozyigit and Toby Manchip in midfield; John Tallis and Andy Smith up front. Roger French and Nick Kinnear completed the Farnborough ensemble. Technically, Roger French had the first ten minutes of the game in lieu of Sinisa, who was impersonating a satnav as he guided his wife home, on the phone. I think this was all there was to it, as Sinisa had resisted Compo's killer chat-up line "Come on – you know you want to", and not joined the birthday party at Biba's the night before, (where much imbibing took place) according to several first-hand witnesses.

Catford Wanderers had let it be known that they were struggling for players (including a keeper) but they still mustered 11, + subs, including three or four players that were a bit younger than our youngest. The referee was Rod Loe, ex-Red Barrel and ex-Farnborough – who had travelled down the A 21 from Farnborough, for old times' sake, to watch, and ended up with a watch and a whistle, but did a good fair job, apart from a momentary failure of his eyesight for the Farnborough fourth goal.

It was puzzling how this game was still 0-0 at half-time, well not really. I could see why - we created and missed several good chances and the makeshift Catford keeper proved better than he had led us to believe. Catford defended in numbers and the younger players I mentioned combined well and matched us in midfield. Our defence held firm though, as experience combined to stifle the youthful exuberance in front of us. Our 'big green giant' had relatively little to do in the Farnborough goal.

As usual Mehmet Bozyigit gave our opponents a lot to think about on the right and was backed up by a sharp Danny Winter who was also managing to provide cover in defence. John Tallis was winning headers and linking up well with those around him – in spite of not having any hamstrings (so he tells me). Sinisa Gracanin navigated the midfield with ease and skill, and Chris Webb was holding his own against the Catford youngsters.

We were also very pleased to see our new mid-week signing, Andy Smith, a canny bit of business by the management outside the transfer window, giving us a presence, menace and **composure** in the box, that belied his years, as he caused no end of trouble to the Catford defence. He came very close when he flung himself at a low cross from Mehmet Bozyigit, only to see the ball roll inches past the post. And he was to hit the post from just inside the box as he swivelled and turned his marker. Even earlier than that, about ten minutes in the game, Chris Webb will have been disappointed with his finish from three yards, as he used his left foot to lift the ball over the bar with the Catford keeper stranded.

Yet the mood at half-time was calm (even Roger's), patient and confident although Catford were proving more resilient than we liked. Roger French came on for Toby Manchip on the left of midfield as we continued to look for our first goal and keep Catford out. The tipping point of our first goal was a bit scrappy as headers in the Catford box were won in succession, first by Chris Webb and then John Tallis to leave Danny Winter well placed to force the ball home. Five minutes later, Andy Smith latched on to a delightful through ball from Chris Webb, rounded the keeper and scored from close range. That was Andy's last meaningful contribution as he came off with Toby Manchip returning to play up front (if that is the right word). It was good to have a Smith on the Farnborough score sheet again. History may yet show that today saw the end to the ambitions which Toby Manchip and Roger French harboured of playing up front – if you put together their performances, and Andy's.

The third Farnborough goal came from a 'pass' executed by Steve Blanchard, who managed, like some Brazilian, to look one way, position his body and feet so that he could mechanically only send the ball one way, only to put it on the opposite side. Chris Webb advanced in the box, drew the keeper and scored from close range. 3-0 became 4-0 not long after as Patrice Mongelard produced a 35-yarder into the top corner, whose audacity and geometry created an optical illusion, as it was not clear how the ball ended up in the Catford net. For a brief moment, the referee's distance and failing eyesight, the opposition's psychological problems with a fourth Farnborough goal, and I regret to say, some mischief making from one or two Farnborough players, it looked like the game might not re-start from the centre circle.

What followed was less well executed – Toby Manchip managed to miss a penalty, and the follow-on. He missed two other close-range opportunities before his taxi came. Roger French too added to the catalogue of missed chances as he managed to put the ball into the tennis court behind the goal, and also showed his poor grasp of the off-side law as he passed to Mehmet Bozyigit when clean through himself. John Tallis put a pile driver into the Homebase car park. Without exaggeration we could have had another 3 goals in the last fifteen minutes – but that would be been a tad cruel on a Catford side that did threaten our goal in the second half, but came up against a solid Farnborough defensive unit – which registered only our second clean sheet this season.

After cold showers, from the bar afterwards, we watched events on the pitch nearby where a game was still being played where things kicked off big time. Even the tennis players, now back on court as Roger was not playing anymore, stopped to watch events as all twenty-two players, subs and supporters created yet more Sunday morning football folklore.

Lastly – as we come to the end of Valentine week – a reminder that romance is not just for 14 February, as I have it from a very reliable source that Toby Harlow bought the wife some flowers on 18 February, as he continues to work on his come back for the Senior Vets.

Man-of-the-Match – Danny Winter for a performance that was as good defensively, as it was offensively – and for the goal that got us on our way, eventually.

27 February 2011: Princes Park Super Vets (N, 7-0)

Senior Vets turfed out of Farrow Fields, but do it on astroturf – to win against Princes Park Super Vets

As this was a home game in February the chances of the Farnborough turf being declared unfit for the winter game of football, were astronomical. And so, it proved – as once again this season, a Saturday match was played with an inevitable consequence that it would queer the pitch for those lower down the Farnborough food chain, the Senior Vets, who play on Sunday.

However, thanks to enlightened team management, the goodwill of plucky opponents prepared to play on a different surface – and, of course, money that could have gone into the Farnborough coffers, going elsewhere – we played our third home game in 2011 on astroturf. I would not bet against a turf accountant that it will be the last. I still have bitter memories of a home game called off on a very sunny 4 April last season.

Farnborough lined up like this: Gary Fentiman in goal; Colin Brazier, Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles and Danny Winter in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb, Toby Manchip and Patrice Mongelard in midfield; Andy Smith and Andy Faulks up front. Roger French, Paul Bell and Rob Lipscomb (turfed out of the young Vets team), completed the Farnborough presence, today also augmented by Isabelle and Thomas French with their own naughty chairs. I should mention too that as the pre-arranged referee did not materialise, the emergency referee today was John Tallis – resting his hamstrings – who cut a fine figure in an American football referee top lent to him by Toby Manchip. This was not all Toby did for the referee today. I later heard of a rather puzzling exchange between John, Toby (Farnborough captain for the day), and the Princes Park captain in the centre circle to decide who would kick off – based on the question “Where is the elephant?” - something to do with children’s playing cards from chez Manchip, as the referee did not have the proverbial coin. Toby was not only a better “tosser”, but was to answer that question later during the second half.

If I were a Princes Park player, I would think that sometimes football is not fair, and their contribution to today’s game was far better than the scoreline suggests. Yes, we won handsomely in the end but it took a while for Farnborough to register our first goal. Before then we had carved out several decent chances as Andy Smith, Andy Faulks, Toby Manchip, Patrice Mongelard forced saves out of the keeper. And Danny Winter hit the post. The midfield was kept ticking over nicely by Sinisa Gracanin and Chris Webb; and the defence was comfortable. We won several corners and unless I am mistaken, I do not recall a single Princess Park corner in that half.

After 25 minutes of resistance Princess Park conceded the first goal as Andy Smith challenged for the ball just inside the box, noted the keeper had wandered off his line, and lobbed the ball into the net with calm assurance for a rather cool finish. This was no more than we deserved and ten minutes later Patrice Mongelard gave Farnborough the cushion of a second goal, as he anticipated a low cross from the right, outpaced his marker, and caressed the ball into the net, from two yards out, with the Princess Park keeper thrown off balance by the speed and subtlety of the move.

At the other end Gary Fentiman was not too busy but still had to be vigilant for long shots and once or twice Princess Park got into dangerous positions in the box from throw-ins. His most significant action in that half was to put a goal-kick on the razor wire and another FOBG ball was turfed out. Even though we had something like 25 throw-ins in that half, it felt like the game

flowed quite well for both sides, and the passing and the touches were far better than could have been expected on an Astro turf pitch – with the unpredictable bounce and pace imparted to the ball by the surface. The game was played in excellent spirit.

At half-time Danny Winter left, probably wondering if we had done enough. Roger French, Paul Bell and Rob Lipscomb came on with Colin Brazier and Toby Manchip taking on new duties. Toby was handed a pale blue sock to run the line, while Colin took over the job of minding the French mignons morceaux – and he seemed to have a calming influence on them that had eluded Papa.

The second half was even better from our point of view and the usual pause in our rhythm that often comes from our substitutions did not materialise. Roger French and Paul Bell settled into a groove on the left and a lot of good work came from there. On the other side Robin Lipscomb was a bustling, energetic presence, supported by Patrice Mongelard now playing at right-back. It was from there that, ten minutes into the half, Patrice Mongelard burst past two defenders, advanced and rolled the ball, with the right weight and accuracy across the box for Paul Bell to stroke home first time with the inside of his right foot. Soon after Chris Webb, who had come very close moments earlier as he slid in and narrowly missed connecting with a Paul Bell cross, was at the far post to meet another cross and sweep the ball into the net. With the score at 4-0 and another 20 minutes or so to go Colin Brazier and Toby Manchip came back on for Steve Blanchard and Andy Smith. Chris Webb dropped back to centre half. I should dispel the rumour that this was part of a conspiracy by the management to keep him from scoring any further goals (as he was now on 5 goals along with co-manager Patrice Mongelard, who had himself rather unselfishly teed up Paul Bell for his sixth goal-of-the-season).

After that it was the Andy Faulks show, in his penultimate game for us this season, as he proceeded to bag a hat-trick with assists from Colin Brazier, Roger French and Sinisa Gracanin if I recall correctly. It was all a bit of a blur but Andy's movement, crisp and powerful shooting stood out. In between all this technical excellence there was a moment of pure farce as Toby Manchip did a very good impression of an elephant, doing an impression of Devon Loch as he collapsed in the six-yard box with the goal at his mercy, on his best foot. Patrice Mongelard had broken through on the right and teed up Colin Brazier, who had himself laid it on a plate for Toby. The sole Princess Park defender in the midst of this could not help commenting that this had been a 4 against 1 situation - except that the four included Toby Manchip, which evened the odds somewhat. However, Toby was still smiling in the bar later as he savoured the irony of Roger French telling him to mind his language in the presence of kids – as four of us shared a packet of crisps and a bag of peanuts. Yes – there was something else that did not materialise today - the surf and turf sandwiches normally provided by Shirley. In fact, there were no sandwiches at all. Shirley had used her local knowledge of the Farnborough micro-climate, and Farrow Fields pitches, to conclude that the Senior Vets game would not be played - pity as we could not reciprocate the excellent hospitality that we have enjoyed from today's opposition, formerly playing under the name of Welsh Tavern.

Another home game next week – and a week wondering if it is going to be case of “Keep off the grass” or “Senior Vets do it on grass” for FOBG (Friends of Beautiful Grass). I hope that like today, our opponents, Staplehurst Monarchs, will be happy to do it on astro turf, if necessary.

Man-of-the-Match today was Andy Faulks – for a “turf-riffic” performance and a lot of running, for a man without a towel.

6 March 2011: Staplehurst & Monarchs Vets (H, 1-0)

Senior Vets leave it fashionably late to nick win against Staplehurst & Monarchs

Games between Farnborough Senior Vets and Staplehurst Monarchs tend to be close affairs with late goals *à la mode*. And so, it was again today – more on the last-minute dramatic *dénouement* later.

This was the best team we have beaten this season: well-disciplined, organised, physical in an athletic not a rugged way, balanced, hard-working (and perhaps having used all their luck against us in our two previous encounters to date). For such a close game – it was telling that today's referee Ron Seymour had only to blow for only about 6 free-kicks in the whole match - such was the fairness of the contest, and the sportsmanship of the two teams.

On an overcast, dry, and cold – colder still in the wind, Farnborough lined up in a kit that was once white but was now the colour of the sky and crucially bearing the Farnborough badge, like this: Jim St John in goal; Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Nick Kinnear and Danny Winter in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb, Mehmet Bozyigit and Patrice Mongelard in midfield; Andy Faulks and Ian Shoebridge up front. Roger French, Paul Bell and John Tallis completed the Farnborough *équipe*, along with Isabelle and Thomas French inside their windbreak.

Our keeper today was a loan from the younger Vets – a comforting, reassuring and towering presence that inspired confidence and gave us a solid platform to work from. Jim was called upon more than once in the first half, mainly to pluck crosses and high balls out of the air, and once memorably, to rush off his line to dive at the feet of a Staplehurst forward. The first half, and probably the whole game, can be said to have been one those where the defences were on top. Staplehurst had a tight quartet of six footers at the back who were comfortable on the ball, and made it difficult for us to penetrate. When we had shots these were scuffed, long range, off target, tame or well-claimed by an experienced keeper who knew his job. The closest we came to breaking the deadlock was when Andy Faulks' *pirouette* in the box looked like it had been defender-assisted but the referee was unmoved. Considering we were playing against the wind in that half we managed to keep a lot of the play in the Staplehurst half, mainly with greater continuity in our passing, but had to be vigilant because there was enough quality in Staplehurst to punish any lapses and they were quite adept at moving the ball along the back four to launch raids down the flanks.

Both teams put a lot of effort into midfield where Sinisa Gracanin and Chris Webb had titanic games today for Farnborough. Things were tight down the flanks too and on the whole, this was not a half with many memorable chances, or half chances even. There were I think only two corners in that half – one each inevitably.

At half-time Patrice Mongelard, Nick Kinnear and Ian Coles made way for John Tallis, Roger French and Paul Bell. Now playing with the wind we were able to exert more pressure and on the whole, created more chances in that half and came closer to scoring. There was a passage of play when we forced three consecutive corners in almost as many minutes. Ian Shoebridge had a great chance to give us the lead – having been set up by Paul Bell – but failed to bend the ball round the keeper from six yards out. This was Ian's first game in three weeks and although the effort and running was there as always, he was a touch rusty. Paul Bell too came close at the end of a bustling run that took him past two defenders and ended with a wayward shot. John Tallis slotted in at the back and played his usual composed and elegant game and gave us an extra menace in the Staplehurst box from corners and free-kicks.

With twenty minutes left, Ian Shoebridge and Mehmet Bozyigit, both looking more than a little spent, retired from the fray and Ian Coles and Patrice Mongelard returned. This meant that John could prove his versatility by becoming a new and effective target man – although he claims that he “does not do running”. He was able even to make a sliced shot from Patrice Mongelard, look good by re-directing it with a header towards goal.

But this not a one-way affair, far from it, particularly as there was a risk that we might commit too many players forward in our eagerness to get what was likely to be the winning goal as the minutes ticked away. Roger French had to put in saving tackles twice, and Steve Blanchard was well placed, to clear the ball off the line on the one occasion when Jim St John was beaten. And Staplehurst hit the bar from a long-range shot.

And then just when we thought this would be our first draw this season – Danny Winter produced yet another overlapping run into the Staplehurst half. He advanced almost as far as the edge of the box – played a perfectly weighted and angled pass into the path of an on-side Patrice Mongelard who darted into the six-yard box, and without having to change the direction or pace of the ball, or break his step, slotted a smooth sliding shot beyond the reach of the advancing keeper into the bottom corner. What was left of the game was taken up with much badge-kissing by the scorer, and thirty seconds later the final whistle could be heard.

And thus, we had our third consecutive clean sheet – and for Patrice Mongelard at the age of 53 scoring for a third consecutive Sunday and the only senior vet I think to score in three consecutive matches this season – and to think the management is minded to let him take penalties for the rest of the season. Someone else who has scored a lot, Andy Faulks, was playing his last game for us this season, and will be anxiously wondering if his 13 goals will top the table by the end of the season. Andy will be back, and if you want to place a bet on the exact date – please see Nick Kinnear. There was another game of chance today – a scratch card jackpot of £24 won by Sinisa Gracanin, with his choice of Swansea.

There were several other winners at Farnborough today: (i) Shirley for a most excellent spread for four Vets teams at Farnborough. (I did it justice, I think, with 9 chicken drumsticks, 11 mini-sausage rolls, 6 cocktail sausages and half a mini-pork pie). Paul Bell’s digestive system finished off the prawn sandwiches (you have to feel for Mrs Bell) (ii) Keith Beston and helpers, for working miracles with both pitches so that today’s games could be played; (iii) Vic Farrow for being reunited with an errant corner flag; (iv) Roger French, for whom the figures finally added up at £73; (v) the Young Vets, handsome 9-2 winners against a team with a Brazilian name. Runners-up I fear were the Farnborough showers and the tea – on a rather cold day.

Lastly, on a religious note, this week we mark Shrove Tuesday on the eve of Ash Wednesday – taking us into Lent. There will be a lot of tossing on Tuesday, including perhaps *chez* Manchip (absent today rightly for a more important matter), and it may even inspire some of us to give something up for Lent, even if it is only pancakes. Before you ask – I am giving up chicken drumsticks.

Man-of-the-Match today was – unsurprisingly, a defender – Steve Blanchard.

13 March 2011: Riverside Wanderers Vets (A, 3-0)

Senior Vets slope off to Eynsford to win against Riverside Wanderers

Thanks to Roger French this weekend's brush with the law became a meander by a watercourse. Let me explain. Roger had moved quickly, off the pitch, late in the week, to secure this fixture – after the Met Police Super Vets had let it be known that the blue line was too thin to give us a game at the Warren - and Riverside Wanderers had cast their net, to get a game, after their original opponents too had wandered off. We are due to Play Riverside Wanderers later this season in the flat earth kingdom of Farrow Fields - but both sides were glad of a game today.

At the Farnborough quiz last night, won by Bunny Beston's team – one of the rounds of questions, set by quizmaster Keith Beston, was road signs. I confess I looked for the road sign warning of a severe gradient once I cast eyes on the pitch. In a rural setting this was a truly agricultural meadow – tufty, bobbly, undulating and with the kind of slope that tractors have to be wary of.

In a yellow and red kit, a-hand-me-up job from the Farnborough second team, we took the field as follows: Gary Fentiman in goal; Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Roger French and Danny Winter in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb, Mehmet Bozyigit and Patrice Mongelard in midfield; Andy Smith and Ian Shoebridge up front. Toby Manchip and Paul Bell completed the Farnborough outfit. And so too in a way did Chris Bourlet, today's referee for 80 minutes, and late Farnborough substitute for the last ten minutes (though it could have been less – more on that later).

Toby Manchip found himself in the centre circle, as non-starting captain, for the toss – which he duly won, and decided in a tactical masterstroke, inspired by Roger French reportedly, that we would play up the hill. Riverside Wanderers had assembled a crowd and several substitutes on the grassy bank by the pitch.

It became clear immediately what a challenge it would be to get some momentum going. There was no wind but there might as well have been. The relationship between ball and sward was unpredictable, the ball followed the topography, our opponents made the most of the terrain; they defended in numbers, worked well to counter our usual thrust on the right where Mehmet Bozyigit and Danny Winter make a potent combination, and even if they did not create clear chances we needed to be at our sharpest – particularly in central defence where Steve Blanchard and Ian Coles had to concentrate. So too did Gary Fentiman who had to come off his line sharply a couple of times. The centre of the field was congested but slowly the greater graft and craft of Sinisa Gracanin and Chris Webb gave us the platform to defy gravity, and keep the ball in the Riverside Wanderers half more than ours, as we strung more passes together than they did and there was more of a recognisable pattern to our play.

A neutral would agree that the better chances in that half were ours. Andy Smith was an effective target man and presence in the opposition box, and held the play well, and won numerous headers, while Ian Shoebridge hustled and hustled. Ian had arguably the best chance of the first twenty minutes, as the ball broke to him just inside the box with the keeper slightly off his line, but he lofted the ball wide. Patrice Mongelard whipped a dangerous swerving free-kick from the left which nearly brought the first goal. Sinisa Gracanin produced the shot of the half with a clean dipping drive, with hardly any back lift, from 25 yards out, that was very easy on the eye as it flew six inches above the bar. In the bar later, we were told that the 0-0 score at half-time, had silenced the home crowd, as Riverside Wanderers knew what would happen in the second half.

First though, we refreshed the left side of the Farnborough team as Toby Manchip and Paul Bell came on for Roger French and Patrice Mongelard. After the first even ten minutes Farnborough began to turn the screw and the chances started coming. But the deadlock was broken when Toby Manchip had wandered inside from the left-back position and lofted the ball over the defence for Ian Shoebridge, to advance, control the ball, look the keeper in the eye and coolly slide the ball into the bottom corner. This seemed to lift a weight off Ian's shoulders. The world will be divided between those who say Toby intended that pass, and others who say this was a hopeful punt by someone running out of space in a congested area. I know what I think. This was the pivotal moment of the game – but soon after, sadly, Toby got injured and Patrice Mongelard took up the left-back position.

The goal settled us, and we created many chances in the last twenty-five minutes. One of these led to an own goal as a dangerous cross was whipped in from the right by Sinisa Gracanin and went in off a defender. Paul Bell had two or three good chances to put us further ahead – including a one-on-one, and a right foot shot that was sweetly struck but the ball refused to dip and curl into the top corner. The ball bobbed as Mehmet Bozyigit was about to pull the trigger from six yards out, either to shoot or square the ball to Andy Smith unmarked at the far post (probably the former). Chris Webb produced an acrobatic scissor kick that saw the ball hit the inside of the post. Our third goal, and Ian Shoebridge's second of the match, came as he ran on to slide rule of a pass from Paul Bell to beat the covering defender and place the ball into the bottom corner from close range. Roger French came back on and went up front to replace Andy Smith, looking for a goal that never got close. So did Patrice Mongelard too, from left-back, who tried hard and in vain – including most notably from a free-kick that stung the keeper's hands in the dying minutes.

Riverside Wanderers found it very hard to penetrate our box in the second half, and Gary had not much to do, which gave him time to compute the number of seconds that had elapsed since we last conceded a goal, as we registered a fourth consecutive clean sheet. Our opponents today had to soak a lot of pressure, and compete all over the pitch for little reward, but at no point did they lose their composure and the game was played in excellent spirit – so much so that Mehmet Bozyigit had little to do when he took over the referee's whistle for Chris Bourlet who wanted to kick the ball for the last ten minutes. Toby Manchip's attempt to substitute Chris after only 30 seconds was amusing (though perhaps not for Chris) in a school-boyish sort of way.

After the game we made the short walk to the Five Bells pub – which became six Bells (and a Brazier) for a while. In this oak-beamed, low-ceilinged, confined space with limited ventilation – I am relieved that Paul Bell was a no-emission zone. This was welcome as we sat with congenial hosts who placed a couple of jugs on the table and chatted, looking forward to the return game. There was even cheese and biscuits I am told – but for once I was in the wrong position for the après-match sustenance – which I cannot write about because Roger French made very short work of it.

Man-of-the-Match today was – another defender – Ian Coles (no doubt pleased to win something, after coming second in the quiz last night, in my team).

20 March 2011: The Buff Vets (H, 0-1)

Senior Vets wings clipped by Buff Vets in defeat

After four consecutive victories and clean sheets, we dared hope to rule the roost against the Buff Vets today – but once again it is the Buff Vets that ended up crowing. I suppose it is a measure of the progress we have made this season that we did not come off worse against opponents of undeniable quality, who had put out a rather strong team today, which would have tested even our younger Vets. And to cap it all, the Buff did not score the winning goal – more on that egg-on-face moment later.

After what seemed like a long time, waiting for the kit, waiting for players to get changed, and waiting to release and wheel the goal posts in position – the match started in very pleasant weather, with Farnborough perched as follows: Gary Fentiman in goal; Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Patrice Mongelard and Danny Winter in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb, Mehmet Bozyigit and John Tallis in midfield; Andy Smith and Leo Maccioni up front. Roger French and Paul Bell completed the Farnborough flock.

It did not take us very long to realise what a tough task lay ahead. This was physically the biggest side we have come up against, with four or five players, not unsuited for the oval ball I thought, on this last weekend of the six nations. They had two mobile man mountains up front, a road runner on the wing, and pulling the strings with that left wand of his, as per usual, Barry Grainger – and a robust defence that was hard to penetrate.

Three minutes into the first half, Roger French replaced Andy Smith who left the field – thankfully only to change his footwear. After recent difficulties the top pitch was in the best condition, we have seen it this season – the Farrow Fields boot room had decided to play on the smaller pitch, to counter the expected pace of the Buff Vets and their ability to run into acres of space from deep, by compressing the play.

There were not many clear chances created in that first-half by either side. It was an even affair, with some dangerous moments at both ends. Our main worry was set-pieces from Barry Grainger's left foot – as we gave some corners and free-kicks away. One Buff corner was particularly good and required an exceptional save from Gary Fentiman. There were other shots from distance, handled with great assurance and no spillages by Gary. John Tallis supplemented the back four and for long periods we held our own.

At the other end Leo Maccioni had a rasping shot that flew past the Buff post. Mehmet Bozyigit had what looked like a good chance when put through by Patrice Mongelard but the Buff keeper made it difficult. We enjoyed some good moments down the right with Danny Winter and Mehmet Bozyigit giving the Buff much to think about. Leo Maccioni got behind the Buff defence more than once with his eager running. Chris Webb was very busy in the centre of midfield, temporarily without Sinisa Gracanin who had moved to the left to support Andy Smith, and who at one point was sumo-wrestled off the pitch.

At half-time John Tallis and Patrice Mongelard made way for Roger French and Paul Bell. Three minutes into the second half, Roger French – with virtually his first touch, was unfortunate to see the ball rebound off him into the net, after a fantastic save by Gary Fentiman. This half was most eventful for Roger – he was ditched later. By this I mean that he waded into a ditch to retrieve the ball for a throw in and to his surprise found it full of water and aggressive leaves. Talking of aggression Roger was responsible for the most serious moment of “fowl” play in that half, as he

scythed the Buff road runner on the cusp of the box – it was premeditated, and predictable, but the referee only gave him a talking to. To their credit, and in the spirit in which the whole game was played, Buff made nothing of it – though they could have. The referee, Roy Seymour, admitted later, in the bar, that it had crossed his mind to send Roger off. The advice from half the Senior Vets management, to him, was not to hesitate next time it happens, as it will.

It is fair to say that we were tested even more in that half. Emboldened by the goal, and secure in the comfort of a solid defence, the Buff took the game to us and they had a few shots but on the whole Gary Fentiman was equal to the challenge, including a rather brave dive at the feet of a rather big unit, in the six-yard box.

What about the Farnborough chances you ask? Well, there was a memorable shot from Leo Maccioni that rolled very close past the post. Mehmet Bozyigit was almost in on a couple of occasions, one culminating in a goal ruled off-side by the Buff Manager, running the line. John Tallis came back on, up front in place of Andy Smith who had toiled in vain in front of his lad. John was in the thick of it when the scrum collapsed around him with the ball trapped in the midst of seven prostrate players in the Buff six-yard box. Patrice Mongelard saw out the last fifteen minutes in place of Steven Blanchard as we pressed for an equaliser that never came.

This is the second time that the Senior Vets management have scored an own goal against the Buff this season, but today's own goal was decisive. There is no doubt that the Buff deserved their victory, and the score will have seemed a paltry return for the quality of their play, but we had our chances too.

I should mention that Nick Kinnear appeared towards the end of the first-half and ended up running the line for the latter part of the second half. Toby Manchip also made an appearance, to his great chagrin, moments after Roger had won the Buff Vets Man-of-the-Match award, but he was able to see Roger ditched – and left some tweetings on the white board in the Farnborough dressing room.

I forgot that the early bird catches the worm, as having tarried to sweep two dressing rooms, I missed most of the splendid spread laid on by Pam Shoebridge, and had to content myself with a few crumbs off the bird table.

The mood in the club house was relaxed – it was good to see the entire Buff side, and numerous fledglings in there. Vic Farrow, full of his usual bonhomie, clucked over his brood of water bottles until the missing one was reunited with the others.

Farnborough **Man-of-the-Match** today was Gary Fentiman, tested and emerging with resplendent plumage, with Chris Webb not far behind in the pecking order.

27 March 2011: Princes Park Super Vets (A, 5-0)

Good times return for Senior Vets with win over Princes Park Super Vets as clocks go forward

The changing of the clocks did not look like it had affected our time-keeping as most of us turned up on a still morning, suffused with sunlight, burning off the last of the morning mist, to gaze upon a crucible of a rustic pitch in a pleasant rural setting, in Oakfield Park near Dartford. I say most us because two of our hands had travelled correctly through time, but not through space, as they went to last year's ground where we played today's opponents. From where we were in the car park, accessible in first gear only, the far goal posts looked like corner flags when laid down, but this was just an optical illusion as the brain and the eye had trouble adjusting to the lie of the land.

We also had an oddly shaped dressing room, with more corners than usual, which had the unfortunate effect of limiting ventilation – as Chris Webb tested our gagging reflex, with a flatus that made Paul Bell's effort in an Edenbridge public house a few weeks ago, feel like an eau de toilette commercial.

We had 15 players available and the various permutations/options/scenarios, which “wasted a good tree” according to our elder statesman (Andy Smith) produced the following starting line-up: Jim St John in goal; Steve Blanchard, John Tallis, Danny Winter and Chris Bourlet in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb, Mehmet Bozyigit and Patrice Mongelard in midfield; Andy Smith and Ian Shoebridge up front. Roger French, Paul Bell, Nick Kinnear and Toby Manchip completed the Farnborough 15. Even that was not quite to plan as Nick Kinnear, who had to travel forward by a year, so to speak, from last year's ground, was not quite ready to start at right-back. He replaced Chris Bourlet about 15 minutes into the half.

Once we had adjusted to the contours of the pitch and established a rhythm and a shape we had more of the possession. But the first scare of the match was ours as a back pass from Steve Blanchard was under-hit – and Jim St John was lured to the edge of the box but could not get to the ball first – but thankfully the giant shadow he cast was enough to put the forward off. Our chances started coming – the best ones fell to Patrice Mongelard – the first was from a short pass by Andy Smith which played him in behind the defence, only to roll his shot against the base of the post. The second chance was an even better one as he pounced on a missed clearance in the centre of the Princes Park defence to advance clean through on goal only to snatch at a shot that went well wide when he could have carried the ball closer to the goal. In between those two misses Andy Smith had showed how it should be done by getting ahead of his marker to poke home a low cross from the right from Mehmet Bozyigit – the first of our five goals all created from the right today.

Twenty-five minutes into the half, Toby Manchip came on for Patrice Mongelard on the left of midfield. Toby has been carrying an injury we think – as this is the only reason why he was caught up by the Princes Park sexagenarian, despite a five-yard headstart. Toby's arrival triggered some on-field banter which was not meant as any disrespect to our opponents (which Andy Smith took a dim view of), but as disrespect to Toby – which nobody minds.

At half-time we made changes as Danny Winter went off for yet another birthday party in his wide circle of friends and relatives – and Patrice Mongelard returned at right-back. Paul Bell came on at right midfield and Roger French went up front as Ian Shoebridge and Mehmet Bozyigit took a breather. Much as in the previous game against Princes Park, we found the second half more

productive. We scored early in the half as Chris Webb produced an acrobatic header from a Patrice Mongelard corner to give us the comfort of a second goal and relax our play. Then we began to express ourselves as the passing moves returned to our game and we applied steady pressure, earning more corners. Roger French produced a left foot shot from distance that looked very good until it went a foot over.

Then we had a couple of injuries which showed the value of having the numbers that we are able to field for every game as first Toby Manchip and then Andy Smith had to go off. Chris Bourlet and Ian Shoebridge came back on. Ian, in particular, gave us a bit more mobility to attack the Princes Park defence down the right and from one 30-yard run he slipped the ball behind for Roger French to produce a delicate first-time chip with his right foot to score our third goal. According to Roger, the Princes Park Manager referred to the moment as a “superb bit of skill”. This was indeed a moment of finesse not usually associated with Roger, which is probably why it was not witnessed by Master Thomas French. The clocks will go back and forward many times before that moment is repeated, I suspect.

Ian Shoebridge was to get his just reward – when he burst through on the right to score our fourth from close-range as he capitalised on a defensive lapse following a cushioned header by Chris Webb from a long clearance by Jim St John. Mehmet Bozyigit came back on for Nick Kinnear and promptly gave us a renewed threat down the right as Ian Shoebridge and Patrice Mongelard threaded passes to him. 4-0 became 5-0 after Paul Bell, who seems to have an uncanny ability to be in the right place in the box, got his unmarked head to a superb cross from Sinisa Gracanin, after a sweeping passing move involving five Farnborough players, again on the right. We nearly got a sixth when a curling corner from Patrice Mongelard, this time from an elevated position on the left, was cleared off the line. There was time for one last scare as Princes Park failed to get a shot on target with Jim St John not in an ideal position – this would have given them a goal which their endeavour deserved, but it was not to be as we registered another clean sheet (our sixth this season).

Our return to the Farnborough clubhouse was not expected, and consequently, there were only a few morsels left and Roger French was reduced to eating his lad’s jam sandwiches. Still, we were able to catch up with Colin Brazier selling some nags for the Farnborough Old Boys Guild Race Night soon to be under starter’s orders. As we could name the horses there was some fun with that (probably against Jockey Club rules), and Toby Manchip bought two horses – not often a donkey gets to own two thoroughbreds you might be tempted to think.

In two games against us Princes Park have suffered two heavy defeats and toiled with scant reward. Apart from a couple of tricky crosses in the first-half – and controlling a couple of dodgy back passes on a bobbly pitch, Jim St John had a quiet first-half – the second one was as quiet, if not quieter. Yet – at no point did Princes Park stop trying to pass the ball, lose their composure or get physical – much to their credit.

Next week – Catford Wanderers – and a race against time to get Toby Manchip fit so he can put the clock back and make amends against them. An oxygen tent has been suggested – though the Webb family takes priority, if daddy’s condition does not respond to medication.

Farnborough **Man-of-the-Match** today was Sinisa Gracanin, for a performance that went like clockwork.

3 April 2011: Catford Wanderers Vets (H, 8-1)

Mother's Day delight for Senior Vets in win against Catford Wanderers

The absence of some fathers on Mother's Day, golf, motor racing, foreign business ventures and injuries had reduced Farnborough numbers a bit compared to recent weeks but the return of some familiar faces in Mark Perry and Colin Brazier was welcome, and Toby Manchip's dedication to the club, playing in a position he does not want to be, in spite of a calf injury, gave us the following line-up for this Mother's Day parade: Toby Manchip in goal; Steve Blanchard, John Tallis, Patrice Mongelard and Nick Kinnear in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb, Mehmet Bozyigit and Mark Perry in midfield; Colin Brazier and Ian Shoebridge up front. Paul Bell and Chris Bourlet completed the Farnborough display.

Our plucky opponents mustered the bare eleven with Rod Loe pressed into service. I was to hear more about how they struggled to get a side later from an unexpected, but well-informed source. I would be lying if I said that I did not think we could win this game. My unspoken complacency must have infected the rest of Farnborough team as we sleep-walked through the first ten minutes, only to get a rude awakening in the form of the opening goal, scored by Catford Wanderers. The centre of our defence had parted in a tribute to the Old Testament and one of the quicker and younger Catford Vets had rushed in from midfield to hit a powerful dipping volley that blew away Toby's hopes of a clean sheet.

As volleys go this was easy on the eye but it was eclipsed ten minutes later as we drew level. A right-wing cross from Patrice Mongelard had been met by Chris Webb's header which was blocked, with the ball dropping to the edge of the box – only to be embraced in the sweetest of clean, crisp volleys by the left foot of Colin Brazier – into the top corner. Any sweeter than this and this volley would have had to carry a health warning for diabetics. Colin was to be in a sweet spot again five minutes later as he met a cross from Mehmet Bozyigit with a deft header at the far post, to put us ahead. We had truly woken up by the time Mehmet Bozyigit was brought down in the box, after he'd pushed the ball round the keeper with an empty goal beckoning. Acting sole – and highly successful manager for the day (with our highest score this season) – Patrice Mongelard, in Roger French's absence, selflessly offered the penalty to Toby Manchip, who started coming off his line for it, but then not being quite over the psychological trauma of missing our last penalty against the same opponents – left it to Mehmet Bozyigit to stroke the ball home forcefully, for a 3-1 lead which we kept until half-time. Chris Bourlet came on for Nick Kinnear, still feeling the effect of walks in the woods, allegedly, with about ten minutes of the half left.

Whilst we had most of the play, Catford were not without hope. They brought out a fantastic diving save from Toby Manchip, who pushed the ball round the post from a powerful long-range shot. It would be a tad picky to think that he should have held the shot - so I am not going to go down that route. Clearly playing with some discomfort, Toby had to rush off his line to make a couple of painful clearances in that half but his distribution was faultless.

The only change made at half-time was to bring Paul Bell on for Mark Perry who offered to play for Catford as they were down to ten men. For someone who had not played for a few weeks Mark gave a very good display in the Catford midfield and was at the heart of things when it flickered into life, and gave us something to worry about.

To cut a long story short we had the better of that second half. We scored a further five goals without reply – though Catford were unlucky not to get a second goal, from one passage of play that saw one of their better players, unmarked at the far post with a relatively easy chance. Our

goals came in a rapid burst. Chris Webb got our fourth from a through ball by Ian Shoebridge which required a cool finish to beat the on-rushing keeper. Mehmet Bozyigit blasted our fifth from close range. Chris Webb produced a delicate lob from a delightful killer pass by Sinisa Gracanin to register our sixth. Ian Shoebridge, got our seventh, (his 14th of the season) to finally move ahead of Andy Faulks as our top scorer – from a well-placed left foot shot into the bottom corner, after a short pass by Paul Bell. Finally, Chris Webb pounced on an under-hit goal-kick to set himself up for another cool finish, and his hat-trick.

There were some other incidents of note. With about fifteen minutes left Toby Manchip had to leave the field such was his discomfort, and our tallest player, John Tallis, went into goal. Nick Kinnear came back on to see the game out. Chris Bourlet had a twenty-yarder that brushed the top of the bar. Paul Bell missed what looked like a very good chance from three yards out, having probably used all his luck to win a (20-1) bet on the top-scorer at the cricket world cup. Steve Blanchard ventured far from his comfort zone to find himself into the opposite six-yard only to roll a ball past the post. Patrice Mongelard spent the last fifteen minutes virtually upfront looking for a goal that never came, and getting the wrong end of several off-side decisions from the very fair Catford Wanderers linesman, who none the less might wish to consider visiting his local SpecSavers for a check-up.

I was not entirely unaffected by Mother's Day – as I had to leave early, in my Mother's Day shirt, to partake of lunch at the Queen's Head in Green St Green. I was not able to do justice to Mrs Shoebridge who had mothered us all by laying on a splendid spread, or drink some of Paul Bell's winnings. It was in the Queen's Head that I ran into Toby Harlow, still working hard with Mrs H on his return, who confided that Catford Wanderers had called him earlier in the day with the news that they were struggling for players – so all the more credit to them for fulfilling the fixture. We need teams with this attitude on our fixtures list.

It was good to see referee Mick Gearing back from his New Zealand holiday – no doubt glad that the earth did not move while he was there.

Man-of-the-Match, to his genuine surprise and without the need for his own vote which he cast by phone, was Toby Manchip – referred to in management despatches by Roger French earlier in the week as “a top bloke who puts the team first”. It is rare that the player who gets a hat-trick – comes second in the voting. Still Chris Webb was able to dedicate his hat-trick to his mum, in lieu of the flowers he was not able to buy outside of the Rose & Crown this morning because the queue was too long. The smell of some fresh flowers would have made a nice change.

17 April 2011: Avery Hill Vets (H, 2-2)

Senior Vets come through searching examination by youthful Avery Hill Vets, to record first draw of the season

On marathon day we bring you news of a great draw, our first in 25 friendlies, against a team of teachers that had failed to learn their lines (*I must not field young players against Senior Vets*).

Before the match the school photograph for the FOBG Senior Vets class of 2010-2011 was taken by Colin Brazier, with some truants sadly. The Farnborough register read like this: Toby Manchip in goal; Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Danny Winter and Nick Kinnear in defence; Patrice Mongelard, Ian Shoebridge, Mehmet Bozyigit and Mark Perry in midfield; John Tallis and Leo Maccioni as forwards. Roger French and Eric Johnson sat at the back of the class. Eric was our international player, who had scored in every game he had played for Farnborough this season.

Avery Hill started with ten players until they were joined after twenty minutes by Yaya Toure. But I am not sure they missed him – given their formation and tactics, quality of their play and technical ability of several of their players – due in no small part to the presence of a few players, including two whippets in attack, that ought to have been on the adjoining pitch where our young Vets were playing.

The early exchanges of the first-half were even, with not many chances created. Avery Hill were quick on the break whilst we built our play more slowly. The first clear chance fell to Avery Hill when a 25-yard strike was tipped onto the crossbar acrobatically by Toby Manchip, and Patrice Mongelard was just able to prevent the nippy Avery Hill winger from putting the ball into an empty net. Avery Hill was to hit the woodwork again in that half. At the other end we were making chances of our own. John Tallis was winning headers, and Leo Maccioni was chasing down defenders whilst Mehmet Bozyigit applied pressure on the right with his crosses, dribbles, ably supported by full-back Danny Winters.

The first goal was scored by Avery Hill after 25 minutes as defenders Ian Coles and Steve Blanchard were not quite able to clear the danger from the muscular presence of an Avery Hill midfielder who had barrelled his way onto a through ball in the centre of our defence, and the loose ball fell kindly to the young Avery Hill winger who rolled it past Toby. Such is our resilience these days, however, that we went on to create the best two chances of the half. First Mehmet Bozyigit was played in behind the defence by Mark Perry, and drew an incredible reflex save from the Avery Hill keeper from three yards out. Then Leo Maccioni charged down a defensive clearance, broke into the box, and had a clear view of goal only to roll his low shot a foot wide. Saves from Toby, poor finishing by Avery Hill in one clear instance, and the strength of Steve Blanchard and Ian Coles' mobility to defend, and mark the quick Avery Hill attacking kept us only one goal behind at half-time.

Roger French came on at left-back for Nick Kinnear who went on the touchline as linesman (or assistant referee). Eric Johnson replaced John Tallis to add pace and skill to our attack as a striker. Roger's defensive intensity and the early second goal scored by Avery Hill changed the mood of the game and the referee, Mick Gearing, had a job keeping the class under control and his yellow or red cards in his pocket. Yet the first ten minutes of the first-half were ours as we put the Avery Hill goal under pressure, and a betting man would at that point have backed Farnborough to equalise. But as often happens in football possession and pressure do not mean much – as Danny Winter, normally so sure of touch, rolled back a pass towards our box which should have travelled fast on the hard pitch, but an even faster traveller was the young

Avery Hill forward who got there just before Toby Manchip could kick the ball, to tuck it into the net for a 2-0 lead to Avery Hill. For a while headmaster Gearing had a job to keep things calm, amid angry calls for off-side or hand-ball, and not dispense cautions or suspensions. There were plenty of afters and mutterings about cheats, and talented youngsters who should be playing others their same age, instead of 50-year-olds. Roger French was probably not far from being expelled, but what concentrated minds was that we got back into the game midway through the second half when Patrice Mongelard picked up the ball outside the Farnborough box, and advanced into the midfield, to slip a clever ball that put Eric Johnson through, only for him to turn his marker and roll the ball into the path of Mehmet Bozyigit to shoot, with a precise low finish into the Avery Hill net (just like a training ground move). By then Avery Hill had swapped keeper and another large physical presence had joined the front line.

The goal gave us renewed resolve. Roger French made a fantastic clearance under our goalposts from an Avery Hill corner. John Tallis came back on (for Steve Blanchard) and Patrice Mongelard dropped into the centre of defence to add his tackles to Roger's. With fifteen minutes left we won a free-kick as Mehmet Bozyigit was up-ended outside the box. Ian Shoebridge resisted Patrice Mongelard's excitement to let him have a shot, and floated a free-kick onto the head of our tallest Player - John Tallis, to get our equaliser (and his first goal-of-the-season – much overdue and well-deserved). The last ten minutes were a little frantic – almost like a quarter-final or semi-final of a cup competition, in the final stages of a tournament (after qualifiers and group matches), though without extra-time, and I think not much injury time in spite of Roger's fouls, as both sides pressed for a winner, as if to avoid a shootout. Eric Johnson hit a powerful shot from the edge of the box that would have been a fitting winner, had it travelled horizontally rather than vertically.

Our spirit was positive after the game. We did not win, but we did not lose either and the end of term report should talk of much progress made – there had been no defeat, disappointment or humiliation for the management who not be getting the sack. We had won the second half, and had not been beaten by a good team with younger players, of superior fitness in key positions. We were missing Sinisa Gracanin and Chris Webb, the mainstay of our midfield this season, but had coped thanks to a good all round team performance, sound tactics, patience, passion, pride and the presence of many supporters and fans, including from overseas.

We did not mind too much that the school canteen was closed – and there was no food after the game. The beer was cold, the sun was out and the tempers raised during the game had passed like a storm in a tea cup. Talking of tea, Vic Farrow kindly brought us some Earl Grey after the game.

Farnborough **Man-of-the-Match** or teacher's pet today was Toby Manchip with top marks for his PE lesson in the Farnborough goal, with excellent goal-kicks, dives and had there been a penalty he would probably have saved it.

Lastly a bit of homework successfully completed by your match reporter – who managed to get into this report the 100 words that an Italian native speaker would need to manage FOBG Senior Vets. There is one extra word, already mastered by Thomas French, that would be needed but I would get a detention if I put that in here.

24 April 2011: Ditton Vets (A, 0-2)

No Easter eggs for hot, cross Senior Vets after frustrating hunt ends in harsh defeat to Ditton Vets

There were not many of the fourteen Farnborough Senior Vets out there today, in the bright warm sunshine, who will recall playing Ditton Vets at the same ground. I am one of them, and once again came away empty-handed, but the manner of our defeat was so different from the past. This was only the fourth game this season that we failed to score – but that was not for lack of trying, and there was much encouragement to be taken from our performance today and the attitude we showed as a team. The score was a poor reflection of the amount of possession we had and the pressure we exerted, and scoring opportunities that we created.

The bijou dressing room was enlivened before the game with Toby Manchip's impression of a Croatian satnav, and some reflections on the religious significance of donkeys on Palm Sunday. This raised the tone from exchanges on waste management, despite promptings from Nick Kinnear and Paul Bell.

The Farnborough Easter parade featured: Toby Manchip in goal; Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Danny Winter and Nick Kinnear in defence; Patrice Mongelard, Ian Shoebridge, Mehmet Bozyigit and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; John Tallis and Leo Maccioni up front. Paul Bell, Chris Bourlet and Eric Johnson completed the procession into Ditton (though technically Chris Bourlet was already there).

The Ditton Vets were solid, experienced and well-organised. However, the early advantage lay with Farnborough as we fashioned some half chances – Mehmet Bozyigit and Leo Maccioni combined to create a shot that Leo flashed past the post. John Tallis produced a couple of dangerous headers from crosses. The first corners were ours too. This said, we were not able to make our usual progress down the right – and the robust play of Ditton in the centre of the pitch where any Farnborough hesitation, or slow movement was punished; their alertness to the second ball, excellence at headers, and muscular tackling from their defenders – made it very competitive. Up front, they had a mobile and skilful target man who stretched our defence.

Then - a little against the run of play, Ditton scored after twenty minutes, with virtually their first serious attempt on our goal – the big forward cushioned a pass on the edge of our box, in the path of an advancing midfielder who hit a powerful 25-yarder that flew straight at the centre of our goal, and hit the underside of the bar to bounce into the net. This was a wake-up call. We pressed harder. Patrice Mongelard floated a ball over the Ditton defence that put Ian Shoebridge through in a one-on-one but the keeper made it difficult, and the rebound was volleyed wide by Mehmet Bozyigit. We continued to press but had a major scare when Ditton beat the off-side trap but failed to get a second as Toby Manchip and a covering Ian Coles narrowed the angle. There were not many other scares for us in that half and having had about 60% of the possession we felt we could recover the situation.

Patrice Mongelard, John Tallis and Nick Kinnear made way at half-time for Paul Bell, Chris Bourlet and Eric Johnson. Right from the resumption of play Farnborough chances started to come. Paul Bell put Ian Shoebridge through for another one-on-one that drew a very good point blank save from the keeper. Leo Maccioni hit a 25-yarder that was less than a foot wide. We came even closer when a shot from the same distance, from Sinisa Gracanin came back off the base of the post, with the excellent Ditton keeper beaten. Ditton had withdrawn their burly and athletic centre forward with the cultured left foot, into the heart of their defence and seemed to

have made the tactical decision to sit on their lead, and hope for a second goal on the break. With about fifteen to twenty minutes left Patrice Mongelard and John Tallis returned (for Steve Blanchard and Ian Shoebridge). The Farnborough chances kept coming - in particular Eric Johnson got to the end of a through ball and drew another reflex save from the Ditton keeper.

As often happens the team pressing for an equaliser was punished. Some loose defensive play was seized upon and a Ditton forward was able to toe-poke the ball into the bottom corner of the net before he could be closed down at the edge of the box.

Ditton felt secure enough at that point to change keeper – and we were to find out that the replacement keeper was even better, as first he palmed a free-kick from Mehmet Bozigit onto the bar and minutes later defied gravity and geometry to tip over a pile-driver from Patrice Mongelard destined for the top corner. That was virtually the last action.

Our play in the second half had been even more impressive (but also more frustrating). At times we looked like the home team. But Ditton knew their business, and from their point of view they frustrated us and got the sucker punch of a second goal with about 8 minutes left and that was it.

A word about the referee today – who I was told came from the Isle of Sheppey. Now – don't get me wrong, some of the most fair-minded people I know come from Sheppey. I am married to one. But I am sure I was not alone in thinking that he was a very local man. He let the game flow – as they say, and there were a lot of Ditton tackles from behind. Pity, because the all-round quality and intelligence of the Ditton play and individual skills on show – does not require that sort of behaviour to win games. Almost at the end of the match - Chris Bourlet was scythed down, quite unnecessarily. I sought the referee's view of the matter – and was told that he saw “absolutely nothing wrong with that tackle”. When I replied that this was precisely my point, I was told that he was prepared “to take things to the next level”. As I am the less volatile half of the FOBG Senior Vets management I will never know what he meant.

However – you should not get the impression that there was any bad feeling – far from it, we were hard done by, but such is football. This was certainly not one of those occasions where we felt we would not wish to play this team again. On the contrary. Off the pitch they were pleasant and sociable – and treated us very well in the Kentish Quarryman after the match – with egg, ham and cheese sandwiches, pizza slices, sausage rolls, onion rings, and oriental bites. And we even bought some raffle tickets – Toby Manchip bought two, “one for each of the Ditton shots in the game”, a remark which brought a wry Ditton smile.

Another testing fixture in the depths of Kent awaits next Sunday, with a few players missing, including some because of the wedding – for which the happy couple has all Farnborough Old Boys Guild Senior Vets' best wishes.

Man-of-the-Match today – Sinisa Gracanin, particularly for an excellent second half noted by Toby, narrowly ahead of Ian Coles who toiled like a Duracell Easter bunny in our defence.

1 May 2011: Staplehurst & Monarchs Vets (A, 2-0)

Senior Vets pull off Italian job in away win against Staplehurst & Monarchs

One week on, another trip to the Kentish Weald, in glorious spring sunshine, and another 2-0 scoreline, but this time Farnborough were crowned.

The Farnborough “squadra” featured: Gary Fentiman in goal; Paul Parsons, Patrice Mongelard, Danny Winter and Nick Kinnear in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Mehmet Bozyigit, Mark Perry and John Tallis in midfield; Jerry Cogotti and Leo Maccioni up front. Chris Bourlet and Roger French (and their bambinos, and Miss Fentiman) completed the Farnborough expedition – for our furthest away game, to facilities, hospitality and opposition that are well worth the trip.

Games between Farnborough and Staplehurst Monarchs have always been close affairs, often with late goals, nicking a result. Today did not follow quite the same pattern – but this was an evenly contested game, played in excellent spirit, and with both teams missing several players from when they last met, at Farrow Fields on 6 March.

The pitch was in excellent condition, a tad dry and bouncy in keeping with the weather, and with a fairly strong breeze that required both sets of players to concentrate and take care of the ball. The early pressure, and greater fluency of passing was ours and we came closest after a quarter of an hour, when Leo Maccioni slammed a close-range shot against the post after good work in the box by Jerry Cogotti. We had a lot of joy down the right with the usual combination of Mehmet Bozyigit and Danny Winter, but failed to make the most of a string of crosses from that source. We were having trouble too with our corners which were mostly under-hit, and therefore well-defended at the near post. The Staplehurst keeper was agile and confident, and it was clear that something special would be needed to get the better of him.

At the other end, Staplehurst reminded us more than once that they could break with effect and purpose, and the ball over the top which held up in the wind, made it awkward for Gary Fentiman to come off his line with maximum efficacy. Staplehurst had the same number of corners as we did, for about half of the possession that we had in the first half. With half an hour gone, our incessant probing down the right, and Jerry Cogotti’s darting runs, quick turns and quicker feet, combined to give us our first goal as Jerry produced an exquisite and crisp half-volley from Ian Shoebridge’s cut-back, with great finesse, to loop the ball over the keeper (a bit like Roberto Baggio or Alessandro Del Piero, I thought). We managed to defend that lead until the break, with John Tallis anchoring the midfield, ably supported by Ian Shoebridge and Mark Perry, aided by Leo Maccioni’s energy and Paul Parsons’ robust defending.

Roger French and Chris Bourlet came on at half-time, for Nick Kinnear and Mark Perry, to give us a new-look, and more rugged left side. We needed it as the breeze was now with Staplehurst and the early pressure was theirs. Five minutes in – they gave us quite a scare as a dipping volley from distance looped over Gary Fentiman’s head, and he was just able to tip the ball onto the bar, and we cleared the rebound. But then, ten minutes into the second half, we managed to do what away teams hope for, and that was to silence the home crowd by getting a second goal, on the break, with Leo Maccioni timing his run to sprint clear of the Staplehurst defence, after some neat inter-passing on the halfway line, to carry the ball twenty yards or so, deep into the Staplehurst box, before hitting a fierce low shot that struck the post before coming to rest in the net.

But of course, this did not finish Staplehurst off – as they pressed forward to get back in the game. They forced some corners and from one of those Chris Bourlet cleared off the line, and Gary Fentiman had to make a smart save diving low, and without spilling the ball, to hold on to a fierce close-range shot in the follow-up. This save will have given Gary particular satisfaction after events in the last minute of last year's corresponding fixture – and (he confided) it made him better able later to enjoy the excellent post-match grub (that is whatever Roger French and Patrice Mongelard left for the rest of the team).

Paul Parsons made way with about twenty minutes left and John Tallis dropped back into central defence, and Mark Perry returned, this time into central midfield, to have, arguably, more influence on the game than he did in the first half. We continued to defend well and to look for the break mainly down the right – and in some ways not really making the most of the opportunities we fashioned, or using our left side as much as we ought. Leo Maccioni hit the post again and Jerry Cogotti was just beaten to the rebound. We crowded round the Staplehurst box, over-passed to some extent and while we did not look like scoring again, we kept the play at their end. Whenever they tried to break our covering defenders, Danny Winter, Chris Bourlet and Patrice Mongelard, managed to play Farnborough out of trouble.

After the excellent showers, power showers compared to the Farrow Fields plumbing (alas), a good number of us made our way to the Kings Head – to enjoy regal hospitality in the form, once again, of a steaming vat of turkey curry, copious parsley-flecked rice, and a mountain of poppadums. Roger French, for whom the match had been relatively serene, tucked in with gusto, like a man who had sharpened his appetite by re-reading the culinary extracts in the report of last season's corresponding match, which he had missed.

The journey home, for all of us, though long, will have been enjoyable, in the lovely Kent countryside, past vineyards, and excellent weather – and with the satisfaction of a job well done in our last away fixture this season, against worthy opponents. We also welcomed news that Friday's wedding had passed off very well, and the groom will be back in a Farnborough shirt very soon. Several of us even have another match to look forward to – on Tuesday, as sadly the season draws to its close.

Man-of-the-Match today – Leo Maccioni, closely followed by Jerry Cogotti. Between them this dynamic duo polled ten out of thirteen votes cast, (no AV system here) for a combined performance that was smooth, intense and velvety – just like a top Italian ice cream – Maccioni & Cogotti's perhaps, or Leo & Jerry's.

3 May 2011: Edenbridge Vets (H, 4-2)

Extra topping for Senior Vets with delivery of hard-fought win over Edenbridge

For six of us today this was our second game in three days, and the Senior Vets had played ten matches since we last played Edenbridge on 6 February. Our opponents on the other hand have, I understand, hardly played since then and that may explain why they were so keen, sharp, eager and gave us, I felt, a harder test than in February. It was certainly hard to believe that they only had ten players in the first half. So, did we for some of it, until Ian Coles joined us about twenty minutes after referee Mick Gearing had started the game bang on time at 6:45, after we had all pulled together to get ourselves and the goal nets ready.

The twelve slices in the Farnborough pizza today were: Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard and Chris Bourlet in defence; Mehmet Bozyigit, Mark Perry, Robin Lipscomb and John Tallis in midfield; Peter Harvey and Colin Brazier up front. Roger French sportingly played for Edenbridge in the second half to even the slices – and fittingly for Roger, some might think, to be playing in black and blue.

We wanted to start on time to make the most of the light for 90 minutes, and for most of the first-half there was almost too much light as the low bright sun shone straight into our eyes – and many a pass went astray because of that (allegedly). There was also some smoke drifting across the pitch from burning vegetation behind one of the goals, with a whiff of the sort of herbs that would be illegal on a pizza. The hard, bouncy pitch did not help either but it was the same for both teams.

It is fair to say we were initially surprised by the vigour, speed and technical standard of the Edenbridge play. They were fewer in number than when we played them at their place but they seemed to have gone for quality rather than quantity. We realised very quickly that we were in for a tough game, even against ten men. Still the early chances and greater share of the possession were ours.

Our first goal was scored by Robin Lipscomb with a downward header in the six-yard box, from a pin-point cross supplied by Mehmet Bozyigit on the right. We had chances to increase our lead but were denied by splendid saves from the Edenbridge keeper. Then, deservedly, Edenbridge drew level. They had been threatening to do this, and moments earlier had come close, and were denied only by a last-ditch tackle in the six-yard box by Patrice Mongelard, with an empty net beckoning. Some loose passing in our midfield was seized upon, and the ball was quickly transferred up front, and we were caught a little unawares on our left side, could not recover the situation and the ball was rolled into our net.

For a while the game could have gone either way. But by then we had eleven players and I think our extra man counted as Mark Perry picked up a loose ball just outside the box, after Colin Brazier and Rob Lipscomb had penetrated the Edenbridge defence, seemed to take a long time to select his shot – before hitting a crisp right foot shot which the Edenbridge keeper could not keep out of the net. 2-1 became 3-1 about five minutes later when Rob Lipscomb played a delightfully weighted defence-splitting pass towards Peter Harvey who let it run across his body, thus beating his marker, and advanced into the box to hit a powerful shot with his cultured left foot into the bottom corner.

For once we did not have the players to make half-time changes, particularly as Roger French's offer to play for Edenbridge was accepted. The second half was, if anything, a more even affair,

with possession, number of chances and corners shared almost equally by both teams. Two good goals were scored – one by each team, not entirely dissimilar goals, but I think one was more intentional than the other.

We took a 4-1 lead about ten minutes into the second half, once again from Peter Harvey's deadly left boot as he got behind Roger French, cut in, and looked up from about 25 yards out, thought to himself that he was going to curl the ball into the top corner above the keeper's grasp – and delivered exactly that. To their enormous credit Edenbridge rallied and put us under pressure. Colin Brazier helpfully dropped back into the defence to allow an "injured" Chris Bourlet to go up front. Chris was the most smartly dressed man in Farnborough yesterday and provided evidence of the long arm of the law when he retrieved a ball from the roof of the dugout. It was his first full game in over a year and like most of us, would have been glad to hear the final whistle in the increasingly cold air after the sun had left Farrow Fields.

Before then, and fittingly, the last goal of the match was scored by Edenbridge – from 30 yards out wide on the right, when a deep cross (I think it was a cross) eluded Gary Fentiman to nestle inside the top corner of the Farnborough net.

All that remained after that was the usual post-match bustle and team work to remove and store the nets, wheel the goal posts back to their docking stations, pick up our bits and head for the lukewarm showers.

The winning Italian theme of last weekend was continued off the pitch this time, as Don Roger French made the offer of six XXL pizzas (equivalent to 72 slices) which we could not refuse. I think they came already sliced and there was no need for Roger to do any more slicing. As I munched contentedly on my 4th slice - I could not help reflect on what a splendid team effort had been delivered – from the ten Edenbridge players who made the long trip to play this game so sportingly, from the Farnborough backroom team – Vic Farrow for opening the club and doing the many small unseen and often unappreciated things that precede and follow games, Des Fallon who manned the bar and disposed of the empty pizza boxes, referee Mick Gearing, Paul Parsons and Nick Kinnear who came to watch their team mates and ended up running the line, and, of course, the pizza delivery man who was on time at 8:40.

Man-of-the-Match today – John Tallis, for a towering performance in midfield, and genuinely surprised to have been chosen by his team mates – who was rewarded, for one night only, with a position on the management team as assistant book-keeper.

All in all, this was a successful occasion enjoyed by all who took part, and further evidence that such games are worth organising, if possible.

8 May 2011: Riverside Wanderers Vets (H, 6-2)

Senior Vets' own wanderer returns to sink Riverside Wanderers with hat-trick, in win for Farnborough

Rumours that Andy Faulks, who had not played for the Senior Vets since 6 March, had come home from some Greek odyssey, to regain his place as Senior Vets top goal scorer were after all true. And it was also reported that Andy had had an early night (leaving Biba's prematurely at 1:30 AM), to prepare for this game. And it seemed the Mediterranean weather had come home with him as well.

For our third game in 8 days, the Farnborough Senior Vets lined up as follows: Gary Rosslee in goal; Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Danny Winter and Nick Kinnear in defence; Mehmet Bozyigit, Ian Shoebridge, Patrice Mongelard and John Tallis in midfield; Andy Faulks and Jerry Cogotti up front. Roger French and Chris Bourlet stood ready to make their mark in the second half – more on that later. For once, we were outnumbered at home as Riverside Wanderers had managed to gather between 15 and 16 players.

When referee Mick Gearing started the game, we were expecting a contest and so it proved to be. Riverside had the wind behind them and it took us a while to get out of our half. I have to be honest and say that our first goal after about 15 minutes was against the run of play – as Patrice Mongelard lofted the ball over the Riverside defence to play Andy Faulks in on goal. Andy got ahead of his marker, steadied himself and took the shot early and crisply from the edge of the box beating the keeper at his near post. Ten minutes later, still against the run of play, Jerry Cogotti provided the same silver service to Andy Faulks, and we were two up with a similar sort of goal. We had got away with it – no question. Riverside forced between five and six corners in that first-half and Gary Rosslee had to be at his best to make a splendid double save from close range. Riverside even had the ball in the net from a rather good back header but that was disallowed because of an infringement well spotted by Mick Gearing in the box. It was really no surprise when Riverside got a goal back - after they had penetrated behind the defence on our left and cut the ball back inside the 6-yard box for a low shot into the bottom corner. We managed to hold on until the end of the half with our spine of John Tallis, Steve Blanchard and Ian Coles holding firm. We even had a half-chance to make it 3-1 when Patrice Mongelard sliced a left foot shot wide from six yards out, when the ball was unselfishly played across the box by Andy Faulks.

At half-time Nick Kinnear and Patrice Mongelard made way for Roger French and Chris Bourlet. Nick went to run the line, from where he was able (allegedly) to ask the youth team about their elderly relatives when their game on the top pitch finished midway through our second half.

Half-time had also seen the arrival of the bride and groom (mentioned in recent match reports) and other supporters, including Chris Webb, plastered and unfortunately out of action, and a little later, expectant father - Paul Bell, with an unusual and interesting sweepstake. We also had at half-time a very kind offer from Pam Shoebridge to top our water bottles, such was the thirst caused by the warm sun, and our efforts to keep Riverside at bay.

Although we now had the wind behind us it was difficult to peg Riverside back. No doubt feeling hard done by in the first-half they pressed us hard. We came close to scoring when Roger French had a volley from the edge of the Riverside box that was made for a left footer, but we had to do more defending than attacking in the first ten to fifteen minutes. Soon after, Riverside got their reward when a dangerous cross from the right was turned in at the far post for an inadvertent

Riverside equaliser by our own Mehmet Bozyigit who was covering the defence. Mehmet tried very hard to make amends and five minutes later crashed a 20-yarder against the Riverside crossbar. Psychologically this was an important moment – as it gave us fresh hope. Andy Faulks, who timed his diagonal runs very well today, latched on to another through ball, and appeared to be impeded as he sought to round the Riverside keeper. The referee blew for a penalty, but Andy sportingly said the keeper's challenge was fair.

We did not have to wait long after that before restoring our advantage. It came from a wholly unexpected source as Chris Bourlet, prone to wander from his left-back position, found himself in the right place at the right time, as the ball fell kindly to him on the edge of the Riverside box, in the centre, and he swept it instantly into the net. His positional transgression was forgiven, on this occasion.

Patrice Mongelard came back on for Mehmet Bozyigit for the last twenty minutes – and was to add to the inspired management decisions made today (though no doubt Toby Manchip would dispute that). Five minutes later Patrice Mongelard teed the ball for Roger French to make it 4-2 to Farnborough with a delicate right foot lob from close range. Two more Farnborough goals were scored in the last ten minutes; first Jerry Cogotti's quick feet slipped the ball behind the Riverside defence for Andy Faulks to run on, and get his richly deserved hat-trick. Soon after Jerry registered his third assist of the game, as he caressed the ball into Patrice Mongelard's path, who advanced into the box and hit a low shot past the keeper to everybody's surprise but his own. Not for the first time this season Patrice Mongelard had scored a goal which did not quite register with his team mates – as it was not immediately clear to them how the ball had ended up in the net. Solitary goal celebrations were followed soon after by the final whistle.

Things were lively in the club house with Toby Manchip, who had come to seek, and obtained approval, to open transfer talks with Cudham – and with perhaps more beer than usual imbibed to accompany Shirley's excellent grub, because of the warm weather and relaxed atmosphere. To keep Roger French relaxed his daughter Isabelle had taken to wearing a fluorescent police vest, and his son Thomas had been armed with a sword. This almost failed, as Roger got exercised when he felt Riverside had got away with something during the game – though being honest I would have to say that Farnborough got away with it a bit today, particularly in the first-half – and we only asserted ourselves in the last twenty-five minutes when injuries and tiredness afflicted Riverside more than Farnborough.

Man-of-the-Match today – an inspired Andy Faulks – for a hat-trick which restored him as top scorer, coming home like a Greek tragic hero, to win his rightful place and dash his rivals' hopes.

Riverside Wanderers liked our pitch and hospitality so much that they are coming back to play us on Wednesday – and I hope to be reporting on that too (our thirtieth and penultimate game this season).

11 May 2011: Riverside Wanderers Vets (H, 7-0)

Senior Vets shrug off goalkeeping crisis to overpower plucky Riverside Wanderers with deadly strike force, in another big win under Waldorf's management

For our fourth game in eleven days, and our second game in four days against the same opponents - the Farnborough Senior Vets lined up as follows: Patrice Mongelard in goal; Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier and Rob Lipscomb in defence; Mehmet Bozyigit, John Tallis, Paul Bell and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Andy Faulks and Peter Harvey up front. Late-arriving Nick Kinnear was our twelfth man. Riverside Wanderers had mustered 14 players.

We had seven players who had played in the 6-2 win against Riverside a few days ago – and Riverside probably had the same number. Of our twelve players - ten were regular Senior Vets – and for today's game we had been rejuvenated with Peter Harvey and Rob Lipscomb (aged 44 and 41 respectively) who normally play for our younger Vets. We had the top scorers from our two Vets sides paired together - over forty goals between them this season, before today's game, and that proved quite telling in the end.

The keen followers of the Senior Vets among you will have spotted an unfamiliar name in goal. Yes, we had a bit of a situation in the goalkeeping department – with Toby Manchip pulling out only hours before the game, and we were not able to find a recognised keeper to fill in. I thought I would not have to mention the 29 April wedding in this report but Toby, wisely in my view, albeit rather late in the day, decided it would not be in his best interests to play football on the eve of setting off on his honeymoon (delayed like for that other couple). I probably would have made the same decision, but been more wary of upsetting Statler (aka known as Roger French) – and I am sure this will not affect the attendance at Toby's testimonial.

Once again, the game was started on time by referee Mick Gearing, and in more pleasant conditions than last mid-week's affair – there was no wind, the sun was not shining in our eyes, it felt very temperate and there was a general stillness in the air on a splendid spring evening.

I have to be honest – from my vantage point this was a very one-sided game. We could have scored five or six goals in the first-half but made really heavy weather of it. A combination of good Riverside goalkeeping, and mostly poor finishing on our part yielded only two goals by half-time. It took us about twenty minutes to score and even then, it was an over-hit cross by Robin Lipscomb that found the net. Another fifteen minutes passed before Peter Harvey meandered with purpose through the Riverside defence to get our second goal.

Outside those two moments we had a string, or farcical catalogue, of missed chances, which I would rather not go into, out of consideration for my team mates, as we peppered the Riverside goal with shots, crosses, headers and corners or tried to walk the ball into the net. There was an off-side goal by Mehmet, too eager to impress his watching nephew.

What about the other end you might ask? I had about five interventions to make – twice to rush out to clear at the edge of the box, and three saves from close range, including a memorable one when I got my fingertips to a fierce shot to send it crashing against the bar. I spilled the ball more than once it has to be said. I had plenty of time to take in the surroundings and could hear conversations among spectators sat high up behind the goal, and the excited cries of children rolling down the bank. Another sort of rolling had taken place, I suspected, from the sweet, woody aroma, wafting from a couple of lads enjoying an exotic cheroot behind the goal.

At half-time Paul Bell made way for Nick Kinnear and I was liberated by John Tallis. If anything, John was to have an even quieter game in goal than I did in the first half. The only frisson of note came when he was caught out by the back pass rule, after chesting a tricky ball from Nick Kinnear, trapping it with a first-time control, looking up coolly – and then spoiling the overall effect by picking the ball up.

The pattern of previous games against Riverside repeated itself as we asserted ourselves in the second half and goals came quickly. A clever ball over the top of the ultra-square Riverside defence from Rob Lipscomb, played Peter Harvey in on goal five minutes into the half, for our third goal. Pete again made it 4-0 soon after once more getting behind the Riverside defence and advancing deep into the box before placing his shot beyond the keeper. Patrice Mongelard put the ball in the Riverside net but was judged to have fouled the keeper, who thankfully was not injured.

Meanwhile Andy Faulks was waiting his turn, not for the first time this season as the goals kept going in, and thanks to a great assist from Peter Harvey who unselfishly squared the ball to him, was able to get our 5th. Our sixth goal was probably our best – a delightfully weighted, angled chipped ball over the defence to Peter Harvey by Sinisa Gracanin, was quickly processed to deliver a tap-in for Andy Faulks. It was crisp, and incisive, and deadly. Re-vitalised, Andy went on to get our 7th goal with about five minutes left, with a clean volley from the edge of the box to bag his second hat-trick against Riverside in four days – to nail the Senior Vets top scorer trophy and take our goal tally in 30 games this season past the 100 mark. There was even time for Andy to hit the post in the dying minutes.

Once again, we owe thanks to Vic Farrow – not feeling 100% today, so no Ceroc for the rock of Farnborough tonight, who opened up, put our stuff out, switched the hot water on, and stayed until the end. We must not forget the referee Mick Gearing, and Ian Couchman for opening the bar, and Steve Blanchard junior who ran the line.

Spare a thought too for our opponents today – who were well beaten but not embarrassed, and who played with a smile throughout. Even allowing for Mick Gearing's economy with the whistle – there was not a single ill-tempered moment, or bad tackle, in that game. I am not sure we would have shown the same solidarity and grace in similar circumstances – well, not Statler anyway.

The pizzas went down very well again – for some reason John Tallis, took a particular liking to them – perhaps reminded of home cooking. I would be surprised if any of us needed a curry after the game (unlike some who will remain nameless after last Tuesday's pizzas).

Man-of-the-Match today – Peter Harvey, with votes deservedly cast also for Rob Lipscomb, Andy Faulks and Sinisa Gracanin. Pete's next game who will be playing against us on Sunday in our final game of the season, which is becoming a traditional celebration of the contentment that Farnborough Old Boys Guild football club brings into the lives of its two Vets teams.

15 May 2011: FOBG Young Vets (H, 0-4)

Youth triumphs over experience, as Farnborough Vets football festival finishes vintage season

And so, it ends – a long season of 31 games for the Senior Vets which started on 5 September, paused during December, ventured on Astroturf in the new year, and finished with five games in a fortnight. The end of year report makes encouraging reading – twenty-one wins, one draw, nine defeats, 102 goals for and fifty against.

For our final game this season Farnborough Senior Vets lined up with Gary Fentiman (43) in goal; Ian Coles (48), Steve Blanchard (45), Patrice Mongelard (53) and Roger French (49) in defence; Mehmet Bozyigit (41), Mark Perry (38), Sinisa Gracanin (42) and John Tallis (47) in midfield; Colin Brazier (52) and Ian Shoebridge (43) up front. Nick Kinnear (49) arrived late for a second consecutive game, and rather unexpectedly Paul Smith (late 40s), who had not played for us in over a year, appeared during the first half. Paul may have sensed we were missing quite a number of forwards today – Andy Faulks, Leo Maccioni, Jerry Cogotti and Andy Smith. In the end that proved quite telling. The young Vets were certainly not at full strength themselves, and had called upon three players, all under twenty years of age, from the club.

The first twenty minutes of this game were very even, with hardly any clear chances created by both sides. The younger Vets carried the greater menace up front but possession was equally shared, as it was throughout the game. As expected, the younger Vets + their even younger players – had the proverbial yard of pace, but we remained compact and with covering midfielders, kept them out. The deadlock was broken in a controversial moment – Peter Harvey, was not given off-side by the linesman (nor the referee) as he latched to a ball over the top, rounded Gary Fentiman, and slotted the ball home. The linesman should have been Nick Kinnear, but as he was late arriving George Kleanthous took on the job. George would himself have been playing for the younger Vets but for injury – but at least he was able to contribute to the occasion.

We rallied after the goal and enjoyed our best passages of play in the first-half and we carved out some half-chances and won some corners. The next goal was going to be crucial and so it proved – as Peter Harvey skirting the edge of our defence and pushing at the boundary of the off-side rule, cut in from the left of our defence, and saw his shot or cross blocked – only for it to rebound kindly to his feet and he lobbed Gary Fentiman from a central position with about ten minutes of the first-half remaining. The neutrals amongst the crowd – may well have felt this was against the run of play - but it showed the crucial difference between the two teams in the final third – and that was the presence and absence of a cutting edge in the opposition box.

We made one surprising change at half-time and that was to put Paul Smith up front, after he assured Roger French there was no medical reason why he could not play. Call it sentiment if you like, given Paul's many years of service as our top goal scorer. Colin Brazier made way to go and capture some of the second half on film – more on that later. The second half followed the same pattern really – except that there were more goal mouth incidents. The very young players in the younger Vets team came more to the fore, and scored their two goals in the second half. We had some good shots from the edge of the box particularly from Sinisa Gracanin. With the score still at 2-0 Mehmet Bozyigit broke clear of the younger Vets defence to create a one-on-one which gave Gary Rosslee in their goal the opportunity to show how invariably good he is in such situations – and our best goal opportunity was lost.

The third goal for the younger Vets, about 15 minutes into the second half, was scored by young Steve Blanchard, who brushed Mark Perry aside a little brusquely from behind, but as there was no whistle, advanced into our half and let fly from twenty-five yards. It looked like a cross that lobbed the keeper but we were to have a second view of it later. With twenty minutes left - Roger French made way for Nick Kinnear; and Mark Perry also retired to allow Colin Brazier to return. However, the young Vets got a fourth goal with about ten minutes left as youthful exuberance and running was rewarded, when a shot from the edge of the box crept in low past Gary Fentiman.

Other incidents in that half included a muscular clearance from Gary Fentiman from a corner which almost required a taxi for Paul Bailey. We also had a "Roger French moment" when Colin Brazier was tripped and trampled on by Steve Blanchard junior – but the referee let play go on. Colin walked off in disgust, muttering darkly and gesticulating furiously, but as this was *en famille* so to speak, was persuaded to pick up his toys and resume play. Mark Perry came back for the last five minutes, to replace Mehmet Bozyigit who had taken yet another knock and will be glad of the rest before we resume training in July. The mood in the dressing room was positive despite what would be seen as a heavy defeat.

For our final game Shirley pushed the luxury cruise liner out – and there was a cornucopia of goodies on offer – crusty rolls with breaded ham, crusty rolls with grated cheddar, cocktail sausages, mini-sausage rolls, egg mayonnaise rolls, cheese straws, honey-glazed chicken drumsticks, sliced onion and even the Branston was out. And Shirley also produced the après-match teas – despite some urn issues. It was good to see Vic Farrow, perkier than on Wednesday, and having almost as many drumsticks as I did.

It was particularly pleasing to see the growing Farnborough Vets family after the game, all gathered in the clubhouse and outside, enjoying a very nice social as well as a sporting occasion played in extremely good spirit, as you would expect for a family affair. An old member of this family, of course is today's referee Mick Gearing (74) – who was presented in the clubhouse with a rather good bottle of brandy, to thank him for his (free and fair) services to the Senior Vets team. We'll be getting him some glasses to go with that – so he can read up on the off-side rule, and on tackling from behind.

Now – there is a lot of debate about whether video technology should be introduced in football. We had our own video technology today – as we were able to view images from the match captured by Colin Brazier during part of the second half. This provided endless amusement of course, but helped clear up whether Steve Blanchard junior had meant his goal, or whether it was a mis-hit cross. Well, the evidence was pretty clear that he meant to shoot on goal. What was also revealed though was that Roger French turned away at the crucial moment and the opportunity to block the shot was lost. Obviously, Colin was not able to film the foul that was perpetrated on him – but if he had – that evidence, plus the pictures of his bruising may well have stood in court.

Man-of-the-Match today – Roger French – (no voting irregularities to report, though votes were taken prior to afore-mentioned video evidence), an early 50th birthday present – and a reminder that many of us will be back at the club next Saturday evening, from 7:30, to celebrate Roger's half-century – and perhaps reflect on whether people mellow with age.

Season 2011-12

11 September 2011	Erith Vets (H)	4-3	Senior Vets edge tight contest against Erith to win and maintain unbeaten start to season
18 September 2011	FOBG Youth Team (H)	1-2	Youth triumphs over experience in all-Farnborough affair, as opponents for two teams fail to show
25 September 2011	Sanco Super Vets (A)	2-3	Senior Vets go down in dull display against Sanco Super Vets
2 October 2011	West Farleigh Vets (A)	1-2	Senior Vets wilt in defeat to West Farleigh Vets as temperatures rise
9 October 2011	Belvedere Vets (A)	2-4	Senior Vets not a pretty sight in defeat to Belvedere Vets
16 October 2011	Inter Vyagra Super Vets (A)	4-0	Senior Vets regain potency with win against Inter Vyagra
23 October 2011	Wickham Park Vets (A)	1-4	Senior Vets on downward slope again, with defeat to Wickham Park in game of two halves
30 October 2011	CUACO Vets (A)	2-1	Roger & Co go back to winning ways in win over CUACO
6 November 2011	Baltic Exchange Vets (H)	3-6	Senior Vets fizzle out in defeat to Baltic Exchange
13 November 2011	Belvedere Vets (H)	0-0	Not much to remember as Senior Vets and Belvedere battle it out to a scoreless draw
20 November 2011	Met Police Super Vets (H)	1-1	Senior Vets feel long arm of the law as Met Police nick draw
27 November 2011	Statler & Waldorf Challenge (H)	5-3	Family occasion for Senior Vets as FOBG barmy army rally round to share an eight-goal thriller in clash of the co-managers
4 December 2011	Old Tamponians Super Vets (A)	0-2	Groans at Old Roan as Senior Vets fail to breach Old Tamponians defence
11 December 2011	Toby Vets (H)	1-1	Senior Vets fail to carve up Toby in draw
18 December 2011	Old Tamponians Super Vets (H)	3-3	Senior Vets snatch draw from jaws of victory against Old Tamponians Super Vets
8 January 2011	Old Colfeians Vets (A)	2-3	Senior Vets short of resolution in new year defeat to Old Colfeians
15 January 2012	Inter Vyagra Super Vets (H)	4-2	Senior Vets make it hard for themselves and come from behind twice to win against an up for it Inter Vyagra
22 January 2012	Baltic Exchange Vets (A)	0-6	Woeful Senior Vets get a kick in the baltics in thrashing
29 January 2012	Statler & Waldorf Challenge (H)	3-3	Senior Vets and Youth Team serve up perfect blend for Statler & Waldorf Challenge Cup
19 February 2012	Catford Wanderers Vets (H)	6-1	Senior Vets left purring after win against Catford Wanderers
26 February 2012	Princes Park Super Vets (H)	0-1	Senior Vets swallow bitter pill as Princes Park rule at the end
4 March 2012	Staplehurst & Monarchs Vets (H)	1-4	Joyless occasion for Senior Vets who go down against Staplehurst & Monarchs

Season 2011-12 (contd)

11 March 2012	Wellcome Vets (A)	3-3	Welcome return of pride and team spirit for Senior Vets in draw against Wellcome Vets
18 March 2012	The Buff Vets (A)	2-5	Senior Vets have their wings clipped by Buff Vets in defeat
25 March 2012	Diamond Vets (H)	3-2	Senior Vets sparkle in win over Diamond Vets
1 April 2012	Catford Wanderers Vets (H)	1-0	Colin Brazier lays early claim to FOBG April Manager of the Month with win over a depleted Catford Wanderers
15 April 2012	Avery Hill Vets (H)	3-3	A very eventful game of two halves as Senior Vets, reluctantly, settle for a draw against Avery Hill Vets
22 April 2012	Riverside Wanderers Vets (H)	1-3	Below par Senior Vets slope to defeat by Riverside Wanderers
1 May 2012	The Buff Vets (H)	1-4	Mayday. Mayday. Senior Vets go down to Buff Vets. Sabotage suspected
6 May 2012	Riverside Wanderers Vets (H)	2-1	A memorable day at Farnborough Football Club, and the Senior Vets also won against Riverside Wanderers Vets
9 May 2012	Old Colfeians Vets (H)	5-4	Senior Vets edge 9-goal thriller against Old Colfeians Vets
13 May 2012	West Farleigh Vets (H)	3-0	Senior Vets get away with it to record win against West Farleigh Vets
16 May 2012	Riverside Wanderers Vets (H)	4-2	Senior Vets get over shocking jinxed start to take decisive lead in test series against Riverside Wanderers with well-deserved win
20 May 2012	FOBG Young Vets (H)	2-2	Honours even as Senior Vets and Young Vets award themselves a draw
27 May 2012	Riverside Wanderers Vets (A) ³	A-A	Two teams unite in tribute to Peter Harvey who breaks ankle in freak accident, after scoring twice in a game abandoned after 70 minutes with Farnborough leading 3-1

Extra Report

27 December 2011	President's XI v Chairman's XI (H)	4-7	Keeping it in the family
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³ Match abandoned after 70 minutes after Peter Harvey broke his ankle (FOBG 3-1 up)

**Farnborough Old Boys Guild FC
Senior Vets, Season 2011-12**



Back row, left to right:

Roger French, Ian Shoebridge, Patrice Mongelard, Darren Burkett, Colin Brazier, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Andy Smith

Front row, left to right:

Simon Harvey, Jerry Cogotti, Rob Lipscomb, Mick O'Flynn, Mick Gearing

11 September 2011: Erith Vets (H, 4-3)

Senior Vets edge tight contest against Erith to win and maintain unbeaten start to season

This fixture, in the second weekend of September, has in recent seasons been a testing one and so it proved today, but with an outcome that was more to our liking. We approached the fixture with only twelve players, our squad depleted for various reasons – paternity (congratulations to Mark Perry and, belatedly, Paul Bell though in the latter's case it may have been the patter of bat and ball); recuperation (last week's Man-of-the-Match Toby Manchip); and injury (Chris Webb, John Tallis, Ian Shoebridge and Roger French, to name a few). Roger normally plays at the back on the left but today was left back at home after a fairly serious injury sustained in a "charity" match at Edenbridge two weeks ago, which almost led to a call for the air ambulance - allegedly. Between you and me I have always thought that the words charity match and Roger French do not go well together.

Farnborough lined up with Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Danny Winter, Ian Coles and Steve Blanchard in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Colin Brazier, Grant Gable and Mehmet Bozyigit in midfield, Jerry Cogotti and Robin Lipscomb in attack. Our sole substitute was Paul Smith – and how heart-warming it was to see him playing football again after a long break, but more importantly after the all-clear from his doctors. He looked very good in his "Peter Cech" hat which is a more common sight in New Zealand currently. Erith appeared to have four or five subs and looked impressive in their pre-match huddle.

The referee Steve Palmer called for a minute silence before kick off to mark 9/11, which was impeccably observed by our 12 players and the swarm of Erith Vets, in black and yellow. The game was barely a minute old when we were stung by a long range shot from the left which beat Gary Fentiman but luckily for us rebounded off the post across goal. The Erith player responsible had announced himself as their most dangerous player – full of running and cunning, strong, pugnacious, and with a deadly left peg. He was to have quite an afternoon.

After this early scare, we took control of the game and began to move the ball about and 60% to 65% of the play was in the Erith half. Our midfield was more mobile and energetic. Our attack was more varied – though with a bias to the right, which Colin Brazier was not slow to point out. Colin showed great hunger for the ball today – that was because he had not had any yesterday, football that is with the 4th team. It was on the right that Mehmet Bozyigit took an early knock to his knee which limited his contribution and he was to come off after 15 minutes, making way for Paul Smith. Still the Erith defence held firm, and their keeper, though relatively slight, was equal to anything we threw at him. The Erith weapon of choice – the long ball to the star forward on the left remained potent and our defensive line had to be vigilant.

Erith scored first – we did not defend a throw in on the left too well, their full-back had advanced to the edge of the box and decided to shoot rather than cross the ball. The ball came through a forest of legs and Gary did well initially to get a hand on it but it squirmed over the line. We equalised fairly quickly as Patrice Mongelard placed a corner straight onto Grant Gable's unmarked forehead in the 6-yard box. We began to have more joy up front – with Paul Smith holding the ball and distributing it well. Jerry Cogotti and Rob Lipscomb were full of running and Grant Gable and Sinisa Gracanin were looking to burst into the Erith box. There were even a couple of long-range shots from Patrice Mongelard that looked good on the eye. We went on to take a deserved lead with a great piece of skill from Jerry Cogotti. Ten yards out, he controlled a high ball from the right, turned his marker in the same move, and volleyed the ball against the

inside of the far post and into the net. We seemed to relax after that and Erith came back into the game to finish the half strongly. The afore-mentioned forward barrelled his way into the box on the left, saw his first shot parried by Gary Fentiman but his quick feet tucked away the loose ball. Before what felt like a very long first-half ended, Erith had a one-on-one that Gary did very well to keep out.

It was important to set the right tone for the second half. Erith were probably unsettled with all the substitutions they made whereas we had the same players and got back into the game more quickly. Colin Brazier lifted our spirits with a great cross from the left that Jerry (possibly the smallest player on the pitch) headed narrowly wide, looking very surprised that the ball reached him. The game followed the same pattern as the first – we pressed more but had to be wary of Erith on the break. Gary Fentiman pulled off a great save from another one-on-one to keep us in the game after the dangerous Erith forward had beaten the off-side trap on the left. This was against the run of play though and about a quarter of an hour into the second half Paul Smith, gradually re-discovering his touch, played a great one-two with Grant Gable who moved smoothly past the last defender to beat the keeper with the outside of his right foot.

To their credit Erith came back into the game and had a goal disallowed for pushing in the box. This led to one of the few sendings off I have witnessed in Vets football. Frustration and possibly the warm sunshine caused their feisty forward to have heated words with the referee and with Farnborough players, and to square up to Rob Lipscomb. This left the referee, Steve Palmer who kept a fair and firm grip, with a smile, on a tight match, with little choice but to expel the player. We did not mind that Erith replaced him to keep eleven players on the pitch.

We needed the security of a two-goal cushion and Grant Gable was to provide this with a run into the Erith box, after neat interplay, which was capped with a well-placed low shot that the Erith keeper could not keep out. A similar Farnborough move moments later nearly brought another goal as Sinisa Gracanin placed a low shot just wide of the post from about the same position. But there was to be a last goal and it was scored by one of the Erith substitutes who had come on at half-time, and caused us quite a bit of trouble, with his close control, balance and dribbling ability, all of which could be seen in the execution of his goal. This caused a late frisson but time ran out for Erith. We were left to celebrate a hard-fought win against a team which I suspect wins more games than it loses.

It was good to see so many Erith players staying in the clubhouse long after the game, in some way making up for the early departure of their forward. We have been playing Erith for several seasons now, and whilst our games have been close and competitive – today's incident was out of character.

Pam Shoebridge provided an excellent spread after the game, including the Branston pickle, and not a crumb was left. I should also mention the appearance of the shellfish man. Vic Farrow was on hand as usual, with his trademark bonhomie, to make sure after match duties were performed. Roger French made an appearance (twice) to help with the paperwork and the food.

Man-of-the-Match today – Grant Gable for a smooth hat-trick, and an all-round dynamic performance – who said to your reporter in his post-match interview, that it was “all about the service” he'd received from his team mates.

18 September 2011: FOBG Youth Team (H, 1-2)

Youth triumphs over experience in all-Farnborough affair, as opponents for two teams fail to show

Our opponents today would have been Edenbridge Vets. Given their record in fulfilling fixtures against us, and Farnborough participation in a charity match at Edenbridge on 28 August, the last thing that entered our minds on this bright sunny morning as we arrived at the club was that we would be up against 16-year-olds. However, as some of us were getting changed the uncharitable news filtered through that Edenbridge had called only moments earlier to say they could not muster a side. We first opted to play 7-a-side on half a pitch as we had two goalkeepers (Steve Palmer having turned up to referee the match). Gradually though an even better scenario began to emerge as it looked like a second set of opponents may not turn up, this time for our Youth XI. The chances of this happening were as remote as Colin Brazier getting sent off. But both happened.

And so, it came to be that, after the regulation 15 minutes after the scheduled kick-off time had elapsed before the Youth XI game could be awarded to Farnborough, we lined up against a team of 16-year-olds. Statisticians among you will be interested to know that the combined ages of the Senior Vets back four in the second half was 200 – more than the entire eleven players facing us. Early thoughts of mixing the teams up had given way to the “better” idea of getting more play time as a team, and setting ourselves a stiff test against the exuberance, mobility and verve of youth – a sort of tortoise versus hare contest for masochists.

Farnborough lined up with Gary Fentiman in goal; Chris Bourlet, Danny Winter, Ian Coles and Steve Blanchard in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Colin Brazier, Leo Maccionni and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Jerry Cogotti, and Robin Lipscomb in attack. Our substitutes were Paul Smith and Patrice Mongelard (the latter running the line and surprising his visually-challenged colleagues with his honesty). All but three of the twenty or so spectators were rooting for the youngsters. But we had the youngest two supporters in Isabelle and Thomas French, with Papa Roger French, himself a casualty of the above-mentioned charity match. I am quite sure that whatever Roger did in that match had nothing to do with today’s turn of events.

It took the “grandads” a good ten to fifteen minutes before we could take the play into the Youth XI half. By then it was clear that we were facing a highly mobile, technically good, well-organised outfit whilst we had trouble putting passes together and holding on to the ball and using it to good effect. It is not often that we find ourselves with so little time on the ball and facing opponents that could make up ground so swiftly. Gary Fentiman was the much busier keeper – having to race off his line to pick up a lot of slightly over-hit through balls to the edge of the box, and he needed to be secure in his handling. It was against the run of play that we took the lead when Paul Smith laid on a pass for Ian Shoebridge to score from eight yards out. We almost doubled a lead with an off-side goal, and a good shooting opportunity that fell to Chris Bourlet who had advanced into the Youth XI box, totally oblivious of his defensive duties on our right.

It took the Youth team about ten minutes to equalise as a seemingly promising situation for us at the edge of their box was quickly turned around with swift passing and movement down the exposed right of our defence and Gary was beaten at his near post from inside the six-yard box. Our opponents were to hit bar and post too in that first half. The other event of note in that first-half was the even more premature departure of Danny Winter (who had been due to play only the first half) after fifteen minutes for a cut eyebrow following a clash of heads with what looked like one of his own players. It was comforting to know that ex-nurse Pam Shoebridge was on

hand in the club house to minister to Danny, before a recommended trip to the Princess Royal Hospital for a couple of stitches.

The second half was equally lively. We soaked up a lot of pressure as the Youth team stretched the play and raided down the flanks – particularly down our left where Colin Brazier was prominent but in no danger of being sent off again, as he was in 1989 when today's opponents were but a glint in their fathers' eyes. Paradoxically, we had what would have looked from the sidelines like the better chances – in particular two one-on-ones for Paul Smith stand in the memory when he shot from further out than he might have liked but it was good to see him getting closer to scoring after such a long lay-off. He might well have scored if Robin Lipscomb had squared the ball back to him inside the box instead of shooting selfishly and tamely from six yards out.

At the other end we had to defend several corners and cope with the Youth team's ability to appear suddenly in numbers, overrun the midfield and threaten our goal. Midway through the second half they took the lead from close-range as they outnumbered us in the box after we failed to clear the danger decisively. The score remained at 2-1 until the final whistle.

The atmosphere in the clubhouse was relaxed and Pam Shoebridge laid on a lovely spread as usual – though I could not help overhearing that some of the Youth team had also gone out for some chips – one of the blessings of a youthful digestive system, I suppose.

So, in the end we made the most of an unpromising situation and we, and the Youth team, were fortunate that we had ready-made opponents so to speak. There was not a single bad tackle in that game and, if I can put it in that way, - today showed that both the past and the future of FOBG are in good shape.

Man-of-the-Match today – Gary Fentiman for playing no small part in keeping the scoreline respectable.

Next week – we are off to Dulwich to play SANCO Super Vets. Injuries are taking their toll on the squad but we can look forward to the return of Compo, aka Andy Faulks, last season's top scorer, home for a while from his Greek adventures.

25 September 2011: Sanco Super Vets (2-3)

Senior Vets go down in dull display against Sanco Super Vets

Today was a glorious day for football, on a still, balmy Sunday morning, and on a peach of a pitch, against opponents that we have beaten in the past on their delightful ground in Dulwich Village. Yet, we came up short after leading twice in the match, and lost the game in the last ten minutes.

Injuries mostly had robbed us of several players and there were other reasons for absences, but we still had a competent team out there and for all we know our opponents could have been missing a few themselves, though they had about five substitutes to our solitary one. But they were better organised and balanced, used their substitutions well, and had home pitch advantage. We played without cohesion and pace. We had two forwards looking for their touch, a midfield not in touch with each other, and a defence that was a touch too defensive.

Farnborough lined up with Steve Palmer in goal; Chris Bourlet, Colin Brazier, Ian Coles and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Rob Lipscomb, Toby Manchip and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Paul Smith and Andy Faulks in attack. Dave Green was our solitary substitute and we had three loyal supporters in Isabelle, Thomas and Roger French.

When the game started, Sanco moved the ball about better through their skilful playmaker in midfield, and to their forwards who were comfortable holding the ball and playing with their back to goal and using the full width of the pitch. We had a more direct style. But Paul Smith and Andy Faulks had trouble imposing themselves on the Sanco defence. Andy had not scored for months – yet he got our first goal after a cleverly angled and weighted ball from Sinisa Gracanin played him in behind the Sanco right-back and he got to it, rounded the keeper and slotted the ball in from a very narrow angle with his left foot. This felt a bit like it was against the run of play – particularly as Sanco were forcing corners which we had trouble coping with. The set-piece is becoming a weakness of ours. It was no surprise when Sanco equalised ten minutes later after we failed to clear the ball and did not close down on the edge of the box and a well-struck acrobatic volley brought the teams level.

Things got a bit tense for a short period as both teams sought to edge ahead. I was called a “throwback” by a feisty and prickly Sanco forward we had not encountered before, who had heated words with three of four of our players in a short space of time. The sentence addressed to me was not fully formed, so I was left wondering what or who I was a throwback to – Tommy Smith perhaps, though I’d prefer to think of Alan Hansen. Putting this rare unpleasantness in a game against Sanco behind us, we rallied and had our best spell of the game. Toby Manchip had a couple of shots from distance cutting in from the left but these were not good, and he seemed in need of new footwear. The management hope that they have now solved the problem. This said, I must confess to putting a technically difficult 25-yard volley well over the cricket sightscreen behind the goal. Ian Shoebridge had a close-range glancing header from an Andy Faulks cross that brought a very sharp save from the Sanco keeper.

Ian began to make some gains down the right – though we lacked our normal penetration down that flank (as we did on the left too with the changes we had had to make) - and from one such move came the best goal of the match. Neat interplay between Sinisa Gracanin and Ian Shoebridge saw Ian free with time to look up, listen to the call, measure and thread a pass across the Sanco box into the path of Colin Brazier coming in at pace who shot first-time to place a low,

hard drive beyond the keeper. Colin will have been quietly very satisfied with this crisp and clinical finish against one of his former teams. We held on to our 2-1 advantage until half-time.

For the second half Dave Green came on at right-back, notionally, for Chris Bourlet. He brought a bit of bite into our game as he put himself about up front, and in midfield but conceded free-kicks. Toby Manchip was substituted after 65 minutes – in what he later described as a game-changing substitution by the management when we were 2-1 up, to be replaced by Chris Bourlet. I think, by then, we had lost belief and Sanco finished the last 15 to 20 minutes on top and that was when the game was turned on its head. The tipping point was the excellent save midway through the second half which the Sanco keeper made from Andy Faulks in a one-on-one, after Sinisa Gracanin had played Andy through when he could have carried on into the box himself. Until then our own goal had not really been troubled but the tide turned with that save.

Our weakness at corners returned as Sanco equalised with twenty minutes to go. The force was now with them, except for free-kicks that we failed to capitalise on. They were awarded a penalty, and rightly so when Ian Shoebridge brought down one of their players in the six-yard box with a late and tired tackle. The afore-mentioned feisty and prickly Sanco player stepped forward and screwed his low shot wide. He will have been disappointed with that. I was not. It could not happen to a nicer chap, I thought, rather uncharitably, I confess. However, just when we were beginning to think that a draw would not be a bad result – with five minutes left, after yet another corner which we cleared this time but failed to get to the second ball, a dipping volley was despatched from about 30 yards out which surprised Steve Palmer and went in under his body and that was that.

We lost to three well-taken goals: (i) a volley from the edge of the box which we were too slow to close down; (ii) a header in the six-yard box from a corner that we failed to defend and (iii) a speculative but well-executed volley from thirty yards which again we were slow to get to. Of course, we played a part in these goals, even if one of omission, and we could not feel after each of them that we should have done better. That was the abiding memory of the game which left us all a bit morose and grumpy, especially Roger French who had been going apoplectic on the touchline. Yet things had started on a light-hearted note before kick-off when Toby Manchip was presented with his 2010-11 season award for services to comedy. And even though some of us were cheered up a little on the way home with the “confessions of a postman” the last laugh today belonged to Sanco.

Man-of-the-Match today was Steve Palmer for a performance that deserved better.

2 October 2011: West Farleigh Vets (A, 1-2)

Senior Vets wilt in defeat to West Farleigh Vets as temperatures rise

We lost our way in this one and I do not just mean the difficulties around Junction 3 of the M25, or the broken-down car that deprived us of Danny Winter, our first choice right-back.

This was our first time against today's opponents based in West Farleigh, deep in the Kentish Weald. When we got there, it was well worth the trip. We had to get over an improvised stile with oak logs to reach our portacabin changing room, and then there were another eighty yards along a well-trodden path to a delightful well-cared for pitch, in an idyllic setting amongst meadows, oast houses and blackberry and hawthorn hedges.

In glorious sunshine Farnborough lined up with Steve Palmer in goal; Chris Bourlet, Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Nick Waller, Rob Lipscomb, Dave Green and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Paul Smith and Andy Faulks in attack. Paul Bell was our solitary substitute and we had eight supporters in Isabelle, Thomas and Roger French; three members of the Bourlet family, Robbie Hall and Steve Palmer's partner. Robbie Hall had come to watch as he is contemplating a return to football but may well be having second thoughts after today.

It did not take us long to realise this was going to be a game of few chances. We went with the slope and about 65% of the play was in the West Farleigh half. We fashioned the early chances and moved the ball about well. We were getting behind them and our midfield were joining the attack, and often Chris Bourlet too. The best early chance fell to Paul Smith as the ball was cut-back to him at the edge of the six-yard box but he put his shot high over the bar.

Although West Farleigh had begun to match us after the first quarter of an hour, it was still a surprise when they took the lead. I would not say it was entirely against the run of play but a well-constructed break down our right was allowed to develop and the ball was carried deep into our box and a low shot was driven across our goal against the bottom of the opposite post and into our net. It did not take us long to equalise – as the ball was moved from Patrice Mongelard to Paul Smith who played Andy Faulks in behind the West Farleigh defence and he in turn passed to Dave Green who had advanced down the left and was able to loft the ball into the West Farleigh net. That was to be our best move of the game, not to be repeated sadly. As half-time approached, we were beginning to feel that things were not quite right, particularly up front.

To add to our discomfort, Roger French and Chris Bourlet had an altercation at half-time. Chris, who was not having the best of games at right-back, and would not have started in that position had Danny Winter made it to the ground, took strong exception to being substituted and complained loudly about never getting a full game etc. etc. etc. Roger French, always the first name on the substitutes bench, reacted and harsh words were spoken, including the F-word, in front of children and Bourlet mère. As toys came out of prams, I thought it would take more than a packet of Farley's rusks to sort this one out. Clearly this was not good – and from two long-serving players who should know better. Chris eventually came back on the pitch "when asked nicely" for a tiring Nick Waller, after his Tevez moment. Chris, whose line of work ought to have taught him about the smack of firm management, the value of team work and serving the community, received a full apology from Roger after the game (to him and his family) but I expect that, with a young family, Chris will now wish to consider his future with the team.

Paul Bell (*homo flatus* himself – who thankfully behaved in the bijou dressing room) came on at half-time for Chris Bourlet in what looked like patent blue leather football boots – the shades that

Paul was wearing would have been needed to handle those boots, but came in handy today. The second half was a difficult one for us. Our lack of movement up front slowed our game down and midfielders tried to do too much. Gradually, the better organised and reinforced West Farleigh put pressure on us. Yet with the score at 1-1 we had a very good chance to edge ahead as Andy Faulks was played through behind the defence but lacked the energy to take the ball fully clear of the pursuing defender who was able to put in a saving tackle as Andy pulled the trigger. There were some long-range shots and a couple of corners but that was it from us. The winning goal for West Farleigh came about ten minutes from the end as our midfield was overrun and a shot from distance crept low beyond Steve Palmer's reach, and to be fair they deserved it. We huffed and puffed a bit more but never really looked getting an equaliser.

For the second week running we had only twelve players whilst our opponents had fifteen and it had a bearing on the game as West Farleigh rotated furiously, and without dissent, and several times in both halves could afford to bring three or four substitutes at a time, particularly on such a hot day. All our water bottles were emptied at half-time and emergency supplies had to be fetched by Robbie Hall and Nick Waller midway through the second half, old friends renewing acquaintance on the walk to and from the oasis. Nick Waller became our water carrier – though not in the sense that football uses the term – besides he only drinks ale.

There was not a bad tackle in that game, nor harsh word with our opponents (amongst ourselves it was a different matter). West Farleigh Vets were friendly, sporting (even putting the ball into touch for a hand-ball missed by the excellent referee) and we look forward to the return game on our turf when we will have players back. Our opponents will never have a better time to play us than at present. Today we were missing an entire first choice midfield in Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb, John Tallis and Mehmet Bozyigit – as well as players like Danny Winter and Colin Brazier among others. But we were pleased to see the comeback of an old boy in Nick Waller – who showed some neat touches and good technical ability.

After the game we were due to go to The Walnut public house for re-hydration but got lost and settled for The Bull, fittingly I thought in view of what we had produced on the pitch.

Man-of-the-Match today was Robin Lipscomb for a lot of running on a very hot October day.

9 October 2011; Belvedere Vets (A, 2-4)

Senior Vets not a pretty sight in defeat to Belvedere Vets

On paper, for this game, we had 15 players – and permutations worked out in a hut in Bletchley Park for a first starting XI, a second after 25 minutes, a third at half-time, and a fourth after 65 minutes. But as ever, events intervened - the main ones being the quality of our opponents, and the poverty of our play. Yet, we had travelled with some hope to post code DA17. After all, against today's opponents last season we had won 3-1 away, and 4-2 at home (with Andy Faulks bagging all four goals).

For today's horror show the Farnborough cast was Gary Fentiman in goal; Danny Winter, Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Nick Waller, Rob Lipscomb, Sinisa Gracanin and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Paul Smith and Andy Faulks in attack. Paul Bell, Chris Bourlet and Colin Brazier were our substitutes (Colin doubling up as photographer). Roger French directed operations from the touchlines with clip board, and Isabelle and Roger French made up a small band of supporters, augmented midway through the first-half by Chris Webb and daughter and son who had brought a kite along in case the football became unbearable (which it did).

We would have had one more substitute in Toby Manchip, but our self-appointed club captain withdrew his services when we were getting changed, on the grounds that his mind was not right for the game, and had been messed with further by the late kick-off of 11:30. That freed up his shorts for Andy Faulks. We could have had one more substitute had Mehmet Bozyigit followed up on his text of last night and turned up, but he did not, and bears no responsibility for today's shambles.

This was our fourth consecutive defeat and whilst it is too early – is it not? - to sack the management in the morning, the fans and the Board are getting restless. And I would not really blame some of our players if they began to have second thoughts about getting out of bed to offer such tripe on a Sunday morning when they could play golf, walk the dog or spend time with their families. Talking of tripe, I think Paul Bell must have had some for dinner last night with twelve boiled eggs and a pint of castor oil. I say this as he announced his presence by assaulting us with vapours from what felt like filled nappies from Olivia Mae Bell, inadvertently disposed of in his kit bag.

Anyway, things began to go downhill very early, when we lost the toss, in fact. Belvedere decided to change ends and kick down the considerable slope (and with the wind). Their game plan must be quite simple compared with that of Professor French – win the toss, play with the slope, use the width of the pitch, get ahead by half-time and then hold out with their vast number of substitutes.

It took us what felt like twenty minutes to penetrate their defence and draw a save from their keeper such was the flow of traffic towards our goal. Their midfield was more mobile and ready to support the attack and break into the box, usually unencumbered with our midfielders. Gary Fentiman was the much busier of the keepers, and pulled off a memorable diving save high to his right that may have had something to do with the presence of our photographer, but we managed to weather the first twenty-five minutes. The danger signs were clear though. Yet the scores were level when the French master plan swung into action as Patrice Mongelard and Robin Lipscomb were withdrawn to make way for Chris Bourlet and Paul Bell, giving us an entire new left side. Five minutes later we were 2-0 down. To make matters worse first Steve

Blanchard and then Danny Winter came off with injuries before the half-time whistle. Patrice Mongelard and Colin Brazier came on but that was not enough to stop Belvedere going 3-0 up. At the other end we had few crumbs of comfort – Paul Smith was getting some shots in from distance mainly. We never looked like scoring.

The second half was much better for Farnborough as we now had the slope and the wind in our favour. We began to have more shots at the Belvedere goal and they were now the ones playing on the break or feeding off our errors. It was against the run of play when they went 4-0 up after a poor pass from the right of our defence was intercepted, and the resulting cross was converted with a very deft header that lobbed our keeper.

Our spirits were raised with a quick riposte in the form of a trademark close-range effort by Paul Bell who was in the right place at the right time to have two goes at converting an excellent cross from Sinisa Gracanin from the right. Our spirits sank again as Belvedere won a penalty from a clumsy tackle in the box on the right of our defence but Gary Fentiman pulled off a smart save. Very soon after that, we got a second goal as Ian Shoebridge lashed the ball against the underside of the bar and into the net from six yards out. We had other half chances but did not look like reducing the deficit though Colin Brazier and Ian Shoebridge had good half chances that were blazed over, and we wasted some crosses when we got behind the Belvedere defence.

To be honest with you I lost track of all the substitutions we made today. There was more shuffling of the pack in the second half. I recall was Paul Smith ending up playing at left midfield for the last twenty minutes when all my instincts told me he should be up front. And Nick Waller went off with a calf injury, our third injury in the game, and proof if ever it was needed that substitutes are necessary. We have four players who played today who are unavailable next week, but we should have others returning, including our American import.

In the end it was a fair result. The better team won. At times Belvedere handed out a lesson in passing, movement and ball retention, and lived up to their name which in Italian means beautiful view or sight. The sandwiches, potatoes and sausages laid on by our hosts in the bar were to our tastes. However, our football had left a bad taste in the mouth – that's all five tastes – sweet, sour, bitter, salty and umami (note to those who were at the FOBG quiz the night before).

7 games into the season - we are finding it hard to adjust to our reduced circumstances compared with last season. Injuries have not helped. I would like to think that we will add to our two wins this season but for this we need to start scoring again – and as Andy Faulks reminded me “I'll start scoring again when the defence keeps a clean sheet”. Fair point, I concede. So, we have a lot to work on after today's limp performance. We'll have to be up for it against Inter Vyagra next Sunday.

Man-of-the-Match today was Ian Shoebridge, as he was in last year's corresponding fixture but that is all the history that was repeated.

16 October 2011: Inter Vyagra Super Vets (A, 4-0)

Senior Vets regain potency with win against Inter Vyagra

We approached today's game with quiet but respectful optimism, mindful of the last time we played today's opponents when we needed a last-minute winner and had to come from behind. The management were under pressure, and the team needed to perk things up after a run of four defeats. The return of Mehmet Bozyigit and Eric Johnson would give us a new thrust, and we hoped our forwards would start scoring again, as long as we kept a clean sheet.

For today's outing to Shooters Hill, the Farnborough raiding party consisted of Gary Fentiman in goal; Colin Brazier, Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Rob Lipscomb, Ian Shoebridge, Mehmet Bozyigit and Toby Manchip in midfield; Paul Smith and Andy Faulks in attack. Paul Bell and Eric Johnson were our substitutes ready for our new roll-on roll-off substitutions regime orchestrated by Roger French from our technical area. Isabelle and Thomas French, and Eric Johnson's Special Lady stood ready to cheer our goals.

Our foreplay nearly had early rewards, as twice in the first ten minutes Mehmet Bozyigit was put through and failed narrowly to score, and even hit the crossbar in the process. Our general play was much improved compared to recent weeks. We had more possession and the advantage of the slope, and our passing was crisper. There was more energy about us as we penetrated the Inter Vyagra defence repeatedly. Yet, for all our dominance, Inter Vyagra held out until our substitutes were introduced midway through the first-half as Paul Bell and Eric Johnson came on, for Mehmet Bozyigit and Toby Manchip.

Paul Bell (who informed us, ominously, that he had beans on toast for breakfast - a sort of coals to Newcastle I thought) must have had a slight tail wind behind him as he latched on to a defence-splitting through ball from Ian Shoebridge, with deceptive pace, to round the keeper and slot home his second goal in consecutive games. The climax of the goal, which had seemed a long time coming, relaxed us and we came back for seconds. Eric Johnson had brought energy, running and good link-up play, all the way from Los Angeles, and the full-backs, Colin Brazier and Patrice Mongelard, were getting behind the Inter Vyagra defence to put crosses into the box. The best cross of the half came from Eric Johnson to the far post where Rob Lipscomb, unmarked, rose, majestically to head the ball over, from three yards out. Robin made amends soon after to convert a pass from Andy Faulks and score emphatically to put us 2-0 up.

Before the half was over there was time for Patrice Mongelard to score a drop goal as he broke through, and got over-excited and shot from 25 yards out – putting the ball between the posts – the rugby posts that is, which were set 4 or 5 yards directly behind the goal. If only Wales could have done this yesterday, I thought, and a great injustice would have been avoided.

Anyway, back to soccer as Eric Johnson would say – and when the second half got underway, we brought back Toby Manchip and Mehmet Bozyigit, with Andy Faulks and Rob Lipscomb taking a breather. As we expected, now playing with the slope, our opponents seemed a bit frisky and we had to be on our guard. Eric and Mehmet were doing a lot of probing down the flanks without reward. The breakthrough of a third goal came when Patrice Mongelard linked up with Mehmet Bozyigit, and threaded the ball to Paul Bell on the edge of the box. Paul still had a lot to do as he controlled the ball and carried it deep into the box and rolled it towards goal beyond the reach of the keeper, only for a sharp and alert Eric Johnson to arrive on the scene and poke the ball over the line.

That third goal unsettled our opponents, particularly their goalkeeper who withdrew his services shortly after, following a fall-out with his defence. Thankfully, our opponents had 15 players and a replacement was quickly found. He could do little though as Andy Faulks regained his scoring touch by getting at the end of a through ball from Ian Shoebridge to put us 4-0 up. Andy had returned to the field of play midway through the second half as Paul Smith and Steve Blanchard made way. Paul would come back in slightly unusual circumstances later.

Amidst all of this we could have had more goals today – it could have been joy of six, as some glaring misses were perpetrated. Toby Manchip put a close-range header wide from an exquisite Colin Brazier cross – perhaps he had not recovered fully from when his head hit the ground in the first-half - I thought I heard a hollow sound but it could have been Paul Bell's beans. Robin Lipscomb put another header over the bar from a gem of a cross from Mehmet Bozyigit. From where I was, without my glasses, it looked like Robin was standing under the bar at the time. That may be why Mehmet opted to shoot soon after when another cross for Robin was on, and he hit the bar again.

In fact, we scored a fifth goal today but then we did not. Let me explain. Toby Manchip, one of a very exclusive group of our players, who did not score last season, had found himself in the box, a yard or so out, in the right position to convert a cut-back from Mehmet Bozyigit. Toby had taken his bow, waved to the crowd, kissed the badge, worked out how he was going to tell us about his goal ad nauseam in the bar afterwards, and was back in the centre circle for the re-start - when the referee acting alone, decided that Toby had been off-side. This was the second harsh refereeing decision I had seen this weekend. Well, the third if you exclude the stonewall penalty that was not given to us. Toby seemed a broken man after that, and became the second player in the game to withdraw his services and go for an early shower. Paul Smith came back on to see out the last ten minutes, but sadly was not able to get on the score sheet. He needs a goal almost as badly as Toby.

It is fair to say that Gary Fentiman has had more difficult times in our goal (for instance the last time we played Inter Vyagra) but when he was called upon, in earnest, to make a point-blank save from a header, from possibly the only Inter Vyagra corner in the game I can remember – he was equal to it.

The mood in the bar afterwards was more positive than in recent weeks. The management was safe for another week. And Eric Johnson was looking forward to his next game for us, in April. Toby had recovered his pertness in a revealing tee-shirt, and had hung a Spurs scarf around the neck of the man from LA.

Man-of-the-Match today were Eric Johnson and Colin Brazier.

23 October 2011: Wickham Park Vets (A, 1-4)⁴

Senior Vets on downward slope again, with defeat to Wickham Park in game of two halves

We approached today's game with concerns that our opponents had been strengthened by defections from another top side but really, we should have worried more about our own team. Last week's big win had masked deficiencies, particularly in our finishing, which came back to haunt us.

For today's outing to Pickhurst Rise we had assembled a squad of 14: we started with Steve Palmer in goal; Colin Brazier, Nick Waller, Danny Winter and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Rob Lipscomb, Ian Shoebridge, Mehmet Bozyigit and Toby Manchip in midfield; Paul Smith and Andy Faulks in attack. Paul Bell, John Tallis and Sinisa Gracanin were to take the field midway through the first-half according to the grand plan orchestrated by Roger French from our technical area. Isabelle French and Steve Palmer's partner (Karen) completed the Farnborough presence on a dry, bright and breezy morning. The playing surface was excellent - grassy, wide, true, but not quite level. There was a bit of a clue in the address.

The return of John Tallis to play his first game this season was very welcome, but he got stuck on the way in, and arrived late. The centre of the defence was unfamiliar with both regular centre halves – Ian Coles and Steve Blanchard missing – but Patrice Mongelard and Nick Waller coped more than well, ably supported by full-backs Danny Winter and Colin Brazier. From our solid defensive platform, we attacked freely, particularly down the right. Our early chances came from there. Mehmet Bozyigit once again was prominent. He could have opened the scoring himself, before he could also have provided an assist for a certain goal by an unmarked Andy Faulks. Paul Smith too had good shooting chances but is still looking for that elusive first goal since his return from injury. Andy Faulks was to miss a one-on-one before he finally scored from a very sweet move. Patrice Mongelard lofted a pass over the Wickham Park defence which played Mehmet Bozyigit through – he advanced to the by-line and this time opted to cut the ball back for Andy Faulks, who timed his movement to perfection and put a sweet and acrobatic first-time volley into the bottom corner.

This,, we thought would unlock the door but that was not to be. We made three changes after 25 minutes as John Tallis, Sinisa Gracanin and Paul Bell came on for Toby Manchip, Rob Lipscomb and Ian Shoebridge. I do not think the substitutions unsettled us as they often do. After all the chances kept coming, and Sinisa Gracanin and John Tallis quickly formed an impressive pairing in midfield. I think what gave heart to Wickham Park was the fact that our finishing was very poor as several good chances went begging. Our opponents got back in the game, prompted by a very tricky winger, a good forward who shielded and held the ball up well and a midfield that moved as a pack. Their equaliser was probably their second shot on our goal as Sinisa Gracanin lost his footing in midfield and a Wickham Park midfielder was able to advance unchallenged, and pick his shot from the edge of the box and place a delightful chip into the net from 15 yards out.

At half-time when I came off, the mood was subdued – we had failed to take many chances and make the most of the 65% of possession we had enjoyed. Now Wickham would have the slope,

⁴ The remainder of this report can be read on the fobg website
<https://www.fobgfc.org/?page=report&id=4284>.

the wind and the sun in their favour. Andy Faulks and Mehmet Bozyigit took a breather but would come back later unlike Patrice Mongelard – who had to leave for a family event.

The second half was about five minutes old when a high speculative free-kick (awarded for a harsh hand-ball I thought) was lofted into our box. As I sloped off the last image of the game which I was to retain on my retina was of Steve Palmer coming off his line, calling for the ball, unchallenged – but with the sun in his eyes (and not wearing a cap), letting the ball slip out of his grasp to the waiting, and no doubt surprised, Wickham Park player behind him, who had gambled and followed up to walk the ball into an empty net. On the drive home I wondered if I would be the only undefeated Senior Vet today. The dressing room had lost half the management, and we seemed to have lost the way to scoring goals.

30 October 2011: CUACO Vets (A, 2-1)

Roger & Co. go back to winning ways in win over CUACO

For today's trip down St Dunstan's Lane in leafy Langley Park, we had the bare 11, excluding Roger French who was unsure whether he had fully recovered from his injury sustained on 28 August in the now infamous charity game, but got changed nevertheless. Quality not quantity we thought, as we prepared to face opponents who were themselves an unknown quantity and quality as we were playing them for the first time. Mindful of our recent form I was hoping that we would not produce a load of guano against CUACO.

On paper we had a strong well-balanced side, with Steve Palmer in goal; Ian Coles, John Tallis, Danny Winter and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Rob Lipscomb, Sinisa Gracanin, Colin Brazier and Mehmet Bozyigit in midfield; Ian Shoebridge and Andy Faulks in attack.

Thomas French, Sam Tallis, Steve Palmer's partner (Karen) and a little later Chris and Alex Webb made up the away supporters' club, on a mild autumnal morning, dry but overcast and with hardly any breeze. The playing surface was conducive to a passing game. The geometry of the goal posts behind the pitch looked not quite right and even when put in position and the right way up, they seemed wider and lower than usual, with some curvature of the bar. More peculiar though were the mix of red and white pitch markings. The presence of archers practising their sport a hundred yards or so from the football pitch was also unusual but perfectly safe, we hoped. We've heard of forwards going down in the box as if hit by a sniper, hit by an archer would be quite a story, in a perverse sort of way.

When the game started, we realised quickly CUACO would be tough opponents, well organised, physically strong, tenacious. At the same time, we could see that we were moving the ball around well and the more dominant side. Possession was about 65:35 in our favour and we attacked down both flanks, with Colin Brazier and Mehmet Bozyigit much in evidence. Our early dominance unsettled CUACO and there was discord in their ranks when their burly centre forward and one of their midfielders exchanged words and seemed prepared to take things to the next level. I heard somewhere that the initial letters in the CUACO team name stand for Commercial Union but there did not seem to be much solidarity in that moment. Still, it passed and there was no recurrence – not even later, when CUACO were under more stress.

Our progress was checked momentarily down the right when Mehmet Bozyigit was bundled into the ditch and tossed into the brambles. But he recovered his poise as we created the early chances. Andy Faulks put a thirty-yarder on the crossbar ("*it would have gone in if the bar was straight*") he muttered later as we walked back to the dressing rooms). Sinisa Gracanin had probably the clearest scoring opportunity of the half when he arrived in the six-yard box to connect with a poor clearance only to put the ball narrowly wide. We had a number of promising free-kicks and long-range shots but nothing came of them. The CUACO keeper was proving quite adept at plucking high balls from the air and being in the right position to make all his saves look deceptively easy, even for the long-range shots from Patrice Mongelard. At the other end Steve Palmer was not exactly over-worked – he may well have been more worried about the archers such was the efficiency of the defence in front of him. When CUACO got corners, John Tallis stretched to get us out of sticky situations with his head.

At half-time we felt we were the better team but it was not a given that we would win the game. The fact that no substitutions could be made at that stage may have helped us as we quickly picked up the tempo of the game and resumed where we had left off. Only this time, we appeared

to have sharpened up our act in the final third. The second half was barely five minutes old when Mehmet Bozyigit broke through on the right and crossed accurately for Robin Lipscomb at the far post – whose header across goal was screaming for a forward to get on the end of it, but it narrowly eluded both Andy Faulks and Ian Shoebridge. From then on, we hammered at the door, and a string of half chances came and went. We were encouraged by the fact that we had more of a presence in the CUACO box, we picked up loose balls on the edge, we recycled the ball quickly from the back and the full-backs were joining in and generally we forced CUACO to play on the break.

Our first goal, about twenty minutes into the half was long in coming but certainly worth waiting for. Andy Faulks had been dropping back to the edge of the box to snaffle the loose ball and fashion shooting chances. He picked up the ball from a lay-off from Ian Shoebridge, saw his first attempt on goal charged down but the ball sat up nicely for him as he got a second bite at the cherry – and what a yummy bite that was – as he produced the cleanest of strikes to arrow the ball into the top corner. It was going to take something special to beat the CUACO keeper and so it proved. We hit a purple patch over the next ten minutes as we created a lot of danger in and around the CUACO box. The culmination was our very clinical second goal: Ian Shoebridge played Colin Brazier in behind the defence on the left – he blazed down the wing, looked up, and measured an accurate low cross for Andy Faulks arriving on time, to stretch and guide the ball inside the post.

We relaxed a bit after that, even though CUACO came close to scoring from the solitary corner they had in that half. There was even time for Roger French to come on for Mehmet Bozyigit for the last ten minutes, in which time Roger fouled an opponent, gave away a free-kick for off-side, and almost had a good goal opportunity. It was very good to see Roger put his injury behind him and finish the game with a smile (which would have pleased young Thomas French, last seen insouciantly poking some barbecue coal remnants with a stick).

There was time for Danny Winter to miss a one-on-one before we gifted CUACO their goal. Patrice Mongelard had outpaced the CUACO right winger, intercepted a through pass and rolled the ball back to Steve Palmer in goal. Steve must have taken his eye off the ball as he attempted to finesse it out of the box instead of putting it in row Z. He scuffed the ball and lofted it gently to the nearest CUACO forward who calmly and expertly placed it over Steve's head into our goal. There were a couple of hairy moments for us in that last five minutes but we held on to earn a deserved away win. Pity about what Chris Webb, now running the line in Roger's stead, called the lesser-spotted Farnborough Senior Vets clean sheet.

Man-of-the-Match today for winding the clock back to his glory days was Andy Faulks for his two goals, and an overall performance which showed, perhaps, that he had put the extra hour in bed to good use. Also deserving of mention was Sinisa Gračanin for a smooth performance like clockwork anchoring the midfield, spraying passes, and being in the right place at the right time for most of the game.

Next week we look forward to the first of four consecutive home games after a run of six away games.

6 November 2011: Baltic Exchange Vets (H, 3-6)

Senior Vets fizzle out in defeat to Baltic Exchange

Picture the scene – a crowd gathers for fireworks, faces lit up with expectations of rockets, roman candles, fountains, wheels, sparklers etc. only to get one bang at the start and then a series of whimpers from the Senior Vets – and a bonfire of our ambitions. There were though plenty of goals – in a sequence that went 1-0, 1-1, 1-2, 1-3, 1-4, 2-4, 2-5, 3-5 and 3-6. The last six goals came into the final twenty-five minutes, to provide a bit of a finale for the crowd.

The thirteen Farnborough plotters today (same number as that lot in 1605) were Steve Palmer in goal; Ian Coles, John Tallis, Danny Winter and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Rob Lipscomb, Sinisa Gracanin, Colin Brazier and Mehmet Bozyigit in midfield; Ian Shoebridge and Andy Faulks in attack, with Roger French and Chris Bourlet making up the second charge.

This was the first time this year that we felt a chill in the air as we warmed up – a sign that winter is coming. Anyway, we were very glad to see that the drainage work carried on the pitch had withstood the heavy rains of the past few days. Whether we could withstand the quality of our opponents was more in doubt – judging by our record against them. They certainly impressed quickly with their passing and overall ability. We knew early on that we had a game on our hands. It was a game of few clear chances for the first twenty minutes as both defences were proving resilient and midfielders were busy, and formations compact. Baltic Exchange even paid us the compliment of saying how highly mobile our midfield was, and adapting one of their substitutions accordingly.

The first breakthrough came from the right boot of Patrice Mongelard who picked up Colin Brazier's astute lay-off on the left and advanced from defence to within 25 yards of the Baltic Exchange goal before letting fly. And what a cracker it was, even if I say so myself, fizzing, low and swerving at the end of its trajectory to squeeze in off the post beyond the keeper's outstretched hands. My celebrations were over-exuberant, almost climactic, perhaps - but I had not scored since 8 May – and I was on the way to earning a beer from Roger French.

This was not entirely against the run of play but we knew there would be a reaction. We contributed to it more than a little. First, we lost a bit of pace, bite and craft when Chris Bourlet came on for Colin Brazier after twenty-five minutes. We compounded that by taking our eye off the ball for a free-kick and not tracking back as a shot was lashed against our bar and the rather good Baltic Exchange forward (looking a bit like a young Eric Cantona) followed up with a close-range effort over the line. Our keeper was exposed five minutes later again as our hitherto highly mobile midfield was flat-footed and a shot from outside the box could not be parried to safety. We had conceded two quick goals in a short space of time and from then on, we were on the back foot.

Patrice Mongelard came off at half-time and Colin Brazier replaced him at left-back. Once again, the first twenty minutes of the half were a bit of a stalemate with not much penalty box action. But like the best firework display the game built up to its crescendo. Danny Winter limped off with a groin strain and Patrice Mongelard returned to the defence. Five minutes later Baltic went 3-1 up, as I failed to clear the ball decisively in our six-yard box. Another Baltic goal followed quickly as Colin Brazier and Sinisa Gracanin got into each other's way and the ball fell to the best midfielder on show today, who placed the ball over the diving Steve Palmer, who got his palm to the shot but could not prevent it from finding the net.

It was difficult to see how we could recover although we were given hope briefly when our chief artificer, also called Faulks (different spelling though from 1605), charged down a clearance and advanced to produce a smart finish to add to his tally of goals before his winter migration to the Mediterranean (and our scoring woes intensify). At that point Roger French came on for Robin Lipscomb to give us more of a presence in the Baltic box. But it was in the Farnborough box that the next goal developed as Steve Palmer could not gather a shot in two attempts and once gain the Baltic midfielder mentioned above scored from close range. With ten minutes or so left our hopes were raised briefly as we won a penalty. Mehmet Bozyigit placed the ball but Ian Shoebridge appeared on the spot and scored. But it was too late for us and there was even time for the Baltic midfielder to get this hat-trick with his best goal of the lot as he burst through our midfield, barely mobile by then particularly down our left side, to place a shot into the top corner with Steve Palmer unable even to attempt a save. The scoreline was punishing but the best side won.

Despite the high scoring and competitive nature of our match there were no unsporting moments in our game. The pyrotechnics were reserved for our Sunday team's match on the adjoining pitch where they were three red cards, a mass brawl, afters down the public footpath – and all this despite what looked like a premature and reflective minute's silence to remember the armistice before the start of their game.

We came close to an explosion in our club house as young Thomas French, playing with fire, lit a very short fuse but thankfully as in 1605 in that other house, there was no explosion. But unlike in 1605, for Thomas Bates, Thomas Percy and Thomas Wintour - there was a pardon for Thomas French.

Man-of-the-Match was John Tallis – for an assured and towering performance in the centre of our defence, without a sticky moment despite the six goals conceded.

Next week – we look forward to another home game and Pam Shoebridge's catering, on remembrance Sunday with an 11:02 kick off, and perhaps a glimpse of today's referee (Mick Gearing)'s medals.

13 November 2011: Belvedere Vets (H, 0-0)

Not much to remember as Senior Vets and Belvedere battle it out to a scoreless draw

On a glorious November Sunday morning with only vapour trails in the azure, and warm sunshine we all observed two minutes' silence before kick-off – called by referee “Commander” Mick Gearing, with only the sound of a bugle to be heard in the distance.

Our remembrance Sunday parade was Steve Palmer in goal; Ian Coles, John Tallis, Colin Brazier and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Rob Lipscomb, Sinisa Gracanin, Toby Manchip and Mehmet Bozyigit in midfield; Ian Shoebridge and Paul Smith in attack. Our reservists were Roger French, Paul Bell and new recruit Mick O'Flynn to whom we offer a warm welcome.

The unseasonal and very pleasant weather for November (15+ degrees centigrade) brought out a good crowd of supporters – Jane (Ian Coles' partner), Karen (Steve Palmer's partner), Helen and Oliver Manchip, Tina Bell and baby Olivia (to whom the fresh air will have been very welcome), and a little later, Chris and Alex Webb and Nick Kinnear. The sunshine had also, I noticed, bought out ladybirds in some numbers– with their red and black neatly matching that of the poppies.

In the changing room Paul Bell had brought a remembrance of the stench of the trenches and the risk of gas attacks. Two of our players had dropped out that morning but with newcomer Mick O'Flynn, we mustered fourteen players – about as many as Belvedere I thought, possibly fewer.

The Belvedere side was if anything stronger than the one that beat us 4-2 at their ground a few weeks ago. There were a few new, and perhaps younger, faces. We knew we'd have to defend very well to keep them out. Whether our offensive play, in their box in particular, would be good enough to break through their lines – was a concern; and so, it turned out to be – a lot of effort, but with defences on top, and two midfields cancelling each other out even if Belvedere's play had more fluency and they seemed stronger in the air in midfield in particular, and their forward play had a sharper cutting edge than ours.

Yet, in that first-half we had marginally the better chances but neither keeper was really extended. Corners were shared too almost equally, though Belvedere created more danger from theirs, owing to the presence of a couple of big units. We had more shots on their goal – Paul Smith curled one that came close from breaking the deadlock. A good run and cross from Colin Brazier nearly created a goal-scoring opportunity for Ian Shoebridge at the far post. At the other end, an Ian Coles back pass caused Steve Palmer some difficulty but he was just able to get his toe to the ball and Patrice Mongelard was on hand to tidy things up. Toby Manchip had come off midway through the half – injured we thought, but it turned out had left the field of play to remove some sort on ankle protector, and found he could not get back on until half-time as Roger drafted in Mick O'Flynn to take his place.

At half-time Mehmet Bozyigit and Ian Coles made way for Paul Bell and the return of Toby Manchip. But the pattern of play remained the same – with Belvedere slightly more in control. Toby livened up proceedings with his impression of Pingu shoved brusquely from behind and doing a belly flop, which would have amused young Oliver though he may have dozed off in the midday sun. There was no dozing in our defence with John Tallis showing great stickability, and he was even able to stick two fingers up without getting into trouble – by this I mean he had to

have two fingers taped together to protect what looked like a dislocated part of a digit. I hope the hospital confirms there is nothing broken, and that all is well too for Paul Smith who gets the results of his brain scan tomorrow. We wish him well. Paul came closest to getting a goal today as he attempted a thirty-yarder, like the Smithy of old playing from memory, only to see the ball cannon back off the bar.

Midway through the second half, Mehmet Bozyigit and Ian Coles came back on for Patrice Mongelard and Mick O'Flynn. With a quarter of an hour left Roger French came on for Paul Smith – and quickly put himself about in the usual way. He created some space for himself by shoving a Belvedere defender out of the way, and then dragged his shot wide, after the (rare) whistle had gone. At the other end, we had to defend stoutly as Belvedere pressed for a winner. Steve Palmer pulled off a smart save to palm a shot onto the bar. Now “running” the line in lieu of Roger French, I failed to keep up with play and did not flag a Belvedere off-side (to Colin's irritation) – having been detained near the halfway line discussing the artistic merit of a Toby Manchip dive with Chris Webb (a Greg Louganis moment he called it).

In the end, after all this effort from both teams - there were really only two goal chances of note in this game – one for each side, and to complete the symmetry, both hitting the bar. There was to be no eleventh-hour winner for either side today as we recorded our first draw against Belvedere, and indeed our first 0-0 draw since 21 September 2008 (only 3 of us played in that game against Cudham – Patrice Mongelard, Roger French and Paul Smith).

Back in the clubhouse the mood was relaxed – with family, friends and the return of our victorious Young Vets (5-1 against Old Roan) adding to the après-match atmosphere - helped by Vic's tea, and especially Pam Shoebridge's excellent post-match grub. She was kind enough to hide a few sausages and two pizza slices from Roger French, for me to have with my three egg-and-cress sandwiches.

Man-of-the-Match today – John Tallis edged out Colin Brazier, by virtue of a late telephone vote by proxy, in a game that saw 12 out of 13 votes cast chalked up for the back 5.

Next week we welcome the Met Police SuperVets to Farrow Fields. We have had some trouble with the law before – not in that sense – and I hope we do not end up playing out another dour 0-0 draw. After 93 games without a 0-0, we do not really want another to come along like that big poppy-coloured double decker thing which runs from North Cheam to Putney Bridge.

20 November 2011: Met Police Super Vets (H, 1-1)

Senior Vets feel long arm of the law as Met Police nick draw

A case of mistaken identity delayed the start of this game as a police vehicle carrying four passengers had gone to the wrong ground. Still, we did not mind waiting on a pleasant, crisp, sunny and still morning as we watched the Sunday team game on the other pitch.

Our identity parade today was Gary Fentiman in goal; Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Rob Lipscomb, Sinisa Gracanin, Toby Manchip and John Tallis in midfield; Ian Shoebridge and Andy Faulks in attack. Roger French, Paul Bell and Chris Bourlet were held back in reserve waiting to be called into action. Danny Winter, wife and two kids and Chris Webb with son and daughter, joined Isabelle and Thomas French a little later to swell our ranks.

For the most part the Met Police Super Vets were just that, though we noted a couple of younger players – one up front, partnering a man mountain, and in particular one in goal with the longest kick I have ever seen. That kick became their weapon of choice as their midfield and defence was by-passed and the keeper ended up having more shots on our goal than all the other Met Police players put together, as his goal-kicks went from box to box. Gary Fentiman was equal to all of them even with the sun in his eyes.

Possession was mostly ours in both halves – not quite nine tenths, but nearer seven. And it is a fair cop to say that we failed to make the most of this. Chances were few in the first half. The Met had the first good chance that was put wide from three yards out as Gary spilled a low shot. That was the only scary moment for us early doors – after that we enjoyed a fair degree of control. It took us a good ten minutes to draw the first save out of the Met Police keeper but we knew by then he would be difficult to beat with the police van parked in front of their goal.

The most memorable save of the half was from a shot by Andy Faulks, about ten yards out that the Met Police keeper saved brilliantly with his foot. His quality was not in doubt – his proud dad - the man mountain leading the line-up front, informed me that the lad in goal was his boy, and played for Faversham FC (as his jersey proclaimed, I noted, later). He clearly was not a Vet and I was left to infer his services were not free either. We had a number of shots from distance that failed to trouble him. At the other end, Gary Fentiman was busy collecting goal-kicks that bounced in his box and had rushed to the edge of his box, and a Met Police forward (thankfully not built to constabulary requirements and not the other forward) had bounced off Gary and become disorientated temporarily. Despite all our pressure, the blue line held.

There was no half-time team talk as Roger French was busy administering an ASBO to tent dweller and daughter Isabelle, but a few of us noted that we had gone 135 minutes without conceding a goal, and that possibly another 0-0 draw was coming round the corner. Patrice Mongelard and Toby Manchip made way for Chris Bourlet and Paul Bell at half-time.

More changes were to follow later in the second half. First Robin Lipscomb, a little black and blue, like the met police kit, from some tackling came off after fifteen minutes or so and Patrice Mongelard went to right midfield. Robin came off and offered apologies to the Met Police linesman and the Winter family for some industrial language. Paul Bell came off after half an hour, also injured from some robust tackling (from his employers). Toby Manchip actually came back on for a 90-second cameo (for Paul Bell), before also declaring an injury, and Roger French replaced them both.

It was very clear to all of us that we were going to have to get pretty close to the keeper to get the ball past him. And so, it happened after about fifteen minutes into the second half when a short free-kick was played to John Tallis by Colin Brazier; John looked up and saw that Andy Faulks had peeled off his marker on the edge of the box and he converted the pass from six yards out by placing a low shot into the bottom corner. John had a good chance a little later to give us a two-goal advantage but put the ball wide from two yards out. We created more chances in that second half but could never convert them. Patrice Mongelard had a couple of storming runs that resulted in a close-range shot, and a low cross that led to nothing. Roger French side-footed a low cross from an Andy Faulks cross towards goal from inside the six-yard box which the keeper saved comfortably.

Just when we were beginning to think that a 1-0 win would do us – we got casual in midfield, failed repeatedly to clear a ball, the referee Mick Gearing, we thought, failed to spot a blatant hand-ball by a Met Police player, there was a resulting corner from the move. And yes – you have guessed it, Gary Fentiman, called, and came, for the ball, was not challenged by anyone, but then dropped it like some piece of incriminating evidence. The ball fell to a black and blue jersey in a sea of yellow and red and four players on the line could not keep the shot out. We felt like we'd been robbed in full view of the police. With only about five minutes left we ran out of time and the Met Police would have been the happier of the two teams on the walk back to the dressing rooms.

Whilst disappointed with conceding a late, avoidable goal, and helping police with their enquiries so to speak, we were not too disheartened in the dressing room. Our minds turned to the tea bag that had been used to make all our teas, to whether Colin Brazier would get the coffee he had brazenly ordered from Vic Farrow; to Patrice Mongelard breaking the dressing room code by not taking his boots off outside – a fact unnoticed, until Colin Brazier put his toe under one of his studs. We even shared the team deodorant with John Tallis who wanted something to “keep the flies away” having run out of sticky paper. We also found time to discuss a recent “calendar” photograph of our former manager Toby Harlow, which could possibly be of interest to our visitors today under the Obscene Publications Act.

The mood in the club house was eerie as CCTV footage of previous matches was studied; there was a bit of a crime scene atmosphere following a situation that I cannot go into as I was not there (your honour) but the police were already on the scene, and a citizens' arrest was nearly made. Toby Manchip was pensive, wondering how to break the news to son Oliver of the announcement allegedly made by Roger French (to his misbehaving kids) that Santa was dead. Roger himself was having trouble counting today's loot but there was no money laundering going on, as match subs, annual subs and curry night subs, and monies owed for Pam Shoebridge's excellent spread, stretched Roger's numeracy, severely.

Man-of-the-Match: Ian Coles was picked out by several witnesses though there were a couple of other suspects.

27 November 2011: Statler & Waldorf Challenge (H, 5-3)

Family occasion for Senior Vets as FOBG barmy army rally round to share an eight-goal thriller in clash of the co-managers

Those of you expecting to read about our first ever fixture against Barming Youth Vets will have to wait a bit longer. But do not despair. We have something better.

The weekend did not start too well as Roger French took a call on Friday evening, from Toby Harlow - our fixtures man, and Downe Trousers 2012 Calendar's Mr January (only for those with a strong disposition), to hear that Barming Youth Vets could not raise a side for today's game. What made it more annoying I am sure was the timing of the call. Still Roger French did not get where he is today by giving up when angry and he spent the next 36 hours trying to raise sufficient numbers to join the 14 players we had available to make a club game of it. And that is how we had 20 players available in the club house for this in-house game despite the absence of five of our regulars. I say 20, but in the end, we had 19 because one player, Steve Palmer, appeared at the club and vanished inexplicably, despite the prospect of a full game, having turned up for a half. The art of management had prevented Roger from disclosing to everyone that today's game was going to be an inside job.

The two sides today lined up like this:

Senior Vets (co-manager Patrice Mongelard (PM's) side)

Gary Fentiman, Danny Winter, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier, Patrice Mongelard, Ian Shoebridge, Rob Lipscomb and Andy Faulks. I suppose you could see this as being quite close to our starting team except there were only 9 players

Senior Vets Reserves (co-manager Roger French's side)

Toby Manchip, Paul Commons, Ian Couchman, Steve Kong, Roger French, Ryan Shoebridge, Paul Smith, Nick Barclay, Jerry Cogotti and Connor Barclay. This was a mix of Senior Vets, young players, contacts, Club President, mates etc – there were 10 of them – enough to make a game of it.

Referee Mick Gearing kicked us off on a breezy but bright morning, freshened by the early morning rain. As could be expected, there was plenty of room to move the ball about with 19 players in space normally occupied by 22. Both teams were experimental to some extent though PM's team had the more familiar look about it, albeit with a new midfield general in Patrice Mongelard himself.

The Senior Vets "regular" side – much more familiar with each other, hit their stride more quickly. We scored three goals in the first-half, two by Ian Shoebridge and one by Andy Faulks. The Reserves relied on the speed of their youngsters – in particular Connor Barclay, Jerry Cogotti and Ryan Shoebridge but the service to them was not as good as they would have liked. The superior organisation of the Senior Vets gave them the advantage and there were several passages of good play and running into space. It is fair to say that Toby Manchip was the busier keeper in the first-half, saving two good goal attempts from Patrice Mongelard, and making other saves. He was to get his finger tips to the two close-range shots from Ian Shoebridge that resulted in goals and could not do much to stop Andy Faulks goal as he finished off a crisp passing move that saw Patrice Mongelard release Robin Lipscomb who in turn rolled the ball low across the back four for Andy to crown the move with a goal. 3-0 at half-time was a fair reflection of the game at that time though some of the play by the Reserves had caught the eye. Paul

Smith in particular was surprisingly alert and mobile in a slightly more defensive midfield role. Our back four had to be on top of their game to preserve our first-half clean sheet.

All the half-time oranges went – no surprise really as unusually two teams shared them – that was five large oranges sliced into 20 quarters. There was even a quarter for the referee though he found it a tad sharp.

There were five more goals scored in the second half and you could argue perhaps (I am surprised Roger did not – probably saving all his arithmetic for the money) that the Reserves won the second half. They brought the game back to 3-2 with sharply taken goals from Jerry Cogotti (capitalising on a dropped Fentiman catch) and Connor Barclay making most of his pace. At the other end we were woefully wasteful – Patrice Mongelard probably more than most as shots and shots disguised as crosses went for throw-ins, or into the trees behind the goal.

The tackling by the reserve side got a bit more agricultural as Roger French in particular brought down Danny Winter and Rob Lipscomb, possibly half a yard late from behind. By then Toby Manchip had come off with a groin strain suffered allegedly by following the trajectory of one of my shots – turning it briefly into a 9 v 9 affair though Danny Winter followed him to the touch lines to restore the Reserves' numerical advantage. Toby Manchip later described Danny's withdrawal as a precautionary move by the manager-in-waiting with next week's game in mind.

We scored two more goals ourselves – our fourth by Patrice Mongelard, who had made the run into the box to apply a silky touch to Ian Shoebridge's unselfish lay-off. After Ryan Shoebridge had brought the score back to 4-3 from close-range with his flexible young legs - Andy Faulks bagged his second as a poor clearance had left the keeper (by then Paul Commons) stranded. There was even time for the referee to deny Patrice Mongelard a penalty as he was brought down by Ian Couchman. The referee later revealed that the theatrical dive, rolling around, and sound effects by Patrice Mongelard, had influenced his decision. 5-3 was a fair result in the end but the real winner today was the club and football.

The mood in the club house was very good – following excellent tea this week, made by Pam Shoebridge, and the wonderful spread laid on by Shoebridge Catering: egg sandwiches, cheese and pickle sandwiches, ham sandwiches, pizza slices, roast potatoes, sausage rolls, sausages, spring onions, celery and potato crisps. We talked about the curry night, yesterday's first team match programme, the switching of the Farnborough Village Christmas lights, re-lived some of the moments from the game, recalled Roger French's tribute to camping last week with daughter Isabelle, and looked ahead to next week's fixture against Old Tamponians – a team we hope to face for the first time, given that in the two previous seasons the month of December had been the wrong time of year to play them.

Man-of-the-Match: all 19 players who showed that where there is goodwill and an appetite for the game, and loyalty to the club, there is a way. Incidentally, 11 of those playing today had shared in another good-for-the-soul FOBG family occasion earlier in the week - the very successful Cobra and Curry evening at the Village Cuisine which raised £263 for the club – another organisational success for Roger French, like today's adding-up of match subs and other monies.

4 December 2011: Old Tamponians Super Vets (A, 0-2)

Groans at Old Roan as Senior Vets fail to breach Old Tamponians defence

At last, we got to play Old Tamponians after a wait of over two years and even though we lost and the better team won the score does not quite reflect the flow of the match and the long periods of sustained pressure we had against a team that soaked it all, and kept the red and yellow of FOBG at bay.

The journey to Old Roan School Playing Fields parallel to Kidbrooke Park Road had been complicated by the replacement of a railway bridge at Chislehurst, and a fire at the confluence of the A20 and the A224, but we all got there on a grey, dry and, for December, a relatively mild day. There was no pre-match tension in the dressing room and we were genuinely curious about the quality of our opponents. Well, we have the answer to that question now and we hope to have the answers on the pitch ourselves when we meet them again at our ground in half of 28 days.

Our starting line-up consisted of Gary Fentiman in goal; Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Rob Lipscomb, John Tallis and Paul Smith in midfield; Nick Waller and Toby Manchip in attack. Roger French, Sinisa Gracanin and Chris Bourlet awaited their insertion into the game. Thomas French sat in his tent – though not quite shielded from the game as he found out later from an Old Tamponians clearance. Before the match started, Toby Manchip had livened things up as he was wolf-whistled from a passing car on the Kidbrooke Park Road by an eagle-eyed passenger who had spotted Toby's shorts a little low as he applied some deep heat to his gluteus maximus. As grounds go Old Roan Playing Fields are the closest to a busy road of all the grounds we play on, as John Tallis was to demonstrate later.

Our opponents were quicker to settle and it became clear that there was much quality in their play, in many positions and that they liked passing the ball about, had forwards who could hold it, midfielders who took great care of it and defenders who did not waste it. They would be hard to get through. Yet, the first clear opportunity came our way when Nick Waller played an exquisite through ball that left Toby Manchip with a clear run on the Old Tamponians goal. Unfortunately, Toby chose to shoot early, and wide, when there was time and space, we felt, to take the ball on into the box although the keeper coming off his line may have made Toby's mind up. Soon after, Paul Smith cut in from the right and advanced centrally on goal, shooting just over the bar from twenty-five yards out. These were two good half chances for us and we had another when Paul Smith put a deep cross to the far post that just eluded both Toby Manchip and Nick Waller. That was the sum of our cutting edge – we wanted to penetrate the Old Tamponians defence more deeply, and have a greater presence in their box but they certainly looked like they could cope with all the pressure we applied.

What about at the other end? We held out until about 20 minutes into the game. A throw-in on the left of our defence had tempted Gary Fentiman off his goal line, he tried to pull back, slipped and the goal was left empty as an Old Tamponians forward with more room than we would have liked in the middle of our penalty area was able to side foot a half-volley over the line. That was about it really until five minutes before the end of the first-half when we were undone by a clever piece of inter-passing that played in an Old Tamponians midfielder, unencumbered by a covering opponent, to score from close range. The mood at half-time was that we been the architects of our own downfall. There were really no other goal scoring opportunities of note for our opponents in that half. We felt we could turn it round.

Sinisa Gracanin and Chris Bourlet came on for Toby Manchip and Nick Waller at half-time as we put up a new front line in Ian Shoebridge and Paul Smith, and Patrice Mongelard pushed up to raid down the right flank. Even Old Tamponians would concede that we had about 75% of the play in that half as the game flowed towards them and they were left to pick up scraps on the break. Our best scoring opportunity was fashioned by Paul Smith who turned his marker, picked his spot ten yards out but was denied by a very good save from the keeper diving low to his right. Patrice Mongelard had a succession of shots from relatively short range as we got behind Old Tamponians: one drew a smart save from the keeper, two others were off target and he also failed narrowly to connect with a ball at the far post after a shot from Ian Shoebridge became a cross but had too much pace on it. As time ticked on, we felt this was not going to be our day as we failed to get the right last ball in, crosses from both flanks and corners were not met. One moment that summed the match up was when Sinisa Gracanin swung a great free-kick in from the left and Robin Lipscomb unmarked, leaping high, failed to connect with the ball from three yards out. Roger French came on for Paul Smith for the last ten minutes or so but could not stop Old Tamponians keeping a clean sheet.

The mood after the game was not too disheartening – we had lost to a team that made the most of their two opportunities and defended very well. We felt we had enjoyed a bit of a moral victory in the second half and given a good account of ourselves. The bar in the small club house was packed – there were about four Vets teams in there – we recognised old enemies in Avery Hill and Erith Vets. We enjoyed some good hospitality from our opponents – sandwiches, chips, sausages – which we hope to reciprocate in a fortnight in what will be our last game of 2011 – (and your match reporter's 372nd in FOBG colours), before the January transfer window opens as Toby Manchip reminded me though I am not sure why, as it will be extremely difficult to find another club for him.

Man-of-the-Match today was John Tallis who stuck to his job in midfield, and showed he can hit the roof of a fast-moving black BMW series 3 with the ball from 50 yards away, on the other side of metal railings, behind the goal.

We should also note the excellent job done by one of the Old Tamponians players who refereed the game – who was very fair and quite professional in a well-contested match that had not a bad tackle or bad word said in it. We can only hope for a similar match in two weeks, but with the same result for the home side.

11 December 2011: Toby Vets (H, 1-1)⁵

Senior Vets fail to carve up Toby in draw

Toby or not Toby - we wondered as our opponents failed to show early but all was well as they arrived en masse – even as we were preparing ourselves mentally to play our Youth Team whose opponents had failed to show.

Toby or not Toby in goal – we wondered as we prepared mentally to break the news to Toby Manchip that he was going to have to play in goal as our regular keeper Gary Fentiman had picked up an injury playing yesterday. Toby could smell a rat, as he walked into the club house to be greeted by a smiling Roger French. The look on Toby's face for a fleeting moment was not unlike the one that crosses my cat's face when she realises that the show of affection was only so we could bundle her in the cat basket for the annual trip to the Vets. But – ever the club man – credit where it is due, after a small amount of amusing grumbling Toby put on the keeper's jersey even though he remembered that the last time he played Toby Vets he was chipped five times in a 5-0 defeat.

To play or not to play – that had been my conundrum, as today was she-who-must-be-obeyed's birthday lunch – and in the end perfect balance was struck with me playing only the first-half, which is why Colin Brazier is reporting on the second half.

The festive season was upon the clubhouse with the Christmas tree all lit up, and there was a flashing bauble at the end of the Santa hat that Vic Farrow was persuaded to pose in. He joined the pre-match banter in the dressing room to ask Nick Waller about his diet and was told that a venison pudding had passed that way the night before.

The game was started fairly promptly by referee Mick Gearing in a light drizzle, on a very overcast Sunday morning, but not as cold we might have feared. The Farnborough line-up was: Toby Manchip in goal; Steve Blanchard, Danny Winter, Ian Coles, and Colin Brazier in defence; John Tallis, Patrice Mongelard, Paul Smith and Robin Lipscomb in midfield; Ian Shoebridge and Nick Waller in attack. Roger French, Chris Bourlet and Chris Webb would join the game later. It was particularly pleasing to see Chris Webb back after his injuries. We provided both linesmen as Toby had the bare eleven.

We also mustered a few good supporters in the stand: Thomas French and Sam Tallis (in the tent really); Darren Burkett (FOBG first team manager), Jane (Ian Coles' partner) and Colin Brazier's brothers (Dave and Alan) and sister-in-law Joy, and Gary Fentiman.

The pattern of play was set quite early on. We had more possession and inter-passing. Toby defended fairly deep and in numbers. They played a many long balls which our defence mopped up well. We played a good line too that caught Toby off-side many times. We had several shots from distance, too far out really, from Patrice Mongelard in particular. Most of these were off target or too tame to trouble the keeper (a pair of shooting boots from Santa (if he still lives) would be nice I thought. The Toby keeper was very good. At the other end, keeper Toby for us was not unduly troubled and had I think one save to make. He was more troubled about his goal-kicks than anything else.

⁵ The remainder of this report can be read on the FOBG website
<https://www.fobgfc.org/?page=report&id=4291>

The clearest scoring opportunity in the first-half fell to us - as Ian Shoebridge, full of running as ever, sprung the Toby off-side trap and advanced on goal and unselfishly squared the ball to Paul Smith. It looked a certainty for a moment that Paul would finally break his duck but the Toby keeper pulled off a remarkable point blank save. Paul had a second bite of the cherry but hit a defender on the line. Another miss soon followed, this time from John Tallis who failed to convert from three yards out, from an excellent Ian Shoebridge free-kick, as the ball seemed to get stuck under his feet. Robin Lipscomb attempted a shot from inside the box which defied description (so I am not going to tell you about it).

Before the end of the first-half Chris Webb and Chris Bourlet had come on for Ian Coles and Rob Lipscomb without affecting the pattern of play. I was not the only one wondering, as the half-time whistle blew at 0-0, if we would ever score. We were creating the opportunities, and restricting our opponents, but there is a cutting edge missing from our game.

Next week we play our last game before the Christmas break – our 17th game this season, and for once in several years, without losing a game to water, snow or frost before the winter solstice.

Man-of-the-Match – by an overwhelming margin, Colin Brazier, who did the family proud.

18 December 2011: Old Tamponians Super Vets (H, 3-3)

Senior Vets snatch draw from jaws of victory against Old Tamponians Super Vets

To play a match on the last Sunday before Christmas, and our 17th game this season, was something of a novelty for us, and we also now have to get accustomed to draws – as we recorded our fifth draw of the current campaign (compared with only one draw last season out of 31 matches).

Our line-up had some new elements – down to only twelve today, one for each day of Christmas, with Nick Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Chris Webb, Ian Forrest and Ian Coles in defence; John Tallis, Ian Shoebridge, Paul Smith and Robin Lipscomb in midfield; Darren Burkett and Andy Faulks in attack. Twelfth man Roger French waited to bang his drum. Nick Waller walked the line and it was good to see him come to support the team even though he was injured. Jane (Ian Coles' partner), Thomas French and, later, Ian Forrest's boss were our supporters.

We had two new faces on the pitch: Darren Burkett up front, brought in to give us the sort of flinty cutting edge we have lacked and Ian Forrest who was an unknown quantity to us – a bit like a box of chocolates – but who in the end made an encouraging debut at left-back for the first half, with his style of play.

The day was cold, even to hardy referee Mick Gearing, with thankfully not much wind but the surface was crunchy underfoot in places and, given the amount of rain we have had, a vindication of the drainage works done over the summer. So, we wish the ground staff a happy Christmas and New Year.

Having lost 2-0 to the same opponents a fortnight ago we were determined to give a better account of ourselves this time round on our home turf. We were up against the same quality of opposition and the early exchanges were even. Crucially, we played the higher defensive line of the two sides and the ball spent more time in the Old Tamponians half and it was no surprise that we took the lead about fifteen minutes into the game. Ian Shoebridge played a one-two with John Tallis on the edge of the Old Tamponians box, penetrated the defence and shot from about twelve yards out. The pace of the ball, or it may have been the remnants of a divot from the overnight frost, seemed to deceive their keeper who could not stop the ball from going under his body and rolling a little tamely into the net.

Five minutes or so later we were 2-0 up, as Darren Burkett got to the end of a through ball from Andy Faulks – and from a position ten yards parallel to the goal line almost, cunningly disguised a shot as a cross and lobbed the keeper. Darren could have increased our advantage soon after as he rounded the keeper but the angle was against him.

At that point I think we got a little bit complacent and Old Tamponians could sense that they were not out of it. A nervousness and lack of composure had crept into our game, we sat back a bit, and we were punished with five minutes to half-time when we did not close down quickly on the edge of our box and when we intervened to block a shot it only diverted the ball beyond Gary Fentiman's despairing dive. The fact that the last Farnborough touch was from Ian Forrest, of course, had nothing to do with him being replaced by Roger French at half-time.

I have often wondered about the expression that a team could score too early in a game. That is what happened to us. With only five minutes of the half gone, Darren Burkett controlled a cut-

back from Andy Faulks in the box and (compared to his first goal) was more deliberate and obvious in his intentions as he placed the ball into the bottom corner of the Old Tamponians net.

To say we lost our way after that would not be entirely fair to the quality, character and endeavour of our opponents. We did not really mean to give them anything - they just took it from us. They never gave up and kept plugging away. Suddenly we looked very vulnerable and there much traffic down our left in particular. Our midfield was struggling to keep the ball – John Tallis lost his hitherto excellent adhesive properties, even Ian Shoebridge tired, and Robin Lipscomb and Paul Smith were having trouble making progress down the flanks. Darren Burkett and Andy Faulks were taking the game to our opponents by often getting behind them but our final ball was not yielding anything. We had several corners that came to nothing. With about twenty minutes left Old Tamponians scored the best goal of the match as one of their second half substitutes, controlled a cross from our left and let fly from twenty-five yards into the top corner. Fifteen minutes later the same player headed a cross against the foot of the post and followed up the rebound to force the ball over the line. After that there were no further goal scoring opportunities for either side. As the final whistle blew Old Tamponians would probably have been the happier side. We had dominated long periods of the game but failed to hold on to a two-goal advantage, twice. A draw was a fair result in the end.

The mood in the clubhouse was very good, with endless trays of food supplied by Pam Shoebridge (who also gets the team's festive greetings). It was good to see so many of the opposing team staying to enjoy our hospitality which extended to mince pies. It would have taken a brave man indeed to snatch mince pies from Roger French's jaw today. I stopped counting after the first one. But I did count the mach subs and it all added up – and as Vic Farrow told us later all monies collected were for a good cause.

Man-of-the-Match – Andy Faulks who gave strong signs of his old sharpness and energy coming back – and the other good news is that Andy has come home for good from his travels. It also bodes well for the new year with Darren on board, new boots for Chris Webb and even Nick Waller, I think I heard it right, giving up ale (but not mince pies or venison puddings though) for January “to start with”.

Perhaps too, we will get a new boiler so we can have hot showers in 2012. Vic Farrow was collecting funds for this – emboldened by a sausage and mince pie, he approached Andy Faulks for his Euros to help with the cost of the new boiler. I suppose it does not really matter that Andy himself would not get the benefit of a new boiler given his commitment to water conservation and allergy to towels. Christmas is a time for giving after all – and we had been a tad generous to our deserving opponents today. Well - I hope we all get what we want for Christmas – Santa lives after all, according to Thomas French.

This may not be my last match report of 2011 – watch this space. Weather, and festive excesses permitting at least twenty-two FOBG members, including your match reporter, will attempt to play the so-called President's match, an inter-club affair, on 27 December.

8 January 2012: Old Colfeians Vets (A, 2-3)

Senior Vets short of resolution in new year defeat to Old Colfeians

After a three-week lay-off there was much appetite for this game – with seventeen players initially available (despite the absence of Colin Brazier and Sinisa Gracanin). Seventeen became fifteen overnight as Darren Burkett and Toby Manchip dropped out. I cannot confirm the identity of the alligator spinning a web of allegations that Toby Manchip had been transferred to another club for a bag of crisps as soon as the transfer window opened.

We were up against new opponents for the first time – in Old Colfeians, and I could not help notice the strong rugby culture at their ground. In fact, there was only one football pitch amongst several rugby pitches which were all in use. I let go some quips about my shooting being more suited to the egg-chasers' posts.

The Farnborough XV were Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Danny Winter, Steve Blanchard and Ian Coles in defence; John Tallis, Chris Webb, Paul Smith and Robin Lipscomb in midfield; Ian Shoebridge and Andy Faulks in attack. Roger French, Mick O'Flynn, Paul Bell and Nick Waller waited to come on at half-time.

When the game started, we were not the quickest off the blocks. It felt like it was a good ten minutes before we made our presence felt. There was a rustiness in our play that did not seem to have corroded our opponents. Their style of play was quickly evident – pressing hard and going for what they called the second ball (perhaps a bit like rugby players), and with energy and not a little craft down the flanks and in midfield. Their defence was rugged and effective.

The first goal, after 15 minutes, was a combination of Farnborough sloppiness and good finishing by our opponents. The ball was recycled quickly out of their penalty area, we got tangled in midfield and missed the opportunity to reclaim the ball. It found its way down the exposed right side of the defence, was crossed in low, not intercepted and propelled beyond Gary into our net from six yards out. This woke us up – the next twenty-five minutes were ours and many chances were created but not all converted. Chris Webb, Andy Faulks, Paul Smith, Ian Shoebridge and Patrice Mongelard had shots that on another day might have brought dividends.

We fashioned an equaliser when Patrice Mongelard lofted a free-kick to John Tallis who had glided into space in the Old Colfeians box, and who chested the ball back to Ian Shoebridge to shoot from the edge of the box. The shot had more spin than Ian intended but it could not be gathered cleanly by the Old Colfeians keeper and Andy Faulks was able to find the net from a narrow angle. This should have been the springboard for us to push on, and get to half-time with an advantage. Instead, we were stung by Old Colfeians, tenacious in midfield, played on side by an errant Farnborough defender, and the ball was lofted into our net from three yards out. This felt very much against the run of play. We had a very good opportunity to draw level when John Tallis found himself unmarked, three yards out, at the end of an exquisite cross from Robin Lipscomb. John's attempted volley had much artistic merit but drifted wide. We'll never know if he had time to bring the ball down – the thought nagged at him too he confided later.

The anticipated changes were made at half-time as Mick O'Flynn, Roger French, Nick Waller and Paul Bell came on for Ian Coles, Rob Lipscomb, Paul Smith and John Tallis. It is fair to say that our opponents got used more quickly to these changes than we did and took control of the midfield. The absence of John Tallis which had been the glue that held our midfield together and

Chris Webb, now in the centre of our defence in lieu of Ian Coles who had to leave early, meant that we struggled to get a grip on the game in the key midfield area where Nick Waller and Ian Shoebridge had quite a tough job with very little time on the ball, and the defence had to work hard to keep Old Colfeians at bay. We were limited to playing on the break – and Paul Bell in particular was providing a good outlet on the right but on the whole we lacked a cutting edge and our presence in the box was occasional and not entirely consequential.

Yet in spite of this we were able to draw level about fifteen minutes into the second half. Paul Bell made what is now termed a key contribution to it, but his role in it was not quite clear cut. However, the dubious goals committee met after the game to award him our equaliser as he hooked the ball back toward goal from the right and the defender was not able to clear it. Roger French was in the vicinity, but did not claim a part in the goal, which to be fair had an element of good fortune to it.

Our joy at drawing level did not last long. The pressure on our goal had been building. Ten minutes after we equalised a Gary Fentiman clearance did not go as far as intended and he found himself out of position as probably the most skilful player on show, in the Old Colfeians midfield picked the ball up and let fly from thirty yards out. The ball took a slight deflection off Chris Webb's boot before nesting into the bottom corner of the net beyond Gary's despairing dive.

And that was it. We huffed and puffed a bit more. Danny Winter went off injured, and Ian Shoebridge went off exhausted, as Robin Lipscomb and John Tallis returned but it was too late for us to salvage anything from the game. Nick Waller drew a smart save from the Old Colfeians keeper but this was not as good as the pair of saves that Gary made flying high to his right and low to his left to keep good goal-bound shots out. These saves had a lot to do with Gary winning our **Man-of-the-Match** award (with Chris Webb not far behind).

After the game we had what were the best showers we have had this season – though Andy Faulks resisted the temptation.

We should record special thanks for the referee today, Mick Gearing, for once doing a game away from Farrow Fields, who officiated with his customary economy and no-nonsense style. When asked in the final stages of the match, by a stressed Old Colfeians player, if he was going to play on until Farnborough equalised, he enquired as to the whereabouts of the player's timepiece.

We sat in the large bar afterwards ruefully reflecting on opportunities missed against worthy opponents. Unfortunately, we were not able to discuss the game with them as none of the Old Colfeians football players were to be seen in the bar. Perhaps the bar is for rugby players only.

Next week we welcome Inter Vyagra at our ground – just the right tonic we need for our flagging form, perhaps.

15 January 2012: Inter Vyagra Super Vets (H, 4-2)

Senior Vets make it hard for themselves and come from behind twice to win against an up for it Inter Vyagra

For the visit of our opponents today we wanted something to be soft and that was the pitch and I suppose we got part of what we wanted as the game was played though this was not a day for studs. Seventeen available players had taxed Roger French's software to work out the team permutations – in the end he was down to a hand job as seventeen became fifteen, and then thirteen, and finally twelve on the morning of the game on a cold, crisp and sunny morning (though my advice was not to inform our caterer, Pam Shoebridge, of our reduced numbers).

The Farnborough hardy twelve were Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Paul Bell, Steve Blanchard and Ian Coles in defence; Chris Webb, Ian Shoebridge, Nick Waller and Robin Lipscomb in midfield; Paul Smith and Andy Faulks in attack. Roger French simmered down the line with a linesman's flag until boiling point at half-time. We had two fans in Jane (Ian Coles' partner) and, briefly, Sinisa Gracanin.

Our record against this team is very good and I think we were complacent and limp in our approach. The game was not five minutes old when we fell behind. Inter Vyagra had the freedom of Farnborough down the right of our defence and produced a speculative long range lofted shot which beat Gary Fentiman at the near post, coming down from a great height and creeping in off the post. I do not know what was more surprising, us falling behind so suddenly, or just the geometry of the whole thing. We set about putting things right but found it very difficult. We had a lot of possession but kept playing the ball into crowded areas down the right, never producing a telling cross or final ball. We tensed up, the passing got wayward, there was too much dribbling by some, there was no penetration in the box, our shape was poor, and every one of our misplaced or over-hit passes, and ineffective tackles gave heart to our opponents as we bickered and argued amongst ourselves in a half full of sound and fury. Whilst Inter Vyagra did not manage to create a clear-cut chance in the next half hour, neither did we. We even found time to inconvenience referee Mick Gearing with a "pass" from Andy Faulks that caught Mick full in the face, with not a little force. Mick was dazed for a bit, but I do not agree that this blow to the head impaired his judgement, though there was controversy later.

With just over half an hour gone, we got back in the game. On one of the rare occasions when play was switched to our left – Chris Webb played the ball to left full-back Patrice Mongelard who swung in a cross. The clearing header only presented the ball to Andy Faulks loitering with intent on the edge of the box – his instant control was followed by a shot from his weaker left foot. The Inter Vyagra keeper was beaten and the ball went in off the underside of the bar.

Despite this rare moment of skill, our general play was still unsatisfactory and unproductive. Sinisa Gracanin – one of our fifteen who dropped out (with flu) appeared suddenly well-wrapped up to watch most of the first-half but his condition must have been made worse by our display. I hope he did not see Inter Vyagra take the lead five minutes before the end of the half. As a sequence of unfortunate events this takes some beating – we conceded a throw on the right at the edge of our box, the Inter Vyagra throw-in was ruled a foul by Mick Gearing. We then took the throw, decided it was a good idea to get our keeper Gary involved. He made a poor clearance and the ball fell to probably the best Inter Vyagra attacking player who instantly measured up his lofted shot from twenty-five yards out. There was time for the not hard-of-hearing Gary to get a hand to it, thus changing the flight of the ball beyond the clearing head of Steve Blanchard on the line who had loudly called for the ball to be left alone.

On the sideline Roger had thrown not only his toy out but had somehow hoisted the whole pram into the adjoining field as he steamed across for a half-time team “talk”, lashing the bench with the linesman’s flag in a moment that brought to mind Basil Fawly thrashing a car with a sapling. Roger’s words to the onanists in red and yellow, were few and pithy as he removed himself to the other side of the pitch to warm up on his own for the second half in lieu of Paul Bell. Warm up? I hear you ask quizzically. Well with hindsight warm down would have been a better idea – given the effectiveness of Roger’s first quarter of an hour at left-back with misplaced passes, mis-controls, sliced clearances and memorably a clown-like tumble whilst on his own. Roger’s insertion in the game meant that Patrice Mongelard moved to right-back - a tad ironic that, given his loud complaints about too much of our play having gone down the right in the first half. This also meant that I had, in both halves, to play on the side of the pitch least warmed by the sun and give a more sure-footed performance than usual.

I would lie to you if I said that we had the better of the first fifteen to twenty minutes of that second half. In fact, at 2-1 the score did not flatter our opponents who were much better all round than we remembered them, and as one of their players kept saying “we never give up”, or at least we never give up telling you that we never give up. We then had one of those tipping points in a game when Mick Gearing blew for a free-kick against us in a passage of play that even now is unclear in the mind’s eye. A flaccid back pass from Steve Blanchard did not quite reach Gary – and when he got there so did an Inter Vyagra forward – there was a tangle of legs, the ball fell to another Inter Vyagra forward to poke into an empty net as the whistle blew. Even then a neutral in the crowd could have been forgiven for thinking that a penalty was on the cards. The free-kick to our opponents came to nothing. That was a pivotal moment.

Chris Webb went off with an injury and Paul Bell came back on – this time at left-back, as Roger elected to go up front whether to try and get on the score sheet for the first time this season, or to leave the nightmare of the previous twenty minutes behind. From then on, our play improved and Roger even managed a couple of shots on target. Our equaliser came when Patrice Mongelard picked up the ball on the right wing, beckoned his forwards to get in the box, and duly delivered a deep cross that eluded the keeper, and landed on Ian Shoebridge’s forehead who converted from two yards out. Five minutes later we won a free-kick on the edge of the box and were treated to the sight of a first goal from Paul Smith this season as the Inter Vyagra keeper fumbled the shot which had cleared the wall, and the ball dropped into the net behind him. This was a hugely significant moment for Paul, after whom our top scorer’s trophy is named, and after the serious doubts that were had about him playing football ever again. He would have preferred a thirty-yard screamer into the top corner but this will do, for starters. Five minutes later Patrice Mongelard snuffed out any hopes of an Inter Vyagra recovery, by hitting the G-spot again (goal spot) as he placed a corner in the six-yard box on Robin Lipscomb’s forehead who made it 4-2. And that was it, a tad harsh on our visitors, but a win that was long overdue for the under-pressure management team.

The showers were at a temperature which made us appreciate Vic Farrow’s efforts to raise a huge sum for the new boiler. Vic was on hand to eat a few sausages, and provide a towel solution to Patrice Mongelard, and an accounting one to Roger French as his sums failed to add up.

Man-of-the-Match – Ian Shoebridge.

22 January 2012: Baltic Exchange Vets (A, 0-6)

Woeful Senior Vets get a kick in the baltics in thrashing

We had no illusions about this one. This away fixture was no picnic and we were facing a team that had put six past us at home on 6 November (though we did score three on that occasion).

The morning was bright but cold, and very windy. The later than usual kick off at 11:00 AM had allowed everyone time to get to Warlingham or thereabouts, and in particular to find a parking space. The mood in the dressing room before the game was as good as it would get that day – despite Paul Bell giving us a sensory experience based on that Geordie favourite, the sprout vindaloo.

There were fifteen of us at the start: Toby Manchip in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Paul Bell, Steve Blanchard and Ian Coles in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Shoebridge, John Tallis and Robin Lipscomb in midfield; Paul Smith and Andy Faulks in attack. Roger French, Mick O'Flynn, Nick Waller and Danny Winter waited for the Farnborough exchange which was timed for twenty-five minutes into the first half.

The first fifteen minutes were quite even. However, the sharper, more cohesive game, aggressive tackling and greater menace in the opposing box belonged to Baltic. Toby Manchip was the busier keeper, mainly having to come off his line to clear danger, but there were no clear chances for either side in that time. Our passing was approximate, hopeful, we were slow to the second ball and these two factors combined to give Baltic their first goal as Sinisa Gracanin and Patrice Mongelard failed to deal with a loose ball in midfield and a Baltic midfielder nipped in, nicked it, and ran unopposed from the halfway line to measure his shot and loft the ball above Tony Manchip inside the far post.

We reacted. Paul Smith drew what was the only save of the half from the Baltic keeper. As the twenty-five minutes came up Roger French rang the changes even as Baltic were about to take a set-piece. Steve Blanchard, Rob Lipscomb, Sinisa Gracanin and Paul Bell made way for the four substitutes mentioned above. The back four and midfield were re-shuffled. The effect was the same. We continued to be under the cosh. Baltic forced a number of corners and two of these led to their next two goals. Patrice Mongelard headed the ball out from a Baltic corner only to see it returned into the box from thirty-five yards out on the wing straight onto the head of their best forward, free as a bird six yards out, who placed his deft header wide of Toby into the bottom corner. Five minutes later another Baltic corner resulted in some pin ball in the Farnborough box which saw two Baltic forwards amidst six or seven Farnborough players contrive to force the ball over the line. We had another scare before the half was out when a further round of pin ball in the box nearly cost us but this time the ball found its way to Toby Manchip who had his back to the ball for most of that episode.

The second half did not start well for us. Baltic were 5-0 up after ten minutes as we were undone in quick breaks which started in their box and ended up with our defence outnumbered as Toby was beaten from close-range, twice. Fifteen minutes into the second half – we rotated again as Patrice Mongelard, John Tallis, Paul Smith and Ian Shoebridge made way for the four who had gone off midway through the first half. I do not normally relish being substituted though will do my share for the team but today I can honestly say that I was glad to come off – a feeling I found shared by at least two of the others who came off then. Five minutes later it was 6-0 to Baltic and Toby Manchip had had a bellyful as he engineered an extra substitution by getting

John Tallis to replace him in goal, almost unnoticed by most of the team. Well, it is a small silver lining that John managed partly by design, and partly luck, to keep a clean sheet.

Strangely, our more fluent passages of play came in the last fifteen minutes or so as we put as much pressure on the Baltic goal as we had all game. The best moment for us came from an Andy Faulks shot into the top corner that was acrobatically tipped over by the excellent Baltic keeper. I complimented the Baltic linesman on his keeper only to be told that the lad was almost thirty years old, was indeed quite good, but his kicking was the weaker part of his game though he would improve over time. There was time for Roger French to have a contretemps with a Baltic player but the red mist was blown away by the stiff breeze that cooled tempers in a game where no prisoners were taken but there was no malice.

Another sad sight today which all footballers dread, apart from the cold, disgruntled and severely humbled FOBG players, was the sight of an ambulance on the adjacent pitch dealing with a serious injury (broken leg we suspect). Had it been a taxi several of us would have jumped into it. We could not all bear to be in the same dressing room afterwards – there were some tantrums and mutterings. There was some relief in the showers though when the transfer of shower gel between John Tallis and Sinisa Gracanin was described as the best pass we'd played all day.

I cannot blame the conditions – they were the same for both teams. Our opponents were not really younger than we were (except for their goalkeeper, and possibly their excellent centre forward). They were just technically superior, better organised and more clinical. There were one or two grumbles about the policy of bringing four substitutes on midway through the first half, and again in the second half, but really no one can think of an alternative way of keeping a squad of 15 happy and, of course, games like today do not help. Some took a little consolation in seeing that we had more of the ball in the last quarter of an hour but by then I suspect our opponents relaxed a bit, at 6-0 up. We'd probably do the same, though I do not suppose we'll ever find out.

Still there was some comfort eating later as Baltic produced a platter of excellent sandwiches and sausage rolls. By then we had begun looking forward to next week's game. Barmy you might think but that's the FOBG spirit.

Man-of-the-Match: this too was a farce as it was apparently decided in the other dressing room that instead of voting today every player would get a vote. I do not know about the others but I want no part of it. As far as I was concerned, today we all deserved to have one vote deducted from our running totals for the season.

29 January 2012: Statler & Waldorf Challenge (H, 3-3)

Senior Vets and Youth Team serve up perfect blend for Statler & Waldorf Challenge Cup

For those of you with raised eyebrows and quizzical looks, the Statler & Waldorf Challenge Cup is the game that is played when the Senior Vets join forces with other players from the club to play a game that would otherwise not be played for a lack of opposition.

Statler and Waldorf are, in fact, the two mostly grumpy old gits that co-manage the Senior Vets – aka Roger French (Statler) and Patrice Mongelard (Waldorf). The analogy owes much to another Senior Vet, absent today, Toby Manchip, who thinks the muppets running the team do not know what they are doing. Anyway, today was the third such game in a couple of seasons and an opportunity for Statler to finally win one.

To get this game on we used the full resources of the club drawing on both ends of the age range of playing members (a span of nearly forty years between the most senior Senior Vet and the youngest Youth); and adding their years together would still be shy of the age of today's referee, the eternally sprightly septuagenarian, Mick Gearing.

What did we serve up today to the twenty-five or so spectators that braved a cold day? Their number was augmented in the second half by a semaphoric Colin Brazier who ran one line (with Steve Blanchard junior running the other). The Youth Team are arguably one of the better, if not the best, supported teams in the club and there was a good crowd out there. They got a brew that was rich, balanced, intense and smooth, and full of flavour to the last – quite unlike the tea we had after the game, which was still welcome.

The line-ups were as follows (with Senior Vets*):

Waldorf's XI – yellows

Gary Fentiman*
Mason Granger
Patrice Mongelard*
Steve Blanchard*
David Arthurton
Brad Smith
Sinisa Gracanin*
Tom Ayton
Tom Bennett
Paul Smith*
Andy Faulks*

Subs: Harvey Bailey, Paul Jarman

Statler's XI - whites

Joel Wolfenden
Mick O'Flynn*
Jack Hampson
Dom Boorman
Darren Burkett*
Ian Shoebridge*
Nick Waller*
Cameron Zegeling
Rob Lipscomb*
Garath Benson
Jerry Cogotti*

Subs: George Rolt, Roger French*

It would take too long to describe the rich tapestry of this enjoyable game. The Whites had the better of the first-half without question. Their attacking force, and intent was greater. The Yellows were mainly on the defensive and did not have much impact in the Whites box. The Whites deserved their 2-0 lead by half-time and could have had more but for Gary Fentiman. Both their goals, though well taken, owed much to mistakes: for their first Steve Blanchard attempted a tackle that reminded us of the forthcoming six nations and a long ball over the top was converted

though Gary got a hand to the shot from Garath Benson but the ball went over the line. The second was a smart bit of control and finish from close-range by Jerry Cogotti after we lost the ball down our left.

The second half started as the first ended but was ten minutes old when the Yellows pulled one back from the sliding boot of Andy Faulks who latched on to a low cross to wrong foot the keeper. Five minutes later though, the Yellows good work was undone as Steve Blanchard and Gary Fentiman got their wires crossed. Steve deftly headed the ball past an on-rushing Gary Fentiman on the edge of the box and the young Whites forward – Paul Jarman, walked the ball into the net with a broad smile at his good fortune. Still the Yellows did not give up. There followed possibly the one controversial decision as the referee Mick Gearing awarded a penalty to the Yellows which was swiftly despatched by Tom Bennett. The last fifteen minutes were upon us and even Roger French, as he could sense a victory slipping from his grasp, would agree that the Yellows had the Whites on the ropes. Our pressure told with barely a minute left when Tom Ayton nipped in like a fox in the box to convert from close-range and level the scores.

And that was it. The energy, verve, pace and elasticity belonged to youth but this was balanced by positional craft, discipline, economy of movement and football brain of the oldies, several of whom were three times the age of their opponents and team mates. Some of the Senior Vets performances were eye-catching: Sinisa Gracanin gave a vintage display in the middle of the park and Andy Faulks mixed it with the youngsters. Ian Shoebridge and Rob Lipscomb ran like teenagers and Roger French was mellow – no Basil Fawlty impressions today, despite having to wait for another match to get one over Waldorf.

On the way back to the clubhouse, Mick Gearing was to be found looking for his lost whistle. I could say that I had not realised he had one but then again how else could he have awarded us that controversial penalty. It is an art, of course, to referee a game with such economy and let the game flow. Still careful owners must miss what they lose, and I hope the club buys him a replacement so he can continue the great job he does.

It was left to the Senior Vets after the game to tidy up – put the goal posts away, take down nets, stow them away in the containers etc. as the teenagers did what teenagers do when it comes to tidying up. To be fair they had done a pretty tidy job on the pitch and like proud parents, we'll let them off.

Pam Shoebridge fed the proverbial 5,000 as four hungry teams, and Roger French, tucked into a cornucopia of egg, ham, cheese and pickle, corned beef sandwiches, pizza slices, sausages, chips, crisps, celery and cucumber.

So today we had six goals like last week in the Senior Vets game but the mood was so different, a really uplifting experience for all involved. There were many moments of quality, plenty of passing, some good goals and a competitive edge that sharpened everyone up in the right sporting way. So, it is a big thank you to all involved in this game, on and off the pitch.

Man-of-the-Match: last week I wanted to take a vote off everyone who played. Today the management are more than happy to give a vote to everyone who played.

19 February 2012: Catford Wanderers Vets (H, 6-1)

Senior Vets left purring after win against Catford Wanderers

After two consecutive defeats to Jack Frost, it was good to be back on the pitch in the bright sunshine with fourteen eager players for the visit of Catford Wanderers. I wondered briefly if the now famous Anfield stray cat (aka Pusskas) would turn up to greet our visitors. There was no greeting either from Roger French, Senior Vets co-manager, who had wandered off to Chessington and missed our adventure.

When referee Mick Gearing started the game, the Farnborough team lined up like this: Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard and Danny Winter in defence; Rob Lipscomb, Chris Webb, Nick Waller and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Paul Smith and Darren Burkett in attack. Colin Brazier ran the line until he could come on and Andy Faulks and Mick O'Flynn sat on the bench enjoying the sunshine (not unlike a couple of tomcats I thought, particularly Andy who had been out probably all night celebrating his 43rd birthday).

Catford Wanderers had two younger players in their midst but we did not mind that as they had many players who were as old, if not older, than us, as well. It was clear quite early on that both teams would seek to pass the ball about on a very good surface. Collectively we had the greater movement but as individuals Catford probably had the two most mobile younger players initially. They also had a very useful forward who was full of feints, close control and had a big bag of dummies. The first ten minutes were cagey and there was some rustiness in our play, but once our fluency and superior passing took hold the chances started coming, particularly when we realised, we could get behind the Catford defence down the sides and with angled runs from Darren Burkett. The final ball or cross was elusive though and we began to get frustrated and impatient.

Our first goal, about twenty minutes in, was in fact disallowed as Darren Burkett had, he thought, cut the ball back, or at least squared it, for Paul Smith to finish from close-range but the linesman thought otherwise. Still, a few minutes later, Darren and Paul repeated the move and this time the goal stood. Five minutes later Darren took what he thought was a poor corner from the left – the ball did not get beyond the first defender at the near post but his clearance only sliced the ball back against the base of the post, wrong-footing the keeper, and leaving Steve Blanchard unchallenged with a tap-in from four inches out to produce a collector's item. 2-0 became 3-0 five minutes later as Chris Webb, with a lofted pass, found Robin Lipscomb who had ghosted into the box drifting in from the left and parting the defence, and he chested the ball down and poked it past the keeper. We could have had more goals in that half such was the overall quality of our play and purposeful movement but the final ball was not always there. Catford were not without danger at the other end and I recall Gary having to dive smartly and bravely at the foot of the lively Catford No 11 but on the whole Gary had one of his quieter games.

Colin Brazier, Andy Faulks and Mick O'Flynn came on at half-time for Patrice Mongelard, Paul Smith and Rob Lipscomb. The changes seemed to knock us off our stride a little. Catford pulled a goal back when new linesman Patrice Mongelard (just because I am wearing red does not mean I will give you an off-side because you ask for it) allowed play to continue – rightly according to three eye-witnesses in line with the play on our bench. The afore-mentioned Catford player managed to sell one of his dummies to Gary Fentiman (price undisclosed) and finish smartly to score a well-deserved goal.

That was a wake-up call. Nick Waller produced one of his many exquisite passes during the game to loft the ball behind the defence to Andy Faulks who had anticipated the pass and moved smartly on the shoulder of, and then beyond his marker. Andy had it all to do as he cushioned the ball whilst running and then volleyed it sweetly in one seamless fluid movement past the keeper from the edge of the box. That was a deserved birthday present from Andy to himself, and it was whispered in the bar later, a real contender for goal-of-the-season. From then on, the game got a little one-sided as we threatened more goals. Andy was to miss simpler chances but he had steadied HMS Farnborough with that moment of brilliance.

With twenty-five minutes left, Patrice Mongelard came back on for Steve Blanchard, still breathless after scoring for the first time in years. Robin Lipscomb and Paul Smith followed five minutes later as they returned and Darren Burkett and Ian Shoebridge departed. But whilst Ian went to run the line Darren came back on for more memorable moments. His opportunity came when Chris Webb had to leave the fray after an accidental clash of heads that left him, so I am told, with the mother of bumps on his forehead - even bigger than his nose quipped someone who will remain nameless. We wish Chris well. Good thing Mrs Webb is a nurse.

There was time for us to have a second goal disallowed, this time from Robin Lipscomb before Mick O'Flynn released by Colin Brazier (taking a breather after his first game in two months) to roam upfront, found himself in the right place to put a cut-back from Rob Lipscomb past the Catford keeper. The Catford players had stood still, making Mick look quite fast, waiting in vain for a whistle from referee Mick Gearing which never came. That was partly because the hitherto hyper-active Catford linesman kept his flag down, and partly because we are more used to (tantric) Mick's economy with the whistle. Still, it was good to see Mick (O'Flynn that is) register his first goal for the Guild. We thought too that Darren was going to bag the goal his play deserved when he side-footed a ball from three yards out to beat the keeper but sadly, or not according to some reactions among his supposed team mates, the ball came back off the post and was cleared. Darren was not finished though – as he raced towards goal at the end of a through ball and found himself in a one-on-one with the keeper. He later revealed that he was unsure what to do, the moment passed but the covering defender unfortunately steered the ball into the net. You could say this was Darren's third assist. That was almost the last moment of the game. As we removed the nets after the game, Robin Lipscomb capped a most useful performance by enabling us to appreciate the value of his home-made contraption (patent pending) to unhook the nets from the back of the crossbar to solve a long-standing problem for the vertically-challenged.

As we, and several of the Catford players enjoyed Pam Shoebridge's excellent spread, there was time in the clubhouse to commiserate with some of the young Vets returning from their brush with the law – another 7-goal thriller, lost by the odd goal to the Met Police Vets (and including a missed penalty that would, if converted, have yielded a hat-trick of penalties for Matt Wright) after being 4-0 down at half-time. There was time also to respond to Roger French's urgent text enquiring about our result – another excellent performance achieved in his absence.

Man-of-the-Match: Nick Waller who completed all his passes in a polished central midfield display and deserved the two Bishop's Fingers that hit the back of his throat after the game.

26 February 2012: Princes Park Vets (H, 0-1)

Senior Vets swallow bitter pill as Princes Park rule at the end

Another Sunday, another glorious sunny spring day in February but there was a much sterner test in prospect for us than last week. Our opponents were a little late in taking the field but we did not mind. We were informed relatively late that they played in yellow and that meant a change of kit for us. Most of us had to change again as our yellow kit was taken off and replaced with a white kit. I should say two white kits as two additional kit bags were brought in. Picture the mad scramble that ensued – like opening a KFC in Somalia, said a most politically incorrect voice, more like the Next Sale on Boxing Day.

When we were all correctly-attired we lined up like this: Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard and Danny Winter in defence; Rob Lipscomb, Chris Webb, Nick Waller and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Paul Smith and Andy Faulks in attack. Colin Brazier ran the line whilst Roger French, Mick O'Flynn and Paul Bell sat on the bench bathed in sunshine.

I am not going to dwell too much on the first 85 minutes. The first-half belonged to Princes Park particularly the last quarter of an hour. We struggled to penetrate their box, lacked energy and a cutting edge. When we did get behind them, we could not hit the target or force their keeper to make difficult saves. They had more of the ball and kept our defence and keeper busier. The best scoring chance of the half fell to them and only a memorable point-blank clearing header on the line from Danny Winter prevented a certain goal. Colin Brazier and Mick O'Flynn came on for Patrice Mongelard and Paul Smith midway through the half.

The squad was rotated again at half-time and with twenty minutes of the game left. We had more of the play in the second half and posed more of a threat. There was more activity in the Princes Park box but the lack of a telling final touch was plain to see. Princes Park were playing more on the break and still managed to hit the bar and Roger French had to make a goal-line clearance. Paul Smith, Andy Faulks, Paul Bell and Robin Lipscomb all found themselves in promising but ultimately frustrating positions.

The last five minutes of the game were the most eventful. By then – had this been the Carling Cup final – thoughts would have begun turning towards extra time. But we fashioned the clearest chance of the whole game. Rob Lipscomb turned his marker and left him trailing in his wake as he advanced on goal with only the keeper to beat from three yards out. From where I was it all seemed to happen in slow motion – Rob steadied himself, looked up (ran his hand through his hair, waved at his family in the crowd – I made that bit up) but was then shoulder-charged aside by a covering defender and the ball unaffected by the action trickled its way to the keeper. The big question was what would the referee do – and I could hear studio pundits utter those words “I have seen them given”.

No penalty. The red mist descended upon Roger French, his mood turned black and the air turned blue and there followed a stream of heated words directed at Mick Gearing, a blatant angry foul on an opponent and some afters. We had not really recovered from this passage in the game when Princes Park counter-attacked and scored with barely a minute left. That was it. Roger French continued his difficult and unedifying conversation with Mick on the side lines, and lost the remainder of the dressing room at that point. He regained some of it with a heartfelt apology – and that is the naked truth – as he posed, or should that be paused, to speak to Mick Gearing on his way to the showers (after an earful, an eyeful, you could say).

Because we came so close to taking a decisive lead in the game, we could fool ourselves that we deserved better. In reality, we came up against the strongest Princes Park side we have played to date, with quite probably a lower average age, and that includes matches played against them when they were known as Welsh Tavern. You could say that was something else the Welsh won this weekend, except the afore-mentioned Cup final. They hit the bar twice, had two shots cleared off our line, defended stoutly and had more of a cutting edge. Crucially perhaps, they never lost their cool. So, the better team won even if the manner of it could have been different (a bit like Wembley - sorry - I promised myself I would not mention that game again but after six barren years (not as long as for Arsenal fans) I hope you will forgive me.

The mood in the club house was not exactly buzzing. Maybe it was because I was late in there after being last in the showers, sweeping our dressing room and the corridor, and putting away three kit bags. Some of the opposition had already departed, the referee Mick Gearing had uncharacteristically left the scene, and were it not for the Youth Team entourage the place would have seemed even more forlorn. But it meant plenty of food for everyone and Pam Shoebridge had even laid cake on for our visitors. A few Young Vets dropped by fresh from their 0-0 draw (and reported missing a penalty which was awarded). Matt Wright seemed genuinely surprised at the way Mick Gearing had been treated. Still my parting words to Roger French were that some flowers for Mrs Gearing during the coming week might be worth thinking about and I hope Mick will referee our next home game in a week's time against Staplehurst Monarchs (kings after today's princes – so maybe some Battenberg next Sunday Mrs Shoebridge?).

Man-of-the-Match: Danny Winter, in no small part due to that stunning point-bank clearing header on the goal line.

4 March 2012: Staplehurst & Monarchs Vets (H, 1-4)

Joyless occasion for Senior Vets who go down against Staplehurst & Monarchs

This was a dismal affair from start to finish as the weeping rain dampened subdued spirits creating a glumness that enveloped the ground and the team, and our performance was not exactly a ray of sunshine.

Pre-match strategy had been thrown out of kilter with the overnight withdrawal of Mick O'Flynn and the emergency transfer of Darren Burkett to the Young Vets who were down to the bare eleven and, unusually, also playing at home today. We still had 14 players available. Our opponents in fact had 16 players – reinforced we noted by some ex-Maidstone players. Something else which they were better at today were substitutions – more on that later.

Toby Manchip had selflessly answered the call to go in goal after Gary Fentiman had to withdraw during the week. This gave Toby an opportunity to mimic Roger French's contrasting telephone manner on either side of Gary's communication. The rest of our starting XI were Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier and Danny Winter in defence; Rob Lipscomb, Chris Webb, Nick Waller and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Paul Smith and Ian Shoebridge in attack. Patrice Mongelard ran the line whilst Roger French brooded in the dug out on the whereabouts of Andy Faulks, among other things. We were later to discover from a bedraggled Andy who trudged into view towards the end of the first-half that even by his standards, Andy's pre-match routine had been most unhelpful to our endeavours.

The first fifteen minutes of the game were very even. Both sides were measured, patient and looking to string passes together. There were no early chances of note to report apart from a good shooting chance that fell to Paul Smith but was wasted. As the half progressed our keeper became the busier of the two. Set-pieces were clearly going to be a problem for us. Staplehurst had more shots at our goal and we were saved by goal line clearances from Steve Blanchard and Colin Brazier. Toby was called into action more than once but we kept our opponents at bay until about the twentieth minute or so. We failed to defend a set-piece, Toby was lobbed with a header from a central position just inside our box and the ball came back off the base of the post, eluded Toby's grasp as well as a Farnborough defender and fell nicely for a Staplehurst forward who slammed it into the net from two yards out. Soon after the goal, Patrice Mongelard came on for Sinisa Gracanin on the right side of midfield.

I cannot say that we did much to get an equaliser before the half ended. We never really penetrated the Staplehurst defence. Instead, we had to withstand more pressure. Toby Manchip made a really brave interception coming off his line which left him a bit dazed. We kept the score at 1-0 until the interval. Rob Lipscomb went off with about five minutes left after what looked like a "sniper job" but was a genuine knock, and Sinisa Gracanin rejoined the fray. Staplehurst will have ended the half in better spirits than we did. Even the copious supply of half-time oranges this week (32 quarters - a number which taxed the arithmetic of some) did not quite lift our mood. Andy Faulks came on for Paul Smith, and Rob Lipscomb returned having recovered his poise. Roger French, we noted was withdrawn and even more surly than usual – his mien not really helped when there was no response to his call for volunteers to make his complicated life easier with our substitutions.

In the first five minutes of the second half, we could have had two goals, capitalising on Staplehurst defensive errors and we nearly opened them up twice but the last connections involving Andy Faulks and Ian Shoebridge both shooting on target were never forceful enough and the chances which perhaps came a bit early for tardy Andy, went begging. The next ten to fifteen minutes were fairly bright for us. At the end of that time Colin Brazier came off for Sinisa Gracanin and soon after Staplehurst doubled their lead. There was a suspicion that the forward who scored had become active from an off-side position to beat Toby from six yards out but the goal stood. Toby Manchip pulled off some great saves over the next few passages of play to keep us in the game. We were rewarded with a goal after some good work by Andy Faulks who teed up Robin Lipscomb for a smart finish into the roof of the net with his left foot from three yards out.

Just when we thought we'd build on this we were undone by one of those "what happened next" moments. The biggest player on the pitch had barrelled his way into our half – the sliding tackle from Steve Blanchard, a little in arrears if truth be told, had, we thought, steered the ball to the on-rushing Toby Manchip. Toby got to the ball but by a cruel twist of fate seemed to play it against the heel of the Staplehurst forward who by then had his back turned to our goal and was starting to enquire with the referee, Mick Gearing, about Steve Blanchard's tackle.

This was a tipping point in the game. Our heads dropped. Ian Shoebridge limped off injured and Paul Smith came back on for him. There were other unsettling changes in that last quarter of an hour. Roger French came on for Nick Waller. Patrice Mongelard was replaced by Colin Brazier but came back soon after as Danny Winter limped off. Staplehurst added a fourth goal which they deserved and that was it.

There is no question that the better team won today. They could have had six or seven goals without us feeling hard done by. There was a malaise in the team today which seeped through with the rain which left a bit of an aftertaste. It reminded me of a book about management called "The fish rots from the head". It did not help the Senior Vets that the Younger Vets won their game on the adjoining pitch 11-1. Clearly, we should have swapped opponents but at least Darren Burkett was happy.

I think that by the time we had showered and had a bit more banter in the changing room we were less glum, and if that is not too much of a contradiction, had started to look forward to our next game – away against the Metropolitan Police Super Vets. The clubhouse was bustling with four Vets teams to feed, and Pam Shoebridge did a sterling job as always, and wisely held back some of the food for you know who. Roger let slip that hunger had added to his morosity and I was even moved to offer him my half-eaten pizza slice to cheer him up. Even the seafood man found some customers today.

Man-of-the-Match: overwhelmingly - Toby Manchip, who took one for the team today, and more, and truly deserved the captain's armband.

11 March 2012: Wellcome Vets (A, 3-3)

Welcome return of pride and team spirit for Senior Vets in draw against Wellcome Vets

What a difference a week makes. After last Sunday's wintry rain and depression came today's spring sunshine and redemption. And it could have been even better.

We might not have had a game were it not for sign of life from our own Lord Lucan, aka Toby Harlow fixer of FOBG Vets fixtures who sparked earlier in the week to secure replacement games for both Vets teams. It has been a good week for Toby – two Chelsea victories, a feature in the FOBG Hall of Fame, as well as a "Toby Harlow remembers" article in this weekend's FOBG First XI match programme. And that is how we ended up making the trip to the Beckenham cricket ground to play Wellcome Vets instead of tangling with the Met Police Super Vets in West Wickham. There were in fact two Wellcome Vets teams on the scene and for a while it was not clear if we would play the more or the less experienced side. In the end we faced the latter.

Once again, our numbers had thinned overnight, from sixteen to thirteen. We lined up with Gary Fentiman in goal; Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier, Patrice Mongelard and Mick O'Flynn in defence; Rob Lipscomb, Chris Webb, Nick Waller and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Paul Smith and Andy Faulks in attack. Paul Bell and Chris Bourlet waited to join the game at half-time.

I am sure I was not the only one who thought, in the first twenty minutes or so, that we ought to have been playing the Older Wellcome Vets on the adjoining pitch. Were it not for the excellence of Gary Fentiman in our goal, we could have fallen two or three goals behind! Gary made two great point-blank saves, dashed off his line more than once (like an Inner City 125 diesel train – more on that later) to clear away danger on the edge of the box. And a Wellcome forward put a free header onto our bar from inside the six-yard box.

And yet we scored first, a little against the run of play it must be said, but after weathering the initial onslaught from younger legs, we began to quiz the Wellcome defence, particularly down the right. Paul Smith played Andy Faulks in with a delicate first touch and Andy got behind the last defender and pushed the ball beyond the Wellcome keeper before being brought down. The referee, a Wellcome club official who did an excellent job right to the last exciting minute, had no choice but to award a penalty. This was coolly converted by Paul Smith. Our confidence grew to the extent that Patrice Mongelard attempted to score from a free-kick on the half way line. I had spotted the keeper, not the tallest we have faced, off his line. The idea was sound but the execution was poor. Chris Webb who had been preparing to take the free-kick himself shook his head in a pronounced manner to signal silent disappointment, disbelief and disgust all at once.

We noticed that Wellcome were having trouble clearing their lines if we pressed them and that is how, ten minutes later, Ian Shoebridge forced an error from them and took possession of the ball on the edge of their box and threaded a pass to Paul Smith. Paul still had a lot to do as he rounded the last defender, advanced towards goal, drew the keeper off his line and finished crisply into the bottom corner – the clearest sign to date of a return to the marksmanship of previous seasons. By half-time we felt we deserved our lead. It was an interesting statistic that for all their pressure Wellcome had not had a single corner in the first half. Neither did we in the second half.

Mick O'Flynn and Ian Shoebridge made way for Paul Bell and Chris Bourlet at half-time. This meant a re-fashioned right side which had the effect of shifting our attack more down our left side. We kept Wellcome at bay for fifteen minutes or so. They got back into the game with a

cross or disguised shot from the right of our defence which Patrice Mongelard failed to cut out, after shaping up to do so, and putting Gary Fentiman off, and drawing a quizzical look from Colin Brazier. Wellcome pressed hard for a second goal and won several corners but we stood firm. Ian Shoebridge came back on for Nick Waller to help us cope with the midfield surges from the Wellcome youngsters. Our hopes soared when we took a 3-1 lead with fifteen minutes left. The Wellcome keeper was having trouble getting any length on his kicks and more than once we picked up clearances thirty to thirty-five yards out. From one such instance Chris Webb lofted the ball to Andy Faulks on the edge of the Wellcome box – Andy's control off his chest was quality as the ball sat up for a right foot volley that went in off the underside of the bar with the Wellcome keeper stranded. Surely that was it we thought. Soon after Chris Webb went off with a thigh strain and Mick O'Flynn replaced him.

The last ten to fifteen minutes were frantic. There were chances for both sides. Wellcome got a second goal with about ten minutes left, an excellent shot into the top corner as our midfield was overrun. Gary Fentiman made two stunning saves diving low to keep long range shots out. The referee became a speaking clock as enquiries were made with him – at one point he said it was six + two) (a bit like the last round of questions at last night FOBG quiz). We were almost at the end of the six when we had a really good chance to kill the game off. Ian Shoebridge ran at the Wellcome defence, slipped Andy Faulks in and all Andy had to do was to lift a cross to the far post where Paul Bell was waiting unmarked to nod the ball in (perhaps even do a Balotelli). You can guess the rest – the cross never got to Paul. We had four players still in the Wellcome box when they broke at speed, and got a forward behind our defence. Gary came off his line like the fastest diesel train in the world (a question he got right in the FOBG quiz last night) and crashed into the Wellcome forward. There was a worrying pause as both players regained their wits. Gary was dazed and said he could not remember if he had been on the winning team at last night's FOBG quiz – he was - and I should know.

Anyway, the referee once again had no choice but to award a penalty even though the Wellcome forward had already put the ball wide. Gary was a whisker from saving the kick with his feet but it had been struck too fiercely by a local 33-year-old Uruguayan (we heard later). For the second time in three weeks, we had let a game slip away from us in the final minutes, but we felt OK about it this time as we had given a team of younger players a good scare. And we were heartened at the prospect of playing the Wellcome older Vets next season.

Even the cold showers did not dampen our spirits. As we waited in the bar for the food – delayed a bit due to a christening party on the premises, we exuded a general air of contentment, tinged with mild regret that we had not held on to claim a notable win. When the food came it was excellent, all the better for being shared between only seven of us – hot onion bhajis, samosas, mini-pork pie and chips. The bhajis reminded me (and Colin, Nick, Steve and Ian) of a question at last night's quiz about the most commonly used vegetable in the world.

Man-of-the-Match: Gary Fentiman unanimously, the only vote escaping him being his own, to cap a great weekend to go with the Chelsea win and the FOBG quiz night triumph on my team.

18 March 2012: The Buff Vets (A, 2-5)

Senior Vets have their wings clipped by Buff Vets in defeat

After taking flight with last week's draw against Wellcome Young Vets, we fell back to earth this week. As I reflected on the way home on yet another failure to knock the Buff off their perch, I found that thinking of the way we had played, allied with the bright sunshine, and the sight of busy florists on Mother's Day restored my spirits a little.

We had the unusual experience of going into a game without having to think about substitutions. Yes - we could only get eleven players out for various reasons, including Paul Bell who at 8:02 on Sunday morning was hit by the realisation, like a thunderbolt, that he was unavailable because he had materialised on a train to Newcastle.

We lined up with Toby Manchip in goal; Ian Coles, Colin Brazier, Patrice Mongelard and Mick O'Flynn in defence; Rob Lipscomb, Chris Webb, Nick Waller and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Ian Shoebridge and Andy Faulks in attack.

Mind you, our opponents had the same number and could not even provide a referee despite being the home side. It was fortuitous that George Kleanthous, one of our Young Vets out with injury had turned up to watch, was persuaded to take the whistle for the first half. Another unusual arrangement was made for the second half when Barry Grainger played in, and refereed, the game at the same time. It was all done though with impeccable fairness and honesty. Indeed, what you might call a local derby was very sportingly played. One possible reason for this could be Toby Manchip's alcohol consumption in The Buff. Toby had entered the dressing room with the observation that all twenty-one other players in the game would know that he was not a goalkeeper. I am not sure that observation was entirely valid – such was the quality of some of the saves Toby pulled off today and I for one will have words with anyone who says that Toby is a joke, in goal, at least.

What about the match itself you ask? A neutral observer would have noted that both teams were looking to pass the ball and make full use of the width of the pitch. The first fifteen minutes were quite even with very few chances. Toby Manchip did well to gather a shot from Barry Grainger from the edge of the box while at the other end the first good scoring chance fell to Robin Lipscomb who forced a very good save from the Buff keeper from one of several corners we won. The pecking order was established about fifteen minutes into the game with a well-worked goal from an emphatic finish as the ball was cut-back from the by-line down our left and a powerful crisp finish did the rest. We were competing though, particularly down our right where Sinisa Gracanin, Mick O'Flynn and Ian Shoebridge were triangulating passes and getting behind the Buff defence. The best chance for us in that spell fell to Sinisa Gracanin, played in by a delightful through ball from Andy Faulks, but his low shot skimmed just past the post. The Buff drew further ahead on the half hour after Barry Grainger measured a low cross our box from the left which was deftly converted from a yard out. Toby Manchip pulled off two or three saves that were as good as anything I have seen this season to keep the score respectable. With about ten minutes of the half left we were undone once again by an excellent delivery from a corner this time by Barry Grainger which led to a headed third goal. That same neutral observer would by now have felt that the 3-0 score was harsh. We'd had few chances but lacked a killer finish.

We started the second half better than the Buff did and caged them into their half. Our rally was rewarded with an excellent goal from Nick Waller – his first for the Senior Vets this season. Nick was lurking on the edge of the Buff box when a clearance fell to him. He seemed to go down on

one knee as he executed a half-volley with his right foot that arrowed into the top corner. The next goal was scored by Nick Waller as well, but not at the right end I am sorry to say. The Buff had raised their game again after we scored and started creating scoring opportunities and forcing corners. After one passage of play which saw them flocking into our box, their roadrunner of a forward had failed to convert from close-range only to see Toby Manchip put his clearance straight onto Nick Waller's forehead a yard from our goal line and the ball rebounded into our net. Well, that is probably the last time Nick gets back to help the defence.

I think we knew at 4-1 down that it would take a miracle to turn this game round but we kept trying none the less. Andy Faulks got the goal he deserved to pull one back for us when he latched on to a pass from Ian Shoebridge, threaded his way into the box, beat two defenders and placed a low shot into the bottom corner.

The Buff pressed the accelerator again and scored an excellent fifth goal with a well-placed and powerful shot from the edge of the box as we were undone again with a cut-back from the wing. There was even time for them to hit the post, and to rule a sixth goal off-side before the final whistle.

News of the Buff Vets' demise are greatly exaggerated. Although they mustered just the bare eleven, they had the usual blend of muscle, pace and artistry. Barry Grainger's cultured left foot as usual gave them a quality of delivery on set-pieces and crosses that we could not match. They have plenty of goals in them – fitting really given that their home ground is now called "Goals". The best team won today – we have no complaints about the result nor the spirit in which the game was played – no feathers were ruffled – and the Buff Vets were well worth their five goals (and could have had a couple more) though we could not help feeling our overall play deserved more than two goals.

Man-of-the-Match: Mick O'Flynn for a performance to make his mum proud.

25 March 2012: Diamond Vets (H, 3-2)

Senior Vets sparkle in win over Diamond Vets

The cold and overcast conditions were unexpected though not as much as the sight of Andy Faulks who had got to the ground even before Vic Farrow today (and parked in Vic's space). We suspect that Andy's sense of time had been more perturbed than usual by the clocks going forward. Still, it was an achievement to have fifteen players there in good time with the possibility of a sixteenth (Darren Burkett) not dismissed until news came late that he was holding the baby. In the continued absence of co-manager Roger French, Patrice Mongelard had set out the starting XI and explained by means of asterisks how the ten planned substitutions were going to work out.

The Farnborough crown jewels today were displayed like this: Gary Fentiman in goal; Ian Coles, Colin Brazier, Patrice Mongelard and Mick O'Flynn in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Chris Webb, Nick Waller and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Rob Lipscomb and Andy Faulks in attack. Our other precious stones were Toby Manchip, Steve Blanchard, Paul Smith and Paul Bell.

The first clear scoring opportunity was ours after about ten minutes as Sinisa Gracanin had drifted in from the left of midfield to latch on to a through ball that saw him advance on goal, untroubled by a Diamond defender. He seemed to be caught in several minds as the keeper was drawn off his line – to place a low shot to the keeper's left, to blast it to his right, to go round him – so much choice but in the end opted to go for a chip and the ball sailed over the bar. For such a technically accomplished player and clean striker of a ball, this was a surprising miss but it gave us all encouragement as we came through the initial pressure from Diamond.

We did better with our second scoring opportunity about five minutes later. We had started forcing corners (unlike Diamond for whom I do not recall a single corner in the first half) and from one such set-piece Diamond failed to clear the ball which fell to Nick Waller, six yards out, dead centre of the box. Nick produced a crisp, acrobatic and powerful volley which left the Diamond keeper clutching at thin air as the net bulged. That was Nick's third goal in two games if you count last week's own goal. After scoring such a gem of a goal today he was advised to stay out of our penalty area, just in case.

We continued to have more of the ball though Diamond were not out of it and had pace up front and down our left to trouble us. After half an hour, the above-mentioned asterisks came into play as Patrice Mongelard, Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Shoebridge and Mick O'Flynn came off with Paul Bell, Steve Blanchard, Paul Smith and Toby Manchip replacing them. I do not think anyone would disagree with the view that this took the fluency out of our game and Diamond took advantage. Suddenly, they seemed to be able to pass the ball better, make fewer mistakes, and when it came their equaliser was not that unexpected. We were careless as we tried to play the ball out of our defence, got caught out of position and the quick Diamond forward (a geezer who has previously played for the Guild, and for Orpington Vets (now folded and, in fact, depriving our Young Vets of a game today)), beat the off-side trap, rounded Gary and tapped the ball into our net. We held out until half-time. The team talk was brisk but dripping with pearls of football wisdom. The XI who had finished the half were sent out again to put things right – at least until the next cycle of substitutions on the hour.

We did not have to wait long to restore our lead. About five minutes into the half Paul Bell, notionally playing at right-back, had made an interception and slipped the ball into space for Andy Faulks to advance on goal. Andy took the ball into the area, steadied himself and placed a low shot into the bottom corner beyond the keeper. This was a confident strike from our top marksman that did much to settle the team and from then on, it felt more comfortable and we began to think we'd win today. Paul Bell was joining the attack at every opportunity and from one such foray he was to score our third goal. Diamond had failed to clear the ball, and it looped back into the box where Paul Bell was in the right place at the right time to hit a first-time volley from six yards out that neither the keeper nor the defender on the line could keep out. Not for the first time we had to admire Paul's knack to find space in the box, as if the defenders around him were being kept at bay by some unseen miasma. I suspect Paul can find the same sort of space on a crowded train. The reason possibly rhymes with his name.

Anyway, the hour was up and the four players who had left earlier came back on for Rob Lipscomb, Colin Brazier, Nick Waller and Chris Webb. There followed possibly our most fluent and composed passages of play as we threatened more goals. Diamond were playing on the break and threatened once or twice but we remained compact and passed our way out of trouble. With ten minutes left the versatile (and extravagantly nipples) Toby Manchip came off with a recurrence of a shoulder injury sustained whilst playing in goal a couple of weeks back, and was replaced by Rob Lipscomb. There was enough time for Rob to swap handbags with a diamond defender in what was the only (mild it must be said) discordant note of the entire game which was played in very good spirit. Ian Shoebridge almost walked the ball into the net after tangling with three defenders, as if in slow motion.

The referee Mick Gearing had only three minutes left on his clock when Steve Blanchard produced a blind reverse pass that wrong-footed Gary Fentiman in our goal and left a lurking Diamond forward with a simple tap-in to reduce our goal advantage to the minimum and create a bit of a frisson amongst the crowd – now augmented by the spectators for the Farnborough Youth Team match taking place immediately after ours. That last goal took a bit of the shine off of our performance but it came too late to deny us a well-deserved victory.

As we sat in the clubhouse, savouring Mrs Shoebridge's cuisine, and reflecting on another good win achieved in Roger French' absence, the mood was good helped by the glorious sunshine now marking the arrival of spring. We heard that our opponents today were at risk of folding. I hope not because they have been good and worthy opponents for the fifteen seasons that I have been playing for FOBG Vets. As our youth team made their way back to the dressing-room I could not help think that there was no danger of FOBG Senior Vets ever folding – such is the blessing of a well-run club – even if the combined age of the starting XI today was 513 years – and with the four subs averaging 45 years between them.

Man-of-the-Match: Andy Faulks for a polished performance.

1 April 2012: Catford Wanderers Vets (A, 1-0)

Colin Brazier lays early claim to FOBG April Manager of the Month with win over a depleted Catford Wanderers

The April sunshine made the cool breeze bearable and playing conditions were excellent even though the firm pitch was a reminder of things to come if April showers do not arrive.

The Farnborough XI were: Gary Fentiman in goal; Ian Coles, Colin Brazier, Steve Blanchard and Mick O'Flynn in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Chris Webb, Nick Waller and Rob Lipscomb in midfield; Jerry Cogotti and George Kleanthous in attack.

There were in fact a further three FOBG players in the whole match – Patrice Mongelard, Sinisa Gracanin and Danny Winter - who had opted to play for Catford Wanderers as they could only muster 8 players. Danny Winter was initially to be the FOBG 12th man but responded to Patrice Mongelard's call to switch sides with some alacrity, it is rumoured, after brief exposure to Colin Brazier's tactical thinking. Still, by sharing our resources in this way we did not need to have recourse to Roger French's substitution scenarios. Roger's continued absence in the line of family duty has not quite reached Lord Lucan proportions, but it provided another opportunity for the team to thrive. I'll leave you to judge if it did today.

Anyway, reporting on this match from the other side of the fence so to speak – feels odd but not entirely out of place on a date like today, and I promised myself I would not be more critical than usual. After all, if Farnborough were to make fools of themselves there would be added piquancy if that happened against three of their team mates.

It was not surprising that Farnborough enjoyed more possession and strung more passes together but from I was, in my position as one of the Catford Wanderers centre-halves, it was not really hurting us where it mattered, in our penalty area. Obviously, Jerry and George had a mobility that we could only envy but our defence was coping and our midfield, where the three best Catford Wanderers players were operating, held its own – and even engineered one or two moments of promise around the FOBG box, but the cutting edge and the pace was not really there.

And so, it came to pass twenty minutes into the game that Chris Webb swept the ball into the Catford Wanderers net with a well-placed low shot from the edge of the area after Ian Shoebridge had done some good work down the right and rolled the ball invitingly to Chris. That goal could have been the platform for Farnborough to build a lead but that did not happen. Yes, they did get behind the Catford defence once or twice but the final ball from the wings was never good enough. I do not think that Gary Fentiman had one difficult save to make in the first-half but then again apart from the goal – Farnborough did not really force the Catford keeper into difficult saves for the rest of that half, as not much was on target.

At half-time, I was not really sure where to go but gravitated towards the Farnborough oranges. There was not much to overhear by way of tactical talk but I sensed Farnborough were disappointed not to have more on the board. Catford Wanderers would have been a little surprised, in view of how previous games between the two teams had gone, that Farnborough had not forged a bigger lead.

The second half was if anything more encouraging for Catford as their midfield posed many problems with short triangular passing and clever running with and without the ball. Clear

chances were as rare as hens' teeth for either side. Farnborough had more attempts at goal but arguably the best chance of the half fell to Catford as their forward made the most of a dodgy Rob Lipscomb pass to get to the ball before Gary did and put the ball over the bar. The same forward limped off (unable to be replaced) with about twenty minutes left and the Catford attack was led by perhaps the most-sprightly 70-year-old, I have played with or against. Yes, there were some Farnborough attempts on goal that looked easy on the eye, from Ian Shoebridge, George Kleanthous, Chris Webb and Mick O'Flynn but these were shots from distance mainly and it seemed to me Farnborough was overdoing the passing at times.

There was as much of the play in the Farnborough half as in the Catford half as the inter-passing of Catford gave them an edge in midfield and the Farnborough defence had to work hard to keep their clean sheet. The most difficult save Gary had to make came from a Danny Winter cross-cum-shot that may well have beaten a shorter man. And arguably, the best chance for Catford to get something out of the game came in the last couple of minutes. The referee, excellent throughout, adjudged that a Farnborough back pass had been intended and had been picked by Gary Fentiman. There followed a very nervy moment as twenty odd players were massed in the Farnborough box and the free-kick almost led to an equaliser that would not have been entirely undeserved.

And that was it – my biased verdict is that Farnborough under-achieved today and I am fairly sure that Catford Wanderers would agree Farnborough had something to do with it (if that is not too cryptic – but a clue is that myself, Sinisa Gracanin and Danny Winter would not mind playing against the same sort of opposition every week).

Talking of April fools, there was a text from the chronologically-challenged Andy Faulks at 11:40 (in Newcastle) asking about the result of the game. I still do not think he has quite got the hang of the clocks changing. I'll have to make a mental note to see how he copes in the autumn.

The showers were excellent, our hosts good company and the quality and abundance of the nosh on offer, as good as anything we have experienced on our travels, if not better.

Man-of-the-Match: Mick O'Flynn

NB: See if you can spot the April fool in the above strap line.

15 April 2012: Avery Hill Vets (H, 3-3)

A very eventful game of two halves as Senior Vets, reluctantly, settle for a draw against Avery Hill Vets

If Roger French could have chosen a game to make his return after several weeks it would probably not have been this one. What was even odder today was the sight of Patrice Mongelard disguised as a goalkeeper in the absence of all three other players who have played in that position this season. You could say today Patrice took three for the team which numbered fifteen: Patrice Mongelard in goal; Ian Coles, Colin Brazier, Steve Blanchard and Mick O'Flynn in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Chris Webb, Sinisa Gracanin and Rob Lipscomb in midfield; Andy Faulks and Paul Smith in attack. Roger French, George Kleanthous, Nick Waller and Paul Bell waited to make their mark on the game when Roger's clipboard said so.

Avery Hill – from memory a team of PE teachers mainly, always give us a tough game particularly with their youthful forwards. Today was no exception, particularly in the first-half– they had two big units in attack built like mahogany wardrobes, and they had the quickest and probably youngest player on show on the right wing.

The first ten minutes or so were quite even as both teams sought their bearings and sized the opposition. Avery Hill settled quicker than we did and the early pressure was theirs. We lacked fluency and did not have a much of a presence in their box. The two big Avery Hill forwards were proving quite a handful and they looked far more likely to score than we did. And so, it proved. My impersonation of a keeper was cruelly exposed for all to see after about fifteen minutes. Avery Hill produced a tame low shot from the edge of the box that found me in two minds – to block with my feet as I would normally or to catch the ball. In the end, my mild schizophrenia meant that I did neither well and to describe the goal as an own goal would not be harsh. My team mates said little but I could sense what they were thinking. We did more defending than attacking in that first half. Patrice Mongelard saved a couple of long-range efforts but could do nothing midway through the half when Avery Hill doubled their lead from close-range after their big forward had wrestled free and set up a team mate in the box. Chris Webb and Colin Brazier made way after twenty-five minutes for Paul Bell and Nick Waller. That was the point at which we struggled most in the game and another Avery Hill goal would not have flattered them but we held firm and we finished the half better than we started it and better than our opponents. Andy Faulks crashed a long-range effort against the Avery Hill bar to give us heart. On balance, Avery Hill had shaded the first-half and deserved their lead.

The second half was an entirely different affair. For one thing, we played with the wind behind us and it seemed to have freshened up. I should mention too that Roger French came on for Steve Blanchard. It is not an exaggeration to say that we had about 80% of the ball in the second half and in the Avery Hill half of the pitch too. There was not a single Avery Hill corner in that half. Suddenly they looked tired and found it very hard to get beyond the half way line. They were still a very dangerous proposition on the break, mainly through the outlet on the right and Patrice Mongelard had to produce a save in a one-on-one (with the score still at 0-2) but apart from such brief interludes it was one-way traffic. Andy Faulks was markedly more mobile and our passing was more sustained and purposeful. Roger was putting himself about in the Avery Hill box - a bit too much at times as he exchanged unpleasantries more than once with an Avery Hill defender that was over him like a rash (maybe finding an angry Roger attractive somehow). Our goals came relatively quickly – the reintroduction of Chris Webb and Colin Brazier (for Mick O'Flynn and Paul Smith) restored a balance and solidity to our game and we made the most of our superior possession and territorial advantage. First Chris Webb's goal-

bound diving header from one of several corners we forced was blocked by Roger French – but Roger somehow managed to swivel and lash the ball into the net from a yard out. From where I was – and today I had a rather unique perspective, it all seemed to happen in slow motion. Five minutes later we were level from another corner by Ian Shoebridge as Sinisa Gracanin leapt like a salmon in the Yemen to place a firm header into the bottom corner of the Avery Hill net. George Kleanthous came on for Rob Lipscomb to add more attacking threat to our game for the last twenty minutes. We were rewarded about ten minutes from time when Chris Webb threaded a very good pass behind the Avery Hill defence for Andy Faulks to hit a low shot which the Avery Hill keeper fumbled (making me feel a lot better) – and we had completed a remarkable turn-around. We had at least two good chances to increase our lead with shots from Chris Webb and George Kleanthous – which made the end result harder to swallow. Well, you know from the score that we did not manage to hold on to our lead. With two minutes left we failed to put a clearance in row Z and against the run of play the ball found its way to the nippy forward who advanced to shoot from close-range from a tight angle. Patrice Mongelard got a hand to the ball diverting in onto the underside of the bar but it rebounded behind the line and that was it – to Avery Hill's great relief. There was barely time to restart the game.

The mood in the clubhouse was marred a little when Colin Brazier, after our twenty-ninth game this season, took issue with our substitution policy. I think he said that he was not going to get out of bed to be a sub, or that he was unhappy with the sequencing of substitutions which took players off after a while and brought them back. It would have sufficed to say he was not available next week but instead let it be known this was because of the substitution policy. Roger French's mood darkened and he broke his promise to son Thomas not to be grumpy. There was a bit of an outburst - Roger went out for some air – returned with a soft toy that had a calming effect and that was it. There will be subs again next week because we need more than eleven players and nobody can suggest a better alternative to the current policy.

The not unwelcome return of Roger French meant that Isabelle and Thomas French also came along with bicycles, naughty tent and jam sandwiches to support the team with Jane, Ian Coles' partner, and also briefly Mehmet Bozyigit with nearly new knee promising to return next season. The last time we saw Thomas he could not ride a bike but today turned up with a gleaming new bike, without stabilisers. Papa French could have done with stabilisers I thought after the paddy in the club house when the wheels nearly came off.

Referee Andy Gable took no nonsense from anyone and kept the game flowing with calm authority. Pam Shoebridge kept the excellent food flowing in the clubhouse and the beer flowed too – particularly in the back of Nick Waller's throat and Vic Farrow kept the showers flowing. The only ones that did not go with the flow today in a sense were Colin Brazier and Roger French. With over a hundred years between them you'd think they'd know better. Next week we make the much-anticipated trip to Eynsford to play Riverside Wanderers in the first of a series of 4 games, marvel at the gradient of their pitch and enjoy their excellent hospitality in one of the local pubs. Colin will be playing golf.

Man-of-the-Match: Ian Shoebridge

22 April 2012: Riverside Wanderers Vets (A, 1-3)

Below par Senior Vets slope to defeat by Riverside Wanderers

Roger French was right to be wary of today's game. In one of his idler moments during the week, he had looked up Riverside Wanderers' results and found that they were a much-improved team this season. Our three relatively comfortable victories against them last season may well have induced some complacency on our part and we paid the price against a team that did a number on us today and took full home advantage – more on that later.

Even before the game had started Roger's plans had begun to unravel. First, two of our squad of 14 pulled out overnight (but we got a bonus in Colin Brazier's availability – a birdie to offset a double bogey so to speak). Second Roger's car would not start and I got the call whilst already on my way to the ground to return to Orpington to pick Roger up (reluctantly – joke!). I and my two passengers at the time had visions of Roger doing a Basil Fawlty impression with the reluctant automobile but instead found him sat outside his house, forlorn, subdued and apparently locked out by his family for their own protection (I made this up but it is not inconceivable), and reflecting on whether he should have spent 60 man-hours during the week working on his substitutions policy. We made good time, once I ignored Roger's directions to the ground, and all agreed this was a glorious day for football and golf.

You have to see the Riverside Wanderers pitch to believe your eyes, and even then, you are not quite sure how to commit it to memory: the word sloping seems woefully inadequate, and you could almost forget the undulations, great width, uneven bounce. However, the rural setting is quite charming and it is framed by a grassy bank on one side and a children's playground on another and you get a sense that it is a focal point for the local community. The family theme was completed by a large number of young and old supporters for the home team and I was certainly impressed by their preparations for the game. Whilst we verged on the over-casual their large squad was drilled by their entourage – manager, coach, physio, personal trainer, kitman, psychologist to name but a few. OK, I might be exaggerating a bit but it felt that way and it was clear they meant business.

The Farnborough line-up consisted of Gary Fentiman in goal; Ian Coles, Chris Webb, Roger French and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Nick Waller, Sinisa Gracanin and Rob Lipscomb in midfield; Andy Faulks and Paul Smith in attack. George Kleanthous, and an unexpected but welcome Colin Brazier completed the team.

Andy Faulks lost the toss and we found ourselves playing with the slope though it did not feel that way in the first quarter of an hour as we had to weather a lot of pressure from the home team who hit the bar in the early stages. Gradually, we began to impose ourselves on the game and passed the ball more, and gave the Riverside defence something to think about. Colin Brazier came on for Roger French and gave us more momentum down our left. Yet the first goal was Riverside's and it was a strange one – against the run of play a little, a cross from the right was made to look very good by Gary Fentiman as he sought, in splendid isolation, to palm it away or over the bar and only succeeded in deflecting it into our net. This was a wake-up call but we missed good chances to equalise – namely two good headers in the six-yard box and Andy Faulks failed to convert a one-on-one. Soon after, the languid referee awarded a penalty to the home side. A headed back pass from Chris Webb fell short and Gary Fentiman was beaten to the ball by a Riverside forward - the ball had gone wide and a long way when the two players came together but the penalty stood. It was not converted. Games between our two teams are usually played in a very good spirit. There was one discordant moment though when, in the

immediate aftermath of this missed penalty a frustrated Riverside player caused a bit of an altercation, after he thought he'd heard Gary Fentiman remark on his striking resemblance to a part of the male anatomy. But this was sorted out quickly and there no further unpleasantness for the whole of the game.

We got back in the game with a smart finish from Paul Smith who had sprung the off-side trap. I think even Riverside would concede that we finished the half the stronger and were unlucky not to have gone in ahead by half-time. They would though have taken comfort from knowing that the slope would be with them in the second half. Yet for the first ten minutes of that half, we looked more likely to score. George Kleanthous had come on for Paul Smith and was linking well with Andy Faulks and Ian Shoebridge and Rob Lipscomb to pose a threat to the Riverside defence. Andy Faulks had a shot cleared off the line and he also got through from a long ball over the top but pushed the ball wide of the oncoming keeper – got a nudge but stayed on his feet when a bit of an “Ashley Young” would surely have tested the referee’s bond with the home side. Apart from a few corners which Ian Shoebridge put too close to the keeper, we did not really create any other goal opportunity until late when Nick Waller (who had gone off and come back to replace an injured Sinisa Gracanin in the final ten minutes) hit a delightful volley that sailed very close to the top corner. But the Riverside defence and keeper stood strong, providing a platform for their team to go down the hill so to speak and press home their advantage.

The action was mainly at the other end where Gary Fentiman earned the appreciation of both teams with a string of stunning saves from close-range to keep us in it. I for one could not help reflect what a difference it makes to have a real keeper in goal (and not the pale imitation in our last game). Gary certainly deserved better than today’s scoreline. He was finally undone with about fifteen minutes left with a bit of a scrappy goal from close-range as the canny Riverside forward with a low centre of gravity managed to squeeze the ball through Colin Brazier’s legs and below Gary’s body and it trickled over the line to the delight of the massed home support. With five minutes left, Riverside applied a final bit of gloss with an emphatic finish from three yards out as we failed to clear the ball, to make it 3-1.

And that was it. We cannot complain. The team that wanted it more and had prepared better won it. I recognised a few faces from last time, noted the presence of some young-looking Vets particularly at left-back and wide midfield, but have to accept we lost to a better team today. The return game in two weeks at our place is eagerly anticipated.

The après-match hospitality in the Castle Hotel was friendly as ever, warm and copious as Patrice Mongelard won the race to eat one hundred samosas, spring rolls and pastry parcels tied with seaweed – or so would some of his team mates have you believe.

Man-of-the-Match: Gary Fentiman - almost unanimously, despite providing an assist for the first goal, giving away a penalty but, it needs to be said, for making three or four “world classies”.

1 May 2012: The Buff Vets (H, 1-4)

Mayday. Mayday. Senior Vets go down to Buff Vets. Sabotage suspected

After the rather surreal experience of looking out for weather reports in May, word came through at midday that this game was on. After the disappointment of last Sunday's defeat to water in what must surely be the wettest drought on record – there was a spring in our step as we took the field in bright, dry and sun-lit conditions for the first in our series of end of season midweek friendlies. Call it revenge against the rain gods. Whether this would also be revenge against the Buff for the third time of asking this season, was yet to be determined.

The Farnborough May day parade consisted of Gary Fentiman in goal; Mick O'Flynn, Colin Brazier, Patrice Mongelard and Paul Bailey in defence; George Kleanthous, Chris Pereira, Rob Lipscomb and Chris Webb in midfield; Andy Faulks and Peter Harvey in attack. Roger French and Rowan Foggitt appeared midway through the first-half to complete our outfit.

Referee Mick Gearing started the game at 6:30 on the dot as Peter Harvey (our captain du jour) won the toss and put the bright sun in the eyes of the Buff keeper. Yet it was our keeper Gary Fentiman who was dazzled by a brilliant free-kick from Barry Grainger about ten minutes into the game that crept in the top corner after Patrice Mongelard conceded a free-kick which the referee adjudged to have been outside the box. To be honest it could have been a penalty. After this early setback we matched the Buff and felt it was only a matter of time before we'd get a goal back. Peter Harvey, George Kleanthous and Andy Faulks had decent half chances which we failed to convert. The second Buff goal about twenty minutes into the match was a tad fortuitous as Colin Brazier unluckily failed to cut out a through ball that rolled over the top of his foot and was converted via the inside of the post from close range. We felt hard done by. Rowan Foggitt came on soon after that (for a tiring Chris Pereira playing his first game in over a year) and immediately posed a threat with his abundant pace, intelligent running and poise. Both sides were fairly evenly matched for the rest of the half. Patrice Mongelard had his brightest moment of the game with an interception on the edge of his box, a lofted angled pass to the waiting Peter Harvey on the left wing and a run to the edge of the Buff box which culminated in a low shot that the Buff keeper could not gather first time but as no one was following in, it all came to nothing. It all went downhill for Patrice after that – more on that later.

Even at two goals down at half-time we felt that we could recover the situation and only needed to convert the first of the many chances we could create. Apart from the two goals Gary Fentiman had a relatively quiet first half. Rob Lipscomb made way for Roger French at half-time, and Chris Webb dropped back into the centre of the defence allowing Paul Bailey to push up into midfield. Our weapon of choice remained the through ball behind the Buff defence to either Peter Harvey or Andy Faulks who had the beating of the Buff defence for pace. Unfortunately, they were too quick too many times for the Buff linesman who kept raising his flag for off-side, much to the annoyance, thespian at times, of Peter Harvey. That is how we ended up having two goals disallowed and mounting frustration from our players. Mick Gearing did his best to keep things calm and fair, even Roger kept his cool, almost, cheered up a little by a long-range cross that came off the Buff bar.

At the other end we had things under control or so we thought until Patrice Mongelard intervened to undermine his own team. First, he broke a cardinal rule of defending by rolling an under-hit pass across his penalty area which was intercepted and slotted in to give the Buff a three-goal advantage. It is not an excuse that there had been no outlet on the right of the defence – where it was rumoured Roger French had moved, although I saw no evidence of this. Mick O'Flynn

had departed midway through the second half to make way for Rob Lipscomb and this seemed to unbalance the team. Mick came back on later for George Kleanthous who is regaining his fitness and getting into good positions and is lacking only the finish he is capable of. In the midst of this period of uncertainty Patrice Mongelard then scored a delightful own goal, with a crisp left foot finish that left Gary Fentiman powerless as an attempt to cut out a through ball turned disastrous. 4-0 felt harsh indeed not least in view of the chances we were creating at the other end. It was scant reward when Rowan Foggitt got the better of an exhausted linesman with the overworked flag lifting arm to run through and finish coolly from close range.

And that was it. You could say without exaggeration that Patrice Mongelard was the difference between the two sides today. He gave away a free-kick from which the first Buff goal was scored, assisted their third goal with some diabolical defending and crowned it all with an own goal of no little quality. I was not exactly overwhelmed by sympathy from my team mates who thought it only fair that I should sweep the home and away dressing rooms, take the kit and have only a small number of slices out of the 96 slices that made up the 8 XXL pizzas ordered by Roger French (two each of Pepperoni Plus, Hawaiian Special, All the Meats, Margherita) on buy-one-get-one-free night. The Buff certainly got something for free tonight. Oh, and to cap it all, my team Liverpool lost to an own goal. I hesitate to say it never rains but it pours as I had one of those games that induce serious thoughts of retirement at my advanced age.

Thanks to referee Mick Gearing (who seems unable to distinguish a chest area from an arm, or to consider the possibility (postulated by Gary Fentiman) that a yellow-clad Buff keeper (like the Farnborough players) was probably confusing the Buff linesman); Vic Farrow for his usual support (and huge appetite); and Ian Couchman for pulling the pints (and commenting admiringly on my technique for my own goal).

Despite this defeat all would agree that these evening fixtures are a good thing and long may Roger French and the club continue to organise them. We must also thank the ground staff for a pitch that played very well after the biblical rain we have had. We have asked nicely if the grass could be cut for next Sunday.

Well – now you know we'll have to wait until next season to see if we can knock the Buff off their perch. This coming Sunday we aim to see if Riverside can play as well on planet flat earth. This will be our 32nd game this season and our victories tally could reach double figures if we were to win.

Man-of-the-Match: Gary Fentiman – for the second consecutive game even though he could not stop a rather clinical finish from you know who.

6 May 2012: Riverside Wanderers Vets (H, 2-1)

A memorable day at Farnborough Football Club, and the Senior Vets also won against Riverside Wanderers Vets

When today's headlines are wrapping chips, I somehow think that the day will not be remembered for the football. More on that shortly.

Of course, the football mattered – it always does though it can pale into insignificance under extraordinary circumstances. We were looking to avenge a defeat against today's opponents two weeks ago, we were on our home turf, and looking for a win that would give us double figures in the W column – a matter of great importance to the management team.

Anyway, the heavy showers we have been having recently could not stop the game being played on the now ultra-drained clay of Farrow Fields as both of the club's Vets teams found themselves playing at home and their stories became intertwined today in scenes never seen before at the club. More on that in a little while – I want to tell you about the game first.

The Senior Vets on display consisted of Gary Fentiman in goal; Mick O'Flynn, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard and Patrice Mongelard in defence; George Kleanthous, Rob Lipscomb, Ian Shoebridge and Chris Webb in midfield; Andy Faulks and Roger French up front. Paul Smith, Chris Bourlet and Colin Brazier made up our reinforcements.

As we warmed up for our match on the top pitch, a rumour started to circulate that the AFC Greenwich Team Vets out to play our Young Vets on our big pitch, included in their midst a Millwall Lioness – yes, a woman (not only not a Vet, but not a man either). My eyesight is not what it used to be and you cannot tell with ponytails these days but I recall thinking to myself that if the rumour was correct then I hoped the tackles would not be so hard – the eventual 10-0 scoreline suggests that was indeed the case. I was certainly expecting harder tackles in our game and what a well-contested affair it turned out to be with credit due to both teams - and not only for the spirit in which the game was played.

The pitch was greasy and in patches a bit sticky, but on the whole, this was a very good flat surface for the passing football that both teams aspired to play throughout. The opening exchanges were even though with Farnborough showing more attacking intent but not really troubling the Riverside keeper. In fact, it was Gary Fentiman who was called to make the first serious save as he tipped a long-range shot over the bar acrobatically (a bit like Cech I thought, magnanimously). But the more structured play belonged to Farnborough as we probed down both flanks and our defence stood firm and remained vigilant. When we scored about twenty-five minutes into the game it was not against the run of play as Chris Webb spotted the well-timed run of Mick O'Flynn overlapping on the right and cutting inside. The perfectly weighted and angled ball was threaded through for Mick to run on unchallenged and steady himself for a rare goal. The Riverside keeper did well to block the close-range shot but the ball fell kindly for Mick now beyond the keeper, with an empty goal beckoning and having to worry about one covering defender who was a little off balance and facing the wrong way but Mick could not apply the decisive finish just yet – he seemed to slice the ball which reared up off the defender before finally being tapped in by Mick. Talk about milking the moment but still Mick was rightly showered with plaudits for breaking the deadlock in such an enterprising fashion. We had Riverside on the back foot but without really engineering a second chance – we had a few corners, sniffed around the box but could not secure the cushion of a second goal. Of course, we still had to work hard particularly in midfield where Riverside were a serious proposition. Other highlights

of the first half: a first time pass with the outside of the foot from Patrice Mongelard (showered with much appreciated compliments from the touchline from Colin Brazier) that nearly put Chris Webb through; and a clash of heads which required a Riverside player to be bandaged – but no air ambulance for Robin Lipscomb who uncharacteristically walked away from the challenge without any fuss. As half-time approached it was increasingly clear that George Kleanthous was regaining his fitness and his contributions were becoming more telling.

True to their spirit Riverside started the second half better than we did and we had to work hard to keep them out in the first quarter of an hour. Paradoxically, Ian Shoebridge had a golden opportunity to put us two up. With an open goal seemingly at his mercy and a clear run at the goal, he appeared to stumble at the crucial moment and shinned the ball well wide from six yards out. Moments later, Riverside got a deserved equaliser as we made a hash of clearing our lines on the right and the ball was played into our box, controlled very well and placed with power into the bottom corner by a cultured Riverside left foot. Game on. We really had to be strong then – and Gary Fentiman had to dive bravely at the feet of two on-rushing Riverside players in the box, and they also hit the post in a goal mouth scramble. We dug deep. Paul Smith and Chris Bourlet joined us for the last half hour, replacing Roger French and Mick O’Flynn. Well, I have to be honest the game could have gone either way and a draw seemed even more likely when our top marksman Andy Faulks (two hat-tricks against Riverside around this period last season) limped off with about fifteen minutes left and Colin Brazier came on. Five minutes later Colin got his head to an Ian Shoebridge corner to loop the ball over the Riverside keeper’s outstretched hands into the back of the net. Colin was showered with the congratulations of his team mates for a rare-spotted headed goal and one that was the difference between the two sides in the end. Colin had achieved the rare distinction of having won two matches inside 90 minutes – having performed for the Young Vets in part of their first and for the Senior Vets in part of their second half. We held out until the final whistle from Mick Gearing (curiously reticent to give hand-balls today unlike last Tuesday).

That was not the end of the day’s excitement if I can put it that way. There was a bigger frisson from the unexpected presence in our showers, no not of Andy Faulks, but of the afore-mentioned lady from the Young Vets’ opponents. It was surreal, unnerving to have a twenty-something athletic woman in the showers, in what can be described as a beach volleyball outfit, in the midst of not so young men in their birthday outfit, showering in total monk-like silence, and in admiration of the plasterwork on our shower room ceiling. We did find time later to also admire the wonderful spread that Mrs Shoebridge showered upon us – which we could not finish despite Roger French’ best efforts. Like the rest of the team who all played their part today – Roger, pleased with the performance and the result, was a calm, benign presence, only his kit bag seemed aggressive as it tripped young Jack Connelly.

Man-of-the-Match: George Kleanthous – looking more like his old self, for a performance full of belief that only lacked a goal.

9 May 2012: Old Colfeians Vets (H, 5-4)

Senior Vets edge 9-goal thriller against Old Colfeians Vets

This was our second consecutive mid-week fixture, and our 34th match so far this season. Meteorology meant that this game was as much in doubt as any played in the depths of winter and come to think of it, the weather and light seemed not that different from when we last played Old Colfeians, on 8 January (a game which they won 3-2). Still the rain held off, at least until the next message to Noah, and the pitch, though stressed in places, was none the less playable in very overcast conditions.

The FOBG team thrown together for this damp affair consisted of Gary Rosslee in goal; Mick O'Flynn, Darren Burkett, Simon Davies and Patrice Mongelard in defence; George Kleanthous, Jim St John, Jack Kamenou and Ben Clunn in midfield; Andy Faulks and Peter Harvey in attack. Rob Lipscomb, John Tallis and Paul Bell added to our recipe.

This eclectic mix of Senior Vets (8), young Vets (4) and guests (2) were mostly known to each other but clearly lacked the cohesion that comes from playing regularly together. I think that held us back a bit today. In the first-half hour or so, we had the lion's share of possession but could not make it count. Old Colfeians were organised and defended well in numbers and probed intelligently but on the whole our defence – marshalled loudly by Darren Burkett, held firm and the Old Colfeians keeper was the busier keeper.

Our first goal had been coming and was well deserved, after about fifteen minutes. It looked quite simple from a distance but in fact had quite a bit of technical merit: Peter Harvey steered an accurate corner to the edge of the six-yard box where Jack Kamenou had drifted unmarked and he struck a first-time volley through a crowd of players and past the keeper. The goal crowned a cameo performance, with some neat touches, from Jack who left us at half-time.

We had the three tallest players on the pitch (6 ft 3+) and two of them combined to get our second goal about ten minutes later. Patrice Mongelard pin-pointed a free-kick in a dangerous area at the far post where Simon Davies unsettled the hesitant Colfeians keeper and the ball fell to Jim St John to poke home from close range.

In between these two goals Andy Faulks drew a remarkable save from the Colfeians keeper with a first-time half-volley from the edge of the box. As the first-half progressed, more Old Colfeians players arrived, and John Tallis who had played the first twenty minutes for the opposition returned to the FOBG fold. At 2-0 up I think we got a bit complacent and failed to appreciate the resilience of our opponents and their ability to break in numbers and triangulate passes. We were sloppy in dealing with a corner and Old Colfeians got a goal back from close-range with a bit of a deflection from one of their own which wrong-footed Gary Rosslee.

John Tallis, Rob Lipscomb and Paul Bell came on at half-time for Andy Faulks, Jack Kamenou and Mick O'Flynn. We shuffled the side and lost a bit of momentum as Old Colfeians put up more of a fight. It was a bit against the run of play when Ben Clunn got our third after a scramble in the box that left him with a simple tap-in. Normally Ben scores against Farnborough as one of the road runners who play for the Buff but today, he had temporarily flown the nest to take a career development opportunity with (boss) George Kleanthous.

It was good to see John Tallis back thriving in the sticky midfield. And we certainly came under pressure as the goals see-sawed in at both ends in a packed half-hour or so. The moves that

led to the three Old Colfeians goals in the second half were partly our mistakes and partly their quality. All were relatively close-range affairs after good approach play which left a keeper of Gary Rosslee's proven pedigree with not much of a chance.

Old Colfeians brought the score back to 3-2 before Ben Clunn got on the end of a superb through ball from George Kleanthous to lash the ball into the net. It should have been Ben setting up boss George really but I did not mind as our two-goal advantage was restored at 4-2. And yet Old Colfeians came again to make it 4-3. A draw was not an improbability I thought from the touchline where I had taken over as linesman from Mick O'Flynn for the last twenty minutes. But I had not factored in Paul Bell's uncanny ability to find space in the box as he turned and with a deft touch found the bottom corner after creative and selfless play from Peter Harvey, to make it 5-3. There was time for many enquiries with referee Mick Gearing about how long was left as Old Colfeians incredibly got a fourth goal to make it 5-4. I was back on the field after George came off with a knock and was not a little relieved to hear the final whistle.

After a rather uneventful shower, sweeping two dressing rooms, and collecting the kit I was out a bit late for the pizzas and just managed a couple of slices (amidst six already empty pizza boxes). It does not happen often but the home side were outnumbered in the bar by our visitors and it was very good to see so many of them enjoying our hospitality. Things were a bit less hospitable when I got home as I was chastised for yet again bringing the kit home (after early promises I would not) *"They must take you for a mug - who has the kit six times, I bet Roger's wife does not stand for this, I am too soft with you, things are going to change around here"*. Clearly the prestige of the Dot Cotton Award, now a near mathematical certainty for yours truly, cuts no ice in maison Mongelard.

Once again thanks are due to Vic Farrow and Ian Couchman for their support and for referee Mick Gearing who took no nonsense from anyone (particularly Darren Burkett). This was not a game for the faint-hearted in the heavy conditions and on a slippery pitch but it was played in excellent spirit throughout and the score reflects the intensity of the game between two well-matched teams and the excitement that came from a goal sequence that went like this: 1-0, 2-0, 2-1, 3-1, 3-2, 4-2, 4-3, 5-3 and 5-4. The small crowd, including some boisterous FOBG Youth Team players came to see experience in play, got their money's worth and saw some rather good goals.

Man-of-the-Match: A joint success with Jim St John and Ben Clunn emerging from the pack.

13 May 2012: West Farleigh Vets (H, 3-0)

Senior Vets get away with it to record win against West Farleigh Vets

Do not be deceived by the scoreline. It does not reflect the game – in fact not unlike the last time we played West Farleigh at their place and lost 2-1. The weather was about the same but that was all that recurred. We have played better and lost. I don't think we have played any worse and won. Things started to unravel when only ten out of thirteen expected players were there to start the game for us. The ten were: Gary Fentiman in goal; Chris Webb, Ian Coles, and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Rob Lipscomb, Ian Shoebridge and Toby Manchip in midfield; Andy Faulks and Roger French up front.

The three missing players were Paul Smith, John Tallis and Darren Burkett. At least Darren had the grace to call to say he'd be late – in the end he was so late he never turned up. You see it is very simple – from a personal as well as a management perspective – when a player knowingly agrees to be on the team sheet a contract is struck between gentlemen, a promise is made, an undertaking given to the team and the club. If someone says they are going to play then, in a big squad like ours, they are also depriving another of a place. Were it not for the good fortune of the Young Vets also playing at home yesterday, and having the numbers to be able to make two players available to us, we could have had a disaster on our hands and that is not good enough!

Mark Friend joined our defence to give us a starting XI. We were to need a second Young Vet, Daragh Nott for the second half as Sinisa Gracanin, injured in the first half, could not carry on. You could say we needed a friend or two to solve a rather knotty problem which we have had all season – how to manage the numbers available and what sort of substitution policy to operate. Needless to say, Roger French was not exactly cheered up by all this and his mood did not really improve during the game, despite the result.

After the first ten minutes I was quietly hopeful that we would score before long. We just had to be patient, not our strong point, and watch out for quick breaks against us – West Farleigh had a couple of nippy forwards but in the main they defended in numbers and kept a compact shape. We were unable to make our initial superior possession count. Chances came and went – we got plenty of crosses into the box, forced corners but the finishing was wayward to say the least – one notable example coming from Roger French as he lifted the ball over the bar from ten yards out – with his wrong foot it must be said. We got over-anxious and irritable, passes were over-hit or over-complicated, we tried to do too much on the ball as our frustration mounted. The pitch was not really helping – it should have been rolled really – it was drier than recently but the surface was bobbly and controlling the ball was not straightforward.

It was a bit of a relief when Ian Shoebridge scored our first goal. The West Farleigh keeper made a poor clearance – Ian collected the ball, looked up from thirty yards out, measured his spot and lofted the ball over the keeper's head into the bottom corner of the net. That should have settled us but it did not. Our overall play did not really improve. By then midway into the half, it became apparent that Sinisa Gracanin was not moving freely and for a while the centre of our midfield was not as sharp as we wanted. Still, we got through to half-time with our advantage intact and by then had given up hope of late arrivals and Roger went to negotiate for a second young vet to join us as Sinisa Gracanin could not carry on – cutting a sad figure on the touchline now out for a season that has been interrupted and below par for him.

Daragh Nott brought some much-needed pace to the centre of our midfield as the second half got under way. I think it is fair to say that West Farleigh made a better start to the half and an equaliser would not have flattered them. Our play was still disjointed, our passing remained approximate and hopeful, and our forward line had not really clicked and put pressure on the West Farleigh defence who could build from the back. Then the inevitable happened as referee Mick Gearing was left with no choice but to award a penalty to West Farleigh as Rob Lipscomb mis-controlled a ball in our box which reared up and hit his hand. To our enormous relief Gary Fentiman made the save and Mark Friend made an even better intervention to prevent a goal from the follow-up. That was Gary's last game this season – finishing on a very high note, with a penalty save and a clean sheet.

That was a wake-up call but I am not sure we really heeded it. It was not clear where or how our next goal would come from. Then Toby Manchip – the self-proclaimed “overall” club captain, headed the ball back from a goal-kick into the danger area where Andy Faulks lurked and he was through on goal to execute a difficult finish by slicing the ball beyond and over the keeper into the top corner. I think, on balance, we deserved it but West Farleigh will have been disappointed with this harsh turn of events. Things got worse for them about ten minutes later when Mick Gearing awarded a dubious penalty to us (despite Chris Webb's honesty in pointing a hand-ball against us just micro-seconds before) – which was put away very greedily and clinically by Andy Faulks – now needing one more goal to become once again a 20-goal a season striker. I felt a bit sorry for Toby Manchip, without a goal in 18 months, who rightly asked who had appointed Andy as penalty taker. Toby deserved better when he volleyed the ball against the post five minutes from the end and Daragh Nott was inches away from netting the rebound.

There was not much else to report in the final stages. Roger French made hashes of a cross and a shot and drew some comments from yours truly. I could be making this up to get my own back at Roger after he told me to eff off in the 81st minute after I pointed out an attempted cross from him was more than useless – but I thought I could hear the bell on Isabelle French's bicycle go at that point. I think I have just worked why a bell is necessary on Isabelle's bicycle. It is some sort of alarm system to warn brother Thomas that dad is chucking his toys out. Children sometimes develop this code between themselves for health and safety reasons.

Not much happened in the showers today unless you count Toby Manchip's impression of Orpington man visiting a hot spring in Croatia with his guide Sidney.

I was not able to partake of post match rituals. In my absence I am sure there will have been plenty of Mrs Shoebridge wonderful spread for our visitors and my team-mates. Our thanks are also due to Rod Loe, for running the line, and of course referee Mick Gearing, who like me, found the game a tetchy affair.

Man-of-the-Match: Andy Faulks – for bagging a brace and keeping his head after being taken roughly from behind more than once by defenders without protection.

16 May 2012: Riverside Wanderers Vets (H, 4-2)

Senior Vets get over shocking jinxed start to take decisive lead in test series against Riverside Wanderers with well-deserved win

This was the Senior Vets fifth game in 16 days and injuries and the heavy pitches are taking their toll. That is why we drafted in four players from our Younger Vets to help us out. I say Younger Vets, but in reality, three of them are in their forties and today we had only one player below the age of 40 in the side, and the average age of the thirteen players out there was 45 – I expect not too dissimilar from the Riverside squad though they might not feel that way. Our squad today consisted of Steve Palmer in goal; Ian Coles, Darren Burkett, Colin Brazier and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Rob Lipscomb, Matt Wright, Jason Miller, Ben Clunn in midfield; Andy Faulks and Peter Harvey front. John Tallis and Paul Bell waited to make their impact on the game – and they certainly did that.

The Riverside team was, to me at least, as strong and accomplished as any we have faced this season. This being our third game against them this season (added to the three matches last season) I feel I am getting to know them quite well and noted their very good left-back (Ollie?) was missing. I should have known that they tend to start their games very well but I do not think any of us expected to be 2-0 down after ten minutes. Several of us had yet to touch the ball when they got their first goal about two minutes into the game. A simple over the top ball, after we lost it in midfield, penetrated the right of our defence and the low cross was converted at close range. Their second goal was not too different except that this time an excellent dipping shot from the edge of the box did the job. We were all over the place, disjointed in midfield, confused in defence and Steve Palmer, playing his first game in months after injury, must have wondered if he and partner Karen should have found a better use of their time.

This nightmare of a start had unfurled itself in front of co-manager Roger French – a surprising sight – making the most of a twenty-minute window in his parental schedule. Roger had rounded up the squad, checked the weather forecast regularly, grovelled to Vic Farrow to let us play on the big pitch, ordered the pizzas at the same Tuesday deal even though it was Wednesday despite not being able to play or partake of the post match hospitality. The other thing Roger did today, we all felt, was to jinx us. Yes – footballers are a superstitious lot and Roger should have stayed away like Dracula at a garlic growers conference. It is no coincidence that as soon as Roger departed the scene, as if exorcised, our performance improved dramatically. But I think he must have still been in the car park when Darren Burkett took a penalty awarded by referee Mick Gearing after twenty minutes. You guess right – Darren missed it, aiming apparently for the goal on our top pitch. If you entered the picture of this moment in a spot the ball competition it is highly likely that the prize would never be won. The penalty will have seemed harsh to Riverside – I have seen them given and not given. But by then we had started to turn the tide. The pace we had injected into the side through Jason Miller, Ben Clunn and Peter Harvey was beginning to burn holes through the Riverside defence. We were even able to shrug off the premature withdrawal of Andy Faulks with a hamstring injury that threatens his target of twenty goals this season – only one more needed but he is going to have to sit out our next game (a testing affair against our Young Vets). John Tallis came on for Andy and got stuck in, fitting like a glove in the midfield and bringing a composure, shape, intelligent distribution and stability that we had lacked in the opening stages, and brought the best out of others, in particular Matt Wright.

I think that even Riverside match reporters will agree that after their initial burst that yielded two goals – they were under the cosh as the one-way traffic towards their goal produced a string of chances for Farnborough. Ben Clunn and Andy Faulks missed very good close-range headers.

Jason Miller, Peter Harvey and Rob Lipscomb had shots that fizzed close. One-on-ones came and went. We had a goal rightly disallowed when John Tallis did a “Nat Lofthouse” on the Riverside keeper. We had an even better shout for a penalty turned down because of a marginal off-side fractionally before the impact which left Peter Harvey in some discomfort and he was not play-acting.

Patrice Mongelard made way after half an hour for Paul Bell at right-back. Patrice proceeded to give the most inept performance, as a linesman, seen at Farrow Fields. He was out of position, behind the play, ahead of the play, even mis-read the number on a Riverside player’s shirt, and bungled an off-side situation that was rescued by Mick Gearing’s very decisive refereeing today (as he was advised to be to the extent of insisting on awarding a corner when 22 players said it was a throw-in). Paul plays his own brand of total football in a position best described as right forback – a cross between full-back and forward (sounds better than right-backward). Defensive duties become an inconvenience and maximum artistry is poured into the objective of arriving unnoticed in the box into space and converting chances. Our efforts were finally rewarded five minutes before half-time when Ben Clunn set up Peter Harvey who finished acrobatically and emphatically with a low shot into the bottom corner.

We could not wait for the second half to start. Our scoring opportunities started to come quickly and early. Ben Clunn and Jason Miller were causing no end of trouble to the Riverside defence. It was no surprise when Rob Lipscomb got our equaliser about ten minutes into the half after Paul Bell had materialised at the far post to cut the ball back for Rob to sweep into the net. Yet at 2-2 Riverside gave us one last reminder that they should not be underestimated – our right forback left a space which the Riverside danger man Kieron (creator of their first and scorer of their second goal) ghosted into for a one-on-one with Steve Palmer. I shut my eyes in horror and missed the touch that Steve applied to the ball to divert it onto the base of the post.

Patrice Mongelard came back on for Darren Burkett for the last half an hour and almost immediately saw Paul Bell get our third goal as he lurked with intent on the edge of the box, controlled a clearance from a corner and picked his spot to place the ball beyond the keeper through a crowd of players. We needed, nay, deserved, the cushion of a second goal advantage which came when Peter Harvey swung a dangerous corner in that was deflected into the net by a Riverside defender. As the last Farnborough player to touch the ball Pete could rightly claim an assist which his all-round performance richly deserved. There was time for further Farnborough misses – including from Paul Bell two yards out as he attempted to walk the ball into the net instead of giving it some gas before Mick blew the final whistle decisively.

The day ended with cold showers, and hot pizzas received by a ravenous Vic Farrow seen pacing the car park awaiting the delivery man (when he should have been switching the hot water on). Recent showers at the cub have gone like this: hot water + bird; hot water + no bird and today cold water + no bird. Once again it was good to see our guests enjoying our hospitality. Only two more games to the end of our long season.

Man-of-the-Match: Paul Bell.

20 May 2012: FOBG Young Vets (H, 2-2)

Honours even as Senior Vets and Young Vets award themselves a draw

This is the one game we all look forward to, a celebration of the Farnborough family and a clear sign that this is a club that values and supports Vets football. It came at the end of a long season though and both squads were down to a bare 12 players. The two teams had contrasting records before today: Senior Vets P36, W13, D8, L15, GF 84 and GA 89; Young Vets P27, W13, D7, L7, GF 89 and GA 47. On average the Young Vets were younger by about 5 years but the statistic that stuck in my mind was that they had scored as many goals as we had let in. We had lost the corresponding fixture quite heavily in the last two seasons and had failed to score against them.

The Senior Vets XI were: Darren Burkett in goal; Ian Coles, Mick O'Flynn, Steve Blancahrd and Colin Brazier in defence; Patrice Mongelard, Simon Harvey, Rob Lipscomb and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Andy Smith and Jerry Cogotti in attack. Roger French was the 12th man.

We had a good number of spectators for this family affair as the game got underway. It became clear very soon that it would be a well contested affair even though we were playing more on the break. We were equal to everything the Young Vets threw at us in this first half. Darren Burkett in goal was a natural – his positioning and handling were excellent. He commanded his area and generally inspired great confidence. We had to defend more than attack but when we did put pressure on the Young Vets defence, we did so with some good passing moves. Jerry Cogotti and Andy Smith could hold the ball well and receive passes with their backs to goal. Ian Shoebridge and Rob Lipscomb were willing runners down the flanks and Simon Harvey and Patrice Mongelard shielded the defence which remained compact and alert – particularly with Paul Tanton and Peter Harvey looking to get behind us.

Ian Shoebridge rang the first wake up bell as he crashed a shot against the bar from distance. That may well have inserted some hesitancy in Gary Rosslee's mind in the Young Vets goal. Hesitancy was certainly there when Andy Smith rose like a salmon in the Yemen (yes, I have used this image in a previous match report but Roger French, whose employer sponsored the film, did not get it the first time) to head home Ian Shoebridge's corner after twenty minutes or so. Things got better for us about ten minutes later when Gary Rosslee put a disappointing clearance (from his point of view) straight to Simon Harvey who squared unselfishly for Andy Smith to apply an unerring finish to put the ball over Gary's outstretched arms into the net. There was a murmur of surprise that rippled through the crowd. Surely there could not be another football miracle on the cards this weekend - if a German team can lose a cup final on penalties - what next.

What came next was not unexpected really as the Young Vets re-organised themselves and came at us after half-time. An injured Mick O'Flynn came off for Roger French and we set out to defend this rather unexpected but most welcome lead. I cannot say we sat back – the Young Vets shifted gears and we lost the shape and composure we had in the first half. It was taken away from us. Fifteen minutes into the half the deadly left foot of Peter Harvey did the job from twenty-five yards out. The ball swerved in mid air and Darren's body was not positioned quite right at the moment of contact and the ball squirted into the net. Fifteen minutes later we did not defend a free-kick from the right too well and Matt Wright got ahead of the defence to nod the ball past Darren low into the bottom corner. You could say Matt had put out our fire.

We could have buckled then but did not. We managed to put some pressure on the Young Vets defence and the game could have gone either way at that point. Patrice Mongelard hit a 30 yarder that Gary gathered under the bar. There were tired legs in the end and I think both teams would have been happy with the final result. The game was played in excellent spirit bar one ugly moment and the quality of the football from both sides was a very good advert for the club.

It was Roger French's birthday on Friday and I hope he got what he deserved from the family. A little oiseau told me that he got a bear called Roger (from Build-A-Bear). If you want the same just ask for the one with the sore head. That thought crossed my mind as Roger sparked off the one unsavoury moment of the game as he had a contretemps with a feisty Jason Miller. Thankfully wiser heads calmed things down. The FOBG Vets are one big happy family but family gatherings can bring out such tense moments. Still the family feel was very much in evidence with several partners and young children in attendance.

Both teams took the opportunity to give out certain awards today (ahead of our main club awards evening on 26 May). You could say Roger French shows the nicer and more thoughtful and considerate part of his character with these much-appreciated awards, presented today by himself, ably supported by his two assistants Isabelle and Thomas. First Pam Shoebridge was presented with a huge bunch of flowers to thank her for the wonderful grub that we and our guests have enjoyed all season – and today was no exception - I can report the brief presence of chicken legs and thighs today. Then there was a special award of a brandy glass for today's referee Mick Gearing (not glasses so that he could read up on the off-side rule – he'll have to go to Specsavers for these, and he said he hoped to bump into me down there). I did not see the engraving on it but I think it said "with sincere apologies from Roger French" - well not really. I made that up. We congratulated Rob Lipscomb for deservedly winning the Managers' Player of the Year Award. We saw Andy Faulks bag both the Paul Smith Golden Boot Award and the goal-of-the-season Award. This was followed by Paul Bell winning the Gruffalo Award for Surplus Greenhouse Gas Emissions (sponsored by a leading air freshener manufacturer if you catch Paul's drift). There was also the best Pingu impression Award, won by Toby Manchip. And finally, the crowning glory – the Dot Cotton Award won by yours truly. Now I am not one to gossip but there were many envious eyes cast in my direction as I displayed it – won for a 17% ratio of kit taken (6) to games played this season (35) to date. I can expect some starchy competition next season for this coveted prize.

Our season is not quite over – we have one more game, our 38th, left on 27 May to complete our 4-match test series against Riverside Wanderers. They'll have home advantage and will want to win to square the series. We'll go into that game with some confidence from today's display.

Man-of-the-Match: Andy Smith – for bagging a brace and reminding us what it is like to play with a proper centre forward.

27 May 2012: Riverside Wanderers Vets (A)

Two teams unite in tribute to Peter Harvey who breaks ankle in freak accident after scoring twice in a game abandoned after 70 minutes with Farnborough leading 3-1

There was a feeling this was a game too far, coming a day after the club's end of season awards evening, in the last week of May, and in a sad sense so it turned out to be.

Yet, the weekend had got off to a good start with Senior Vets winning several club awards: Robin Lipscomb won the Stan Cole Trophy for the club's most enthusiastic player; Gary Fentiman won the Vic Goddard Trophy for having amassed the highest number of Man-of-the-Match votes in the club and Patrice Mongelard and Roger French had won the Robert Taylor Trophy for services to the club, primarily for their contributions to the first team match programmes (though Colin Brazier does most of the work !). Unfortunately, three of the four winners were not present but Toby Manchip collected Gary Fentiman's Player' Player of the Year award, a little disrespectfully perhaps as he tossed it outside. (Toby thought he was collecting the Eurovision trophy as his eyes turned green).

I should mention that the Award ceremony passed quickly without the presence of Roger French. I cannot confirm the rumour that after his lengthy peroration at last year's corresponding event, the club had arranged for him to win a family weekend away at Centre Parks. A few of today's team had also had more than a few beers the night before (both for the Awards evening and for Paul Eddleston's 50th birthday party at the club) but on paper we had a good team out, to give our opponents the respect they have certainly earned this season. They did more to earn our respect today. More on that later.

We mustered 12 players for today's closing chapter to our 38-game long season: Steve Palmer in goal; Ian Coles, Mick O'Flynn, Steve Blanchard and Colin Brazier in defence; Patrice Mongelard, John Tallis, Rob Lipscomb and Chris Webb in midfield; Peter Harvey and Jerry Cogotti in attack. On a day ideal for willow and leather, and with several drinks' intervals, Nick Waller was our 12th man. Andy Faulks was our water carrier and half-time analyst whilst Jane (Ian Coles' partner) and Karen (Steve Palmer's partner) made the most of the rays, and Jane was to play a part in the day's events later.

This was without doubt the warmest conditions we have played in this season and it was very sensible of the referee to introduce breaks for cooling down and taking water. We also appreciated the Riverside entourage making water bottles available in various places around the pitch. As ever the Riverside team looked very polished in their pre-match preparations – I could not help notice their two forwards who'd caused us much trouble in previous games were absent but they still mustered at least 14 players, and a large number of young and old supporters, and as expected, we had a contest on our hands.

I won the toss and decided to kick uphill. Riverside came at us but we weathered their initial thrusts and Peter Harvey and Jerry Cogotti had the legs and cunning to keep them on their toes. We won more corners than they did even though we were against the gradient but our corners were mostly under-hit by the usually very assured dead ball kicker Chris Webb. Peter Harvey had the first clear chance as he latched on to a through ball and tested the keeper who did well to parry the shot and gather the loose ball. Pete also took a bloody knock on the nose in a coming together in the Riverside box which seemed to double his resolve. Our defence was tested, particularly down our left, but Colin Brazier was equal to it and we posed more of a threat

down that side. Still, it was Riverside who took the lead about twenty minutes into the game – we failed to deal with a free-kick, were suddenly outnumbered in the box and the ball was lashed into our net from three yards out. Whilst not quite against the run of play we had not sensed that kind of incision would be produced by our opponents.

We were though playing well enough to believe that we would draw level and we did though our equaliser owed much to a Riverside defensive mistake but we had the quality to profit from it. Jerry Cogotti put his twinkle toes to work and threaded a delightful ball into the path of the ever-alert Peter Harvey on the shoulder of the last defender. Pete had anticipated the move and was clean through and curled the ball beyond the keeper into the top corner. Five minutes later Pete caused havoc in the Riverside box from a throw-in, got to the corner of the six-yard box before cutting the ball back to Jerry Cogotti whose shot from three yards out beat the keeper before being stopped by the use of an arm by the Riverside left-back. This red-card offence (in a normal game) was punished with an excellent penalty from Peter Harvey that left the Riverside keeper with no chance. Soon after Pete was to have a delightful left foot curler from just inside the box that brushed against the far post as all stood to admire the execution of the shot. We did not have to wait long to make our period of ascendancy count. Patrice Mongelard drew a defender before putting a superb angled and weighted pass in the path of the overlapping Mick O'Flynn who advanced and crossed low into the box from the right. The Riverside defender could not clear the ball as Jerry's silver-quick feet darted in and poked the ball beyond the keeper. 3-1 was a well-deserved lead at half-time as we rehydrated furiously.

Nick Waller came on for Rob Lipscomb on the left side of midfield and Riverside made numerous changes which gave them a fresh impetus and the first fifteen minutes of the second half belonged to them as we dug deep and had a stroke of luck as they hit the bar and post and failed to convert at least one close-rangeheader. We did not panic as we knew we had the slope with us and could use the pace of Jerry and Pete to stretch the play but we did really carve any good chances in that period. Chris Webb dropped a bit deep and we defended more than attacked.

The referee was not far from calling a drinks' break – about 20-25 minutes into the game when it happened. The ball had gone out of play and in trying to retrieve it Peter Harvey, on his own, with no Riverside player within three yards, appeared to tread on the ball, lose his footing and fall awkwardly causing the fracture of his left ankle. Those nearer to the incident say they heard a crack and Pete's obvious pain and distress and immobility quickly led to calls for ambulance. This was such a freak incident and so out of place in the lovely weather, and lovely setting, and the spirit of the game, and the sequence of play. Children were ushered away as players from both teams clustered to give shade and whatever comfort and assistance they could. The paramedic came with ten minutes and the ambulance seven minutes later once the woman driver had negotiated the narrow entrance. Gas and air made way for a stronger intravenous pain killer and a splint. Pete was in great pain but conscious to make arrangements and call his father Tony. Despite his promise to the lady ambulance driver to be her best friend if she took him to Farnborough hospital, he was taken to the Darent Valley Hospital as the nearest A&E. Pete even found time for some gallows humour to say to a little boy who asked which leg had been broken that it was his right leg which he proceeded to bang vigorously into the ground. It was sad indeed to end the game like this. There was no need to say anything about the game being abandoned. Ian Coles rode Pete's motorcycle back to his parent's place in Orpington and Jane followed to bring Ian back to Eynsford and I am glad there were some of us still there, when they returned, to appreciate this kind act from both of them.

Our last game, like our first on 28 August, was marred by serious injury and if we look for further symmetry Peter Harvey scored twice in that game too. I would have gladly lost today's game if it meant all twelve players walked away uninjured at the end of it. At times like this as one waits for the ambulance and is confronted by a team mate's pain - one wonders what would happen if one got seriously injured – who would comfort us, help us through the pain, keep our spirits up, look after our things, attempt jokes, tell the family. The answer is, of course, our team-mates and the other team. Riverside were excellent in their reactions today, acting promptly, giving comfort and practical help, and treating the whole incident with the seriousness and dignity it deserved.

We had been promised lavish hospitality and so it turned out to be with a cornucopia of stuff available: chicken and pork skewers, chicken wings, sausage rolls, sausages, pork pies, crackers with pate, onion rings, crisps, spring rolls, spicy chicken balls, onion bhajis, scotch eggs and more. Of course, I, my team and our hosts, would have preferred to have enjoyed this in different circumstances and if it looked to some of my team-mates like I was doing it justice – I am less sure, there was some comfort eating going on, I feel.

Man-of-the-Match: no contest really – voted by both squads – Peter Harvey, a great striker and above all a man of great heart and spirit, and lover of football, to whom we all wish a speedy recovery. Will a 45-year-old man, suffering his third serious fracture come back to the game? Anyone else probably not – but Peter Harvey will.

2011-12 Extra Report

27 December 2011: President's XI v Chairman's XI (4-7)

Keeping it in the family

The 2011 end of year break meant two quiet consecutive weekends for the Guild's teams. This inactivity and the relatively mild weather meant that the Guild was able to uphold one of its traditions by inviting players from all of the club's sides to make up two teams – the President's XI and the Chairman's XI, to do battle in the midst of the excesses of the festive season.

It took a little while for Ian Couchman (Club President) and Nick Barclay (normally associated with the 4th XI, but today acting on behalf of Chairman Steve Viner who was unfortunately not well and could not attend) to sort the two teams out as players arrived in ones and twos, some who were expected to play dropped out and others were summoned by phone. The intention was to have two fairly evenly-matched sides with players playing in their normal positions. In the end this is how the twenty-five players in the two sides lined up:

President's XI

Ian Couchman	(Senior Vets)
Tom Smart	(4ths)
Patrice Mongelard	(Senior Vets)
James Pyne	(4ths)
Sam Small	(4ths)
James Foyle	(4ths)
Sean Casey	(4ths)
Rhyse Elliott	(4ths)
Connor Barclay	(4ths)
Andy Faulks	(Senior Vets)
Kevin Atoku	(4ths)
Rod Loe	(Senior Vets)

Chairman's XI

Steve Palmer	(Senior Vets)
Lee Cross	(2nds)
Mason Granger	(Youth Team)
Chris Webb	(Senior Vets)
Richard Tapsfield	(2nds)
Jack Hampson	(Youth Team)
Mike Knight	(2nds)
Cameron Zegeling	(Youth Team)
Dave Martin	(2nds)
Gary Harrigan	(3rds)
Paul Jarman	(Youth Team)
Bobby Moulson	(3rds)
Alex Barnes	(2nds)

An attempt was made to blend youth and experience but on paper at least the Chairman's XI seemed a stronger side having nabbed all the Youth Team and 2nd XI players, and with a numerical advantage to boot as it transpired that Paul Jarman had gone to the wrong dressing room.

The game turned out to be a tight affair for about 75 minutes. It had an exciting start with the Chairman's XI taking the lead inside the first five minutes. It took another twenty minutes or so before they could double their lead. They had most of the play and Ian Couchman was the much the busier keeper and attracting some mainly complimentary banter from the side lines. It probably surprised everyone to see the President's XI rally and draw level at 2-2 by half-time (and in spite of a fairly decent shout for a penalty magisterially ignored by referee Mick Gearing). It was a bit against the run of play too that the President's XI took a 4-2 lead at the midway point in the second half. Then the game followed the team sheets as the Chairman's XI found the final touches their superior and more energetic play deserved as they rattled in five goals in the last twenty minutes or so to finish 7-4 winners.

The scorers were: for the Chairman's XI – Jack Hampson and Cameron Zegeling (both Youth Team) one goal each, Bobby Moulson (3rd XI) one goal, Paul Jarman (Youth Team) and Gary

Harrigan (3rd XI) two goals apiece; and for the President's XI – James Foyle, Rhyse Elliott and Kevin Atoku (all 4th XI) one goal each, Andy Faulks (Senior Vets) one goal.

For the record it is worth noting that the Chairman's XI won by the same three-goal margin, that time 3-0, when this fixture was last played, exactly two years ago, on 27 December 2009 with goals scored by Ricky Stevens, George Kleanthous and Darren Burkett.

Of course, this is not just about the players – and it would be remiss not to mention the many others who helped make this enjoyable family occasion possible. First, the officials – referee Mick Gearing and linesmen Darren Burkett and Rod Loe/Nick Barclay. Rod doubled up as a substitute for the President's XI whilst Nick also morphed into a team selector (with Ian Couchman). Some exchanges between Darren and Mick provided one or two moments of light relief – in a competitive but very sporting contest between the two teams. Second, the many helpers who work behind the scenes: Vic Farrow put all the gear out in the dressing rooms and chivvied everyone along with his usual finesse but left it a bit late to put the hot water on for the showers; Mick Hampson put the nets out and also doubled up as Chairman's XI team manager on the day (not least as that team had all the Youth Team representatives in it, funny that); Bunny Beston marked the pitch; Carole Couchman opened the bar. Last, but not least, we had a good dozen spectators who saw some very good football and an 11-goal thriller, all for free amongst friends and family.

Season 2012-13

2 September 2012	AFC Greenwich Vets (A)	3-1	Senior Vets slow to come from behind to win opener to season in game of two halves, two pitches, a girl, new kit and a new sponsor
9 September 2012	Erith Vets (H)	1-3	Senior Vets shortcomings exposed in defeat to efficient and experienced Erith Vets
16 September 2012	CUACO Vets (H)	5-1	Roger & Co KO CUACO in handsome win
7 October 2012	Belvedere Vets (A)	1-1	Senior Vets come away with well-earned draw from Belvedere
14 October 2012	Inter Vyagra Super Vets (A)	3-4	Shoddy and Sloppy Senior Vets get Inter Vyagra stuffing
21 October 2012	Wickham Park Vets (H)	0-4	Senior Vets come up very short as revitalised Wickham Park dish out footballing lesson
28 October 2012	CUACO Vets (A)	1-1	Senior Vets come away with a well-made point
11 November 2012	Belvedere Vets (H)	2-2	Stalemate at Farrow Fields
18 November 2012	Met Police Super Vets (H)	7-1	Superb Senior Vets hit Met Super Vets for Seven
2 December 2012	Old Tamponians Super Vets (A)	2-3	Old Tamponians Super Vets unable to hold back Senior Vets who come from behind to win
9 December 2012	Orpington Vets (A)	2-1	Senior Vets win Beckenham wacky races, and local derby
16 December 2012	Old Tamponians Super Vets (H)	2-1	Senior Vets come through to win against Old Tamponians Super Vets in tight affair
23 December 2012	Wellcome Super Vets (A)	3-1	Senior Vets unwrap early Christmas present with comfortable win
6 January 2013	Old Colfeians Vets (A)	1-7	A very difficult start to the year for under-strength Senior Vets who are hammered
13 January 2013	Inter Vyagra Super Vets (H)	2-0	Senior Vets score twice with a clean sheet against Inter Vyagra Super Vets
3 February 2013	Staplehurst & Monarchs Vets (H)	4-4	Senior Vets snatch draw from jaws of victory in 8-goal thriller
10 February 2013	Sanco Super Vets (H)	5-2	Roger (briefly) & Co. KO Sanco
17 February 2013	Catford Wanderers Vets (H)	8-1	Senior Vets open the floodgates late
24 February 2013	West Farleigh Vets (H)	7-4	A taxi for Manchip, a stupendous haircut and Farnborough firepower see off spirited West Farleigh at chilly Farrow Fields
3 March 2013	Santos Vets (H)	3-2	Senior Vets go marching on, and leave Santos behind
17 March 2013	Reigate Priory Vets (N)	4-5	Senior Vets beat the weather but are beaten by new opponents on a subdued St Patrick's Day
31 March 2013	Catford Wanderers Vets (A)	7-0	Seven Easter Eggs for Senior Vets as Statler finds his scoring boots...finally

Season 2012-13 (contd)

7 April 2013	Metrogas Vets (H)	2-5	Senior Vets run out of gas on brightest and saddest day at Farrow Fields
14 April 2013	Avery Hill Vets (H)	0-3	A very inglorious day for Senior Vets against Avery Hill
21 April 2013	Riverside Wanderers Vets (A)	6-3	7-minute 3-goal salvo from Senior Vets sees off spirited Riverside Wanderers and officious official
28 April 2013	Wellcome Super Vets (N)	3-2	Senior Vets leave it late to register welcome win
5 May 2013	Riverside Wanderers Vets (H)	0-0	Farrow Fields frustration for Farnborough
12 May 2013	Old Colfeians Vets (H)	8-1	Senior Vets help themselves to hollow triumph
19 May 2013	FOBG Young Vets (H)	1-1	Family affair goes with honours even, and awards galore

**Farnborough Old Boys Guild FC
Senior Vets, Season 2012-13**



Back row, left to right:

Mehmet Bozyigit, Ian Shoebridge, Chris Bourlet, Andy Faulks, Gary Fentiman, John Tallis, Roger French, Colin Brazier

Front row, left to right:

Chris Webb, Patrice Mongelard, Rob Lipscomb, Mick O'Flynn, Sinisa Gracanin

2 September 2012: AFC Greenwich Vets (A, 3-1)

Senior Vets slow to come from behind to win opener to season in game of two halves, two pitches, a girl, new kit and a new sponsor

"You smell nice for the lads" said Mrs M as I was preparing to leave the house for our first match this season. The sheepish reply was "Well I might as well come clean, since you may read about it, our opponents today AFC Greenwich had a girl playing for them when they played our Young Vets last season. I am sure I told you about it".

We had offered the use of our home pitch for this game but in the end made the journey to a passage between Ravens Way and Hamlea Close off the A20 to get to the Sozo House of Praise Community Outreach Centre - there were rumours at the end of the game that the bar had been turned into a place of worship.

For our first outing this season – the team lined up as follows:

Gary Fentiman in goal; Mick O'Flynn, Ian Coles, John Tallis and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Mehmet Bozyigit, Chris Webb, Rob Lipscomb and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Andy Faulks and Andy Smith in attack. Reinforcements were Roger French, Chris Bourlet and Leo Maccioni. Loyal supporters consisted of Jane (Ian Coles' partner), campers Thomas and Isabelle French, and later Sinisa Gracanin.

I made a mental note that nine of these 14 players had attended training during the summer, but some more than others.

In a bijou dressing room, we had the excitement of unpacking and unwrapping our new kit – from our new sponsor - Village Cuisine, after Roger French had agreed to consume one hundred curries and drink three hundred cobra beers in the course of the season at said establishment in Farnborough High St. – I joke of course but not entirely. I'll just have to join him to take one for the team, so to speak.

When we all got our leg over – the low brick wall that is - to reach the pitch we discovered that we were to play on an unmarked pitch, with bespoke goal nets. The grass was unusual – thick, springy, and short, with the capacity to slow everything down – players and ball. The referee was the above-mentioned girl – until she swapped shirts to play in the game midway through the half. By the end of the game, she had earned our respect – with intelligent running, good ball control and passing (better than some of us) and heading ability. She took up some good positions and I do not think that anyone pulled out from tackling her, including from behind, but obviously she could not be manhandled. In fact, I do not think there was a single bad tackle or word said during this game even though there was tension and the result was far from a foregone conclusion.

It is fair to say that we were taken by surprise in the first-half when AFC Greenwich scored after about ten minutes with a well-worked goal that came from a fast counter-attacking move. We could see they had three or four players much younger than we were – particularly in midfield and on the left but we had a lot of possession and were probably complacent – perhaps mindful of the very heavy defeat they suffered at the hand of our Young Vets last season. I hesitate to say that as this was our first game this season, we were rusty, tentative, and not really with it. It would have been the same for the other team. They were more content in the way they played – than we were. We were tetchy, impatient and a string of missed chances did not help. On the plus side the chances kept coming – and we enjoyed the greater possession. Apart from the

goal, Gary Fentiman had one save of note to make in the half – whilst at the other end, the not very tall AFC Greenwich keeper was equal to everything we threw at him. Andy Smith, Andy Faulks, Mehmet Bozyigit all had good shots saved and three one-on-ones came to nothing. Midway through the half Leo Maccioni came on for John Tallis and we reshuffled the side with Chris Webb dropping back into central defence but continued to put pressure on the AFC Greenwich goal. We forced six or seven corners to their two – all to no avail.

We had ended up playing on the unmarked pitch rather than one of the two adjacent marked pitches due to an administrative error. However, we spotted that the game on one of the pitches had ended prematurely – not sure why but it would not have been an outbreak of peace and understanding in SE12. That is how we ended up playing the second half on a different pitch. Chris Bourlet came on for Mick O'Flynn at half-time.

The grass was different – more suited to our game – a much better, truer surface that did not absorb any energy from the ball or sap the players. We recovered our bearings from the white lines on the pitch. Less than a minute into the half, Ian Shoebridge played Andy Faulks in behind the defence and Andy at last converted the opportunity. Ten minutes later the same two players combined and Andy lashed the ball into the net. From then on it was difficult for our opponents to get back in the game. The defence was well marshalled by Chris Webb and John Tallis now back on for Ian Coles. We created other chances but could not finish. With only the slenderest of advantages some tension did creep into our game especially when the ball was in our half and we were making heavy weather of securing the cushion of a third goal, and Roger French had come on for Mehmet Bozyigit. With about fifteen minutes left, Ian Shoebridge also departed the scene (nothing to do with a glaring miss that put the ball on the pitch we had left) with Mick O'Flynn returning. Ian Shoebridge did come back for a tiring Andy Smith (at 56 – only just our oldest player but still with all the moves) for the final moments. In that time Rob Lipscomb was able to tee Andy Faulks up for his hat-trick from close range. And that was it. In Village Cuisine terms this had been a korma of a game rather than a vindaloo but there will be plenty of time to spice things up.

Talking of spice, the après-match was not eventful, nothing to report in the shower department, players drifted away in the absence of a bar or food. There was limited opportunity for post-match analysis or Benny Hill humour.

Man-of-the-Match – Ian Shoebridge took the gold medal.

9 September 2012: Erith Vets (H, 1-3)

Senior Vets shortcomings exposed in defeat to efficient and experienced Erith Vets

The way some of the lads were talking of last week's match report you'd think they been reading *Fifty Shades of the Guild*. So, I am going to keep it clean today but it isn't going to be pretty.

Things started not going to plan when we had to change twice before the game. We had all put on a blue kit – after Roger French assumed that our opponents played in yellow. This was proved wrong when one of their players walked into our dressing room, listened to Roger's master plan for the game, and remained unnoticed in our midst. He was wearing a blue kit not fifty shades removed from ours. So, it was back to the red and yellow kit sponsored by Village Cuisine, including for our three players who had already gone out to the pitch. Things did not really get better after that. The referee failed to turn up and thankfully Chris Bourlet stepped up, naturally, to enforce the laws of the game, but for the first-half only. We had no idea what the second half officiating arrangements would be. In fact, having no idea summed us up nicely today but more on that shortly.

On arguably one of the hottest 9th Septembers anyone can remember the Senior Vets team photo taken by one of our opponents had the following line-up:

Gary Fentiman in goal; Mick O'Flynn, Chris Webb, Roger French and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Mehmet Bozyigit, John Tallis, Sinisa Gracanin and Rob Lipscomb in midfield; Andy Faulks and Ian Shoebridge in attack. With Chris Bourlet as the "man in black" our second substitute (running the line) was Colin Brazier. It was good to see Colin back after injury and wearing a Brazil shirt – which sadly failed to inspire the Senior Vets today. Graeme Evans was found loitering with intent and became our 14th man.

We could not quite believe that we were 2-0 down at half-time. We had enjoyed so much possession that we seemed to have convinced ourselves that we were better than we actually were. Our passing was good, even excessive. The problem was in the final third where it mattered most. At the risk of reminding some of last week's report, we had a lot of foreplay but no penetration. The final ball was never there and our frustration grew. Erith defended a little too robustly at times – most of the fouls were conceded by them and some of these were a little late and from behind. They were not slow to challenge refereeing decisions (not helped by the absence of a linesman from their number but that did not stop their Roger).

We were not quite disciplined either, not as much as our opponents. We got caught on the break twice and paid the price for it. After twenty minutes Erith scored from a deep cross from the right that eluded Gary Fentiman and Mick O'Flynn and was tucked in with a deft header back across the goal. Fifteen minutes later, Erith played a good one-two on the edge of the box and the big man with the cultured left foot applied a delicate finish to lob Gary Fentiman from ten yards out. I should mention that between the two goals a rasping Erith thirty-yarder was tipped onto the bar by Gary Fentiman.

At the other end, we huffed and puffed but could not really break through. Andy Faulks produced a powerful shot from a lay-off by Ian Shoebridge which drew a good point blank save from the Erith keeper. Apart from that they coped well with what we had to offer. Whilst we had more of the ball, we also made more mistakes and in many ways were more naïve.

At half-time Colin Brazier and Chris Bourlet came on with Roger French and Ian Shoebridge making way. Roger went on to referee the second half and we were treated after fifteen minutes or so with two Rogers exchanging words in anger. But after a few expletives, things settled down. This is not the first time we have played Erith – but today's game was quite a tetchy affair.

The pattern of the first-half was repeated again. Greater possession and passing from Farnborough – resolute defending from Erith and danger on the break. We did make more of an effort to have a presence in their box and we created more chances and applied more pressure, forced more corners than they did but could not find the elusive finishing touch. In an effort to get back in the game, we gambled with Mick O'Flynn pushing up leaving three at the back. I am not sure this really worked as Erith got a third goal on the break. Sinisa Gracanin went off injured and Ian Shoebridge returned. Graeme Evans came on for Mehmet in the last fifteen minutes.

I did not think we would ever score. I am glad we did, especially as in the last ten minutes Erith had started to rub it in with calls of "Clean Sheet". You know you are on to a good hiding when the opposition start saying things like that. That is why we were all pleased, with about five minutes left, to get one back. The goal epitomised our play today – good inter-passing down the right which saw Mick O'Flynn advance in the box behind the Erith defence, cut the ball back for Robin Lipscomb unmarked in the six-yard box only to see him produce a limp shot that was saved by the keeper. However, Andy Faulks was finally well-placed to scuff the rebound into the net from a yard out. And that was it. We were well beaten on the day by a good team and had contributed in no small way to our discomfiture.

Talking of contribution, I should mention Roger French. He not only played the first half, but refereed the second, took the kit home, added up his match fees without any help from me (or that smart lad Thomas French), and perhaps his most telling achievement today – rescued a plate of cheese and pickle sandwiches (the best that Rob Lipscomb had ever tasted and a tribute to the fare that Pam Shoebridge laid on for her boys today) from some ravenous youths from Orpington FC. We won't mention the kit thing, or the absence of a referee (not Roger's fault really), or any part that Roger might have played in the first two Erith goals.

It was good to see so many Erith players still in the clubhouse when the bell went for last orders. Why not? After all they had had a rather good game and earned their beers. They had given a classic away performance, silencing the home crowd, soaking up the pressure, letting us have the ball where it did not hurt them, defending in numbers and hitting us with quick breaks down the flanks and making the most of their assets and finishing the few chances they created.

So, after only our second game our unbeaten record for the season had gone. Our new shirts advertising the Village Cuisine had seen a performance today that would not curry favour with our sponsor.

Man-of-the-Match – Chris Webb – one of the very few to emerge with any credit from today's difficulty which left us all hot and bothered.

16 September 2012: CUACO Vets (H, 5-1)

Roger & Co. KO CUACO in handsome win

Apparently, I am not allowed to say we came from behind – gives ideas to some of the unwholesome minds on the team – so I will say we overcame an early 1-0 deficit to storm to a well-deserved 5-1 win to cap a good team performance.

Kick-off was delayed as our opponents' kit was in the environs of Ashford when it should have been at Farrow Fields – a wrong turning on the motorway it seems, or the wrong Farnborough entered in the sat nav. Anyway, we passed the time in the dressing room looking through the contents of Andy "Compo" Faulks' kit bag – entirely bereft of shower materials and personal care products; and marvelling at how well Steve Blanchard moved in spite of a broken ankle. Further light relief was provided by Toby Manchip's analysis of Roger French's team selection for today. Toby considers Roger to be one of only two managers to have lost the dressing room after only two games. The other is AVB, I think.

When referee Mick Gearing eventually blew the whistle, the team selected by Roger French lined up like this: Gary Fentiman in goal; Ian Coles, Chris Webb, Nick Waller and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Mehmet Bozyigit, John Tallis, Ian Shoebridge and Rob Lipscomb in midfield; Andy Faulks and Andy Smith in attack. Toby Manchip, Leo Maccioni and Roger French completed the selection.

Graeme Evans was found loitering in the undergrowth once again, and ended up running the line. Our fans (for all or part of the game) included Thomas and Isabelle French, Jane (Ian Coles' partner), Steve Blanchard, Vicky Parsons, Steve "Docker" Durbridge and his dog, and Compo's girl-friend.

There was not much between the two teams in the first fifteen minutes. Defences were generally on top and the two keepers were not really tested. We had some early pressure with corners but it was CUACO who took the lead after about twenty minutes with a determined run from one of their midfielders who came through a couple of tackles and set himself up for a powerful shot from the edge of the box which came off the underside of the bar, in the top corner, and over the line. This was a very good individual goal in the midst of greater collective play from Farnborough.

We just about kept our composure, most of us, almost. At that point things were not going too well for us. Robin Lipscomb and John Tallis made way for Leo Maccioni and Toby Manchip after about twenty-five minutes. Toby later confided that he thought his arrival shored up the play and shortened our game. Something changed anyway.

Until then we had visions of déjà vu – plenty of possession, buzzing round our opponents' box, and a midfield quartet neglecting its defensive duties. Mehmet Bozyigit got a frothy and foamy reminder of said duties from Patrice Mongelard which did him a lot of good. So much so that moments later, he broke through on the right, chasing a pass from Ian Shoebridge, got the better of the covering defender, and produced a very crisp finish from twelve yards out that left the CUACO keeper grasping at thin air. Five minutes later, he produced a peach of a corner from which Chris Webb narrowly failed to score with a powerful header at the far post. Mehmet repeated the dose not long after, this time with a plum of a cross, again to the far post, which was met with a meaty forehead from Andy Smith to give us a 2-1 lead. CUACO would have been relieved to hear the half-time whistle. We were glad to be tucking into the half-time oranges, in the lead.

The CUACO relief was short-lived though because from the restart the first ball played sliced through their defence and Mehmet was almost through to score again. That sort of set the tone for the rest of the game. The second half was barely five minutes old when a suicidal back heel in a dangerous area left Andy Smith with still a bit to do but he showed all his craft and experience by scooping the ball into the net over the CUACO keeper, lured off his line and left very exposed by the defensive error. That goal really settled us and we applied more pressure and won several corners. CUACO made the occasional break but on the whole our defence, well-marshalled by Chris Webb, was on top. We contained CUACO in their half without really creating any clear chances for the next quarter of an hour or so, but it was not until Andy Faulks scored our fourth goal, and his fifth in three consecutive games in which he has scored, that we felt the game was won. Andy had nipped in to steer the ball home so quickly and from short-range that not everyone, including probably his girlfriend realised he had scored. Roger French, John Tallis and Rob Lipscomb came on for Nick Waller, Toby Manchip and Andy Smith without affecting our game such was our dominance. It was no surprise to see John Tallis get our fifth late in the game as he pounced on a loose ball on the edge of the box from a poor CUACO clearance to stroke the ball, with finesse rather than power, into the bottom corner; and that was it. A job well done and a game played in very good spirit by our opponents (apart from a spicy exchange between Ian Coles and one of their players).

We had three or four players missing from last week but others stepped up and, in the end, we gave quite a cohesive performance full of character, and with goals that came at the right time for us after our opponents gave us a difficult examination in the first twenty minutes or so. It was good to see Nick Waller back, with an assured performance at left-back. Entre nous I am always glad to see Nick in the team as he makes the size of my plate of sandwiches look normal. Talking of sandwiches Pam Shoebridge delivered once again and excellent fare was enjoyed by all, especially Nick.

Man-of-the-Match – by several furlongs, Mehmet Bozyigit, who sliced through the CUACO defence like a kebab knife, and in spite of a vote for Toby Manchip from Docker's dog.

7 October 2012 : Belvedere Vets (A, 1-1)

Senior Vets come away with well-earned draw from Belvedere

The truth is we were mildly apprehensive about this game as we huddled in the car park. Our numbers were reduced – we had a twelfth man who would be late, involved in a vehicle retrieval situation, and possibly a thirteenth who had been sent a hopeful text. We had been well beaten on our last visit here and we expected our opponents to have vast numbers of players to make the most of what is not only one of the biggest pitches we play on, but with a slope that makes the pitch at Eynsford suitable for a spirit level convention.

Our opponents had fifteen players, a linesman and a referee on their side. We started with eleven spread out in the vast expanse of the pitch thus: Gary Fentiman in goal; Ian Coles, Chris Webb, Colin Brazier and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Mehmet Bozyigit, Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Shoebridge and Rob Lipscomb in midfield; Andy Faulks and Roger French. There was no sign of our substitutes at that point, nor when about ten minutes into the game both Mehmet and Rob found their movement severely hampered with a groin strain and a pulled hamstring/tendon respectively. Mehmet was carrying an injury from last week but thought his special Turkish groin massage the night before had done the trick.

In a sense we were hanging on, from quite an early point in the game but took pride in defending well and restricting opportunities for our opponents. Their defence too was on top and coped with the occasional foray that Andy Faulks led. Most of the play was in midfield where our two able-bodied players Sinisa Gracanin and Ian Shoebridge worked like Trojans. There were no goal scoring opportunities of any note in the first twenty minutes or so. By then we had two subs on: first Steve Blanchard, back only yesterday from an all-inclusive holiday and a “broken ankle”, came on for Rob Lipscomb – to find that his first game this season was not going to be a cruise; and Mehmet too had hobbled off to be replaced by Chris Bourlet who woke up this morning and remembered then that his vehicle was in the Westerham area.

The feeling that we were doing OK was enhanced on the half hour when Chris Bourlet, fed the ball from Andy Faulks, produced what looked suspiciously like a cross but with no Farnborough shirt in the box, and managed to deceive the Belvedere keeper from twenty-five yards (I would like to point out that the referee did actually say to me it must have been the intelligent run I made into the box that deceived the keeper, to which I replied that must count as an assist - Statler). The home crowd gasped as the ball arced into the net and made that familiar sound as it brushed against the polypropylene netting on its way down. It was one of those clear still sunny mornings when everything seemed sharper (like the parakeets having a drink in the guttering on one of the houses adjoining the ground). Of course, Chris was to claim later that it was a shot but I think if this claim was going to be evidence in the sense that he understands it, he'd have to change his story. We did not mind. To score a goal playing against the kind of slope that really could do with a road sign, was a bonus.

Sadly, we could not hang on to this lead. A few minutes before half-time we gave away a silly free-kick in a dangerous position and paid the price as the ball came through a mass of players, got tangled in Patrice Mongelard's legs, and fell kindly for a Belvedere player to poke into the net from a yard out. And that was it for the first-half. I cannot recall other goal-scoring opportunities for either side though we had had to do more defending than Belvedere. At half-time the Jaffa franchise, suspended for the last two weeks like some errant civil servant, resumed and served to fortify us for a testing second half - even though there was a feeling that the slope would be worth a goal to us. It was not in the end – but more on that shortly.

I think it only fair to say that Belvedere put us under even more pressure in the second half, playing against the slope and the arrival of four pairs of fresh legs for them had a lot to do with that. They forced several corners in that half. I do not recall a single Farnborough corner. Gary Fentiman was certainly busier and pulled off some good saves, including a remarkable one handed save to tip a close-range header over the bar during a period of sustained Belvedere pressure. Patrice Mongelard was on foot to make a last-minute saving tackle two yards out as a Belvedere player prepared to tuck a rebound in from another good save by Gary. The back four was immense with Ian Coles and Colin Brazier making some good tackles and Steve Blanchard's ankle held out as we kept Belvedere at bay. Chris Bourlet, Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Shoebridge and Chris Webb all had to attend to their defensive duties. This left us with not much of a threat up front, except for the occasional break by Andy Faulks. One such move fashioned what was arguably our best scoring opportunity with about fifteen minutes left. Andy burst through on the left, got behind the defence, advanced into the box, drew the keeper and then squared the ball. All that was required was a cool, precise, controlled and low finish into the near empty net. But the ball had been squared to Roger French. That was our last sniff at the Belvedere goal. We held out until the final whistle and that was our first draw this season.

The après-match hospitality was good in the cosy Belvedere bar. Sadly – no – luckily, Gary Fentiman, Andy Faulks, Chris Bourlet and Chris Webb left before the landlord brought out trays of sandwiches, sausages and potatoes. Patrice Mongelard was able to demonstrate the art of eating a piping hot sausage wrapped in two cos lettuce leaves. Roger French was off target again – not on the money you could say as he failed to make the match subs add up. In fairness, not many people know that Roger was carrying an injury and given the choice would not have played a full game in a thankless position.

This was more a point gained than two points lost. There was a little sadness that Andy Faulks' record of scoring in every game this season had ended. You could say this was the first time that his girlfriend had seen him fail to score on a Sunday morning. A draw was probably a fair result in the end though this time more than in previous matches our opponents showed a tetchy undercurrent as we frustrated them. Mind you, we had our moments of annoyance too when the referee did not punish some harsh tackling from behind as Andy Faulks boot was removed from his foot and there were some free-kicks that we should have had we felt, including one in the box when "Sidney" was manhandled after bamboozling his marker. Still things did not get as "tasty" as the 2-2 draw between our Young Vets and the Met Police back at Farrow Fields.

On the way back Mehmet was contemplating a bit of a break to aid his recovery during the international break perhaps some voluntary work with the elderly. His admiration for older people with a zest for life is such that he is contemplating renaming his kebab emporium – the "Jackie Stallone Kebab Centre". I think he was joking.

The truth of the matter is that Belvedere could refresh their team with four new players whilst our two subs were crocked and we were under pressure from start to finish; but we had avoided defeat for a second consecutive away game and we could look forward to another away fixture next Sunday, against Inter Vyagra who are no longer a soft touch.

Man-of-the-Match – a defender unsurprisingly, Ian Coles, sporting his Robinson Crusoe look, who was a rock on which wave after wave of Belvedere attacks got shipwrecked.

14 October 2012: Inter Vyagra Super Vets (A, 3-4)

Shoddy and Sloppy Senior Vets get Inter Vyagra stuffing

As limp performances go, this will take some beating, and the contrast of bright autumn sunshine and the darkest of moods will remain in the memory for a long time. Yes – we lost for the first time against a team we have always beaten in the four seasons that we have been playing them and the manner of it was shocking. As I said at the end of last week's reportage our opponents are now a stiffer proposition, and they certainly enhanced their performance today. To say we gave them their four goals may seem patronising but there is no denying the part we played in all of them, collectively and individually.

Even though our usual kit had been washed twice this week by Chris Webb – it was not used as we switched to a navy-blue kit (as the away team) to avoid a clash between Inter Vyagra's orange and our usual "bacon and egg" strip. Some of our players later claimed that our kit clashed with the referee's colours and that was why so many of their passes went to him. We had the luxury of fifteen players today and that too became an issue at the end. The starting XI were: Gary Fentiman in goal; Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb, Mick O'Flynn and Rob Lipscomb in midfield; Andy Faulks and Ian Shoebridge in attack. John Tallis, Chris Bourlet, Paul Bell and Roger French waited to come on, or not.

I do not think that we were alarmed at all by our opponents in the first fifteen to twenty minutes. The overall lack of quality in our play was more of a worry as we failed to make the most of our superior possession and the slope. Our passing deteriorated, we crowded the midfield unnecessarily and our final balls were poor. Still the natural order seemed to be restored as we took the lead. A scrappy goal to be honest as Ian Shoebridge put Mick O'Flynn through on the right – Mick sliced his shot but the rebound fell kindly to Robin Lipscomb to poke home from short range. A back pass, soon after, from Mick O'Flynn had Gary Fentiman struggling in the corridor of uncertainty but we got away with it. Inter Vyagra got back in the game but the manner of their equaliser could not have been predicted and had to be seen to be believed. Yet another hopeful Guild through ball was cleared by the Inter Vyagra goal-keeper as he came out of his box and from fully seventy yards out wellied the ball upfield. The 6ft 3in Gary Fentiman in the Farnborough goal took three steps forward, mis-judged the bounce of the ball and was lobbed in the top corner. Worse was to come. John Tallis had been on the pitch for about five minutes (replacing Steve Blanchard in the centre of our defence) when he attempted something fancy on the edge of our box and failed. The ball fell to probably the best Inter Vyagra player on the day who lashed it from fifteen yards out against the post past Gary's outstretched hand and into the net. We did well to get back in the game soon after as our best passing move produced a moment of rare quality: Patrice Mongelard found Mick O'Flynn, for once staying wide on the right, and he played the ball through to Ian Shoebridge who squared it for Sinisa Gracanin to place a low finish from twelve yards past the Inter Vyagra keeper. The whole sequence of passes took seconds, was clinical and left everyone wondering why we had not produced more of the same.

We knew, as we tucked into the half-time oranges, that we had not played as well as we could but some found cause for optimism. Patrice Mongelard and Robin Lipscomb made way for Chris Bourlet and Paul Bell. It was clear very quickly that any optimism we had was very misplaced. If anything, we became even more disjointed and whatever composure we had before drained away. The half was barely five minutes old when Chris Bourlet, in the centre of our defence inexplicably, attempted a move that required finesse, quick feet, balance and not a little pace. He lost the ball and hacked down the nimbler Inter Vyagra forward. The stonewall penalty was

duly converted and we were all over the place. Perhaps things look worse from the sidelines but the poverty of our play was unrelenting. Whatever pace and penetration we had down the flanks had evaporated. We vacated the centre of the Inter Vyagra defence as Andy Faulks dropped deeper and wider to get the ball and, of course, a Farnborough defensive error could occur at any moment. Yet somehow, we had about ten minutes in that second half when we gave the appearance of turning things round. Ian Shoebridge produced a peach of a corner right into the heart of the Inter Vyagra defence where it was met cleanly and emphatically by Sinisa Gracanin to bring us level again. Soon after good half-chances fell to Andy Faulks, Ian Shoebridge, Sinisa Gracanin and Paul Bell but we failed to convert any of them. At the other end, there was another Farnborough defensive cock-up and we were 3-4 down.

Patrice Mongelard, Robin Lipscomb and Steve Blanchard came on for Ian Shoebridge and Ian Coles – yes it was 3 for the price of 2 and this was not noticed by anyone until Patrice Mongelard pointed out to the referee that Farnborough had twelve players on the pitch. We could have had all fifteen it would not have made any difference today. In fact, only fourteen of the fifteen Farnborough players got to play today. Roger French had been hoping to get on for the last five minutes but was stymied when the referee blew the final whistle – after only forty minutes. Roger – stopwatch in hand, pointed out with rare fury that this was five minutes less than the first-half but to no avail – the Farnborough turkey was stuffed.

This meant that the game ended on a very sour note for Roger French. I understand that in the final tense five minutes or so young Thomas French who earlier had filled the team's water bottles, made it known to his father that he was, as they say "touching cloth". Roger asked "Why?". I do not think Thomas answered this question but I will – it is because s**t happens. And today's game was ample proof of that but we did not deal with it very well, or as mature adults should. Roger's mood did not lighten when one of the Inter Vyagra players complimented him on his tent (a place of refuge for the French enfants) – only to be told "Sorry mate – I am not in the mood for this". Things did not get better in the cramped changing rooms and the mood did not lift until Roger left. The absence of food after the game would have tipped Roger French over another edge so just as well, he was not there – having abandoned us, engorged and incandescent with rage (and without taking the kit quipped some who will remain nameless). We could see there were facilities there for food – after Colin Brazier purchased a bacon and egg sandwich which he savoured in front of several pairs of hungry eyes, not put off by our discussion of young Thomas' predicament. But our opponents did not reciprocate the generosity we had shown them today. Their goal-keeper will never tire of telling the story when he scored in a famous victory over those Farnborough chumps. As I left the showers, I could hear talk of "90 yards". It could have been even further if they had not played us on the shortest and narrowest of the pitches available – a tactic that served them well, allied with our underestimation of their spirit and collective play.

No match subs were collected – and on a day when the lesser-spotted Ian Coles cheque book made an appearance. We did use the après-match though to present Paul Bell with his GAG award (that's Gruffalo Award for Gas) from last season. Given the extent to which we manured our performance today I'll spare you the details how he came by that award. Suffice it to say, we hope he's had the operation to remove the dead skunk from his intestines.

Man-of-the-Match – Sinisa Gracanin – responsible for the only two moments of quality that we produced today, as we drowned in a sea of complacency, mediocrity and raging ineptitude

21 October 2012: Wickham Park Vets (H, 0-4)

Senior Vets come up very short as revitalised Wickham Park dish out footballing lesson

I am still undecided on whether the awfulness of this week's defeat was worse than last week's defeat. Things are not good and certain truths have to be faced. I must apologise to my readers if over the course of the hundred and sixteen match reports that I have written to chronicle our matches over five seasons, I have given the impression that we are any good. The truth is we are rarely very good, occasionally good but most of the time pretty ordinary or poor. There are severe limitations in our brand of football and in our squad that we choose not to see, as we emphasise the social dimension of our Sunday morning exercise in masochism. I will not dissemble any more – we play without solidarity and without intelligence – there I have said it - and nothing will happen between now and the rest of the season to change this. At this point you can stop reading this report or carry on, but you have been warned.

It is not quite Halloween but the starting XI in today's horror show were: Gary Fentiman in goal; Ian Coles, Mick O'Flynn, Patrice Mongelard and Chris Webb in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Nick Waller, Ian Shoebridge and Rob Lipscomb in midfield; Andy Faulks and Andy Smith in attack. Mehmet Bozyigit, Chris Bourlet, and Roger French waited to join the lesson. We could have had more players – two had stood down (Colin Brazier and Steve Blanchard). Colin was among our supporters along with Paul Smith, Trevor Stewart, Graeme Evans and the two young tent dwellers Isabelle and Thomas French.

Prior to the game Roger French had been provided with mood-calming foods, in the form of a banana and dark chocolate. I suppose we have to be grateful that these were consumed. There'll be more on Roger's consumption later.

The Wickham Park Vets we played today were not the same team that we played last season. They seemed younger, faster, more skilful, more organised, more purposeful and mobile than any of us could recall. We had no illusions about the difficulty of the task but I do not think we were quite prepared for the gulf in quality that began to show early doors. Their first goal, about fifteen minutes in, was a bit scrappy as we failed to clear danger and the ball went in off one of our defenders who attempted to block a close-range shot after the ball had fallen kindly to our opponents in the box. We threatened briefly – Chris Webb came closest to equalising from a corner and Sinisa Gracanin had a good shot that the Wickham Park keeper was in the right position to pluck from the air. But on the whole, we were restricted to tame long-range shots, set-pieces and never really penetrated their box or got behind them. Instead, they broke with pace down the flanks or thorough our middle and they always seemed to be able to defend in numbers and snuff out any threat we mustered. After about thirty minutes Nick Waller was replaced by Mehmet Bozyigit but we continued to be under the cosh. The second Wickham goal ten minutes before half-time was a very good header from six yards out that crashed against the underside of the bar and went in after an excellent cross from the right.

Roger French and Chris Bourlet came on for Chris Webb and Andy Faulks at half-time. Our best opportunity to get back in the game came after five minutes when Sinisa Gracanin was hacked down from behind in the box but to our dismay referee Mick Gearing was unmoved. Even the Wickham Park players thought we had a case as the stud marks and the swelling ankle brought Sinisa's involvement to an end, and Chris Webb returned to the fray. That banana and dark chocolate appeared to work as Roger French engaged Mick Gearing in conversation minus red mist. I do not think we threatened the Wickham Park goal after that. At the other end, we conceded a third, after we failed to pick up an advancing midfielder on the edge of the box who

finished the move with a cool lob into the top corner. By the time Wickham got a fourth the fight had gone out of us as a goal-kick was returned with interest and another Wickham midfielder burst through two tackles and rounded Gary Fentiman to inflict our heaviest defeat this season, with Farnborough failing to score for the first time in eight matches and now with more games lost than won this season – always a dispiriting tipping point. Further changes were made as Nick Waller and Andy Faulks came back on for Andy Smith and Rob Lipscomb and later on Ian Shoebridge and Rob swapped places – all to no avail, and in some ways adding to the disjointed shambles we served up.

It did cross our minds later that perhaps it would have been better if Wickham Park had played our Young Vets on the adjacent pitch where the latter scored four without reply against Sanco Vets in the first-half hour before winning 5-3 at the end. But then again, we lost 3-2 to Sanco Super Vets a few weeks ago so maybe the idea of a switch was not such a good one after all.

There was much sound and fury in this game – all from Farnborough. If there was a trophy for the team most shouted at by its own players and management – we'd be champions, every year. There is not a game without raised voices, accusations, dark mutterings, swearing, and other imprecations directed at our own. It needs to stop. John Keats' poem "To Autumn" tells us this is the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness. I fear that for us, it is turning into a season of misses and bitter frustration. After a game like today's, as I find myself, at 55, just one game away from my 400th game as a Farnborough Vet - I find attractive the idea of leaving the scene with a round figure and putting an end to the "anguish of the soul" that John Keats also wrote about in his "Ode on Melancholy". At least I will be spared the most irksome sight of players ten years or so younger than me playing without heart, brain, hunger, pride or fitness.

There were four Vets teams at Farnborough today with assorted families and the food laid on by Mrs Shoebridge was all gone by the time I appeared after sweeping two dressing rooms. Fortunately, Mrs S had saved me a couple of sausages, four chicken drumsticks and a ham and Branston sandwich which were duly dealt with before more pizza slices and sandwiches were released. Most of these went on Roger French's plate (note for Mrs French – Roger could need worming). Anyway, I think I know why Roger has trouble adding up the match subs - and today was doubly perplexing as he was collecting two weeks' worth. It is all about blood flow – blood that should be going to the brain for arithmetic is being diverted to digestive duties.

Alas, the day did not get better for me. Having tarried at the club I arrived late at home (14:28) for a visit to mother-in-law's, only to see Mrs M about to get into our other car to drive off without me and I was greeted with the words "How long does a ***** game of football take?". Wisely, I kept two thoughts to myself: (a) women, even intelligent ones, will never understand football and (b) good thing I did not take the kit home. I had put my name down to start the defence of my Dot Cotton Award but my guardian angel had persuaded Mick O'Flynn to grab the kit bag on his way out.

Next week the clocks go back. The only way to improve our performance I feel is, for the clock to go back at least five years but only for us, not for our opponents!

Man-of-the-Match – Andy Smith for a thankless task in a very poor team performance on a melancholic day.

28 October 2012: CUACO Vets (A, 1-1)

Senior Vets come away with a well-made point

When the clocks go back footballers do not mind – they get an extra hour in bed, softer pitches that take a stud, and cold wet weather all suited to the winter game that is football.

Today we made the trip to the well-appointed suburbs of Park Langley in BR3 to play CUACO Vets at the Old Dunstonians Sports Ground – home not just of football but also rugby and, a tad alarmingly, archery. Both sports were being played on adjacent pitches as we took the field. This trip comes only six weeks after we beat CUACO 5-1 at Farrow Fields. We were expecting a much closer game today. In the end the teams could not be separated though separation was just what was needed at one point.

We had some absentees and injuries but mustered the following: Gary Fentiman in goal; John Tallis, Mick O'Flynn, Patrice Mongelard and Nick Waller in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Mehmet Bozyigit, Ian Shoebridge and Rob Lipscomb in midfield; Andy Faulks and Andy Smith in attack. Roger French and Danny Winter (making his first appearance this season as the clocks went back). Isabelle and Thomas French were our only two supporters – and would have a special memory to treasure from the game – more on that later.

We felt comfortable on a very good playing surface right from the start. CUACO were better used to the width of the pitch and filled space better than us initially but both teams sought to pass the ball and build from the back. Yet it was a piece of direct football – that is a long ball over the top that yielded the CUACO goal after about ten minutes. John Tallis thought he had cleared the ball but it rebounded off the big CUACO forward who barrelled his way into the box, was tackled by the onrushing Gary Fentiman and the ball looped out of the heap, trickled towards the base of the post and over the line. This was a wake-up call and from then on to the end of the game I think it is fair to say that we enjoyed about 60% of the possession. We forced several corners in that half – five to CUACO's one – and began testing the keeper. Ian Shoebridge played Andy Faulks in for a close-range shot which the CUACO keeper saved very well with his feet. Our approach play was good but the cutting edge was not there as Ian Shoebridge, Andy Smith and Rob Lipscomb all had shots that failed to restore parity. Danny Winter came on for Mick O'Flynn on the half hour. We were more dangerous from set-pieces and from a corner, about thirty-five minutes into the game, came one of the best goals I have seen scored by a Farnborough or any other player.

A corner on the right was swung in by Mehmet Bozyigit with great accuracy and purpose. He had picked out Andy Faulks who had drifted unmarked to the edge of the box and signalled where he wanted the ball. The volley that followed was pure, clinical, technically perfect as Andy connected with the ball in one fluid moment, generating enormous power to propel the ball into the bottom corner through a forest of players with the CUACO keeper transfixed on his line by the terrible beauty of the shot. Last season Andy had scored the goal-of-the-season in the corresponding fixture (on 30 October) and here again he had turned the clocks back. Sadly, Andy's match ended about five minutes before half-time when he collapsed after feeling faint. This was a very worrying moment but he was able to come round and walk off the pitch. The biological clock waits for no man and at the age of 43 there is a toll to be paid for playing two games a weekend with a heavy night in between always, and fuelled by a breakfast of red bull and nicotine. If Andy wants to carry on scoring goals like today, my advice to him, as someone who has played more Vets games than he has had early nights in, is to get himself checked out – blood sugar, blood pressure that sort of thing. Roger French replaced Andy.

The second half followed the pattern of the first. We had more possession, forced more corners than our opponents who were playing on the break, without breaking through. Sinisa Gracanin had a superb shot from twenty-five yards that still looked very good even though it came off the bar on the rugby goal behind the football pitch. One of our most promising moves came late in the second half, when Andy Smith played Mehmet in behind the CUACO defence and all Mehmet had to do was to arrow in towards goal. Nobody can explain what happened next as Mehmet managed to trip himself up with much artistic merit and sprawled to the ground with no other player within two yards of him. For a moment I feared one of the archers had got him. I thought it oddly amusing that whilst Andy Faulks scores memorable goals at this ground, a sort of poetry in motion, Mehmet has accidents of motion – I still see him hurled into a ditch last time we played at this ground.

Mick O'Flynn came back on for Nick Waller to see out the last twenty minutes or so but the stalemate could not be broken in this well, and fairly, contested game. Tackles went in but where they got more man than ball it was more out of clumsiness than out of malice but temperatures rose and the pressure cooker that is Roger French erupted when another volatile presence with a Scots accent in the CUACO side had a touch of the William Wallace. The referee sent them both off clutching their handbags. Isabelle and Thomas French will probably not have realised why papa joined them on the touchlines. It was not out of concern for their health. In years to come, maybe they will realise and marvel at why this was not a more frequent occurrence. Today was my 400th game for Farnborough Old Boys Guild – all of them played for the Vets team. I have a feeling this is a club record. I hope to add to this number and whoever beats my record will be very old and tired. I have played about half of these games with Roger French and it is one of life's great mysteries that I had to wait until today to see him sent off. Still, I shall have the memory of a really special goal to treasure as well.

Nick Waller took the kit home – as did Mick O'Flynn last week to my subsequent relief – but I expect it will be washed this time.

The referee today was one of the best I have come across. He was fair, firm, approachable and good-humoured. He even had a drink with the away team. He kept the game moving, playing advantage whenever he could. He also handled the recalcitrant players very well including when voices were raised – for example when Robin Lipscomb remonstrated with Patrice Mongelard who had pointed out, for the umpteenth time to Robin that he should release the ball more quickly and play the simple pass.

The clocks went back last night but we all got there on time. After last week I had my eye on the clock for other reasons but I had omitted to change the clock in my car. On the way back as we drove into our club car park at Farrow Fields, I noticed with some alarm that the digital display showed 14:28. For a split second I feared Mrs M would be asking me the same question as last week. However, Ian Shoebridge pointed out that the correct time was in fact 13:28 – and that allowed me to have a swift half to toast a very good win for our Young Vets 6-1 winners against a usually good Ditton Vets side. We did not win today but the draw we secured was just as satisfying to us after last week's dark place.

Man-of-the-Match – Ian Shoebridge whose hour came on the day the clocks went back.

11 November 2012: Belvedere Vets (H, 2-2)

Stalemate at Farrow Fields

Games on Remembrance Sunday have a special meaning, or at least they ought to. It is noticeable how often we have crisp, dry and gloriously sunny mornings on such Sundays. The two-minute silence before the game, at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, impeccably observed by twenty-eight players and referee Mick Gearing (who had left his medals at home) in the centre circle added to the solemnity of the occasion; but that was before the game – more on that later.

In the trenches today Farnborough had: Gary Fentiman in goal; Mick O'Flynn, Nick Waller, Ian Coles and Steve Blanchard in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Mehmet Bozyigit, Patrice Mongelard and Rob Lipscomb in midfield; Andy Faulks and Ian Shoebridge in attack. Roger French and John Tallis were the reservists.

Toby Manchip had joined us in the dressing room to air his deeply held concerns about Roger French's sending-off in the last game we played, recall a previous sending-off involving the same recidivist, offer tactical advice, translate for Sinisa Gracanin, and try to convince us that the growth on his upper lip was in fact a moustache and not a case of *Chalara fraxinea*.

We knew from the away game a few weeks ago that Belvedere would ask serious questions and that discipline and plenty of effort would be required of Farnborough to avoid defeat. Both sides started well with plenty of passing. We carried the greater threat in the early stages particularly from our right side. It was with the run of play that we scored the first goal as Ian Shoebridge threaded a ball through the middle to play Andy Faulks in behind the Belvedere defence and Andy was able to apply a precise finish to tuck the ball wide of the keeper low into the bottom corner. Our lead did not last long though as Belvedere drew level within five minutes after we failed to clear a high ball which fell to the feet of the well-balanced forward in the six-yard box who turned smartly to finish from close-range and a tight angle.

We were galvanised by this, despite having to adjust our formation as Mick O'Flynn went off with a calf injury and John Tallis took up position in the centre of midfield as Patrice Mongelard dropped to right-back. It was from the right that we were to fashion an exquisite second goal. Sinisa Gracanin measured a deep cross to perfection which Andy Faulks finished acrobatically to give us a deserved 2-1 lead. If Andy had not scored such a great goal against CUACO Vets a fortnight ago we would have had a contender for goal-of-the-season today. We had come from behind with great vigour. Our potency was nearly rewarded with a third goal not long after as John Tallis rose unchallenged at the far post, three yards out, to glance a delightful pin-point cross from Mehmet Bozyigit against the outside of the post. Mehmet Bozyigit, Robin Lipscomb and Ian Shoebridge had half chances that fizzled out. Belvedere would have been happier than Farnborough to hear the half-time whistle.

The game had been played in excellent spirit to half-time, despite the effort being put in by both sides. Roger French came on at half-time, initially to play on the left of midfield having relieved Rob Lipscomb. Roger dropped to left-back later to replace Nick Waller (as Rob re-joined the action). Before I take you through the second half, I have to say that a draw was a fair result today and I am glad things did not get out of hand and apologies were offered and accepted later to referee, club President, spectators, team mates, bar staff, ramblers, dogwalkers and the opposition. I think too Mrs Shoebridge's excellent fare also played a part in smoothing things

over later (even after I had my share including five chicken legs/thighs and a specially made cheese and pickle roll).

Like they did when we played them at their place a few weeks ago the substitutions made by Belvedere at half-time seemed to give them a fresh lease of life and it is fair to say they had the better of that half (to balance out our slight dominance in the first). Whilst not quite a war of attrition there was an emphasis on defence rather than attack on our part. We were playing on the break and Andy Faulks had two half-chances that did not give us the badly needed cushion of a third goal. He was clattered by the Belvedere keeper after he had lifted the ball past him and had a goal ruled out for off-side. At the other end Belvedere had a good shout for a Farnborough hand-ball in the box turned down and two of their players got in each other's way to spurn a good scoring opportunity two yards out.

Our problem was that we could not hold the ball up long enough for us to move up the field and Belvedere were adept at probing down our flanks.

A certain volatile Guild player was at the centre of two rather heated incidents with Belvedere players within minutes of each other and other players had to intervene to remove this stain on the game and help the referee out. You might think that these unsavoury interruptions unsettled the rest of our players and made the game last longer than it should – and you could well be right.

This mattered because as we repelled wave after wave of Belvedere attacks, and defended corner after corner we were only two minutes away from the final whistle when Belvedere got their well-deserved equaliser – and it was a cracker, a powerful shot from the edge of the box out of a very crowded space that rifled into the top corner of our net. And that was it. There was much shaking of heads as we took down and stowed the nets away and it was not all about the score.

Next week we are up against the Met Police Supervets and a repeat of today's incidents could have very serious consequences.

Man-of-the-Match – Andy Faulks back to his old self again with a brace of goals.

18 November 2012: Met Police Super Vets (H, 7-1)

Superb Senior Vets hit Met Super Vets for Seven

After last week's incidents on Armistice Day, all was quiet on the western front today. The only disturbance came midway through the first-half when Roger French who had been running the line had to intervene to get young Thomas and Isabelle to toe it in the tent.

It is true to say that we have not had much success down the years against today's opponents and the result was a pleasant surprise. Facing the blue line today Farnborough had: Tom Mihalea in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Chris Bourlet, Ian Coles and Steve Blanchard in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Shoebridge, Nick Waller and Rob Lipscomb in midfield; Andy Faulks and Andy Smith in attack. Waiting in the back of the van round the corner were Roger French, Paul Bell, Paul Smith (his first game this season), and Colin Brazier.

The glorious November sunshine, clear sky and warmth of a still and dry autumnal morning brought out some of our fans: Sharon (Andy Faulks' girlfriend); Jane (Ian Coles' partner); Isabelle and Thomas French encamped on the grassy slopes of Farrow Fields. Also present was Vicky Parsons whose perceptive comments on some of our play in the second half made more sense than what I have heard from most of our own players, and confounded my belief that women do not understand football. We also had a visit from Chris Webb midway through the second half – sadly fearing the worst about his knee injury.

We were quickly into our stride, playing for the first time this season on our big pitch, when the game started and did not allow our opponents to settle as we kettled them in their half. They had arguably the quickest player on the pitch – the youngest looking Vet, let alone Super Vet, I have come across but collectively, and with Ian Coles' pace, we had a fair degree of control on the game. The score was 0-0 when Tom Mihalea had to produce a superb save diving low to his left to keep out a very good long-range shot. This was a reminder that our opponents were not without a sting of their own. Gradually we began to learn how to spring the off-side trap. Paul Bell was running the line with scrupulous fairness – if his loyalties were torn between his employer and his team mates, it did not show. And I think the indiscipline of one of our players in running off-side repeatedly made his job easier.

About fifteen minutes into the game Andy Faulks was released down the left by Andy Smith, he cut in, beat his marker and placed a low shot beyond the keeper. From then on, we scored every five minutes for the next quarter of an hour. Andy Smith got two quick goals from close-range after seeming to take an eternity to shoot and appearing to want to walk the ball into the net and beating several players with feints and dummies (even he felt he had had a bit of a senior moment for our third goal – the painkillers had worn off he thought). Not to be outdone Andy Faulks rattled in our fourth after a splendid solo effort, running with the ball from outside the box, beating two opponents and placing a low left foot shot into the bottom corner that went in off the base of the post.

In between these goals, Sinisa Gracanin had put a great unmarked header wide, three yards out, from an Ian Shoebridge cross. This does not mean we had things entirely our way, although incursions into our box were rare. The Met forced a number of corners mainly from long range shots that Tom kept palmed wide. It was from a corner of our own that we got our fifth – a goal-bound effort rebounded off the bar – there was a bit of a crowd scene on the line and Chris Bourlet was on hand to force the ball over from very close range.

At half-time Patrice Mongelard, Ian Shoebridge and Robin Lipscomb made way for Paul Bell, Colin Brazier and Roger French. Perhaps we thought we'd carry on scoring with regularity but the Met rallied and our opportunities became limited. The changes had unsettled us a little and maybe the Met sensed this as they pressed to get back into the game. In their eagerness to compete one of their players brought down Chief Superintendent Bourlet from behind and said things that would normally attract a caution and he was invited to go and cool off on the naughty bench by referee Mick Gearing. That was not the last word from the Met player.

Even after Andy Faulks had brought us the joy of six after latching on to an astute through pass from Andy Smith to steer the ball low into the net – we were not entirely convincing. The Met got a very good goal when one of our attacks broke down with a ball over the top through the middle. The nippy forward was driven wide as Steve B chased him down but struck a powerful low shot that rebounded off Tom's outstretched leg to nestle in the top corner. Paul Smith came on for Andy Smith; Robin Lipscomb and Ian Shoebridge re-joined the game as Chris Bourlet and Nick Waller departed – with about half an hour left. We lost our cutting edge five minutes later when Andy Faulks came off with a nosebleed and Roger French went to play up front as Patrice Mongelard shored up the left side of our defence.

The last fifteen minutes did not yield any more goals as several players (French, Bell, Lipscomb) missed opportunities, scuffed shots, or drew good saves from the Met keeper. Colin Brazier had a good header that was saved but in another month without the Movember tache getting in the way, could have hit the back of the net. There was time for the Met player who had been sin-binned to get back on the pitch and get involved in an unsavoury exchange with Rob Lipscomb. It must be hard for a team used to laying down the law and not taking prisoners to take defeat well; however, this was one exception – the rest of the team were fine and there was no ill feeling after the game.

Our fans will have heard Rob Lipscomb "Keep our Shape" many times through the game – surely some sort of mantra from a personal trainer I thought, as he could not possibly be referring to our team formation as he is the least fixed point in it. It was left to Ian Shoebridge, in the final minutes, to show our pseudo strikers how to do it as he lashed a left foot shot into the net from the edge of the box as he made the most of a poor clearance from the Met keeper.

The après-match atmosphere was a bit muted I felt because we had only two teams playing at Farrow Fields today and many of the Met Police players had left when I emerged from the two changing rooms I swept with the help of Isabelle and Thomas French – both of whom earned a free drink for their contribution. Still, it meant plenty of food was available – I decided to celebrate today's win by having one chicken leg for every goal we scored to accompany my specially prepared cheese and pickle roll. Pity Roger French did not manage to score on what was his 200th game (even games when one is sent off count). On today's evidence I sincerely hope he does not have to wait another two hundred games before he scores again.

Pam Shoebridge's copious fare was a welcome sight to some of our Young Vets - returning to the club after experiencing Sunday morning glory too, with a 5-1 away win against Inter Vyagra.

Man-of-the-Match – we had a brace in fact, in Andy Faulks and Andy Smith who will never again have such an agreeable brush with the law.

2 December 2012: Old Tamponians Super Vets (A, 3-2)

Old Tamponians Super Vets unable to hold back Senior Vets who come from behind to win

“Football wins” said Paul Bell on a day when the bright sunshine got at the early morning frost (with a delayed kick-off courtesy of the referee). In a sense it did, as a well-contested game played in very good spirit left us feeling rather pleased to get maximum away points against opponents that have proved quite difficult to beat in the past.

The Farnborough team that Old Tamponians were aiming to stop today consisted of Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Nick Waller, Steve Blanchard and Mick O’Flynn in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Shoebridge, Mehmet Bozyigit and Paul Bell in midfield; Andy Faulks and Andy Smith in attack. Roger French was our twelfth man with Ian Coles held up somewhere by a blockage on the M25.

The extended warm-up was rather pleasant on a bright, sunny, dry and still day and we could sense the ground getting softer as we passed the ball around and took shots at goal wondering if we’d look that good when actual play started. In one way we did, and in another we did not. We knew that Old Tamponians moved the ball about well and we sought to match them. The early chances were ours: a Sinisa Gracanin surge in the box, and a thumping header by Andy Smith from a Mehmet Bozyigit corner were the highlights and initial signs of promise. We felt comfortable but without really dominating the play.

It was a surprise when Old Tamponians took the lead about ten minutes into the match. A mix-up on the right of our defence saw the overlapping left-back from Old Tamponians advance to the edge of our box and from out wide send over a cross that did not seem dangerous or destined for anyone until Gary Fentiman made it look like a cunningly disguised shot that squirmed out of his grasp and trickled over the line. As Gary pounded the now softer turf it was clear that he was disappointed with the way he had dealt with the situation. Five minutes later, another Farnborough moment of carelessness with the ball in the corridor of uncertainty between midfield and back four resulted in a rather well struck shot from twenty yards out that Gary was left to pick out of the back of our net. We could not believe that we were 2-0 down after twenty minutes. We’d had twice as many half chances and shots on goal, and twice as much possession, as our opponents, but had nothing to show for it.

Our collective play and team spirit have been improving in recent weeks and a passing move involving Nick Waller, Patrice Mongelard, Andy Smith was crowned with a well-taken goal from close-range by Sinisa Gracanin who had anticipated Andy’s through ball, penetrated the Old Tamponians box, beat the defender with some neat footwork and placed the ball low into the bottom corner. The last twenty minutes or so of the half were a bit of a purple patch for us. Ian Coles had finally arrived and moved to the centre of our defence as Paul Bell made way. Andy Smith played Mehmet Bozyigit through with an exquisite ball that was begging to be put away but Mehmet blazed the ball over the bar from ten yards out. Our belief that we would get back on terms was vindicated when Mick O’Flynn produced an audacious thirty-yarder from out wide on our right to connect with a Nick Waller lay-off and take everyone by surprise, not least the Old Tamponians keeper as the ball dropped into the net at the near post with a minimum of fuss. The game was delicately poised at half-time but we had more cause for optimism.

Patrice Mongelard made way for Roger French after the oranges as both teams sought to break the deadlock. The first fifteen minutes of the second half were largely inconclusive from both

sides but with Farnborough having to defend more than attack (including a very good last-ditch tackle from Roger French in the six-yard box). Things did not look too bright for us when Andy Faulks took himself off – saying he was not feeling 100% having had a bug for the last couple of weeks. He was not quite his normal self and the energy and hunger were not there. Paul Bell came on for Andy and went up to create space in the opposition box in that unique manner of his – more on that later.

I thought to myself at that point that a draw would not be bad result. Old Tamponians were coping with the flow of our attacks and causing problems of their own in our defence. Midway through the half Patrice Mongelard came on as the holding midfielder to replace Nick Waller. We had something to defend then as Paul Bell had yet again found space in the box after some good work on the left by Mehmet Bozigit, and turned to convert a half chance from about six yards out – once again in the right place at the right time to give us a lead that was deserved and all the sweeter as we had reversed a two-goal deficit.

There was still time for Old Tamponians to seek to force a draw and they had one very good opportunity from six yards out at the far post that thankfully for us was put just wide. We had to defend resolutely and in numbers but we did so with composure and spirit. There was even time for the referee to book Gary Fentiman in the final minutes for time wasting, after he tarried over a goal-kick. It felt odd to see someone other than Roger go into the book, so to speak, but I should report that after seeing red a few weeks ago Roger seems to have mellowed (in the way that dormant volcanoes do sometimes). Still, it makes for a better atmosphere.

The final whistle was greeted with some relief by the Farnborough players and we sauntered off the pitch in the warm sunshine after warm handshakes with worthy opponents whom we expect to test us at Farrow Fields in a fortnight.

After hot showers there was time for cold beer and a tray of sandwiches, and chips and sausages that were placed right in front of me (not just for me though). We debated briefly how far out from goal Mick O'Flynn was when he attempted his cross but as he did not buy the match reporter a beer, he'll have to do with thirty yards. It was decided that Ian Shoebridge would break the news of Gary Fentiman's booking to Vic Farrow face-to-face.

Man-of-the-Match – Ian Shoebridge full of running that Old Tamponians could not staunch.

9 December 2012: Orpington Vets (A, 2-1)

Senior Vets win Beckenham wacky races, and local derby

“Don’t be late for my birthday lunch” said Mrs M as I left for what I thought would be a straightforward outing in well-known surroundings but against new opponents even though you could say they were our closest geographical rivals. Geographically it turned to be an interesting day.

I suppose we should have sensed something was not quite right when we had a clubhouse and dressing rooms at an away ground (the Beckenham Cricket Club in Foxgrove Road) all to ourselves. Still eleven of us were there at 10:15 and decided we would descend to the changing rooms and get changed for our 10:30 kick-off. I had filled two and a half water bottles when someone appeared who looked like he was in charge and said – “there is no football here today”. He proceeded to tell us that Orpington Vets played at another ground not far from where we were, in Worsley Bridge Road. All we had to do was to go down to the bottom of Foxgrove Road, turn right, then do a left at the mini roundabout, then do a right at the second exit, carry on ahead, look for a big white building, and we’d be there – or words to that effect which went in eleven ears and came out of another eleven as there was a mad unco-ordinated scramble to gather our things and head for our motors. We could have been listening to a Croatian sat nav except that Sinisa Gracanin had cried off with flu. So, we had 13 players in 12 vehicles and the next half hour was like something created by that other French bloke – Jacques Tati, as cars got lost, separated, retraced their steps (that should be wheels surely) stopped, phone calls were made and the illuminating message came through the ether from Vic Farrow to tell us that we had gone to the wrong ground. The trouble was that other traffic got in the way (how inconsiderate) and Worsley Bridge Road was not only very long but has a very high density of football pitches (probably higher than Hackney Marshes). By then we were well past 10:30 and Mrs M’s words were beginning to weigh mighty heavy on my mind and the thought of going back home was starting to acquire some merit except that I had somehow grabbed the kit on the way out. However, it was as if some sort of homing instinct took us back by our separate ways to the original Foxgrove premises. Our calmest, coolest, most placid and even-tempered representative Roger French went in to get fresh instructions from the oracle that had spoken earlier.

Yes – you must have guessed by now we somehow made it. I was told that our opponents had been out on the road by the entrance to the ground flagging down all cars with people who looked like they might be Vets looking for a game of football. I cannot be sure what time we started the match. It must have been around 11:00 and there was no time to warm up on a heavy pitch.

The Farnborough team that eventually and hurriedly took the field comprised Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard and Mick O’Flynn in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Mehmet Bozyigit, John Tallis and Nick Waller in midfield; Andy Faulks and Andy Smith in attack. Roger French and Paul Bell would join the game later.

After his little contretemps with a referee in our game against Inter Vyagra Super Vets a few weeks ago, Roger French now operates a stopwatch on the sidelines and that told us that the first-half lasted 37 minutes. In that time, we had a very good game between two evenly matched sides playing a passing game and with defences generally on top. Even though we were playing up the hill the momentum was more with us than our opponents and the early scoring chances came and went for us.

Ian Shoebridge opened the scoring after twenty minutes after a good pass from Mick O'Flynn had anticipated Ian's well-timed run into space. Ian had beaten the Orpington off-side trap and had time to control the ball, steady himself and pick his spot as he floated a delicate chip over the keeper's head into an empty net. The game had barely restarted after Ian's goal when he was substituted with Paul Bell taking his place. By then in fact both substitutes had been on as Roger French had already made a cameo appearance up front as Andy Smith went for some emergency repairs before coming back on to the pitch.

Ten minutes later we forced a corner and Patrice Mongelard went to take it with his right foot. There was a fairly helpful breeze blowing across the field and the Orpington keeper was not as tall as our Gary. What followed took everyone by surprise as Patrice Mongelard curled the ball in with the right amount of elevation and pace inside the top corner at the near post with the Orpington keeper unable to adjust his position and cover that small window of opportunity. My celebrations left Orpington in no doubt that I do not score often and I was very pleased to give my team a two-goal cushion. Equally pleasing, if not more so, was to put a bit of daylight between myself and Roger French still waiting for his first goal this season after several fruitless attempts up front.

We had something to defend after half-time as John Tallis made way for Roger French now playing at left-back while Patrice Mongelard moved into midfield to tighten things up. What followed was 40 minutes of lively football as Orpington made valiant efforts to get back into the game. They scored a good goal with a well-placed shot from the edge of the box that eluded the outstretched arms of our six-foot three keeper midway through that half. They nearly equalised but for a diving save on the line by Gary to clutch a looping ball that fell behind him with three Orpington players closing in to apply the final touch.

At the other end, Paul Bell had a couple of good half chances in one-on-ones with the keeper. He also fashioned an acrobatic half-volley that would have brought greater reward but for the positioning of the Orpington keeper following another corner from Patrice Mongelard that unsettled the Orpington defence. Andy Faulks and Mehmet Bozyigit nearly broke free to finish intelligent through balls from Andy Smith. John Tallis and Ian Shoebridge came back on (for Steve Blanchard and Nick Waller) and gave us fresh wind as we defended with conviction and desire and in the end, Orpington ran out of time (you could say time started running on them earlier in the day). It was pleasing to see a collective effort as our forwards and wide midfielders rolled their sleeves up to protect our three points. We just edged it and look forward to playing Orpington again.

I left immediately after the game for reasons I have explained and missed the opportunity to take my team mates through my goal but it will keep for next week – by which time there'll be some extra yardage gained. The kit too can wait even though I had intended to take it home today to begin my defence of the Dot Cotton Award. I did take some kit home after all as I travelled home in my kit – no time to waste. I cannot say if there was any après-match hospitality but I was able to celebrate my belter of a goal with a surf & turf platter and a nice cold beer in a local establishment that I had no trouble finding. I will also have no trouble finding the pitch for next Sunday's game as we welcome Old Tamponians to Farrow Fields.

Man-of-the-Match – Ian Coles for a turbo-charged performance at the back.

16 December 2012: Old Tamponians Super Vets (H, 3-1)

Senior Vets come through to win against Old Tamponians Super Vets in tight affair

It was 14 days ago that we faced Old Tamponians Super Vets at their ground for a narrow win and here they were at Farrow Fields only a fortnight later visiting us. We were expecting a close game and so it transpired.

Our pre-match preparations were more leisurely this week in anticipation of the game on our big pitch - a tribute to our ground staff after so much recent heavy rain and well able to cope with a second game in less than twenty-four hours - in very good conditions for football – clear skies, no wind and without any signs of the Beast from the East remaining.

The Farnborough contingent today consisted of Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard and Mick O'Flynn in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Mehmet Bozyigit, Sinisa Gracanin and Nick Waller in midfield; Andy Faulks and Andy Smith in attack. Roger French, Chris Bourlet and Colin Brazier waited for their time to come. John Tallis was late and in fact did not show.

Vicky Parsons, Thomas French, and Jane (Ian Coles' partner) were the home support to match the away support that had travelled to the game and took up station in the away dug out.

Quite how we did not score in the first-half hour will remain a mystery. Twice Andy Smith had fashioned shooting chances in the opening ten minutes only to put the ball wide. Andy Faulks had not one, not two, but three gilt-edged chances to give us the lead. We were in control of the game, attacking down both flanks and coping at the back with what Old Tamponians had to offer. It came as a bit of a surprise when Old Tamponians took the lead on the half hour with the best goal of the game. They got the better of us in that corridor of uncertainty between the defence and the midfield and the ball was laid back expertly and invitingly just outside our box in a central position for their best player (I thought) in midfield to hit a first time shot, with more accuracy than power but no little finesse beyond Gary Fentiman into the top corner. You might think we had invited this reverse of fortune by making two defensive changes immediately before with Steve Blanchard and Mick O'Flynn making way for Colin Brazier and Chris Bourlet. I disagree; our collective play and strength in depth are now good enough to cope with these changes – so I think it is fairer to say that Old Tamponians had the quality to surprise us in this way and perhaps we got a bit complacent even though we kept missing good chances and really should have been 2 or 3 goals up by the time they registered.

We knew from two weeks ago that we had the wherewithal to come back against our opponents. When our equaliser came, it was deserved but perhaps a tad fortuitous. From a Farnborough corner, Andy Smith had improvised in a crowded box with a clever back heel to propel the ball against the angle of bar and post and Nick Waller was on hand to head the rebound across the goal against the base of the other post from where it bounced back, we thought, into the arms of the keeper but he was unable to keep it from squirming out of his grasp and over the line as he stumbled forward. It was a bit untidy but gratefully received, in particular by Nick Waller (his 186th goal for Farnborough).

The game was well-poised at half-time when Roger French came on for Mehmet Bozyigit. However, we found ourselves pegged back and the flow of the game was with Old Tamponians. In general, they had a better second period of the game whilst we claimed the first (despite the scoring). They forced several corners and came close to scoring – not least when their nippy

pony-tailed full-back twice broke clear into our box but thankfully was by his own admission one of those people who could not finish (though I noted he was still there in the bar at the finish – which we always like to see the opposition do).

Ian “I’ve got two” Coles held firm at the back. By the way, most of us as far as I know have got two also but that is not something to shout over the rooftops. Still, he could have meant that he had two linesmen – because at some point in the second half Mick O’Flynn was sharing the job with Thomas French and some delays in communication could have cost us. Incidentally Thomas was voted unanimously linesMan-of-the-Match. In fact, young Thomas is showing promise – he can now sort out the money after the game and can also write the names of the players on the board – soon dad will be surplus to requirements. Who says the Senior Vets do not have a youth policy?

Patrice Mongelard made way for Steve Blanchard on the hour and went to give a performance with the linesman’s flag which explains young Thomas French’ accolade. Once again as we did two weeks ago, we were to nick a decisive goal in that half. The re-insertion of Mehmet Bozyigit (for Andy Smith), Mick O’Flynn (for Ian Shoebridge) and later Ian Shoebridge (for Roger French who had migrated upfront in search of that elusive goal) turned the tide in our favour. Andy Faulks had missed yet another one-on-one and must have thought this was not his time of the month but he was there to tap-in a cut-back from Mehmet Bozyigit after excellent approach play involving Ian Coles, Gary Fentiman, Colin Brazier and Sinisa Gracanin had unhinged the Old Tamponians defence. We had chances to put the game beyond Old Tamponians with late chances that were missed by Ian Shoebridge and Mehmet Bozyigit. Patrice Mongelard was back on for the last ten minutes to replace a hamstrung Steve Blanchard and we preserved our advantage to the final whistle blown by referee Mick Gearing who had one of his easiest games to referee such was the spirit in which the game was played – there was only one mistimed tackle in that game and not a single angry word was heard from anyone, not even from you know who.

With only two teams playing at Farrow Fields today there was plenty of Pam Shoebridge’s excellent grub to go round. There was space also for Vic Farrow to update the contents of a first aid kit bag – out of which popped a December 2009 newsletter and first aid supplies going back to 1909 (I just made this up). There was time to welcome a couple of our Young Vets back from a 12-0 away win (against opponents who will remain nameless). I could not help wondering whether our 2-1 win had been more satisfying. I know which one I’d prefer.

Man-of-the-Match – Ian Coles who now has two MoM awards in consecutive weeks. I know we have to vote for our own players but if Old Tamponians asked us today to vote for their Man-of-the-Match – it would unquestionably be their goal-keeper. He soaked up everything we threw at him, pulling off some incredible saves to block, stop, staunch us at close-range and in one-on-ones. He did not deserve to be on the losing side but then neither did we. With four consecutive wins and an unbeaten run stretching back to 28 October we hope Father Christmas has something left for us for our next game on 23 December at the ground where we first went last Sunday except that this time, we think we will be welcomed there.

23 December 2012: Wellcome Super Vets (A, 3-1)

Senior Vets unwrap early Christmas present with comfortable win

All week we had been watching the dark heavy clouds unload on the Orpington area (and elsewhere) and wondering if we would have the opportunity to continue our rich vein of form. The silver lining was that this was an away game and we knew from a recent flying visit to Wellcome's ground that there were grounds for hope on the well-drained and well-kept pitches at Beckenham Cricket Club in Foxgrove Road. I had been keeping an eye also on the Mayan calendar but it had not said anything about both Farnborough Vets teams playing on the same Sunday at the same ground against the two Wellcome Vets sides. A consequence of this was that we ended up playing on the smaller pitch (and probably the better surface given where the wickets are). In the end it was quite mild, dry, sunny even at times and although there was a bit of a breeze this was one of the best pitches we have played on this season even if its size suited our opponents better than us.

The norovirus and Christmas schedule had reduced our numbers to twelve – and the Farnborough drummers today were: Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard and Mick O'Flynn in defence; John Tallis, Mehmet Bozyigit, Sinisa Gracanin and Nick Waller in midfield; Andy Faulks and Ian Shoebridge in attack. A wan Roger French ran the line.

An unfit Andy Smith turned up to watch the first-half and Jane (Ian Coles' partner) was there for both halves and après-match. She also brought Christmas presents for Isabelle and Thomas French – a sweet thought as they truly deserve a present (if you get my drift). In return, I hope Santa brings Jane a Cath Kidson bag (Ian - ahem).

It was very clear from the start that we had the better individual and collective movement and that we could expect most of the play would be in the Wellcome half. The game was barely five minutes old when a throw-in from Patrice Mongelard played Sinisa Gracanin in on goal but he was not able to get his shot on target. If anything, we lacked a bit of composure and did not make our pressure tell. It was against the run of play that Wellcome fashioned the clearest scoring opportunity of the opening fifteen minutes when a break down the right of our defence saw the ball played across goal to the Wellcome forward with the intelligent movement only a yard out and with the goal seemingly at his mercy. It took a virtuoso save with his feet from Gary Fentiman to prevent us from going behind.

Thankfully we heeded the warning. A smart bit of inter-passing left Andy Faulks unmarked on the edge of the box and he placed a delightful lob over the keeper into the net. Five minutes later Andy back-heeled the ball into the path of Sinisa Gracanin gliding into the Wellcome box to place a low shot beyond the keeper. That was our best spell of the game – we forced several corners and it did not take very long for Andy Faulks to get his name on the score sheet again. Nick Waller cut the ball back from the left to Patrice Mongelard who advanced to the corner of the Wellcome box before unleashing a powerful low shot that the Wellcome keeper parried but could not hold and Andy pounced on the loose ball like the predator he can be to give us a comfortable and deserved 3-0 lead.

At that point there was a touch of complacency that crept into our game. The referee initially awarded a penalty for an Ian Coles hand-ball in the box (even though it felt like a ball to chest situation) but he was eventually persuaded that contact was on the edge of the box. Nothing came of the free-kick but five minutes later there was another penalty given against us – rightly this time even though Gary Fentiman thought it was a 50:50 situation as he rushed out to

intercept a ball at the feet of the Wellcome forward with the smart moves. The problem was that Gary was not first to the ball and one 50 was the forward's right leg and the other 50 his left leg. Gary redeemed himself by saving the penalty diving low to his right but as the Farnborough defence had decided to pay tribute to the Easter Island stone carvers at that very moment – the Wellcome penalty taker was the first and only player on the scene to lash the ball into the net.

We had a good opportunity to restore our three-goal lead when Mehmet Bozyigit ghosted in from the right behind the Wellcome defence, took possession of a clever Ian Shoebridge through ball, rounded the keeper, but as he only uses his left foot to stand on, he had to re-adjust his position and the narrow angle did him no favours - his shot came back off the crossbar above an empty net. Mehmet was a little unlucky today – another of his runs behind the defence had seen him through and clear on goal but the referee had blown for off-side (wrongly as he apologised for straight away). It turns out that the referee John Pearce was an old friend of Vic Farrow's and we passed on his Christmas tidings to Vic. The game was played in excellent Christmas spirit even though Andy Faulks seemed to attract a fair number of tackles, but then again it was Faulks' fault for holding on to the ball too much.

The second half was very much a hit and miss affair. Roger French came on for John Tallis as we reshuffled the side. Roger had a part in the woeful shot that Andy Faulks attempted from the half way line as the second half whistle blew. In a sense this set the tone for our half. We had plenty of chances but none were converted. Sinisa Gracanin had what a neutral observer would call two sitters but both were missed. The first one was a delightful move involving three or four players that carved the Wellcome defence open and deserved a goal. Roger French had a header that drew a smart save from the keeper and there was a pile driver from Andy Faulks that caught the eye with the keeper equal to it. We even had the ball in the Wellcome net courtesy of John Tallis who came back on for Nick Waller but the goal was ruled off-side.

To their credit Wellcome defended better in the second half and whilst they never created a clear scoring opportunity, we needed to be careful and vigilant at the back. The wind got up a bit and the game got a bit scrappy. Still, we'll take the 3-1 win, our fifth consecutive win, a rare feat which I cannot recall in my long memory of 400+ games for the Farnborough Vets. Meanwhile on the other pitch our Young Vets were edged out by the odd goal in a nine-goal thriller. But if you aggregate today's scores over both games you could say that Farnborough won 7-6.

The Wellcome hospitality afterwards lived up to their name as a steaming plate of sausages, mini stone-baked pizzas, chips and onion rings (or as Mick O'Flynn imagined, calamari rings) arrived and was duly dealt with.

Man-of-the-Match: Sinisa Gracanin (despite two shocking misses) but at least Ian Shoebridge and I know he got the Mrs something nice for Christmas but she does not know yet (unless she reads this report on the club website before Tuesday).

One more game we hope in 2012 next Sunday as we seek to recover from the mince pies, turkey etc. My letter to Santa asked him to make sure Paul Bell does not have any sprouts.

6 January 2013 : Old Colfeians Vets (A, 1-7)

A very difficult start to the year for under-strength Senior Vets who are hammered

It cannot get any worse surely. At 5-0 down at half-time we feared a rugby score was in the offing but even if we kept it to single figures this was not a good day in the office. We knew we were struggling to get a side out with several regulars missing and our dressing room felt like the Old Cougheians had turned up. Our opponents seemed healthier than us, and in keeping with the surroundings had at least XV players for the one pitch not given to the oval ball on their home ground.

We could only muster twelve players - Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Nick Waller and Chris Bourlet in defence; John Tallis, Mehmet Bozyigit, Rob Lipscomb and Paul Bell in midfield; Andy Faulks and Jack Kamenou in attack. A coughing and spluttering Roger French ran the line.

Given how the game went, it was ironic that the first goal opportunity fell to us (after only five minutes) as Paul Bell saw his shot come back off the post as he latched on to a John Tallis headed flick from a throw-in. That was I think the closest we came to scoring in the first half. The rest of the half we chased shadows as Old Colfeians passed the ball around, injecting a lot of pace particularly down the right side of our defence with the youngest and nippiest "Vet" I've come up against, and playing the ball behind our leaden-footed defence for forwards and midfielders to run on to.

It took a few good saves from Gary to keep scores level for the first fifteen minutes or so. Their first goal came from one of the many corners they forced in that half and we gave them a bit of help with it, as Rob Lipscomb playing his first game for weeks after his mishap with a jigsaw, made his first telling contribution of the game by bringing down an opponent in the box as we scrambled to clear the ball. Before the game Rob was saying that he had noted how our performances had improved since his accident.

The penalty was scored as if by a pro – and after that the goals were rattled in quite quickly all from close-range – several of them fashioned by their unplayable youthful left winger. We did not really threaten their goal at all in that half – except for a shot from distance from Patrice Mongelard after he had intercepted a pass out of the Old Colfeians defence but their giant keeper (this was a rugby club after all) was equal to it.

The mood at half-time was sombre indeed. Roger French came on for Chris Bourlet. Old Colfeians made three or four changes which they could afford to make – taking their foot off the pedal a bit I thought. In fact, the second half proved more of a contest - even though things did threaten to boil over when Rob Lipscomb and an Old Colfeians player I shall return to, forgot this was not a game of rugby. And there was the obligatory tackle from Roger French that resulted in an altercation that thankfully did not fester. On the whole, the game was played in good spirit – well as good as it can be given the scoreline. But even that did not stop the Old Colfeians player mentioned above – skilful midfielder, full head of dark hair, unlined face, cultured left foot – from doing a rather churlish and graceless thing as he refused to fetch the ball after he and it had gone behind our goal. It was only a few yards away. I saw him as I was leaving the ground – a few yards away as his car had got stuck in the copious mud. There was no one around to help him. If only he had picked that ball up, I thought.

Back to the football – we had more of the second half. We scored one good goal when Andy Faulks finished a four-man move from close-range as we, for once, outnumbered the Old Colfeians defence in their box. Roger French and Rob Lipscomb had very good chances to narrow the scores but could not finish. Mehmet Bozyigit and Jack Kamenou saw more of the ball and used it better. True we let in two goals more but they did not feel as bad as the five we had let in earlier because we defended better. So, pride was restored to some extent even though it hurt to end our run of five consecutive victories in such an emphatically dismal manner. Still, at least it did not rain and it was not a cold day.

More grief was to come though. Sadly, the game finished prematurely as with about five minutes left Jack Kamenou fell awkwardly from a challenge and dislocated his shoulder in the middle of the park. Ian Coles, and partner Jane, once again came forward to help an injured Farnborough player in distress and took him to hospital. After that there was not much to say really. The mood at full time was even more sombre.

We wish Jack a speedy recovery. It is especially hard to see players who are helping out because we are short - get injured.

It was revealed to Roger French in the bar that Old Colfeians had not only lined up a father and son combination against us today but also had an ex-professional player leading their front line - a bit of a sledgehammer to crack a Christmas nut if you ask me, given the high quality of their play without the extra support. They deserved to win the game no question but there was probably no need to go to such lengths to make sure.

Man-of-the-Match: Gary Fentiman – because of, not despite, the seven goals he let in.

Next week we are up against Inter Vyagra and a limp performance like today will not do. We have amends to make, not only for today, but more importantly because they beat us 4-3 at their ground in October.

13 January 2013: Inter Vyagra Super Vets (H, 2-0)

Senior Vets score twice with a clean sheet against Inter Vyagra Super Vets

In the end, our worries about the icy weather came to nothing and the game went ahead. It was on the cold side but there was not much wind, it was dry, the pitch was in fine fettle and the illusion of small snow-flakes dissipated, and the last quarter of an hour was even played in comforting winter sunshine – and our showers were the hottest any one could remember in a long while.

We played in a changed strip of white and black but with the Farnborough crest on the shirt so that Roger French would have a badge to kiss in the unlikely event of him scoring. Our strength in depth was severely tested particularly between the sticks with three players who have kept goal for us all unavailable, including Gary Fentiman who missed the opportunity to exorcise a 70-yard October howler against today's opponents. But Daren Burkett stepped up to the plate and what a safe pair of hands he proved to be to give us our first clean sheet of the season. The other unfamiliar name in our line-up was Scott Dowie, ex-Buff player now looking for a new perch.

Our starting line-up was Darren Burkett in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Mick O'Flynn and Scott Dowie in defence; Nick Waller, Mehmet Bozyigit, Rob Lipscomb and Paul Bell in midfield; Andy Faulks and Ian Shoebridge in attack. Roger French ran the line while Ian Coles got changed for the second time. Ian would have started the game – he arrived late but it looked like he had got changed in the car but the trouble was that he was wearing last week's bacon and egg kit (presumably laundered since). So, Scott Dowie had the first fifteen minutes while Ian kept Florence, sorry - Jane warm on the touchline, before coming on. Also keeping warm but in their familiar tent were Isabelle and Thomas French with guest Master George Dowie (one of them was hit by the ball in that tent in the first-half and they wisely vacated it for the second half to have, unwisely, a water fight with the water bottles). This was the same tent that was the subject of an abrupt conversation, between Roger French and an Inter Vyagra player in October - but I gather was Roger was more gracious to the same individual before today's game.

Commander Mick Gearing got the game underway with the usual minimum of fuss and we set about avenging last October's defeat. Inter Vyagra had come to get something out of the game judging by the intensity of their pre-match team talk (an art Roger French has yet to master). They defended in numbers, and deep, and were quite happy to let us have the ball and play most of the game in their half. We had the better passing and movement in the early exchanges and indeed for most of the first-half and for some time it looked like that was all we would have. Andy Faulks had missed a very good scoring opportunity when he side-footed the ball wide from three yards out after a quarter of an hour. Paul Bell blazed the ball over the bar from close-range soon after Ian Shoebridge had flicked a Patrice Mongelard lofted pass into his path. It appeared, to coin a phrase, that we had a lot of foreplay but no penetration. Footballers will, of course, know this means we had plenty of possession, the passing was fluent, in the right zones, but the final ball was lacking and we never had enough bodies in the box to climax the move.

We were though getting quite a bit of joy down the right and it was from there that we forced yet another corner twenty minutes into the game. Andy Faulks loitered just outside the box, not quite in David Beckham territory but on the edge of the corridor of uncertainty. There was nothing uncertain though as he met the ball from the right with a sweet and crisp low volley that propelled the ball low into the bottom corner of the net.

We did not think that one goal would be enough and the cushion of a second one was very much on our minds as we pressed Inter Vyagra back into their half. Ten minutes later, our second goal arrived and this too was technically a thing of beauty as Robin Lipscomb with his back to goal in the 6-yard box delivered an overhead kick that the Inter Vyagra keeper could only watch as it looped over and nestled in the back of the net. There was no mistaking the identity of the scorer (as I had mistaken the identity of the player who gave away the penalty against Old Colfeians last week).

It was not all one-way traffic. Darren Burkett was not entirely idle in our goal and had to intervene once or twice to gather crosses and tip shots away for corners. For an occasional keeper, Darren made the job surprisingly easy with good positioning, anticipation and distribution. Rob Lipscomb cleared a goal bound header off our line from an Inter Vyagra corner and bar a long range shot that was narrowly wide we felt at 2-0 up at half-time that we had coped well.

The second half was a different affair, though goalless. Patrice Mongelard and Paul Bell had made way for Roger French and Scott Dowie and we had a new left side. But that was not the reason for the regression in our play. We dropped deep, ceded the midfield to Inter Vyagra and gave them hope. It was tense for quite a while. Darren made some good interventions under the appreciative eyes of wife, daughter and grandson. I am not sure that there were any clear scoring opportunities for either side in that second half. Roger French reminded me that he had the ball in the net but that was long after referee Mick Gearing had blown the whistle for off-side – so sadly it will not count as Roger played another barren spell up front to where he migrated on the hour as Scott Dowie and Nick Waller made way for the return of Paul Bell and in particular Patrice Mongelard to shore up our defence.

We deserved our win undoubtedly but we did not make it look easy and our visitors must take credit for this. A well-contested game was played in good spirit throughout and it was good to see our opponents enjoy our post-match hospitality - as I did with the foresight of a pre-order placed with Pam Shoebridge for a cheese and pickle roll, several chicken legs and thighs, and a slice of pizza. Inter Vyagra had sharpened the appetite. There was not much food left for some of our Young Vets returning with a 3-3 away draw to Princes Park Vets under their belt.

Man-of-the-Match: Ian Shoebridge for a dynamic performance tirelessly linking midfield and attack.

Next week we are away to Baltic Exchange – not a happy hunting ground for us – but we would still rather not lose the game to the Beast from the East so once again will be weather-watching all week.

3 February 2013: Staplehurst & Monarchs Vets (H, 4-4)

Senior Vets snatch draw from jaws of victory in 8-goal thriller

In the end, the Farnborough clay proved porous enough to allow this game to be played at Farrow Fields and a third consecutive void week was avoided. The absence of rain in the last 48 hours and the stiff breeze helped. I hesitate to say that the absence of co-manager Roger French away on family business in Devon, a despatching and a matching on consecutive days, also helped (I might not have been there in person but kept a very close eye on proceedings all through the week to ensure a contingency plan was in place, just so you know - Statler). Still, it was going to be interesting to see if we could despatch our opponents in today's match. We had cause to be apprehensive as Staplehurst & Monarchs are a quality outfit that travel in large numbers. It was a surprise when referee Mick Gearing said that they had the bare eleven (figuratively speaking, of course, as they wore black and red, thankfully not too much of a clash with our yellow and red).

We started with Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Mick O'Flynn and Ian Coles in defence; Nick Waller, Mehmet Bozyigit, Rob Lipscomb and John Tallis in midfield; Andy Faulks and Ian Shoebridge in attack. We ran both lines with Paul Bell and Danny Winter (making a long overdue comeback) on patrol in the first half. Andy Smith had clearly not recovered from flu to join us and Andy Faulks looked like he still had to recover from a Saturday night that left him a bit confused as to where he woke up (and who with) on the Sunday morning. I took advantage of his confusion to insist he took the kit home today, for the first time after 18 matches. I was beginning to think he did suffer from hydrophobia after all!

It was very clear as soon as the game started that Staplehurst had brought quality even if quantity was missing and a difficult contest lay ahead of us. Both sides aspired to an intelligent passing game. Defences remained on top on both sides and a cat and mouse game developed in midfield where we were occasionally outnumbered because our two wide midfielders Mehmet Bozyigit and Rob Lipscomb did not appear to have read the bit of their job description which said what they had to do when we did not have the ball – namely get behind the ball, tuck in and help the defence and central midfielders.

Our first goal arrived about 15 minutes into the game – from an unexpected source and with a little hint of controversy as Stephen Blanchard found himself in the right place in the box to crown an excellent corner from Mehmet Bozyigit with a close-range shot that left the Staplehurst keeper grasping at thin air. Referee Mick Gearing ignored the Staplehurst suspicions of hand-ball (or knock-on on this Six Nations weekend). Still Mick ignored our calls for off-side five minutes later as a Staplehurst forward ran on to a simple ball lofted over our defence, after one of our attacking solutions had broken down our right leaving us rather exposed, to beat Gary and bring the scores level.

Five minutes later, we were 2-1 down after a passage of play that would have left Gary profoundly disappointed with himself. He rushed out to the edge of his box to hoof a through ball up the field, kicked fresh air and left the Staplehurst forward with one of the easiest goals he'll ever score as he walked the ball into a vacant net behind a thoroughly embarrassed adult. The same player, the best on the pitch today, was to get one of the most difficult goals later.

Still, we rallied and plugged away at it. Our equaliser came in the shape of an excellent shot from the edge of the box into the top corner from Andy Faulks; and just before half-time, Andy, no

longer confused, crowned a solo run with an excellent and deadly shot from the edge of the box low into the bottom corner which wrong-footed the Staplehurst keeper to restore our lead.

Mick O'Flynn and Rob Lipscomb made way for Paul Bell and Danny Winter at half-time. We proceeded to have a purple patch of twenty to twenty-five minutes when we created many chances that we simply could not finish. We ran Staplehurst ragged down the channels. Andy Faulks hit the post, Paul Bell came close with rebounds, Andy had a one-on-one, and Ian Shoebridge waltzed into the Staplehurst box between two defenders and put a low shot just wide. By then we had a good crowd of supporters: Jane (Ian Coles' partner) who was left momentarily in charge of team tactics on a bit of paper, club President Ian Couchman, Steve Durbridge aka Docker recalling his playing days under Commander Gearing, Paul Eddleston (Nick Waller's great mate), and Chris Webb. They will have wondered how we conceded an equaliser amidst all this domination. Yet we did and what a goal it was – the best goal of the day as the most skilful player on the pitch, a silver fox in the Staplehurst midfield with quick feet, arrowed a 25-yarder into the top corner (in the space known as the postage stamp) after we gave the ball away in a dangerous position.

The last twenty minutes or so were very exciting. Nick Waller and Mehmet Bozyigit were replaced by Mick O'Flynn and Rob Lipscomb and we continued to create opportunities that we could not finish. Andy Faulks hit the post and Paul Bell came within a whisker of forcing the ball home from two yards out twice. It was not all one way though. Staplehurst hit the post with a twenty-yarder from their star player. With ten minutes to go Ian Shoebridge broke into the Staplehurst box, rounded the keeper, sold him a dummy and squared the ball on a plate for Paul Bell to slot home from a yard out. Referee Mick Gearing did not bother explaining the off-side law to Staplehurst and we were back in front with a few minutes left. Alas – we could not hold on. You could say we failed, naively, to run down the clock. A bad day in the office for Gary got worse as his goal-kick, tame, central (instead of wide), from the corner of the 18-yard box, fell to an unmarked Staplehurst player thirty-five yards out (in so-called David Beckham territory) who returned it with interest over a scrambling Gary struggling to get back into position, into our net. There was barely time to restart the game.

On balance a draw was a fair result but the manner in which we contributed to the goals scored against us was disappointing (and we failed to capitalise when we were clearly on top). I suspect if someone had offered a draw to Roger French before today's game, he would probably have taken it against difficult opponents. We remain unbeaten in February and showed we had lost none of our fluency after a two week lay-off.

The hot showers were welcome on a cold day. I was reflecting on Mick O'Flynn's company name "Exposed Solutions" when I wondered if we could get him to sponsor the showers. The two rounds of teas (and allegedly coffees) were welcome too. Pam Shoebridge laid on an excellent spread as usual. Sadly, I could not quite do it justice owing to the existence of a roast dinner at home with my name on it, Still I snatched at a handful of chicken legs (so as not to hurt Pam's feelings) washed down by a swift half, ahead of my toposide, Yorkshire pudding, Cabernet Sauvignon and apple tart with vanilla ice cream.

Man-of-the-Match – Andy Faulks (who cannot stop scoring).

10 February 2013: Sanco Super Vets (H, 5-2)

Roger (briefly) & Co. KO Sanco

Before I chronicle today's events I must, by popular demand, own up to having, in the recollection of my team mates, played a not insignificant part in last week's first goal by Staplehurst & Monarchs. It seems I played the scorer on-side. I did not see it myself but then again, I am not sure I want to sound like Arsene Wenger. So, apology offered. Back to today.

We have to be grateful to the Farnborough ground staff and management for being able to play today's game. The surface was not ideal but playable nonetheless in the moisture that hung in the air like a mist, occasionally worsening to the thin drizzle level. A reminder of the precariousness of fixtures at this time of year came with the news that our Young Vets' game was off – their fourth consecutive cancellation. I dread to think what such a sequence would do to Roger French, although he did find a way to disturb the peace. More on “may blow a gasket” French later.

With the welcome return of Sinisa Gracanin and Andy Smith to our ranks we were able to start like this: Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Mick O'Flynn and Ian Coles in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Mehmet Bozyigit, Rob Lipscomb and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Andy Faulks and Andy Smith in attack. Paul Bell, Roger French and Chris Bourlet completed the squad. In the absence of Mick Gearing, Nick Kinnear took the referee's whistle.

We have not had much success against Sanco – particularly playing away, and we like, if possible, to put things right in the home fixture – something we were not able to do for the last two seasons because of the weather.

The pattern of the game was set fairly early – we had a lot of possession, fluent passing and put Sanco on the back foot. It felt like it would only be a matter of time before the dam broke. Our first goal came after a quarter of an hour or so when Mehmet Bozyigit (a constant thorn in Sanco's side) glided into the box from the right wing to collect a perceptive and dangerous through ball from Ian Shoebridge, with his back to the Sanco goal, roll the defender, swivel and lash the ball into the net from no more than five or six yards out. It felt like only a matter of time before the next goal would follow, at the same end, as we buzzed round the Sanco box and took turns to shoot. Sinisa Gracanin put a twenty-yarder against the base of the post and other chances came and went.

We must have got a little too comfortable as Sanco managed to conjure an equaliser much against the run of play, from a ball over the top that Steve Blanchard seemed to have under control as he looked to shepherd it back to Gary in our goal. But Steve had underestimated the power and pace of the burly Sanco forward who caught up with him on the sticky surface and brushed Steve aside (no mean feat) and went on to guide the ball under Gary's body to bring the scores level. For the avoidance of doubt, I should say that I played no part in that goal. But soon after, in a pre-arranged move, I made way for Paul Bell who came to play as a cunningly disguised left-sided attacker from defence.

On the half hour, the same Shoebridge-Bozyigit combination worked its magic with an almost identical move with an intelligent ball from Ian that gave Mehmet his second goal with a low crisp finish. The rest of the half belonged to us. Our superior movement in defence, midfield and up front allowed our passing game to flourish and we caused all sorts of problems to Sanco without

pulling further ahead as Rob Lipscomb, Mehmet, Andy Smith and Andy Faulks all had decent half-chances, with the latter finding the base of the other post in a one-on-one.

Andy Smith gave us the two-goal cushion we deserved ten minutes from half-time when he was found in space he had created on the edge of the box by Andy Faulks, and was unerring with his right foot. 3-1 at half-time was no more than we deserved. Such was the extent of our passing that I commented from the dugout that it was like watching Brazil – only for Ian Coles' partner to point out that it would be warmer in Brazil (and there might be Samba girls too I thought, wistfully).

Roger French and Chris Bourlet came on for Ian Shoebridge and Andy Faulks at half-time. This seemed to unsettle us and Sanco had their best spell in the game, without it must be said creating any clear-cut chances. In fact, the clearest chances fell to us – Paul Bell had a golden opportunity in a one-on-one that the Sanco keeper did well to keep out. Andy Smith fashioned a one-on-one with a barnstorming run from the halfway line but his last touch was a tad heavy and the Sanco keeper intervened. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the Sanco keeper kept the score respectable as they say.

We could not really settle and things got a bit tetchy and after only about fifteen minutes Roger French, who else, got into an altercation with at least two Sanco players and the referee Nick Kinnear had no choice but to let Roger go. Roger took the referee's invitation to leave the pitch and Patrice Mongelard was back on earlier than planned. Immediately we recovered our fluency. It seemed only a matter of time before Paul Bell would put one away but the next goal came from Sanco. One moment we were camped in their box with a corner and the next there was a breakaway down our right and the burly and deceptively quick Sanco forward was able to carry the ball a long way even past our quickest defender, before slipping it past Gary via the post from two yards out. In days gone past, we might have buckled but not anymore. Andy Smith settled our nerves with an exquisite finish, left-footed this time from the edge of the box that found the proverbial postage stamp under the angle of bar and post. Soon after Andy left the pitch saying he had or done enough and Andy Faulks sauntered back on.

The last quarter of an hour was not quite the Alamo but you get the idea. Paul Bell finally got the ball in the net but was (harshly we thought) ruled off-side. Referee Nick Kinnear had to cope with some angry and frustrated Sanco protestations and mutterings but they are not that kind of team and nothing got out of hand. You might say that Nick had lanced the boil earlier.

There was time for a Brazilian moment as Patrice Mongelard playing in an advanced position from left-back, swerved past his marker and threaded a pass of terrible beauty that split the Sanco defence and eased silkily into the path of an unmarked Andy Faulks who was able to put his name on the score sheet by tucking a low shot into the bottom corner. And that was it – a satisfying performance that put us in a good mood to enjoy Pam Shoebridge's fare. Our opponents certainly did and it was good to see so many of them there in the clubhouse and at the bar. It is not true that I consumed as many chicken legs as the whole Sanco team put together. Nor is it true that the chicken came with a label that said "may contain horse". Still, we performed like thoroughbreds today – including our two **Man-of-the-Match** – a fine pair today in Mehmet Bozyigit and Andy Smith, who shared four very good goals between them.

17 February 2013: Catford Wanderers Vets (H, 8-1)

Senior Vets open the floodgates late

Today was a lovely day for football, dry, still, bathed in glorious sunlight, under blue skies - all a bit at odds with the state of the pitch which, whilst not quite looking like the Somme, had seen better days. Once again, we have to be grateful to the Farnborough ground staff and management for being able to play today's game and I was able to pass my thanks in person to grassmeister Keith Beston. Apart from one squidgy area on one side of the centre circle, I could not see any impediment to being able to pass the ball too.

Once again, we mustered fourteen players: Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Mick O'Flynn and Ian Coles in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Mehmet Bozyigit, Rob Lipscomb and John Tallis in midfield; Andy Faulks and Andy Smith in attack. Paul Bell, Roger French and Nick Waller completed the squad. There was an initial frisson of uncertainty mixed with anticipation, about whether Andy Faulks would arrive in time, and in what state, after his risqué birthday celebrations judging by the raunchy reports from some eye-witnesses but he seemed no worse than usual when he appeared with the news that he had scored four times yesterday, playing for his Saturday side, I assume. Mick Gearing was back as the man in black, allegedly with instructions from the upper echelons of the club to send Roger French off at the first whiff of trouble. Former players Trevor Stewart, Nick Kinnear, Chris Webb + two little Webbs, and the two petits Francais in their tent made up our base camp.

Our fans told us that for the first twenty-five minutes the ball was not in our half. I think that is a slight exaggeration but you get the idea. We scored after ten minutes in a fluid clinical move with three passes – as the ball travelled from Gary Fentiman to Patrice Mongelard, hence to Andy Smith before being invitingly transferred into the path of Andy Faulks to be tucked low into the bottom corner. This was no more than we deserved. We managed in that first half of an hour to miss three one-on-ones involving Mehmet Bozyigit, Andy Faulks and Andy Smith, and to hit the post and miss the rebound (John Tallis both times) from a yard out. Despite the sticky pitch in places our passing game was much in evidence with John Tallis and Ian Shoebridge exhibiting much midfield craft, energy and composure. Mick O'Flynn and Mehmet Bozyigit gave the Catford defence a torrid time down the right. I think we led by about five corners to one in that first half-hour and for every Catford pass there were three or four Farnborough ones. This said we lost a bit of our fluency and pace on the half-hour with the introduction of Nick Waller and Paul Bell for John Tallis and Rob Lipscomb. To the uninitiated in the Roger French dark art of substitution, it may have appeared that John was paying the price of failure for missing an open goal from a yard out only moments before the substitution.

In football one goal is rarely enough and a failure to capitalise when on top can be costly. A couple of times Catford had committed numbers down our right, moving at pace towards the goal and creating a genuine goal threat. We did not heed the warning and were exposed on one such break. Although Gary called for the loose ball, he was not able to get to it before the Catford forward, who went round him and calmly guided the ball into an empty net. The last quarter of an hour of the first-half was a very even affair – with our opponents sensing the loss of momentum and uncertainty that had crept into our play. Suddenly, they had more energy and belief and we were no longer dominant. At one point Gary Fentiman made a thirty-yard dash from his line to only just get to a through ball. I pointed out to him in my best Anglo-Saxon vernacular that he acted rashly and foolishly – but he got away with it, on this occasion.

At half-time - to be fair to our opponents - it was difficult to call the result of this game. After a very bright start and a string of missed chances we had let Catford wander back into the game and surely, they would have entertained hopes, at that point, of getting something out of it. We could not quite believe that the scores were level and I went to ruminate about this running the line with my young apprentice Master Thomas French, whilst French père went to see if he could last forty-five minutes without disturbing the entente cordiale. As I commented to young Thomas, we did not really improve in the first few exchanges of that half. I suppose there were two turning points in the game. Firstly, early in that half Rob Lipscomb came back on for Andy Smith who had “forgotten to take his tablets”, and moved into an advanced position. After twenty minutes, John Tallis and Patrice Mongelard came back on for Ian Shoebridge and Ian Coles and we began to recover the poise and panache we had in the first half-hour except this time with the ability to finish. With twenty-five minutes left we finally restored our lead with the second turning point. In a crowd scene from a set-piece Nick Waller found himself unmarked about ten yards from goal, in a wide position from where he caressed a volley with the outside of his left foot into a cunningly disguised flight over the goal-keeper, into the space behind the goal line to beat a despairing lunge by a Catford defender to dig the ball out. Not the prettiest of goals but the most welcome. 2-1 to Farnborough.

So, where you might ask did the next six goals come from? Well, my memory is not quite what it was but I think this was the rapid sequence:

3-1: a crisp passing move ended with a peach of a cross from Mehmet Bozyigit on Rob Lipscomb’s meaty forehead at the far post, without Rob having to break his stride to score.

4-1: Rob intercepted a poor Catford clearance in the area known as the mixer, drove forward and drilled the ball home.

5-1: Rob completes his hat-trick after his first attempt is parried but he gets to the ball while on the ground to force it over the line from close range.

6-1: Rob heads the ball into the path of Mehmet Bozyigit who advances on goal and lashes a low goal-bound shot which beats the keeper but is then helped over the line (to Mehmet’s anguish) by selfish birthday boy Andy Faulks (who was awarded the goal by the dubious goals committee).

7-1: Rob plays Paul Bell in to slide the ball home with a typical poacher’s finish.

8-1: Mehmet gets a richly deserved goal (he had also hit the bar with a rasping shot amidst our feeding frenzy) as he crowns a solo run with a crisp finish into the bottom corner (and no Andy Faulks within ten yards).

As you can imagine, the mood in the clubhouse was buoyant helped in no small way by the warm sunshine which heralded the coming of spring, and Pam Shoebridge’s excellent fare which included 100% beef sandwiches and nothing that was in the 2:40 at Kempton Park last Saturday, if you know what I mean.

Man-of-the-Match – by several furlongs, Rob Lipscomb with three goals and two assists in a devastating second spell on the pitch.

24 February 2013: West Farleigh Vets (H, 7-3)

A taxi for Manchip, a stupendous haircut and Farnborough firepower see off spirited West Farleigh at chilly Farrow Fields

Football fans know that when a taxi is called for a player during a game it is not good. Today we had to call a sort of taxi for a player before the game. News had come in the morning that Darren Burkett had picked up an injury on Saturday and would not be able to add to the only clean sheet we had kept this season. So, Toby Manchip had to be recalled to the side from his indefinite loan spell at short notice. Being the great club man that he is, Toby responded to the SOS and Ian Shoebridge (who lives a few doors up from Toby) was dispatched. He returned without Toby who only wanted a lift to Chelsfield station to pick up his car. Still, it was relief all round when Toby turned up. Relief would not have been the emotion when Mick O'Flynn turned up and took off his woolly hat to reveal the sort of haircut that leaves little hair behind, which I can only describe as medieval (the last time I saw anything like it was when watching the film "In the name of the Rose"). With a papal election in the offing perhaps "Irish Errol" fancied his chances. Still, the sight of Roger French and Mick together caused a few chuckles.

Our shivering thirteen today were Toby Manchip in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Mick O'Flynn and Ian Coles in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Mehmet Bozyigit, Nick Waller and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Andy Faulks and Rob Lipscomb in attack. Roger French and Chris Bourlet completed our happy feet on the side lines. Thomas and Isabelle French + arctic tent, and Jane (Ian's partner) were around but could not be blamed for preferring the warmth of the clubhouse. I am not sure Master Thomas was there all the time despite his linesboy of the match award! Chris Webb appeared in the second half to witness events and contribute to the post-match analysis.

This was not the best surface to play on although we appreciated much work had been done on it during the week. It was drier than last Sunday but much harder and bobbly and some moulded footwear could be seen. There was a cold wind as well that added to the challenging conditions. None the less we had a great start to the game. We were three goals up after twenty-five minutes of sustained pressure, abundant possession, slick passing and good finishing. Mehmet Bozyigit had picked up where he left off last week, perhaps still miffed at the goal that was "stolen" from him, as he found the net after ten, and again after twenty minutes. His first goal came after a shot from Shoebridge could only be parried by the West Farleigh keeper into Mehmet's path for a cool close-range finish. For his second Mehmet had galloped on to a through ball from Andy Faulks for another silky finish. Rob Lipscomb added a third goal after twenty-five minutes with a powerful volley that dipped and came off the underside of the bar into the net.

At that point I could not foresee a West Farleigh rally – even when Ian Shoebridge had to go off injured on the half hour to be replaced by Chris Bourlet. As often happens when Ian departs, we lost cohesion and purpose. Maybe we got complacent, felt that we could overrun the West Farleigh defence which to their credit always tried to play their way out of trouble despite the ease with which we could intercept and win the ball around their box. I should have guessed that things would not be that easy when Andy Faulks missed a one-on-one and later rolled the ball against the post after beating the keeper. One moment we were buzzing round the West Farleigh box and trying to make a corner count, and the next they had broken down our right, left without cover, a bit like Mick O'Flynn's head, and we had conceded a goal despite Toby getting his hand to the scoring shot. A few minutes later we were denied a seen-them-given penalty for hand-ball only for West Farleigh to be awarded one at the other end. Steve Blanchard had shouldered West Farleigh's "Tintin" a bit too vigorously and blatantly in the box and nobody could quarrel

with referee Mick Gearing's decision. "Tintin" was quite a thorn in our side, skilful, energetic, quick feet, slight but wiry build, not tall, ginger quiff, feisty. Toby managed to palm the penalty onto the post but the rebound fell kindly to the penalty taker. The last ten minutes of the first-half undoubtedly belonged to West Farleigh, suddenly full of belief and hope. We were probably more relieved than they were to hear the half-time whistle.

Patrice Mongelard made way for Roger French at half-time. I don't think our play improved. Roger was subdued today and surprisingly was not involved in the two unsavoury incidents shared firstly by "Tintin" and Rob Lipscomb, and "Tintin" again as he threatened Chief Super Bourlet with a swinging handbag. After ten minutes of the second half Andy Faulks, who else, brought us some relief as he scored a peach of a goal. He produced a low volley from the edge of the box, where he had cunningly drifted as we took a corner, which kept low as it travelled at speed through a forest of legs, including Nick Waller's which opened at the right moment, to find the bottom corner. A few minutes later Andy scored again, an even better goal, as he cushioned a high ball from Mehmet with his head on the run, advanced into the box and lofted the ball over the keeper. Patrice Mongelard and Ian Shoebridge came back on for Mick O'Flynn and Nick Waller with about twenty-five minutes left.

Amazingly we then went 6-2 up when Rob Lipscomb too got to the end of a through ball on the right, drew the keeper, and executed a shot of similar technical quality as Andy's, to score in the same spot. To their credit, West Farleigh did not give up and would have felt pretty hard done by at that point. 6-2 became 6-3 when they played their way through our defence for a well-taken goal. There was time for Andy Faulks to get his hat-trick (his twenty-eighth goal for us this season in twenty-one games) as the keeper hesitated with a back pass forced by Patrice Mongelard pressing a defender, and Andy closed him down and took the ball off him and calmly rolled it into the West Farleigh net. But that was not the end of the scoring – West Farleigh got the last goal of the match with an unmarked header from a corner after Chris Bourlet and Toby Manchip decided to impersonate Easter Island deities. Toby was to redeem himself with a stunning point blank save in the dying seconds. His contribution carried on after the final whistle as he helped take the nets down quickly (so he could get to the bar pronto) with the help of a piece of wood he had picked in the rambles when he went to retrieve the ball in the woods and fields behind the goal. Despite the odd French-free contretemps the final whistle handshakes were genuine after a competitive and fair game.

Needless to say – in spite of the cold we had a pretty warm feeling inside today as we tucked into Pam Shoebridge's fare. Toby – who had been absent for a while, asked me the secret of the special bread roll I get from Pam. Despite Toby's Oscar-winning performance I thought it would no longer be special if I told him. Still, another performance like today from him and I may just have a word with Pam on his behalf.

Man-of-the-Match – in a clean vote without assistance from family members, Toby Manchip – the prodigal son, "Farnborough's No 5 keeper", back with a very safe pair of hands, and a slimmer waistline I thought, to warm the cockles of our hearts and break West Farleigh's.

3 March 2013: Santos Vets (H, 3-2)

Senior Vets go marching on, and leave Santos behind

It was a while since we had played Santos Vets although they have been playing our Young Vets in rather one-sided affairs. So today they would have been expecting to give a better account of themselves against the more experienced Farnborough side. And so, it was.

Last Sunday's tundra was more prairie today and the conditions much more conducive to a morning out in the fresh and still spring-like air. Despite this we were fewer in number compared to previous weeks. In fact, as we left the dressing room there were only nine of us. Andy Faulks and Paul Bell were late for reasons best left unexplained in a family publication. We were able to call on the services of Danny Saines from the Young Vets (a case of Saines versus Saints you could say). I had a feeling that Andy Faulks has trouble with time on 3 March and lo and behold a year ago exactly I wrote this in the match report of our 4-1 defeat to Staplehurst & Monarchs: *"We were later to discover from a bedraggled Andy who trudged into view towards the end of the first-half that even by his standards Andy's pre-match routine had been most unhelpful to our endeavours."*

Still, by the time we had put the nets up, and kicked the ball about a bit, and with seconds to spare before the referee Micjk Gearing's whistle blew we numbered twelve. The twelve Farnborough disciples today were Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Paul Bell, Danny Saines, and Ian Coles in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Mehmet Bozyigit, Nick Waller and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Andy Faulks and Rob Lipscomb in attack. Roger French did penitence running the line.

Our worshippers Thomas and Isabelle French, and Jane (Ian's partner) were present. Jane also helped turn water into tea at the end of the game. Mick O'Flynn (absent because of a head cold brought on by an unwise haircut) appeared among the faithful after a spot of vegetable peeling. I was able to show him what a stylish haircut without much hair looks like.

I think we were a tad complacent and underestimated our opponents, and grew frustrated as we failed to convert the early chances we created. Andy Faulks and Mehmet Bozyigit had guilt-edged chances in one-on-ones, following defence-splitting pinpoint passes from Sinisa Gracanin, to give us a deserved early lead which went begging. The Santos keeper was proving a tough nut to crack. It would not surprise me if he was their Man-of-the-Match today. We all quickly realised that to beat him we'd have to get pretty close or produce something rather special. In fact, it was the keeper who produced something rather special as he somehow kept out a point-blank header from Andy Faulks at the far post where Mehmet's Bozyigit dream of a cross had found him unmarked.

We had the greater possession and more fluent passing with the craft of Sinisa Gracanin and Ian Shoebridge's energy giving us the edge in midfield but Santos had their own cutting edge which we could not ignore. It was against the run of play after twenty minutes that they took the lead with a bit of a scrappy goal with two deflections taking a tame shot past Gary Fentiman. We were at our most tetchy then but five minutes later Andy Faulks guided a ball into Mehmet's path and he advanced into the box to slot the ball home. Soon after, Rob Lipscomb departed with a tweaked hamstring and took his team mates' advice not to rush back and pinball wizard Roger French took up position upfront. We continued to dominate especially with the outlet provided by Mehmet on the right at the end of raking and perceptive passes from Sinisa but we could not find a breakthrough by the time the half-time whistle went. For once there were no

half-time changes to make. Santos must have felt they were in with a chance as they produced their best spell of the game in the first quarter of an hour of the second half.

Yet again, a now wider-awake Andy Faulks came to our rescue. The trickery and finesse shown by Sinisa Gracanin to sell a dummy to his marker at the edge of the Santos box to create space for the cross deserved a goal and the finish from Andy was equal to it – a powerful and accurate first-time volley from the corridor of uncertainty that was too good for a very good keeper. Five minutes later we were 3-1 up as Paul Bell crossed for Andy Faulks – in an identical position as for the first-half header mentioned above, but this time the keeper was beaten. Santos would have felt this was particularly tough on them and to their credit their heads did not go down. In fact, they had come close to forcing an equaliser with a ball that trickled agonisingly towards our goal with Gary Fentiman beaten only to come back off the base of the post. But they got their just reward when their small, nippy and resilient forward earned a penalty from a tackle made by Patrice Mongelard. There was more than a moment of confusion when the referee awarded a free-kick but the linesman, our own fair-minded and possibly myopic Ron Lipscomb, persuaded him that a penalty was the right decision. The player who had earned the penalty put it away and the last fifteen minutes were exciting for the neutral as both sides chased a game-changing next goal. Andy Faulks came close with a shot that crashed against the Santos post but we managed to hold on for our fourth consecutive win. The statistically-minded among you will want to know that this was the fourth consecutive game that Mehmet had scored but this was still well behind Andy Faulk's ninth consecutive scoring game. Another statistic for the history books is our Young Vet Paul Tanton notching his 373rd goal for the club in their 5-1 win over Inter Vyagra Vets on the adjacent pitch. Inter Vyagra had trouble getting up to Farrow Fields this morning for their delayed kick-off. Both Vets teams won today to redeem a dismal weekend for the club with five other Farnborough teams all defeated.

Pam Shoebridge's post-match grub was a delight as usual and it was a tad ironic that Paul Bell delayed Andy Faulks' departure to get at the roast potatoes. Andy had delayed Paul's arrival when he went for seconds earlier in the day. There was more clubhouse comedy when Gary Fentiman left his phone behind (and Roger rang Gary to tell him – think about it). Gary came back just in time before the phone left with someone else. Rob Lipscomb too sneaked back for his kit bag long after he left it behind.

Gary's predicament reminded me of a new word I saw in the paper last week: nomophobia which means fear of being without a mobile phone. Gary clearly suffers from the condition. A condition we all suffer from I suspect is rogophobia (the g is hard as in aggro) which means fear of how Roger French will behave but today there were no symptoms. Master French may suffer a touch of it later though as he left his shoulder bag behind in the clubhouse.

Man-of-the-Match – Patrice Mongelard despite the agricultural tackle that gave away a penalty.

17 March 2013: Reigate Priory Vets (N, 4-5)

Senior Vets beat the weather but are beaten by new opponents on a subdued St Patrick's Day

That this game was played at all owed much to the persistence and web-surfing of Roger French to find us a replacement fixture, and a replacement pitch – and, of course, the willingness of new opponents to travel and play on Astroturf. Still a game was better than no game and after last Sunday's cancellation due to a waterlogged pitch we were glad to get a game today before what I fear will be yet another rain-induced cancellation next week.

They say it rains a lot in Ireland but this weekend St Patrick would have felt at home in Farnborough. Maybe he did not look after the Senior Vets today, but we do not mind as long as he looks after our club Secretary Vic Farrow who was sorely missed this morning having been taken to hospital yesterday with a suspected heart attack. We all wish Vic well and must apologise for not giving him the tonic of a Farnborough victory today for the only team in the club that got to play a game this weekend.

We did not know what to expect as this was our first ever game against Reigate Priory Vets. They came in large numbers – with between four and five substitutes that were rotated throughout the game with more than a little tactical acumen particularly in the second half to break our flow. We could only manage twelve players - having opted not to call on any of our Younger Vets who had a wet day off. The twelve Farnborough astroplayers today were Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Nick Waller, Mick O'Flynn and Ian Coles in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Mehmet Bozyigit, Scott Dowie and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Andy Faulks and Rob Lipscomb in attack. Roger French conversed with Jane (Colesy's partner) and young Thomas on the line.

The astroturf pitch at Darrick Wood School is a peculiar surface to play on. Think of a narrow strip of light wet sandpaper, hemmed in by razor wire fencing, a surface that imparts energy to the ball and where the ability to weigh a pass correctly and control the ball instantly are at a premium, where sliding tackles, dodgy knees and ankles are inadvisable, and where you need a large supply of footballs because on three sides of the pitch it is not possible to retrieve balls that go over the fence. I think we used about between five or six different balls in that game – you could say that you need a lot of balls to play on that pitch.

We were genuinely surprised by the quality of our opponents. We had somehow formed the impression from their website that they were of mixed ability, felt it more important to play than win, liked the social aspect of the game etc. But all this does not preclude quality, technical ability, a nippy well-balanced midfield in particular and they probably had more than one player under the age of forty unlike us who had only one. I think too we did not help ourselves, having played more than a part in the five goals that our opponents scored. Yet things looked very good for us after five minutes as we relaxed in the glow of a lead given to us by Ian Shoebridge who had capitalised on a poor clearance to beat the Reigate keeper from twenty yards out. And for a brief while it looked like one of Mehmet Bozyigit's crosses from the right, or one of Sinisa Gracanin's shots from distance would yield more – Rob Lipscomb with a header, and Scott Dowie with a volley at the far post had come very close to extending our lead.

We had the stuffing knocked out of us with three quick Reigate goals. The first came from a through ball over the top that Gary could not reach before one of the nippy Reigate forwards who poked the ball home. For the second we were ambushed just outside the box passing the ball

in a dangerous area and a very well-executed volley was driven home. We were doubly guilty for the third – first by allowing Reigate an unmarked header in our box from a corner and second with Patrice on St Patrice's day deserting his position on the back post as we all watched the looping header go over the line in an adjacent area. Things did not look good at that point – Mehmet had come off after taking a knock and Roger French came on with Scott Dowie transferring to the right of midfield. Gary's dislike of the playing surface was apparent and our chief marksman Andy Faulks was finding it hard to penetrate and having to drop deep to pick the ball up. But we kept at it and Scott Dowie scored with a low left foot shot to bring us back into the game.

Rob Lipscomb made way for a returning Mehmet who went up front as the second half started. All our good intentions and pious hopes were extinguished as Reigate registered their fourth goal – again a mini-catalogue of defensive errors, as probably the oldest player on the pitch was rewarded with a coolly taken goal after riding two Farnborough tackles. Chris Webb and two offspring appeared at that point and they would have witnessed signs that Andy Faulks was stirring and he began at last to trouble the Reigate defence. He came close with a low shot that narrowly shaved the post before pulling one back for us after timing his run to collect a through ball and beat the keeper from close range. We could not build on this immediately as we were exposed again on the right of our defence and Reigate got to the by-line and the ball was cut-back to come off Patrice Mongelard on a path parallel to the goal line before somehow being diverted into his goal by a diving "I hate this surface" Gary Fentiman.

The last twenty minutes were quite a lively affair. Rob Lipscomb came back on to add to our presence up front and there were more scoring chances falling to Farnborough than to Reigate. Andy Faulks notched his second of the match to bring the scores to 5-4 and then had two great attempts saved very well by two different Reigate goalkeepers. First, he slid in at the far post to direct the ball into the net only for the keeper to pull off a great reflex one-handed save. This was followed by a one-on-one where the keeper saved a goal bound shot with his feet. We huffed and puffed but could not force the equaliser that our play deserved. We created twice as many chances as Reigate over the course of the game but had also made twice as many mistakes at the back.

Mick O'Flynn lightened the atmosphere with some Irish music in the changing rooms. By then there was more water falling outside than there were in the showers. About twenty of us, over half from the opposition, and including referee Mick Gearing, made our way back to the club where Pam Shoebridge had laid on a feast fit for a Saints' day: cheese and pickle/egg mayonnaise/ham sandwiches; potato croquettes, pizza slices, chicken thighs and legs, sausages, pork pies, sliced red onion, celery sticks, spring onions and crisps – and Ian Couchman opened the bar, as he did the club today in Vic Farrow's (we hope temporary) absence.

Man-of-the-Match – Sinisa Gracanin and Andy Faulks

31 March 2013: Catford Wanderers Vets (A, 7-0)

Seven Easter Eggs for Senior Vets as Statler finds his scoring boots...finally

The early morning frost had been dissolved by the sun by the time we arrived at the Catford Wanderers Club on Beckenham Hill Road off the A21. Andy Faulks arrived a little later with the kit, having had two reminders from Roger French that the clocks had gone forward overnight.

It was a relief to be playing on grass again - in British Summer Time - after a seemingly interminable catalogue of waterlogged, frozen and snowbound pitches. On the last day of March there was a feeling that we were emerging into spring at last. We could not help think back on last season's corresponding fixture, played in tropical heat, which we won 1-0, having loaned several players to Catford who were short. Today they had the numbers. So, did we - with Jim St John in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Nick Waller, Mick O'Flynn and Ian Coles in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Mehmet Bozyigit, Scott Dowie and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Andy Faulks and Rob Lipscomb in attack. Roger French and Paul Bell waited to join our Easter egg hunt. Jane (Colesy's partner), Thomas and Isabelle French, Master Dowie and a special Andy Faulks friend completed our Easter congregation.

It is no hyperbole to say that we enjoyed about 75% possession in the first-half as we wove wave after wave of attacking moves, passing profusely and probing here, there and everywhere. The trouble was that we could not get the breakthrough we wanted. The final ball was lacking, we did not have enough bodies in the box at the right time or in the right place, crosses were not hot, shots were rushed and wild, and, of course, Catford defended in numbers and well. Their keeper was equal to a couple of one-on-ones involving Mehmet Bozyigit and Rob Lipscomb. There was an uncharacteristic miss from Mehmet Bozyigit from a yard out after the keeper had parried his close-range shot and Mehmet followed up, perhaps with his mind elsewhere like a kebab shop owner who had his savings in the Bank of Cyprus, to miscue. At the other end the rare sorties that Catford made when they wandered into our half of the pitch were neutered by the defence or by an alert Jim St John. Jim's powerful and accurate throwing arm was a joy to behold.

After twenty-five minutes Paul Bell replaced Mehmet Bozyigit – though Mehmet was back soon after to replace a misfiring Andy Faulks who went off to gather his thoughts. The half-time whistle was not far from being blown when we got our breakthrough. Nick Waller had made an overlapping run and was able to measure a cross with his trusty left peg that connected first time with Paul Bell's corresponding limb, five yards out, crisply, unerringly to sail past the keeper.

Surely, we thought, more goals would follow even with the introduction of Roger French up front at half-time, as he and Andy Faulks became the new pairing up front (with Scott Dowie and Mick O'Flynn taking a breather). The pattern of the first-half repeated itself. It took us ten minutes though to get the cushion of a second goal. The busy Catford keeper parried an Andy Faulks shot into the path of Sinisa Gracanin who finished calmly and coolly. The goals kept coming after that as we found acres of space behind the overworked and tiring Catford defence. Roger French was played in on goal by Andy Faulks – Roger's first touch looked rustic but was a cunning disguise to lull the Catford keeper into a false sense of security. Roger assured us that his shot was goal-bound, in fact behind the line, when a Catford defender cleared that ball high into the roof of the net. It would have been cruel, to deny him his first goal-of-the-season and so the goal will go down as a ROG instead of an OG. Five minutes later, Ian Shoebridge saw a gap from distance and placed a low twenty-yard shot beyond the keeper into the bottom corner. Sinisa Gracanin and Nick Waller made way for the return of Scott Dowie and Mick O'Flynn.

After two assists, and a growing number of individual attempts, Andy Faulks body clock was now fully awake and he duly registered his first and second goals of the game (numbers 33 and 34 for the season in only twenty-four games) with identical moves. as he was put through by Ian Shoebridge and Robin Lipscomb to race on goal and finish with precision. After waiting ages for a goal, Roger French saw his second goal arrive - as he was played in again by Andy Faulks. He saw his first shot parried by the Catford keeper but was able to capitalise on the rebound to score what turned out to be our last goal of the game. There was time for Roger to be denied a third bun with a very good header from a cross by Mehmet Bozyigit after the linesman ruled Roger was off-side. There was applause for the linesman from both teams – I made this up – but seriously the prospect of Roger taking us through his hat-trick in the bar afterwards was avoided. As it happens, I did not get to hear about his brace as I had to shoot off to spend time with the family at this special time, as most of us did I think – so, apologies to Catford for our low numbers after the game, this is not our style.

Next week we have a tougher test in the depths of Kent away to Staplehurst & Monarchs. What price a clean sheet as today – only the second time this season that we have kept the opposition out, and both times without our regular keeper – hmmm. Jim was excellent on the rare times he was called upon – a dive low to his left, and a hand to a high corner stood out in the memory, and on a day when he could have been adding to his 15 goals as leading scorer for our Young Vets (who won 3-0). So, thanks again Jim.

Man-of-the-Match - with no need for his none too subtle suggestion, Roger French, for the hat-trick that never was.

7 April 2013: Metrogas Vets (H, 2-5)

Senior Vets run out of gas on brightest and saddest day at Farrow Fields

He would have wanted us to play. To win would have been better but we are sure he was there watching us. He did something about the weather too – of that there is no doubt. The poet W H Auden asked that the sun be dismantled in similar circumstances but our much-loved Club Secretary Vic Farrow, our North, South, East and West, who passed away yesterday, had other ideas. He dragged the sun out to give us the sunniest and warmest day of the year. The playing surface was excellent and in fact could accommodate both mouldeds and studs, something that we were most anxious to establish before the game.

It was a twist of fate that gave us the comfort of a home game today instead of an away game to Staplehurst & Monarchs who are now defunct. New – and quality, opponents in the form of Metrogas Vets had materialised early in the week to step into Staplehurst's shoes. Word got round quickly that we were in for a tough game against ex-pros such as Steve Gritt and co-manager Roger French had a sleepless night worrying about our goal difference.

The mood in the club before the game was subdued but busy as several of us did jobs that Vic used to do which we took for granted. There were twelve of us around the centre circle for a minute's silence, impeccably observed, in Vic's memory – joined by his friend, referee Mick Gearing, Isabelle and Thomas French, Jane (Ian Coles' partner) and the eleven Metrogas Vets.

The twelve Farnborough mourners were Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Nick Waller, Mick O'Flynn and Ian Coles in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Mehmet Bozyigit, Colin Brazier and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Andy Faulks and Rob Lipscomb in attack. Roger French was the single linesman. Keith Beston watched with the Metrogas management which included John Bumstead.

This was to be an occasion to enjoy against a good team playing a passing game that we tried to emulate. Both sides moved the ball around well but chances were rare in the first ten minutes. That was until we took a surprise lead from a rare source. Colin Brazier had followed the ball into the box after it was diverted into his path by a Metrogas header that put the ball behind rather than in front of their defence. Colin appeared to make a meal of the scoring chance but was merely savouring the moment as he had two goes at it before forcing the ball home out of a tangle with the Metrogas keeper. This galvanised our opponents and they began to construct their attacking moves with good positional play, carefully weighted through balls and stretching us down both flanks. We held firm for the next ten minutes but a moment's lapse in defence as Mick O'Flynn failed to clear a ball he appeared to have under control was punished from close range. It was another ten minutes or so before Metrogas would pull ahead with Farnborough playing an active part in the decisive moment. I cannot say that we had many clear chances at the other end. Andy Faulks was not at his sharpest today but we forced a couple of corners, held our own in most phases of play and 2-1 to Metrogas at half-time was a fair score as they had threatened our goal more than we had theirs.

Roger ("four in two games") French came on for Ian Shoebridge at half-time. In fact, it is fair to say that we started the second half better than our opponents and moved the ball around well but without really getting a breakthrough. We were though vulnerable to quick breaks and the sudden untracked arrival of Metrogas midfielders in our box to connect with cutbacks from the flanks or crosses. The score had not changed when we had a very good chance to draw level as Nick Waller got his head to a corner from a central position on the edge of the six-yard box. In a

way he headed it too well and too straight and the Metrogas keeper made an excellent save. Not long after that Metrogas extended their lead with a trademark move as they got behind our defence on the left and the ball was cut-back to an unmarked player who had drifted to the edge of the 18-yard box and he steered the ball low into the bottom corner. I will be honest and admit our heads dropped at that point and Gary Fentiman – perhaps still a bit irked by the reference, in last week's match report, to clean sheets achieved in his absence, was right to berate us for our poor attitude and lack of energy. Vic must have been annoyed too and I'd like to think he helped Roger French pull a goal back for us. A through ball from Mehmet sat nicely up for Roger French as he ran on to it and took it early, and surprisingly elegantly in his stride, and stroked the ball home low into the bottom corner, with a following wind from Vic.

There were still another fifteen minutes or so to play and, in that time, the superior craft and energy was with Metrogas as they stepped on it. Nick Waller was caught in two minds as he went to clear a ball at the far post and teed it up for a Metrogas midfielder who had anticipated the moment – like the pro that he was – to restore their two-goal advantage. Our lamentable off-side trap was sprung ten minutes later in a rapid counter-attacking move and the difference between the two sides grew to three goals as the ball was tucked away expertly by the Metrogas left winger who surely too had played at a high level.

Metrogas enjoyed the game and our hospitality and there was talk after the match of adding them to our fixtures next season – though this might be a job for our Younger Vets. Pam Shoebridge fed us all royally as usual after the game, including with the best cheese and pickle sandwiches in Farnborough made by Jane. I confided in Pam that Vic Farrow had appeared to me to say that I, and not Roger French, could have his sausages. In our own separate ways – as we sat there as we had done hundreds of times – I am sure we all thought of Vic. I thought he would have enjoyed gazing out of the window onto the sunlit grass outside the clubhouse, where I could see Isabelle and Thomas French indulging in a spot of Greco-Roman wrestling – no longer a sport on Mount Olympus, thought Mick O'Flynn. Vic will know by now.

Man-of-the-Match - Colin Brazier - but the man of the day was Vic Farrow.

14 April 2013: Avery Hill Vets (H, 0-3)

A very inglorious day for Senior Vets against Avery Hill

The very heavy rains of the last twenty-four hours had left their mark on the pitch and there was real doubt about the game being played, before, during and after the event. As it happened, we had to cede the top pitch to the Sunday team for their league match on their referee's advice whilst we older players were left with the bigger and heavier pitch.

The fourteen Farnborough mudlarks were Toby Manchip in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Nick Waller, Mick O'Flynn and Ian Coles in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Chris Bourlet, Rob Lipscomb and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Andy Faulks and Andy Smith in attack. Roger French, Danny Winter and (our US import) Eric Johnson waited their turn to join the mud bath. Referee Mick Gearing would have been forgiven for getting his battle of the Somme medals out. I made this bit up but the pitch was not the surface we are used to and there would be few volunteers for the kit today. We'll never know if Vic Farrow would have allowed the game to be played – probably not. There are other things he would not have allowed, more on that later.

This pitch suited big, tall players and Avery Hill certainly had a few of those with a sprinkling of youthful looking vets. We were left in no doubt that they would be a very tough hill to climb. The first twenty to twenty-five minutes belonged to the visitors with Farnborough doing more defending than attacking. But we got back in the game even after some early substitutions when Patrice Mongelard and Rob Lipscomb made way for Eric Johnson and and Danny Winter (playing his first game since the winter). In fact, the best scoring opportunity came when an intelligent through ball from Sinisa Gracanin played Andy Faulks in on goal six yards out but Andy put his shot wide. Andy was a shadow of his usual self today, the heavy pitch sapping whatever he had left after playing yesterday, and last night, and he had a second consecutive game where he failed to score. Still Andy Smith was doing the work of two players, putting in a big shift, against some big units and giving us hope.

That hope was extinguished about ten minutes from half-time when Chris Bourlet failed to deal adequately with a not particularly tricky through ball and dropped us in it. Toby pulled off a great point blank save but the sprightly Avery Hill forward was quicker than those around him and got to the rebound and forced the ball home. That goal was against the run of play but on the showing of the full half, deserved.

More changes were made at half-time with Patrice Mongelard, Rob Lipscomb returning, and Roger French joining the fray. Ian Shoebridge, Mick O'Flynn and Ian Coles took a breather. I do not think we started the second half particularly well but neither did our opponents although they brought on a new forward (known to us from previous encounters and still retaining a miraculously fresh youthful face) and he began causing us a fair bit of trouble. It was not until Avery Hill got their second goal that things started to get interesting. The goal itself was bizarre as Toby was seemingly lobbed when he was under the ball and under the crossbar from a shot that looked more like a mis-hit. That put a lot of people in a bad mood – including in particular Toby who began to mutter dark thoughts about this match which should never have been played given the state of the pitch. That was seventy odd minutes into the game and his stance was surprising as I did not think he cared that much about the state of the pitch even though he had helped water it once, one summer, from the Woodman pub. We were even more surprised when Toby started to walk off and at that point both he and Roger French descended into the twatosphere, that intemperate region full of red mists and pithy angry Anglo-Saxon words and to his credit Toby got back in goal to finish the game (and with a request to see Roger afterwards).

We had a big gathering of supporters today – Mrs Johnson, Jane (Ian Coles' partner), the Webbs, Toby Manchip's brother, Steve Blanchard, the French enfants, some Young Vets whose game had been cancelled, and some former players come to sign Vic Farrow's book of condolences. They would have been saddened by what was unfolding.

A third Avery Hill goal, courtesy of a delightful through ball from Chris Bourlet, did not help. Confusion over further substitutions added to our malaise but yet there were signs that we had our pride if nothing else. Eric Johnson carved out two great chances with his movement which nearly gave us the goal we deserved. In the end, we failed to score – a rare occurrence this season.

Back in the clubhouse Mick O'Flynn was in the shower when he was volunteered for the kit. Pam Shoebridge put out a very nice spread with the recent innovation of potato croquettes proving popular (and took an order for onion bhajis for our next home game). Toby and Roger French seemed to have made it up, until the next time. There was also the appearance of a dirty set of Farnborough football kit in a bag carrying the mark of the Farnborough Reserves (Second XI to you and me) which had festered overnight in a locked and dirty changing room after their game yesterday. It is only two weeks since Vic Farrow's passing and this was a sorry state of affairs that he just would not have tolerated. We await news of the most important funeral in our club's history. It looks like it will not be clashing with that other one this week.

In the clubhouse I experienced my second Manchip tantrum – this time from three-and-a-half-year-old Oliver Manchip. He has clearly inherited his mother's looks (good) but on today's showing, also his father's temperament (bad). One Manchip threw his toys out because he wanted to come off the park, the other because he wanted to go to the park. I leave you to work out which one showed the greater maturity. Still there was atonement of sorts when Toby unplugged the boot washing sink, swept the showers, and took home the second team kit. He's off to Norfolk with the Johnsons for a few days – at least he won't be in the doghouse because he has been forgiven.

Man-of-the-Match – Andy Smith – who put players 5, 10, 15, years younger (20 if you count Avery Hill), to shame.

21 April 2013: Riverside Wanderers Vets (A, 6-3)

7-minute 3-goal salvo from Senior Vets sees off spirited Riverside Wanderers and officious official

The sun always shines when we visit Eynsford Village to take on Riverside Wanderers. The rural setting is postcard material, the locals are friendly but the playing surface is more field than pitch - tufty, bobbly, with a 1:2 gradient from goalmouth to goalmouth and more undulation across the pitch.

We lost the corresponding fixture 3-1 on 22 April 2012, and a few weeks later, on 27 May we were back there, leading 3-1 when Peter Harvey suffered a bad ankle fracture on this ground. Footballers are superstitious and I just wanted to get through the game without injury to anyone. More immediately, we wanted to start the game with eleven players but that was not possible. Paul Bell and Andy Faulks were missing at the start because Andy could not come earlier to give Paul a lift. And over the weekend we had been deprived of Mehmet Bozyigit who had returned from a holiday in Turkey a couple of days ago but was not well – a dodgy kebab perhaps.

So, the Farnborough X were Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Mick O'Flynn and Ian Coles in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Rob Lipscomb, Scott Dowie and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Roger French and Nick Waller in attack. Seeing they had over fifteen players Riverside kindly lent us Steve to play at left-back while we waited for Andy to come.

I am not sure if we lost the toss but we started the game kicking uphill and I mean uphill. Both sides were trying to move the ball about in spite of the pitch and I think we settled more quickly and played with more fluency. Certainly, the first really good chance fell to us as Ian Shoebridge curled a left foot shot just wide of the post from twenty yards out. Riverside had a strong, physical bustling forward – who had played semi-pro according to the ref and had a few tricks up his sleeve, and Ian Coles and Patrice Mongelard had to be at their best. Still, we coped and after a quarter of an hour or so the first goal scored by Ian Shoebridge was with the run of play and what a thing of beauty it was. Twenty-five yards out Ian Shoebridge controlled a pass from Scott Dowie – cut inside – the ball sat up nicely off one those tufts I mentioned, and Ian let fly with his right boot - true, straight and still appearing to pick up speed as the ball filled the top corner of the net. About ten minutes later we doubled our lead when, with consummate disguise, Mick O'Flynn guided the ball from far out on the right wing beyond the grasp of the Riverside keeper transfixed on his line. It felt like a cross, looked like a cross, except it was not as it went into the net without any other agency apart from Mick O'Flynn's boot.

2-0 up and with twenty minutes of the half left we brought on Paul Bell and Andy Faulks (for Roger French and Riverside Steve). They were both to show the value of coming early as they both missed goals that they might well have scored on another day. First Andy Faulks was played in by Ian Shoebridge to advance on goal and screw his shot wide from five yards out. Paul Bell was to miss an even better chance from a yard out after Sinisa Gracanin had got his head to a Patrice Mongelard free-kick to direct the ball back across goal. Rob Lipscomb got behind the Riverside defence but his cut-back was wasted as Andy had not come to it. Rob also flashed a left foot shot just wide of the post. At the other end Riverside were not without threat – Ian Coles and Patrice Mongelard made last minute challenges to block shots on goal and Riverside forced two or three corners and from one of those their ex semi-pro powered a header that beat Gary Fentiman but was cleared off the line by Mick O'Flynn. Still Riverside were not to be denied as their forward deservedly got a deft touch to a deep cross to guide the ball into our net from two yards out.

We were not too worried at half-time because we had a twelfth man in the form of the slope in our favour, even with Roger French returning up front instead of Rob Lipscomb. I do not think anyone had really taken much note of the referee in the first-half but he was to play quite a part in the second. Games between Farnborough and Riverside are keenly contested but without any malice and played always in excellent spirit by both sides. But there was tension out there today and I would venture the hypothesis that the referee had much to do with that, the antithesis of refereeing if you like. Five minutes in the half he awarded Riverside their first penalty of the game for a push by Ian Coles, in the box, on a bigger and heavier man doing a good impression of a 15-stone bag of Maris Pipers. The penalty was put away (and said forward admitted later that he had conned the man in black). The next fifteen to twenty minutes were difficult for both sides. Riverside pressed to take the lead and we too wanted to restore our lead. Andy Faulks was showing signs of coming into form.

Patrice Mongelard had a little contretemps with the ref when, some sixty yards away from the action, he asked "What about that?" when one of our forwards was seemingly bundled over in the box. The referee, piqued by that enquiry, awarded Riverside a free-kick on the spot from where Patrice Mongelard had asked his perfectly reasonable question, maybe it was the way I asked it. He was also to ignore a Riverside hand-ball in the box from a Farnborough corner but surprised us moments later by awarding a penalty to Farnborough this time when an Ian Shoebridge shot cannoned against a Riverside arm in the box. It looked more like ball to hand and the shot was not goal-bound but that did not worry Andy Faulks as he finally came good by squeezing the ball home from the spot. There was even better to come from Andy.

Our joy was short-lived indeed. Riverside went back on level terms within two minutes after we failed to clear a cross and the ball was volleyed rather well low into the bottom corner of our net from the edge of our box. Roger French was not happy at all at that point. Young Thomas French had told us in the changing room – "I am not a very good loser" – in one short sentence proving the laws of heredity. The self-awareness comes from his mother.

Our discomfiture did not last long as we were to hit a purple patch. In a seven-minute spell we rattled in three goals without reply. Andy Faulks, who else, restored our lead with a rasping shot from twelve yards out that swerved and dipped and bamboozled the Riverside keeper. Rob Lipscomb back on for Paul Bell then rattled in two quick goals. He was in the right place at the right time to lash the ball into the net after it had rebounded across the goal from the base of the post following an Ian Shoebridge shot that Roger French almost interfered with. Soon after he chested down a pass from Andy Faulks, rounded the defender and expertly shinned the ball past the keeper.

There was time for another puzzling refereeing decision as a penalty was awarded against Patrice Mongelard as he emerged from the box with the ball with a Riverside forward crumpled on the deck in his wake. The referee blew for the penalty, then blew what sounded like the final whistle but then watched as the penalty was screwed wide. I wondered briefly if Vic Farrow had intervened holding the scales of football justice. Still, it was quite a refereeing performance – three penalties (all marginal) and a yellow card brandished with great flourish as Rob Lipscomb's name went in the book. Just as well Roger French was having one of his rare mellow moments because there was a red card too in the referee's top pocket.

That was the last action of a memorable game before we repaired for a swift half in the Castle Hotel and I was still in situ to catch the piping hot spring rolls and dipping sauce and sausages before the supply dried up. I left Roger French in the pub with a faux-medieval sword hanging over his head despite our win.

Man-of-the-Match – Scott Dowie, for a dynamic and responsible display on the left of midfield.

28 April 2013: Wellcome Super Vets (N, 3-2)

Senior Vets leave it late to register welcome win

This was another bright sunny April Sunday morning with Farnborough playing away except that this was a “home” game, and on a pitch as bobbly and tufty as last week, but with longer grass and in breezier and cooler conditions.

Our Young Vets and the Sunday side had claimed the two pitches at Farrow Fields (the latter for an unplanned double header to clear their backlog of fixtures) and so we gave up our home pitch to welcome our opponents at Norman Park, only ten minutes away, in the environs of Bromley. The customer experience meant that we had to put the nets up, peg them and tape the nets to the goal posts and bar. There was so much tape on the metal that we could have passed for an art installation for the Turner Prize. There was not much art in what followed though.

Unlike last Sunday, we had twelve players from the start this time: Toby Manchip in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Danny Winter, Chris Bourlet and Ian Coles in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Paul Bell, Mehmet Bozyigit and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Andy Faulks and Rob Lipscomb in attack. Roger French ran the line. Commander Gearing was having a rare Sunday off and Nick Kinnear bit the whistle. Jane (Ian Coles’ partner), Isabelle and Thomas French and Ronda, Andy Faulks’ special friend, and Chris Bourlet’s assorted family provided the crowd scenes.

As the game got under way, Manchip assured us that he would not be chipped by any man today as he could touch the bar from a standing position. He should have kept that thought to himself. We had the better of the first twenty minutes or so. We had more of the ball and constructed more attacking moves even if they were a little predictable and lacked bite. Early chances fell to Mehmet Bozyigit (still feeling the effects of that dodgy kebab I thought), Andy Faulks, who seems to peak late, and Chris Bourlet, who could not quite get the right connection from a yard out in a goal-mouth scramble. Wellcome had two good bustling and muscular old-fashioned centre forwards who could hurt us with the right service, and if we made mistakes.

We scored first and with the run of play after about twenty minutes, when Rob Lipscomb timed his run well to head the ball home from a rather good deep cross from Danny Winter. That was to be our brightest moment of the half as Wellcome got back in the game. They had been forced to bring on a 21-year-old after Mehmet had run the hamstring off his marker and the youngster’s pace helped them recover their momentum. We were vulnerable down the left of our defence and from that direction a cross was arrowed in that was better than the one Danny had delivered because it chipped Manchip. The striker of the ball claimed he meant it – they always do. Things got worse ten minutes later when Ian Coles could not get quite enough on a headed back pass and the rangy muscular Wellcome forward did the rest. This was no more than they deserved at that point.

Roger French came on at half time to give us more teeth upfront after snarling up and down the line in the first half. Chris Bourlet made way as Paul Bell went to impersonate a left-back. I do not think we played particularly well in the first twenty minutes of that second half. Wellcome were proving surprisingly tough to crack and they could be physical when necessary. They must have felt they were doing well because at one point one of their players said “We’re murdering them” even though the score was the same – so in a sense we were still quite alive. It is the sort of remark that is calculated to irk. I have done it myself usually with the words “It’s like watching Brazil”.

The last twenty-five minutes belonged to us and, in a way, they were the minutes that counted. I should point out that for that period Patrice Mongelard went into goal after Toby Manchip left early to get home to look after young Oliver and tell him about that chip that did his old man. I counted three one-on-ones, two for Andy Faulks, and one for Mehmet which drew very good saves from the Wellcome keeper. In the midst of this he could not do much about the shot from Sinisa Gracanin who had waltzed into the Wellcome box in a neat passing move, but that came off the post. Also, in that phase of play, Andy rounded the keeper but his shot was cleared off the line.

Wellcome were not toothless at the other end but their long balls were mopped up by Patrice Mongelard, now playing in his favoured sweeper position, but not playing anyone on-side, even if that meant wearing goal-keeping gloves. With ten minutes left Andy finally achieved the outcome he was after as he was played through yet again on goal and placed a low shot beyond the keeper. You could say we were now as hungry as ever and Andy was to bite into the cherry as he produced a ferocious half volley from twelve yards out that kept low and went through a forest of legs to give us the edge over Wellcome. This was no more than we deserved in the end. Wellcome mounted one final assault with a dangerous free kick that Patrice Mongelard got his hands to, diverting the ball over the bar. No man chip for me.

After we unpegged, untaped and packed the nets - and shared the two functioning showers there was time to go back to Farrow Fields to get our teeth into Pam Shoebridge's excellent cheese and pickle rolls. Roger "Nosher" French had three of them, more than the number of meaningful touches he had in the game, but matching Isabelle's tally of crisp packets. There was one roll for the solitary Wellcome player who found his way back to the club, but that may have been because he was visiting his brother who lives in Farnborough. Still, he was good company if only a bit morose from having missed a very good chance in the second half to put the game beyond Farnborough, and partly because of what the team I support did to the team he supports yesterday at St James' Park. Still unlike Geordie Paul Bell he could not bring himself to place a bet at 13/10 on his team losing.

Man-of- the-Match – Andy Faulks for scoring twice late on, something Ronda had seen him do before, only last Sunday.

5 May 2013: Riverside Wanderers Vets (H, 0-0)

Farrow Fields frustration for Farnborough

Occasionally sporting metaphors get mixed and football commentators will say or write “If this was a boxing match the referee would have stopped it”. We did everything but score. If there were match stats for this game in tomorrow’s newspapers, you’d get a pretty one-sided picture in terms of possession, shots on goal, passes, number of corners etc – the usual metrics, with one significant missing factor.

This was not the only missing factor today. Almost exactly a year ago on 6 May 2012, our Young Vets played AFC Greenwich – a most memorable occasion still fresh in the mind’s eye. They would have played the same opponents today but were frustrated to learn upon arriving at Farrow Fields (with their shower products) that their opponents would not show. Err, I think their disappointment was heightened by it being such a nice day (what I now call Farrow weather, warm, full of sunshine like the man the Farnborough family said goodbye to, in our hundreds on Wednesday). Still, it meant there would be plenty of room in the showers; also, we were able to welcome Young Vets Paul Bailey and Jim St John to swell our numbers, and we got to play on the big pitch in front of what was our largest home crowd this season.

When referee Nick Kinnear (once again with Commander Gearing’s whistle) started the game, we were arranged thus: Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Colin Brazier, Mick O’Flynn and Ian Coles in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Nick Waller, Mehmet Bozyigit and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Andy Faulks and Rob Lipscomb in attack. Jim St John ran one line whilst Roger French and Paul Bailey studied proceedings. Thomas and Isabelle French played with the water bottles on what was a very hot day – a day for cold showers you could say.

Riverside had travelled in numbers and brought along a big squad to reverse the 6-3 defeat we inflicted on them at their place only a fortnight ago. They also came by paddle steamer which they parked in front of goal (I made this up but you get the idea). The pattern of the game was set quite early and varied little for the duration. Riverside soaked the pressure we applied, defended in numbers, committed only two or three players forward on the break at any one time and waited for us to make errors. We probed down both flanks, using the two full-backs well, ran off-side more than once in our eagerness, could not find the final ball and their keeper (a new face) was sharp and alert. We won several corners which all appeared to end on Nick Waller’s forehead as he gradually got closer with his efforts. Andy Faulks started as he now does, slowly, and Rob Lipscomb twisted this way and that, and again, and we just had to be patient. It would only be a matter of time, so we thought, before we converted one of our many crosses or through balls.

At the other end, there was just one scare when a Riverside forward got behind us but nothing came of it, like the two corners they won when they did eventually venture up the pitch. On the half hour Paul Bailey came on for an injured Ian Shoebridge whose game ended at that point and Paul gave us a fresh impetus and muscular presence down the left. In the last quarter of an hour of the half we fashioned three great chances. First Andy Faulks saw a shot come off the crossbar; then Rob Lipscomb (played in by Sinisa Gracanin) attempted to walk the ball into the net instead of shooting from three yards out; and then the best chance of all as Andy Faulks, clean through, drew an excellent point-blank save from the Riverside keeper from only a yard out.

Roger French brought himself on at half-time to play upfront to give us the cutting edge we missed. Patrice Mongelard and Sinisa Gracanin made way and Jim St John came on to tower over the midfield and to seek to add to his goal tally (for the Young Vets). We got our bearings fairly quickly, after adapting to our new formation, with Paul Bailey and Jim St John anchoring the midfield most effectively. Clear chances at either end were as rare as an Orpington Buff's teeth. Jim St John had a very good one when he met a Mehmet Bozyigit cross arriving in the box on the half-volley with a shot that could well have burst the net. Moments later he nearly scored at the other end when he directed a defensive header back towards where he thought Gary Fentiman was. Gary pulled off the save of the match diving low to his left, going back on himself, and stretching his full 6 ft 3 frame and long arms to keep out what would have been a most undeserved goal for our visitors. Gary deserved his first clean sheet of the season, to join the other two keepers who had achieved this for us this season - Darren Burkett and the versatile Jim St John.

Gary would not have to make another save until the closing stages, and again from one of his own players. For the rest of the half, we continued to seek an opening. Roger French took a heavy tackle and crashed to the ground. Riverside were no doubt relieved that he could carry on. It was as usual, a clean but competitive game between our two sides. Patrice Mongelard and Sinisa Gracanin came back on for the last twenty minutes (for Nick Waller and Mick O'Flynn). We forced several corners in succession and from one of those Jim St John drew a point blank save on the line from the (other) Riverside keeper (who had let in six a fortnight ago). Patrice Mongelard produced an inviting cross to the far post that was almost met by Roger French leaping like a halibut. With a few minutes left, there was time for a frisson as Patrice Mongelard intercepted a through ball on the run with some force and the ball sped towards Gary Fentiman who was equal to it. Farnborough had created the best two Riverside chances in the game. Andy Faulks had a final tired effort on goal that would have fared better in previous games. Today he was a shadow of the marksman that has netted thirty-eight times for us this season. He'll need to get his mojo back. We play our Young Vets in two weeks – a family affair with the usual degree of sibling rivalry. There were many Young Vets there today, two played for us, and half a dozen watched idly. I cannot see them losing sleep with anxiety about us – in particular our forward display. And to prepare for this we must first face opponents who beat us 7-1 in January, but who we hope will have the decency and fair play to field players of the same age as us this time.

The louder cheers and congratulations were Riverside's at the final whistle. They had won a point whilst we had lost two. Talking of frustration, I had to leave early after the game and walked out of the door just as Pam Shoebridge was taking the sausages out of the oven. I am sure Noshier French did them justice and I hope so did our visitors.

Man-of-the-Match was Colin Brazier – whose fire burned brightest on a very hot day.

12 May 2013: Old Colfeians Vets (H, 8-1)

Senior Vets help themselves to hollow triumph

Right until the delayed kick off it was far from clear if this game would be played. The making of an omni-shambles was only avoided by turning the match into an 8-a-side game and with Farnborough supplying 75% of the players. Carol Vorderman would be proud of you if you worked out that Old Colfeians turned up with four players only – but turn up they did, to their credit, and they had kept us in touch with their frantic efforts during the week to muster a side. We had our problems too with one late cancellation (Mick O'Flynn) and one no-show (Toby Manchip) and several injuries (Ian Shoebridge, John Tallis, Steve Blanchard), one cricket season casualty (Paul Bell – we suspect Old Colfeians had a few of those too) and one or two others not available for other reasons. Thankfully our Young Vets were at home too, playing a tough friendly, defending an unbeaten home record this year, and they were able to spare one player – Mark Friend, out of their fourteen, to join our motley crew. Frantic, desperate phone calls had failed to add to our number. I was not alone in thinking that this was perhaps a game too far and the season should have ended at the end of April. Mrs M. agrees.

When referee Rod Loe started the game – the Farnborough octet was Gary Fentiman in goal; Colin Brazier, Ian Coles and Scott Dowie in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Rob Lipscomb and Mehmet Bozyigit in midfield and Andy Faulks sitting comfortably upfront. Patrice Mongelard, Roger French, Nick Waller and Mark Friend had swapped red and yellow stripes for green and white hoops. The petits French (Isabelle and Thomas), Master Dowie and Jane (Ian Coles' partner), Ian Shoebridge and other Farnborough figures spectated on and off.

The suggestion to reduce the length of the pitch by rolling both sets of goal posts to the edge of the six-yard box was not well received so we ended up with a lot of space, or another way of looking at it, having to do a lot of running on a hard pitch. I am not sure we were that well-equipped for that type of game. Sorry - by we, I mean the hybrid side – which I will call the Farneians – for today's purposes, and which provides my perspective for this report.

The Farneians had a more than useful keeper and for the first quarter of an hour or so we held our own, though without troubling Gary Fentiman. Gary had a very untroubled game, right until the final moments, and in a sense his own team probably caused him more trouble. The inevitable happened when Sinisa Gracanin produced two almost identical smart finishes after timing his runs into the box to slot two cut-backs home from close range, to put Farnborough 2-0 up. Surprisingly, the score stayed that way until the half-time oranges shared by both teams. I cannot recall much by way of goal threat from the Farneians. We had one or two corners that failed to yield anything and the closest to a frisson for us came when Gary Fentiman appeared to fumble a ball on the line that had spun back off Ian Coles. From sixty yards away I suggested to the referee, with the benefit of my superior eyesight of course, that the ball had crossed the line, but the look he gave me suggested he had been to Specsavers.

The second half was a less even affair. For once, the substitutions were an easy decision to make – i.e there were none. Early in the half, Andy Faulks missed a comfortable sitter. However, ten minutes in Scott Dowie cut in from right-back and from twenty-five yards out curled his left foot round the ball, lofting it accurately beyond the Farneians keeper into the top corner. I think he meant it. Five minutes later Sinisa Gracanin was quickest to a loose ball in the box and placed his shot with the outside of his foot into the bottom corner to register an impressive hat-trick. Sinisa turned provider five minutes later to tee up a suspiciously off-side Rob Lipscomb at the far post who tapped in and the goal stood.

I wondered if Rod Loe had that on his conscience when he was persuaded that Andy Faulks was off-side as he scored a sixth goal for Farnborough. Andy – two goals short of forty for us this season (with another 40+ haul for his Saturday side) got over his disappointment fairly quickly soon after when he lashed an exquisite shot into the top corner from fifteen yards out. 6-0 became 7-0 as Rob Lipscomb poached another (iffy) goal in the six-yard box after the keeper could only parry an Andy Faulks shot into his path. There was even time for Ian Coles to convert a Mehmet Bozyigit pass to make it 8-0. Ian's unbridled celebration was a joy to behold – as he and Colin Brazier bumped puffed out chests - he does not score that often as Jane reminded us later. By then we were getting overrun with alarming regularity and I would not have been alone in wishing for the relief of the final whistle.

The game's surprises were not over though as with almost the last kick of the game Roger French profited from someone else's work by converting a ball that had fallen to him fortuitously after Gary Fentiman parried a rare shot from the Farneians. The football gods had not granted the prayer "Please don't let Roger French score" much to the delight of the French male line as Thomas joined in the celebrations (even though technically you could say it was an own goal).

On the way back down from the pitch I paused in the sunshine with Mehmet Bozyigit to watch the final moments of our Young Vets game as they went down to a rare 1-0 defeat.

Our mood in the clubhouse was good – not least as we had rescued a game on a sunny Sunday morning, from a difficult set of circumstances, all the more unusual because Old Colfeians had around seventeen players when they beat us 7-1 in January. And as Noshier French pointed out during the game – our reduced numbers meant more food. I was very pleased to see that today's fare included onion bhajjis – I do not think the others noticed because I made rather short work of 75% of them (out of a pack of 4 – work it out says Carol).

Man-of-the-Match was Ian Coles, who had a very good game marking Roger French, and even found time to cross the halfway line to score – something which had been a long time coming according to Jane.

19 May 2013: FOBG Young Vets (H, 1-1)

Family affair goes with honours even, and awards galore

And so, it ends – a season that began on 2 September last year, struggled through the snows and floods of winter, to emerge in the sunlight of May with the traditional fixture of youth versus experience as the Senior Vets pitted the wisdom of age against the exuberance of youth. There was scant respect shown for the elderly as the Young Vets nabbed the bigger dressing room, and kept their Farnborough kit. A maroon and black number was dredged up from the vaults to contrast with the Guild's bacon and egg livery.

The final twelve Senior Vets were Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Mick O'Flynn, Ian Coles and Steve Blanchard in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Rob Lipscomb, Colin Brazier, Graham Donnelly (our own youth policy) and Mehmet Bozyigit in midfield; and Andy Faulks as the lone ranger up front. Roger French ran the line after a fashion. In fact, Roger played the first five minutes as Colin was doing his bit as the Guild's official photographer on the other pitch. I counted fifteen players for the Young Vets despite notable absentees.

I would be lying if I said we were confident of winning this one – even with one or two regulars missing the Young Vets remained a potent force. We just wanted to feel at the end that we gave a good account of ourselves. It did not look that way in the opening quarter of an hour. The Young Vets mastered the ball more quickly than we did, and their play had more shape and attacking intent than ours as we struggled to maintain a presence in their half. They had the ball players and speed merchants down the flanks in particular, and some big units in the centre of the park and upfront and they also had the wind in their favour. That wind was to disappear in the second half when the sun came out but it did us no favours while it was there, particularly as the Young Vets proved to be at their most dangerous on set-pieces.

They had scored through Mark Friend after only ten minutes from a corner. Quietly, we feared the worst at that point but somehow, we restricted them to that solitary goal. Gary Fentiman was having an inspired match in goal and pulled off a number of saves, coming for crosses, commanding his 6-yard box and getting good distance on his goal-kicks (the latter destined mostly for Young Vets' heads). Colin Brazier cleared another set-piece off the line, Mick O'Flynn cleared the ball against the base of the post after Gary had got his hand to a low shot and diverted the ball against the same post. An acrobatic point-blank save from Jim St John was the pick of our Gary's display.

At the other end their Gary – Rosslee, in the Young Vets' goal, was having a more relaxed morning but had to save smartly from Andy Faulks. We were making inroads into the Young Vets' half but the final ball or cross was never produced and in the main Andy was isolated whilst our defence played too deep. But there was only one goal between the teams at half-time and all who know football know this is often not enough. We made no changes at half-time whilst the Young Vets made several and that seemed to affect their play. On balance, even they would agree that they had fewer chances to score in the second half whilst we had more, relative to the first half. Paul Tanton drew a good diving save from Gary Fentiman and Gary was equal to all the crosses and corners that were put in. Roger French came on after twenty minutes or so for Mick O'Flynn. By then we were making a better fist of it. Graham Donnelly carved out a great opportunity as he intercepted an attempted flick over his head by the last defender and was clean through on goal only to fire over the bar from ten yards out. With ten minutes left on the clock we got a deserved equaliser as Robin Lipscomb attempted a shot from twenty yards out – the dubious goals committee was not entirely certain about this one. Gary Rosslee may have had it

covered, or it may even have been bound for the giant holly behind the goal – but the diversion off Jason Miller wrong-footed Gary Rosslee, and we had scored our 100th goal this season. Mick O’Flynn came back on to replace Colin Brazier and preserve our draw. Five minutes from the end, Andy Faulks produced a long range shot cum cross that had Gary Rosslee scrambling back on his line to palm the ball onto the bar. And that was the end of the excitement, and the season, as the final whistle was heard soon after for what was a fair 1-1 result.

The records of both Farnborough Vets teams stood thus at the end of it.

Young	Vets:	P26	W15	D7	L5	GF105	GA47	GD58	Pts52
Senior	Vets:	P31	W17	D6	L8	GF100	GA68	GD32	Pts57

Referee Andy Gable kept a close eye and firm hand on things – to the extent of booking Rob Lipscomb for unsuitable language for a family gathering, but had nothing to trouble him as all, even Roger French, were on their best behaviour.

The après-match today was enlivened by a sparkling presentation of various Senior Vets awards for the season, by the French family:

The Referees Award of a hip flask (well a photo of it anyway in a brown envelope - it is in the post honest) was made to Mick Gearing for the 13 games he did for the Senior Vets free of charge.

The Catering Award of a little red robin plant (*photinia x fraseri*) was made to Pam Shoebridge for taking good care of us and our visitors (with special thanks from Noshier French).

Andy Faulks bagged the Golden Boot Trophy (with 39 goals), the Goal-of-the-season Trophy for a superb edge of the box volley (which Paul Scholes will have dreamt about) against CUACO on 28 October, and a Thundered-t-shirt which showed twenty-four verbs which could be used to describe the manner of Andy’s goals.

Ian Coles was a deserved winner of the Managers’ Player of the Season – with 29 games played, 31 MoM votes, three kit washes and two ambulance and rescue missions.

Ian’s partner Jane won the Supporter of the Season Award – a stylish yet functional thermos flask for touchline vigils next winter.

The Dot Cotton award for the highest number of kit washes was finally relinquished by Patrice Mongelard and was shared by Ian Coles and Ian Shoebridge with a magnificent total of three apiece. Andy Faulks also notched a trio of efforts in this competition but did not want his washes to count as this would spoil his carefully nurtured image.

Lastly – the Clown Award – a hereditary award made to Toby Manchip, was presented in the form of a dodgy keeper t-shirt. True to his name Toby reciprocated with a Tin Tack Award for the management duo of Patrice Mongelard and Roger French (and a kind card probably written by Helen). He was either talking out of his Khyber Pass or having a Sherman. You choose.

Pam Shoebridge’s copious fare was rounded off with vast amounts of cake (from Jane) which Noshier French did his best to put away, it appears already in serious training for that ultimate

mixed grill he has got his eye on for our end of season munch, pushing his body to its limits like a true sportsman.

Man-of-the-Match by a long chalk Gary Fentiman who, you could say, saved his best for last.

Roll on next season – all thoughts of retirement banished, although we must announce an important retirement this week – no, not the minor celebrity playing for Paris St Germain, but of Farnborough icon Colin Brazier giving up Saturday football to concentrate on Vets football. A thought to sustain us through the next few months until it all starts again, as it must. Au revoir.

Season 2013-14

1 September 2013	Orpington Vets (H)	8-0	A most encouraging start for the Senior Vets, as the digital age reaches the boot room and an old face makes a surprise apparition
8 September 2013	Erith Vets (H)	0-2	Rueful Farnborough sent back to earth by Erith
15 September 2013	CUACO Vets (H)	4-1	Near normal service resumed
22 September 2013	Sanco Super Vets (A)	10-2	Senior Vets far from dull in Dulwich as Farnborough firepower overwhelms SANCO Super Vets
29 September 2013	West Farleigh Vets (A)	4-1	Senior Vets get away with it
6 October 2013	Belvedere Vets (A)	1-6	Senior Vets ask for a thrashing, and get it at the feet of Belvedere
13 October 2013	Inter Vyagra Super Vets (A)	5-1	Senior Vets score five times as Inter Vyagra restore their mojo
20 October 2013	Wickham Park Vets (N)	0-5	Norman Park stroll for Wickham Park against shambolic Farnborough
27 October 2013	CUACO Vets (A)	4-1	New boy makes quite an impression as Farnborough put the clock back six weeks
3 November 2013	Wickham Park Vets (H)	2-2	Tensions boil over as Farnborough put up a fight to earn draw
10 November 2013	Belvedere Vets (H)	1-3	Senior Vets remember to lose graciously as Belvedere overrun Farnborough trenches
17 November 2013	Met Police Super Vets (H)	3-2	Singular goal gives Farnborough the edge
24 November 2013	Reigate Priory Vets (H)	1-4	Not much to cheer on and off the pitch at Farrow Fields
1 December 2013	Old Tamponians Super Vets (A)	2-2	A game of two periods as Old Tamponians check Farnborough flow
8 December 2013	Orpington Vets (A)	2-0	Farnborough win, but do not quite convince
15 December 2013	Old Tamponians Super Vets (H)	3-1	Farnborough pressure too much for Old Tamponians
22 December 2013	Wellcome Super Vets (A)	1-6	Farnborough gift-wrap six goals for the opposition
12 January 2014	Inter Vyagra Super Vets (N)	1-3	Senior Vets cannot do it on Astro Turf with Inter Vyagra
23 February 2014	West Farleigh Vets (H)	2-2	Farnborough the unready earn well-deserved draw
9 March 2014	Charlton Rangers Vets (H)	2-0	Normal service resumed as Farnborough re-discover the art of winning
16 March 2014	Reigate Priory Vets (A)	2-2	Wry smiles in Reigate as Farnborough help opponents snatch draw
23 March 2014	Glendale Vets (H)	1-0	By George, Farnborough edge close contest
30 March 2014	Catford Wanderers Vets (A)	5-0	New striking partnership blossoms in Catford sunshine

Season 2013-14 (contd)

6 April 2014	Met Police Super Vets (A)	2-1	Farnborough nick the three points for Vic
13 April 2014	Avery Hill Vets (H)	2-1	Farnborough master the art of winning ugly
20 April 2014	Riverside Wanderers Vets (A)	2-2	Eynsford Easter eggs shared as Farnborough earn draw
27 April 2014	Wellcome Super Vets (H)	3-2	Farnborough trickle over winning line
4 May 2014	Riverside Wanderers Vets (H)	0-2	Quality beats quantity
11 May 2014	FOBG Young Vets (H)	0-5	Farnborough Vets football the winner but Young Ones much happier than Seniors
18 May 2014	Lloyds TSB Super Vets (A)	6-2	Farnborough birthday boy signs off with a handsome win
25 May 2014	Brixton Bus garage Vets (H)	7-3	Ten-goal thriller closes Senior Vets season

**Farnborough Old Boys Guild FC
Senior Vets, Season 2013-14**



Back row, left to right:

Ian Shoebridge, Ian Coles, Ian Lyons, Roger French, Gary Fentiman, Toby Manchip, Mick Gearing, Andrew Washington, Mehmet Bozyigit, Andy Faulks, Rob Lipscomb

Front row, left to right:

Nick Waller, Colin Mant, Eric Johnson, Michael Ugwumba, Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Patrice Mongelard, George Kleanthous, Colin Brazier

1 September 2013: Orpington Vets (H, 8-0)

A most encouraging start for the Senior Vets, as the digital age reaches the boot room and an old face makes a surprise apparition

And so, it begins – the first of what we hope will be a maximum of thirty-eight games this season, weather and Farrow Fields geology permitting. It would be too much to expect every one of these games to play out as today's but there was a sense that all the training put in by the Senior Vets over the summer had paid off. So too we hope will be the Google Nexus 7 Tablet unveiled by Roger French as a sort of electronic clipboard, soon to bristle with apps for managing our business on and off the field (when Master Thomas French is not playing online poker on it).

It was no game of chance for us today though as we unveiled a performance of great efficiency and no little panache and style in front of our fans, albeit after a sluggish start. It felt odd and sad to begin a season without Vic Farrow and the clubhouse was a hive of activity before the game to sort out various little bits for ourselves – not least the kit, wi-fi connection, match balls, container and dressing room keys etc. You could say that Vic was in some way present, as his sister Doreen appeared later in the clubhouse. It was a good omen as all three matches played by Guild teams today were won: 8-0 for us, 10-5 for the Young Vets and 3-2 for the Sunday team.

When the game started, we lined up like this: Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Mick O'Flynn and Ian Coles in defence; Rob Lipscomb, Mehmet Bozyigit, Chris Webb and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Andy Faulks and Ian Shoebridge in attack. Roger French, Colin Mant and Obinna (Michael) Ugwumba waited to play in what you could say was a derby game. Isabelle and Thomas French + tent, the two Webb enfants +hammock, Jane and Miss Coles provided the home support – to be joined later by the numerous Michael fan club.

Looking back now it seems inconceivable that we were only one goal to the good at half-time. Andy Faulks had opened his account with a very crisp half-volley after Rob Lipscomb had put him through with a diving header. But that had taken about twenty minutes to manifest itself. Before then Ian Shoebridge had missed a relatively simple tap-in as he casually rolled the ball against the base of the post with the Orpington keeper stranded.

We were creating chances but not finishing them: Andy Faulks crashed a twenty yarder against the underside of the bar; Chris Webb agreed he should have done better with an excellent cross delivered into the six-yard box by Mehmet Bozyigit. The two changes we made midway through the half to bring on Colin Mant and Michael (in lieu of Ian Shoebridge and Sinisa Gracanin) did not disturb our rhythm, or the flow of the game, but we kept missing chances, for example when Colin Mant put a header wide from two yards, from an exquisite Patrice Mongelard cross to the far post.

At the other end Orpington were doing enough in bursts to remind us that teams which do not finish chances they create can pay dearly, and Gary had to be alert to palm away a close-rangeshot which bobbed.

Patrice Mongelard made way for Roger French after the half-time oranges. The second half was a one sided-affair but even then, we took about ten minutes to blow away the cobwebs as Michael played a delightful through ball for Andy Faulks to round the keeper and slot the ball home with his left foot. On the hour Patrice Mongelard, Sinisa Gracanin and Ian Shoebridge returned as Steve Blanchard, Mehmet Bozyigit and Andy Faulks left the stage, the latter temporarily.

After that the floodgates opened. We scored a further six goals in half an hour. Rob Lipscomb got our third with a powerful twenty-yarder in the proverbial postage stamp; he followed that up with our fourth after electing to shoot rather than set up a team mate. Ian Shoebridge glided in from the right to convert a Colin Mant lay-off with a crisp early shot which beat the keeper on his near post. At that point our chief artificer Andy Faulks must have felt a pang of envy and he was to be handed the opportunity to add to his tally when Michael had reached the limits of his fitness and came off. Andy jumped at the chance and was to add a further brace, including a headed goal from a foot out which he put against the post first before it crossed the line, which gave him what in football parlance is called a perfect hat-trick: right foot, left foot and header. Rob Lipscomb was to add an eighth in the dying moments.

In the midst of this scoring frenzy there was a frisson that went through the Guild ranks as Toby Harlow, aka Lord Lucan, the architect of our 38-game fixtures list, former Vets Player-Manager, and Guild legend extraordinaire (he'd won everything going he told me), had materialised on the touchline, after an absence of several years. I'd like to think Toby was impressed with our display, but not too worried about getting into the side as he promised to be back to resume playing in six weeks once his six-pack was restored. He drinks Diet Coke now. Toby's presence added to the general feel-good factor around the club, and it was evident how much his presence was appreciated by many (and himself). He pinched a ham sandwich on his way out. I almost forgot to mention that another football celeb, Mick McCarthy, was spotted watching the Sunday team game between the Guild Sunday team and a team called FC Wasps which features McCarthy Junior in its ranks.

Pam Shoebridge, resplendent in a Guild polo shirt, aided by Jane, served a real treat much to Noshers French' appreciation: chicken legs (whatever yours truly left for the others), sausages, potato croquettes, scotch eggs, crisps, special rolls for the management, ham/egg/cheese and pickle sandwiches.

Roger French sold some match programmes for the first XI's match on 24 August, which included a longish piece by Patrice Mongelard, and accompanying photos by Colin Brazier, on the 2012-13 Senior Vets end of season awards. Colin Mant appreciated the poetry of the description of Andy Faulks' goal-of-the-season; Mick O'Flynn commented on the photo of Ian Coles and Jane in the Premier Pensions advert; and Mrs Fentiman commented on the quality of the paper on which the programme was printed. Roger also sold key rings in Senior Vets colours and Village Cuisine logo, and other merchandise, and collected match subs and some annual subs and appeared to add it all up without difficulty, or recourse to the Google Nexus 7 Tablet, which could not really be prised from Thomas' fingers.

Lastly – an apology – I forgot to sweep the dressing rooms today – I blame the chicken legs. I promise to do better next week – with the broom that is, not the chicken legs (which is not really possible!).

Man-of-the-Match – Rob Lipscomb for a performance of great energy, verve and selfishness in front of goal, for whom there was to be more joy in another derby later in the day – sorry Colin.

8 September 2013: Erith Vets (H, 0-2)

Rueful Farnborough sent back to earth by Erith

After last Sunday's heady, sweet draught a more bitter taste in the mouth today as our unbeaten run came to an end, and our shortcomings were exposed. I did not see the last fifteen minutes of this game, just as well, I think. Our record against today's opponents is not great. We lost the corresponding fixture 3-1 last season. We knew our opponents had quality, toughness, and would pose a serious challenge. I do not think we responded very smartly.

Yet, it started well in the sunshine, all useful activity, endeavour and teamwork as we prepared for the game, sorted out water bottles, corner flags etc, opened the containers, put the nets up and I even cleared what dogs leave behind so the Erith keeper could show us his moves, and he certainly had a few.

The starting XI was in fact the same as last week's: Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Mick O'Flynn and Ian Coles in defence; Rob Lipscomb, Mehmet Bozyigit, Chris Webb and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Andy Faulks and Ian Shoebridge in attack. Roger French, Colin Mant and Obinna (Michael) Ugwumba were joined on the subs bench by Colin Brazier and Nick Waller. Isabelle and Thomas French, Jane and Miss Coles and an even bigger Michael fan club gave us a good home crowd.

Like last week, I feel we started sluggishly and I am not sure we really snapped out of it, or rather we had opponents today that made it difficult for us to do so. Passes were a tad sloppy, we seemed slow, Erith were quicker to the second ball, physically more committed to the game, and made fewer errors. We created chances undoubtedly in the first-half but never really looked like we believed we would score. As I said in my last report, teams that do not make the most of their scoring opportunities inevitably get punished. The final ball was more often than not too heavy, or short, crosses were too deep or too delayed. When we did have an end product, the Erith keeper was equal to it. We scored after a quarter of an hour but the goal was ruled off-side - following an exchange of passes between Ian Shoebridge and Sinisa Gracanin in the Erith box Sinisa had slotted the ball home as the whistle went. Andy Faulks forced a very good save from a diving header a few yards out and Mehmet Bozyigit forced no save from a header two yards out unmarked at the far post (with time to bring the ball down I felt).

At the other end, Erith looked dangerous from set-pieces, particularly corners. I cannot recall Gary having to make a real save in that first-half but we all had to be vigilant because Erith were good playing on the break and had players that could hurt you.

We started the second half with a bit more purpose. We enjoyed a sustained period of pressure forcing a string of four or five corners to threaten the Erith goal. They dug deep – their keeper made some excellent saves and two goal-bound shots were saved by Erith players on the line with the keeper beaten. That purple patch lasted about ten minutes before a needless free-kick was conceded by Roger French on the hour. Although it was almost on the half way line and close to the touch line the ball was delivered with precision and purpose and a header of great quality converted it into a goal as the ball was headed from the edge of the box into the top corner of our net to beat out 6ft 3 keeper at full stretch. This single moment changed the complexion of the game. Erith heads perked up while Farnborough heads went down, particularly when moments later Nick Waller had a golden chance from six yards out after a one-two in the box to bring us level but the shot fell to his weaker right foot and in the end, he just lobbed the ball tamely into the arms of the centrally-placed keeper. Five minutes later our back four, with three

new faces in it, was breached as the off-side trap was beaten. Gary parried the first effort but Roger French could not provide a covering tackle in time and the ball was rolled into our net by the crafty winger who was causing quite a bit of angst down the left side of our defence.

We were taught a lesson today – how to defend with solidarity and intelligence, how to keep control of emotions, play with composure, how to be patient and make the most of scoring opportunities when they do arise, how to keep a shape and pattern of play.

We had sixteen players available and that meant many changes during the game which had to be made, however unsettling. Rather than break up the narrative of the match here are the changes en bloc as they were made:

25th minute: Colin Mant, Colin Brazier and Nick Waller on for Ian Coles, Sinisa Gracanin and Rob Lipscomb. Half-time: Roger French and Michael Ugwumba for Mehmet Bozyigit and Mick O'Flynn. 65th minute: Mehmet Bozyigit, Mick O'Flynn, Ian Coles, Sinisa Gracanin and Rob Lipscomb for Patrice Mongelard, Chris Webb, Steve Blanchard, Andy Faulks and Ian Shoebridge. 75th minute: Ian Shoebridge for Colin Brazier.

Our policy is to give everyone in the squad a decent run out and we live and perish by it. What is less acceptable is when a single player's behaviour stands out and impacts adversely on the team. It did not take long for the red mist to descend on Roger French - fifteen minutes into the second half and an hour into the season. It did not look great from the touchline and Mick Gearing deserves a medal for handling this situation. At times it looked like an accident waiting to happen on the left of our defence, a bit like cars speeding in the fog, as I had cause to recall as I crossed the Sheppey Bridge today for a family occasion which meant my early departure from the ground. That is why I am not able to describe to you the après-match hospitality or what transpired in the club house after the game. All I know is that Jane stepped in for Pam Shoebridge to put food on the table, so to speak, and I am sure will have taken excellent care of every one and shown a more hospitable side of our club to our visitors.

Man-of-the-Match for Farnborough – Chris Webb who kept a cool head in midfield, defence and gave a perceptive view of events in the left of our defence from the touch line.

Man-of-the-Match for Erith Vets (a personal view) – their excellent goalkeeper.

CUACO Vets next week – and an opportunity to regain our poise and self-respect I hope, amid news that one of our players from last season has signed for Old Tamponians because of events in our midst on the pitch.

15 September 2013: CUACO Vets (H, 4-1)

Near normal service resumed

After last Sunday's contretemps, we were anxious to return to a more serene and familiar state of affairs. This we did today but although we won 4-1 it is fair to say that we were not entirely convincing throughout, and our opponents deserve some credit for inducing moments of doubt in our minds.

Fifteen of the sixteen involved last week were available and we made a slight variation to the front line as Andy Faulks had become unexpectedly available. The starting XI was: Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Mick O'Flynn and Ian Coles in defence; Rob Lipscomb, Mehmet Bozyigit, Chris Webb and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Colin Mant and Ian Shoebridge in attack. Roger French, Andy Faulks, Obinna (Michael) Ugwumba and Nick Waller were the reinforcements.

Jane Martin and Rebecca Coles, a smaller than usual Michael fan club, and a prospective recruit (with partner and offspring) gave us a home crowd which topped double figures if you add Mick and Jack Hampson and Keith Beston for part of the time. Nick Kinnear took the whistle in Mick Gearing's absence, and I am glad to report refereed an untroubled match played in excellent spirit, with fairness and calm authority, in overcast conditions as the weather shifted inexorably but slowly from late summer to autumn in the space of a couple of hours.

Here, ahead of the action, are the changes we made during the game: 25th minute: Andy Faulks for Ian Shoebridge. Half-time: Roger French, Nick Waller and Michael Ugwumba for Mehmet Bozyigit, Robin Lipscomb and Mick O'Flynn. 70th minute: Mehmet Bozyigit, Mick O'Flynn, and Ian Shoebridge for Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Andy Faulks and Colin Mant.

For the kick-off the sides changed round – you do not see that often in Vets football, but it could have been a tactical ploy on CUACO's part. I cannot recall if the wind was a factor and I do not think the longish grass made a difference but there was a pervasive greyness which dampened the spirits. It is the only way I can explain the lackadaisical manner we went about the business at hand, or so it seemed, as passes went astray, first touches went awry, and there was a lack of sharpness and energy in our game. This said, the direction of travel was indubitably towards the CUACO goal though without really troubling their keeper. A neutral observer would venture that Farnborough had 65/70% of the possession but without doing much with it. There were not many clear chances at both ends. Ian Shoebridge had what looked like the best scoring opportunity when he raced clear of the CUACO defence but could not muster the finesse to lob the advancing keeper. He was replaced soon after – the two events being unrelated of course, as Andy Faulks was brought on, and here I will pretend to read his mind “to make a difference and show us how it is done”.

As the game wore on, and the score remained 0-0 CUACO were emboldened and once or twice caused some alarm in our defence and I am sure I was not the only who was beginning to feel this was not going to be our day, a repeat of last week's game. It was at that point with about ten minutes of the half left that we got our breakthrough. Mick O'Flynn lofted what he claims was a pass over the CUACO defence; Colin Mant had timed his run to perfection and beat the off-side trap. He advanced into the box and coolly slotted the ball home. Five minutes later we had yet another corner swung in by Patrice Mongelard which discombobulated the CUACO defence with Sinisa Gracanin lashing the loose ball from the edge of the box into the net. We were 2-0 at half-time, and felt this was a fair reflection of the balance of play.

Any concerns we might have had after half-time when Roger French came on to lead our attack were put to rest soon after the re-start when Andy Faulks produced a gem of a lob from twenty-five yards to increase our advantage.

Five minutes later there was another corner to Farnborough which Patrice Mongelard raced across the pitch from left-back to take with his right foot, to deliver an in-swing from left to right. Chris Webb thought the kick was more suited to a left footer given the amount of space available in that far corner of the pitch by the hedge (for the right footer) and told me not to mess it up. I told him to have more faith. Well - what can I say dear reader – I scored from the corner spot (a not uncommon occurrence as regular readers of our match reports will recall). The excessive degree of curl I had imparted to the ball, its direction and flight must have foxed the CUACO keeper as he appeared to catch the ball but it spun out of his hands into the net. My celebrations were not muted. I did not feel though that my team mates shared the exquisite joy of the moment. The most short-sighted of them started a rumour that it was an own goal, and even claimed that Colin Mant had interposed himself in the process, “got a touch” but, and this is the funny bit, had forgotten to celebrate. There were some failed attempts to disturb my mellow fruitfulness later in the dressing room but the dubious goals committee rightly confirmed that it was Mongelard 1 – French 0 so far this season.

After that I do not recall any clear chances for us. Yes, we threatened the CUACO goal and forced a few corners but with the corner specialist off the pitch by then nothing came of it. There was a Roger French attempt on goal which pretended to be a cross for Andy Faulks, Mick O’Flynn blazed a shot over after a good overlapping run, Mehmet Bozyigit almost got through a couple of times. CUACO, to their credit, never gave up and were encouraged by some of the vacant spaces appearing in our midfield. Deservedly they were to get a goal of their own from a corner that we defended rather poorly at the near post with about five minutes left just as I was beginning to feel the warm glow of another clean sheet.

Pam Shoebridge’s excellent and copious catering service was restored and I was introduced to a couple of sausage rolls. Sausages, sausage rolls, pork pies, crisps, celery sticks, plum tomatoes, spring onions, egg/corned beef sandwiches were aplenty and the mood was good in the clubhouse as Nosh French collected the monies and recorded the rightful scorers of today’s goals for posterity. I made up for not sweeping the dressing rooms for the last two games, and gambled (correctly) that Mrs M, pleased that I had scored, would not be too upset at the sight of the kit.

Man-of-the-Match for Farnborough – Sinisa Gracanin for an excellent goal which settled us, and for a lot of guile and graft in the engine room of the team.

Next week our first away game of the season, in Dulwich against SANCO, a trip that has more often than not ended in disappointment for us, and we’ll be missing a couple of key regulars.

22 September 2013: Sanco Super Vets (A, 10-2)

Senior Vets far from dull in Dulwich as Farnborough firepower overwhelms SANCO Super Vets

Now it is all over – and the outcome so positive for us, a 10-2 win, – it makes the pre-match anxiety a tad ridiculous. Yet it was there all right. We were missing four regular players from our normal starting line-up, our replacement goalkeeper was almost nabbed by the Sunday team overnight, and we could not be sure that we would all make it in time to find the concealed entrance to the SANCO ground in Dulwich Village. And when I got there at about 10:15 co-manager Roger French was heading back to Orpington to deal with a domestic situation.

Still, we had twelve players eventually and took to one of the best pitches in our calendar with this formation: Graham English in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Mick O'Flynn and Nick Waller in defence; Chris Webb, Colin Brazier, Ian Shoebridge and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; Colin Mant and Andy Faulks. Obinna (Michael) Ugwumba was our solitary substitute whilst Roger French and Thomas French retraced their wheels on the South Circular. Michael maintained his record of having at least three fans at each of our games this season.

The SANCO ground is I think one of the very few grounds where we play eighty minutes rather than the more usual ninety – which makes the score today all the more remarkable. We had a very early start with Chris Webb beating the keeper in only the second minute with a thirty-yard lob from the centre of midfield. Chris appeared to take a nonchalant swing with his right boot but the intent and accuracy were deadly, as the SANCO keeper had made the mistake of advancing off his line and made Chris' mind up for him.

We scored a further three goals to go 4-0 up with relative ease and in fairly quick time. Nick Waller crowned an overlapping run, I'll repeat that, an overlapping run, with a cunning left foot shot that looked like a cross but dropped into the far corner of the goal beyond the despairing keeper. Nick noted this was his third consecutive goal for Farnborough which registered without touching the net but of course it only needs to cross the line. Ian Shoebridge got behind the SANCO defence to pull the ball back for Andy Faulks to do what he does best from close range. At 3-0 up after twenty minutes sole manager Patrice Mongelard brought on Michael for Mick O'Flynn. Soon after Patrice Mongelard crossed the ball from right-back (to where he had moved after Mick's temporary withdrawal) for Andy Faulks to volley home acrobatically from two yards out. Mick was doing his stretching exercises at the time but I hope was still able to see what a true assist looked like. Mick came back on before the half was over for Colin Brazier.

At 4-0 up, I think we got complacent and to their credit SANCO got two quick goals which momentarily made me think of previous matches where they came from behind to beat us – surely not this time? As if sensing the need to answer this question to put our collective unconscious at rest, Sinisa Gracanin delivered a pin point cross from near the corner spot for Andy Faulks to head home.

Half-time came and went without the reappearance of Roger French and the game restarted with Patrice Mongelard making way for a returning Colin Brazier. In fact, Colin used to play for SANCO in his younger days a long time ago, and like all exes was keen as mustard to get on the score sheet, making several attempts in the second half – all to no avail.

A few minutes into the second half and Roger French re-appeared with Thomas (but not Isabelle whom he had gone to fetch). The 5-2 score would have cheered him up but he was hiding his feelings well.

The numbers do not lie and the second half was more one-sided than the first. We attacked at will down both flanks and through the middle, from all directions. I think every Farnborough player bar the goalkeeper felt they could get a bit of the action. Andy Faulks was sometimes off-side and sometimes not, and on one of the latter occasions slotted the ball home from close-range to start the second half barrage.

Colin Mant must have wondered if he would get in on this feeding frenzy. He was to get his reward with two classic poacher's goals – downward headers at the far post - after being set up by Andy Faulks and Chris Webb. Patrice Mongelard and Roger French had come on with about twenty minutes left (for Sinisa Gracanin and Nick Waller) in the interval between the two Colin Mant goals, separated by an Andy Faulks shot which came off the inside of the post and rebounded back across the goal without crossing the line.

With about ten minutes left Roger French put his name on the score sheet after good work by Ian Shoebridge who squared the ball unselfishly for Roger to poke home. Chris Webb was in close proximity and like Ian could have had this ninth Farnborough goal to his name – but both Chris and Ian realised the therapeutic value of that goal to Roger after the morning Roger had had. I think I overheard Chris say something about a potentially life-saving goal.

Farnborough were not quite sated – Andy Faulks struck our tenth goal with a fierce left foot shot from inside the box – by then he was looking for the perfect hat-trick of right foot, left foot and headed goals – which he duly claimed. He could have had another in the dying minutes after Patrice Mongelard slipped the ball behind the CUACO defence but he flashed his shot just wide of the postage stamp.

I had my own domestic situation to deal with after the game – not before or during it, and left my team mates to enjoy the après-match. As I crawled back to Orpington along the South Circular, I was relieved at the thought of having to do this only once today.

I spared a thought too for the absent Rob “Arnie” Lipscomb, now out until the new year after sustaining an injury that would require surgery in early October, whilst honing his pecs in the gym. Rob was hoping to keep Andy Faulks hungry in the race for the golden boot. It seems to be working. Rob will be back.

Man-of-the-Match for Farnborough – Andy Faulks for five goals (a penta trick?) who said in his post match interview with the Dulwich Village Chronicle that it was all about the service. Guess which bit I made up.

Next week we visit the Weald of Kent for a rustic assignment with West Farleigh Vets (tricky opponents on their home turf).

29 September 2013: West Farleigh Vets (A, 4-1)

Senior Vets get away with it

At the end of last week's match report, I wrote: "Next week we visit the Weald of Kent for a rustic assignment with West Farleigh Vets (tricky opponents on their home turf)." And so, it came to pass.

I had forgotten how charming the setting was for this ground – the experience of playing there now enriched with superb new changing rooms and facilities all done with great taste and in keeping with the rural context. We did not mind the travelling one bit – and those who went the right way, or left in good time, would have enjoyed the 30-35 minutes' journey from the Farnborough club house via Junction 5 of the M20.

We did not look like a well-oiled machine to start with – and we creaked a bit at the finish too. Our numbers had dwindled to twelve overnight with the withdrawal of Scott Dowie, and ten minutes from the kick-off we were still short of three players and the kit. With hindsight, entrusting the kit to Andy Faulks was not the best idea. It was not only that he operates a just in time policy but we could not be sure that the kit would be washed, or dried, or see the inside of an airing cupboard, chez Andy. Still Andy was the least tardy of the missing trio. Michael was late too, though he arrived almost in time for kick-off resplendent in his "international duty" tracksuit. His fan club arrived soon after. Jane Martin, and Rebecca Coles, our other fans, had arrived early but left before the game started. Sinisa Gracanin was the last to arrive – he called us from Junction 4 to confirm he was en route – but failed to specify it was junction 4 of the M25, not the M20. With our numbers so stretched, it was a relief that there was no phone call summoning Roger French back to Orpington.

The starting Farnborough X were Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Mick O'Flynn and Colin Brazier in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Chris Webb and Colin Mant in midfield; Roger French and Andy Faulks in attack. Michael (Obinna) Ugwumba joined the midfield five minutes into the game.

The first twenty minutes were a cagey affair with both teams probing for weak points and with Farnborough having marginally more of the play but needing to be vigilant against quick West Farleigh breaks led by their two mobile forwards. Both sides were looking to play a passing game, a little hindered by the longish grass, and a wind which made the flight and bounce of the ball unpredictable. The West Farleigh pitch is one of the biggest we play on and with a bit of a slope across it which could either increase or decrease the pace of the ball. Both defences played deep so it felt like there was a lot of ground for everyone to cover.

The game was about twenty minutes old before it was illuminated with a brilliant piece of football. Michael had taken possession of the ball on the left of our midfield and looked up to see Andy Faulks in acres of space on the right. He flighted the ball with just the right amount of pace, angle, precision and weight into Andy' path as he glided free of two defenders. Andy did not have to break his stride, all that he needed was to compute the keeper's position and the twin geometry of the ball and goal, and connect. The half-volley was fluid, clean, exact and the ball flashed past the motionless West Farleigh keeper and arrowed into the bottom corner of the net. That was just the tonic our play we deserved.

But West Farleigh rallied and the nearest we came to adding to our score was when Patrice Mongelard intercepted a ball being played out of the West Farleigh defence, advanced to the

edge of their box and put too much on the pass that was meant to tee up Andy Faulks (a better option could have been Roger French to my left but we'll never know). After half an hour Roger French made way for Sinisa Gracanin (who was late in putting a Guild shirt on this time) but Roger was back not long after that as Ian Coles pulled a muscle and had to come off.

At half-time we had eleven fit players (or just about) while West Farleigh brought on several subs. We are not sure what happened to the wind after half-time. It did not feel the same as in the first half. West Farleigh too had changed – there was more energy and strength in their play and they dominated the early ten to fifteen minutes of the half and put us under pressure. We lost a bit of our composure and had trouble holding on to the ball. When we scored our second goal it was against the run of play. Andy Faulks had chased a long ball down the channels, feinted past his marker and set up a shooting opportunity for himself from eight yards out but from a narrow angle. From where I was it looked like the West Farleigh goalkeeper had been led to think he could parry the shot with his foot but he missed and we were 2-0 to our evident relief. It was beginning to feel like a smash and grab raid – the home crowd was silenced and stunned.

To their credit, West Farleigh did not give up and would have felt justice was done when they got a goal back after neat passing down our left which ended with a deft close-range finish. At 2-1 and a few of our players showing signs of carrying knocks we had to dig deep. "It's like the Alamo out here" shouted Chris Webb now at the heart of our defence rallying the troops. I was thinking more of the Magnificent Seven myself, particularly when Sinisa Gracanin and Roger French combined to allow Ian Shoebridge the opportunity of a volley at the far post which put us 3-1 up. My inner voice said "Nice one Shoey, Nice one son, Nice one Shoey, let's have another one."

Remarkably, we were to grab a fourth before the game was over. Gary Fentiman punted the mother of goal-kicks up the field, the West Farleigh centre half missed his clearing header and Michael was free to advance on goal and plant the ball into the bottom corner with a powerful left foot drive. Moments earlier Michael had needed to strap himself to continue playing. I am sure the goal made it all worthwhile and his three number one fans were there to see it go in, positioned as they were behind the West Farleigh goal like some football photographer who had guessed right.

There was no hiding the sense of relief that we felt at the final whistle. There were a few aches and pains but we revived at the prospect of a visit to the local public house at the top of the lane called "The Good Intent". There my joy swelled with the news that I was today's **Man-of-the-Match** and with the consumption of seven magnificent sausages and assorted potato products including two roast potatoes from a generous patron on an adjoining table. Not much good intent on my part there as far as the diet goes, but I felt I'd earned it today. We all did. I hope Mrs M sees it that way when I come clean.

Another tough away fixture awaits us next week at Belvedere Vets, against an even bigger squad on an even bigger pitch than today.

6 October 2013: Belvedere Vets (A, 1-6)

Senior Vets ask for a thrashing, and get it at the feet of Belvedere

At the end of last week's match report, I wrote "Another tough away fixture awaits us next week at Belvedere Vets, against an even bigger squad on an even bigger pitch than today."

What I could not foresee is what a hash we would make of it. We went down to our heaviest defeat against today's opponents in the four seasons we have played them. I cannot remember the last time we had what footballers call the bare eleven. We were exposed today badly, by opponents who had the numbers and the savoir-faire to make us look less than ordinary.

The day started well though – a gloriously crisp and clear autumn morning, mists burned off by the warm sun, not a breath of wind, and we travelled to the ground by the Sini route eschewing the meander through Old Bexley and its leafy environs for the direct utilitarian thrust of the M25, A2 and A206. Colin Mant had already laid the kit out by the time we got there at 9:55. I had even remembered to look for a keeper's top as the usual one had mysteriously disappeared in Andy Faulks' airing cupboard. Whilst rooting through the deepest corners of the FOBG kit room I found an old scarf in our club colours which I was told later belonged to our much-missed Secretary, Vic Farrow. I wore it to the ground but now wish I had not, given the way things turned out.

The starting, and only, Farnborough XI were Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Chris Webb, Nick Waller and Grant Gray in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Waine Hetherington, Sinisa Gracanin, and Colin Brazier in midfield; Colin Mant and Andy Faulks in attack.

Michael (Obinna) Ugwumba and Paul Bell were on the team sheet left by co-manager Roger French (absent today thankfully) but failed to show – much to our disappointment and mild sense of outrage at the poverty of communication in a team where the management use advanced spreadsheets to plan every game and detailed maps of away grounds are circulated. We had two players making debuts – Grant Gray and Waine Hetherington. We had no linesman, no fans and I could not help reflect that seven out of the fourteen players who started the season on 1 September were not to be seen today for various reasons – including, very sadly, for Mehmet Bozyigit, a career-ending injury. Our pride was certainly injured today but at least we'll be back on the pitch next week

To be honest there is not going to be a lot of football described in today's report, at least in my report. The Belvedere report will no doubt be different. The reasons for this will be very clear shortly.

Only in football can a team take the lead only to be hammered subsequently. What a good goal it was and, in a sense, it came too early, after about ten minutes. Sinisa Gracanin crowned arguably our best passing move of the game to shoot low from the edge of the box against the inside of the post and hence the back of the net. I am told we had at least one other goal scoring opportunity in the half but I must have missed it. Most of the action was in our half of the pitch, in our box to be precise as Belvedere made the most of playing with the not inconsiderable slope. Gary Fentiman was immense in goal, saving a penalty, pushing another shot onto the crossbar and post and catching the rebound, making numerous interventions and parries. Our defence was stretched but coping and we strung a few passes on the break but these never culminated in anything. Eventually the weight of Belvedere attacks paid off as we failed to clear a corner and after some pin-ball in the box the ball was forced home from a yard out.

Our mood at half-time was not great as we knew we had no subs whilst Belvedere brought on four or five players and we had another forty-five minutes to hold out. We were playing with the slope but a fat lot of good that did us. We came up against a very good side, used to the vastness and slope of their pitch; we were short of numbers, fitness, energy, hunger, and organisation. We got what we deserved. We held out for the first fifteen minutes but the signs were there that we would suffer. Our movement and touch were not good. We could not hold on to the ball, we were being outnumbered at the back and could not penetrate the Belvedere defence or get behind them. We got tetchy with each other and fell apart in the last half hour as Belvedere rattled five goals without reply. Some of these were avoidable like two crosses that travelled a long way and were converted at the far post, a goal line clearance off a corner that rebounded off the back of Gary's head into the goal – and amidst this mayhem a gem of a right foot curler into the top corner. The final whistle was a relief – the handshakes genuine as we were well-beaten by a superior team and there was not a single bad tackle in the game. Talking of which a Belvedere player asked Ian Shoebridge “if the idiot was playing today”. You might think you know who he meant but I could not possibly comment. None of us felt particularly clever at the end of the game. However, our mood improved in the cosy clubhouse with the sandwiches, sausages and roast potatoes, as it always does, well mine anyway.

Man-of-the-Match today – a player who deserved far better than the team around him, Gary Fentiman with 63.63 % of votes cast.

Next week we visit another away ground at Inter Vyagra off Shooter's Hill, where we suffered embarrassment last year, it had never happened to us there before, and where a limp performance like today's could see heads rolling.

13 October 2013: Inter Vyagra Super Vets (A, 5-1)

Senior Vets score five times as Inter Vyagra restore their mojo

I would challenge anyone reading this report to say they have played football in grander surroundings. Today we brought our firepower to architect James Wyatt's 200-year-old Royal Artillery Barracks at Woolwich. After last week's flaccid display, we could not afford to fire blanks today and we could still smell the cordite (in our dressing room) after last season's 4-3 reverse in the corresponding fixture.

The magnificence of the setting was translated into the quality of the pitch, more than equal to the testing conditions, and into the facilities on offer – including two rather smart Perspex dug-outs which were most welcome in today's biblical downpour. The warm welcome from our opponents extended to a bag of quartered half-time oranges, a first in my experience, and a nice touch.

After last week's personnel shortages there were fourteen of us who reported for duty today in an unfamiliar, mostly long-sleeved, away navy-blue kit that had matching numbers on the shirts and shorts (to avoid a clash between our egg and bacon strip and the Inter Vyagra orange livery). The front-line troops were Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Chris Webb, Steve Blanchard and Mick O'Flynn in defence; Ian Shoebridge, Waine Hetherington, Sinisa Gracanin, and Nick Waller in midfield; Colin Mant and Andy Faulks in attack. The reservists were Roger French, Martin Warwick and Paul Bell.

I have to admit we were surprised by the youthful vigour of Inter Vyagra in the first quarter of an hour. It was very clear that they had refreshed their side since last year and they had some nippy operatives in midfield and upfront. We had great trouble advancing into their half and holding on to the ball. I do not recall their keeper touching the ball in the first ten minutes. It was no surprise when they took the lead after about fifteen minutes – a quick break down the right of our defence, after we could not hold the ball in midfield, was crowned with a pacy low cross that just skimmed the top of Chris Webb's sliding boots before being niftily converted from two yards out to give them a well-deserved lead. At that point I thought, and I was not alone, that we would do well to get a draw out of the game. We lacked zip and sharpness and played as if we were waiting for medication to take effect.

Slowly, we began to ask questions of the Inter Vyagra defence. Ten minutes after they had scored, we were level. A free-kick from Patrice Mongelard troubled the Inter Vyagra defence greatly as it left their keeper alone to face Colin Mant and Sinisa Gracanin with a ball deep into their defence. I am told the keeper attempted to punch the ball clear but he could have been deceived by the spin, or wet surface area, and ended up directing the ball into the net. Technically, Patrice Mongelard was the last Farnborough player to touch the ball with scoring intent but his so-called team mates unanimously used the words "own goal". Martin Warwick came on for Ian Shoebridge midway through the half to give us more of a foothold in the Inter Vyagra defence. It was a more even affair by then although Inter Vyagra had the best opportunity to edge ahead with a downward header at the far post that was planted narrowly wide. Patrice Mongelard whose urge to shoot from distance was Pavlovian in the wet slippery conditions had a couple of efforts that looked interesting but on the whole both teams cancelled each other, to half-time.

Roger French and Paul Bell came on at half-time for Colin Mant and Waine Hetherington. This was Paul Bell's first outing for us this season and he marked the occasion with a pair of new

bright yellow boots. We started the second half far better than the first. In fact, we started so well that after ten minutes we were 3-1 up. First Andy Faulks got clean through to get to the end of a lofted clearance from Steve Blanchard to chip the keeper from ten yards out. The tall Inter Vyagra keeper got a hand to the ball but could not materially affect its flight into the goal. Suddenly there was more lead in Andy's pencil and from then on, he was a constant menace.

A few minutes later, Roger French and Paul Bell combined as Roger flicked the ball (expertly he says) into Paul Bell's path as he embarked on a run across the length of the Inter Vyagra box before putting the ball where everyone including the keeper knew it would go but could do nothing about it. The ball was curled low and meaningfully into the net, with a precision that the Royal Artillery would salute. From then on, we bossed the game, though not before Gary Fentiman pulled off a great save to palm a powerful volley out wide by diving low to his left. Mick O'Flynn went off with a calf strain, perhaps to ponder the fate of his Merc left with a flat tyre in the genteel part of Mottingham, and Waine Hetherington was back on with Patrice Mongelard switching to the right of defence. Patrice had a great chance to add to the score after drawing a missed tackle from an Inter Vygara defender and advancing into the box to shoot without result. Soon after Patrice made way for Colin Mant and the re-arranging of our artillery was completed with the return of Ian Shoebridge (back on in place of a stiffening Nick Waller).

We added two more goals to complete a resurgent second half, as we thrust forward, our potency regained. Roger French displaced a couple of Inter Vyagra defenders at a corner which allowed Farnborough Captain Chris Webb a clear point-blank header to register our fourth goal. Soon after, Paul Bell nonchalantly volleyed a cross from Colin Mant into a tiny but big enough space between post and keeper's glove to match out best ever score against today's opponents (achieved on 16 May 2010 when Paul Bell, Patrice Mongelard and Ian Shoebridge were among the scorers). We kept trying to add to the score – Roger French, much to our and his amusement, vainly followed a through ball, aquaplaned and ploughed well beyond the pitch boundary. Short of pace, he was also short of sleeves, as his number 3 shirt bore the signs of a crime against football couture after some miscreant had in a rather rudimentary fashion converted a long-sleeved shirt into a short-sleeved shirt with their teeth. This act of vandalism will have to be reported to the Management Committee.

It rained from start to finish today and yet you would not know it from the state of the pitch. The hot tea and showers were most welcome before we made a rapid return to the Farnborough Club house for a swift half and the use of the radiators to dry some items of French outdoor wear. The club house was deserted and we could not help wonder whether the Farnborough pitch had been bested by the exceptional amount of precipitation (surely the cyclone in the Bay of Bengal had nothing to do with it).

Man-of-the-Match today – Paul “Golden Boots” Bell who made up for going awol last week, by bagging a brace, taking the kit home, and behaving himself after his curry and wine evening.

Next week it is a welcome return to Farrow Fields and Pam Shoebridge's home cuisine, (chicken legs and sausages on order), after four consecutive away games, and we have a tough nut to crack in Wickham Park who came, saw and conquered 4-0 in the corresponding fixture last year.

20 October 2013: Wickham Park Vets (N, 0-5)

Norman Park stroll for Wickham Park against shambolic Farnborough

Looking back, I ask myself at what exact point were the seeds of today's abysmal display sown. Was it when we had to relinquish our home pitch to make way for the Sunday team's re-arranged fixture; was it our misplaced faith in referee Graham Seymour turning up (he has form we should have remembered); was it when our fourteen players went down to twelve in the space of twenty-four hours; was it when we allowed 10-man Wickham Park to play a 16-year-old; was it when we got old and slow – or was it a combination of all these things? We'll never know but what we do know is that today was a most inept performance, (I hesitate to use the noun) of our season so far – and the future is not exactly rosy.

We knew Wickham Park were a good side – after all they beat us 4-0 at our place last season; but I am not sure we knew how badly we could play. This will be a short report, I fear.

The starting XI were Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard and Nick Waller in defence; Waine Hetherington, Paul Bell, Martin Warwick and Colin Mant in midfield; Roger French and Andy Faulks in attack. Our only substitute Chris Webb impersonated a referee with a whistle from Master Thomas French' Christmas cracker last year, and did a very good impression of one, for a man without a watch.

Before we could start though we had to put the goal nets up – I say put but it was more a case of having to tape the nets up. The bars and post bear witness via sticky tape of thousands of matches played on the Norman Park pitches in the London borough of Bromley. The man in the hardware shop was prescient when he sold me a larger roll of duck tape than I needed two years ago. This was our second "home" visit to Norman Park in six months, and for the same reason. Paul Bell needed an industrial-size loo roll to clear one of the goal mouths of what I can only think was evidence that the Hound of the Baskervilles had passed this way looking for Iodium. Ironic, I thought, that Paul should complain about the smell.

When the game got under way, I felt like asking Paul to do a bit more waste management to clear what Farnborough was leaving behind. Maybe I felt that way as I was marking someone young enough to be my grandson (I do not mind a gap of one generation but two seemed a bit much) and I think he'll remember me in the morning. But as a collective we were for the most part poor, slow, unfit, lethargic, never in the right place, not marking our opponents tight enough, second to second balls, weak in the tackle, without shape or discipline, tetchy with each other, out of breath, out of ideas, unable to hold on the ball or string two passes together. We should have been more than 1-0 down at half-time. Our opponents were good and we made them look even better. We had at least two players carrying knocks and who should really have come off but we did not have that option, let alone luxury. Referee Chris Webb let the game flow timelessly, and without the support of linesmen – and it was typical that the only thing he blew was for a foul throw by Paul Bell as he attempted an entreechat at the same time. Paul Bell had the only sniff of a chance we created in the first-half and even here we failed to draw a save out of the Wickham Park keeper.

It is only 1-0, we said at half-time, and would have taken that as the final score but of course our opponents had other ideas and I cannot blame them really. Nick Waller – unable to walk let alone run took over as referee with a proper whistle and stopwatch whilst Chris Webb attempted to shore up our midfield.

It was like shooting fish in a barrel. Wickham Park rattled another four goals and it could have been more but for some great saves by Gary. The pattern was broadly the same - quick breaks overwhelming our defence mainly through the middle or down the left and Wickham Park players queuing up to have a go in the box. Roger French limped off (self-injured we think) to have his parenting skills severely tested on the touchline by young Isabelle and Thomas French who had passed up the opportunity to go back to the club with Jane Martin, Rebecca Coles and friend. We played the last quarter of the match with ten players.

When Nick Waller drew matters to a close it felt like a mercy killing. In the midst of this debacle there were some players who put in quite a shift today – in particular Martin and Waine, and they deserved better. Andy Faulks had a good chance to restore some pride when clean through in a one-on-one but blazed over from three yards out. Martin drew a good save from the second West Wickham keeper. You know you are not doing well when the opposition change keeper with ten minutes left for what I can only think was to give the original keeper a chance to get on the score sheet.

The arthritic showers made us miss our home ground even more. Five of us made our way back to our clubhouse where Pam Shoebridge had kindly saved us some food. I was able to have one chicken leg for every goal we conceded today. Call it comfort eating – good thing I did not play for our Sunday team who lost 10-0. Our Young Vets lost too, but only 3-1, and after lending a player to the 10-man opposition. I think this was a particularly grim weekend for the club – none of the Saturday sides won either.

Man-of-the-Match today – Gary Fentiman in the Farnborough goal. Enough said.

Next week we visit CUACO – who will be keen to avenge their 4-1 defeat at our place a few weeks ago. Based on our showing today I would say the odds are 1-4 in their favour.

27 October 2013: CUACO Vets (A, 4-1)

New boy makes quite an impression as Farnborough put the clock back six weeks

After last week's debacle we were back in numbers today, and hoping to repeat the 4-1 scoreline of six weeks ago at our place. This we did, on what turned out to be quite a good morning for us in the breezy, dry and sun-dappled air of leafy Park Langley at the Old Dunstonians Sports Ground. This was our third visit to that ground and we took in the familiar landmarks of the narrow access lane, three car parks, tennis courts and archery practice within bow shot of the vast pitch, the white and red lines on the pitch, and what we now know as Mehmet's ditch.

The starting XI were Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Chris Webb, Colin Brazier and Steve Blanchard in defence; Wayne Hetherington, Martin Warwick, Sinisa Gracanin and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Colin Mant and Andy Faulks in attack. Roger French, new boy Andrew "Denzil" Washington, Mick O'Flynn and Obinna (Michael) Ugwumba made up the XV.

We would have had sixteen players but for Ian Coles who was carrying a knock. Ian was there though with Jane Martin to give us a running commentary on the touchline. They were not our only fans as the return of Michael, sporting a pair of (fake?) leopard skin pumps, a purchase from Dubai I understand, brought back his three number one fans. We were missing our two regular fans and tent dwellers, Isabelle and Roger French, and here I must quash the rumour that they had been sold to some Roma family. It was more a case, I surmise, of the family not finding a buyer for Roger.

The start to the game from both teams was slow, as we got used to the size of the pitch and to each other. We had more possession (60:40 I would say) but did not do much with it. Both teams sought to move the ball around but had to rely initially on set-pieces to create any danger in the opposite box. Two Farnborough corners in quick succession, by Ian Shoebridge and Patrice Mongelard, were met with clean Farnborough headers without breaking the deadlock. Both teams struggled to come up with a telling final ball but we had more attempts at it. The first of many changes was made after twenty-minutes when right-back Patrice Mongelard was replaced by Mick O'Flynn. Ten minutes later Ian Shoebridge managed to thread a ball behind the CUACO defence which could not be cut out entirely and a lurking Andy Faulks did what he does best by rounding the keeper and finding the gap between two retreating defenders to give us a 1-0 lead which was, on the balance of play, deserved. Five minutes later though the CUACO equaliser was struck, equally deservedly, because we had lapsed into the old habit of not tightening things up in midfield and leaving space in front of the back four for opponents to colonise. The twenty-five yarder was a beauty, true, powerful, straight and unstoppable as Gary grasped thin air at the very moment the net bulged behind him.

We rang the changes at half-time, a luxury denied to our opponents who had the bare eleven. Michael and Denzil came on for Ian Shoebridge and Colin Brazier. The reshaped Farnborough team now had the wind behind them and we penned CUACO back as we launched wave after wave of attack. From one such incursion on the right of the CUACO defence, ten minutes in, Denzil had the composure and vision to measure a cross to the far post where Wayne's cultured left foot produced a first-time volley of no little beauty that flew past the keeper and into the far corner of the net. Five minutes later Andy Faulks had a golden opportunity to make it 3-1 in a one-on-one but was countered by the CUACO keeper who had a good game today despite the result. He could do nothing though about our third goal, and Andy's second, as he was played in by Martin Warwick and calmly lobbed the ball into the bottom corner after the CUACO keeper had committed himself.

Our confidence was high at that point and with twenty minutes left the four players on the touchline - Roger French, Ian Shoebridge, Patrice Mongelard and Colin Brazier joined the fun as Colin Mant, Waine Hetherington, Martin Warwick and Steve Blanchard left the pitch with the satisfaction of a job well done. The team's satisfaction was, we felt, sure to increase but we made heavy weather of it – a free-kick from Patrice Mongelard left three Farnborough players well placed to add to our tally but this was not capitalised upon. With about ten minutes left Denzil found himself in the right place in crowd scene in the CUACO box to turn and shot low into the bottom corner. The beginner's luck was well deserved.

There was time for a Roger French moment as he stretched, groaned and grunted to get to a sitter laid on unselfishly by Michael two yards out. Roger's flick was not good and even managed to put the predatory Andy Faulks off. My unbiased advice to Michael is that next time, at all times really, he should forget Roger French and take a shot himself - this was likely to be far more productive. When the final whistle came after 80 minutes CUACO would have welcomed it whereas we would have liked the extra ten minutes.

New boy Andrew "Denzil" Washington ran the line in the first-half, all the while analysing and dissecting our performance as he revealed perceptively during the half-time team talk. Ian Coles thought that Andrew had made more sense after only forty minutes in the club than Roger had after more than a decade. He was joking, I think. Anyway, Denzil was on fire today – registering an assist for the second goal with an exquisite cross to the far post and getting on the score sheet with our fourth goal. Unfortunately, we could not get to hear more from Denzil as he was called away on business. He did enough I think to be the first name on the team sheet next week for what will be a much tougher assignment against our conquerors of last week, Wickham Park, as we return to the Pickhurst Lane environs.

Until we took control of the game in the last half hour it was an even contest. There was a not a single bad tackle in the game, and the good-humoured referee had a trouble-free morning, helped by what he assured us was his 20:20 vision after we had naively queried a decision.

With the clocks going back, there was just enough time for me to get back to the Farnborough clubhouse to return the first aid kit, balls and water bottles to their home before the place was locked by Paul Tanton (basking in the glow of a 3-2 win for the Young Vets against Ditton Vets). Paul kindly offered me a spare cheese roll which kept me going until I could get myself some egg and chips at home (and I did not have to share my chips with my team mates).

Man-of-the-Match today – Waine Hetherington, a relatively new boy playing only his 4th game for us, for a gem of a volley, and more.

3 November 2013: Wickham Park Vets (A, 2-2)

Tensions boil over as Farnborough put up a fight to earn draw

Two weeks ago, we were hammered 5-0 by the same opponents and our performance was even worse than the result. Today we were determined to put things right. We even shrugged off the loss of two players overnight, including a goalkeeper. However, today's match will be less remembered for the football. You are reading the last ever report of a match between the Farnborough Senior Vets and Wickham Park Vets, at least so long as I remain your match reporter. I have been playing Wickham Park for as long as I have played Vets football for Farnborough – seventeen consecutive seasons – and today all those years of tradition were swept aside in a moment of stupidity and bile. It is sad when that happens.

The starting XI were Toby Manchip in goal; Ian Coles, Colin Brazier, Mick O'Flynn and Steve Blanchard in defence; Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant, Michael Ugwumba, Sinisa Gracanin and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Andy Faulks in attack. Roger French and "Denzil" Washington made up the XIII. Michael had brought his three fans, Roger his pair, Isabelle and Thomas, and later towards the fractious and premature end, three Webbs and two more Manchips appeared.

The Farnborough brains trust had come up with the idea of playing five in midfield, with Patrice Mongelard as the holding midfielder. The other welcome surprise was the appearance of self-appointed overall club captain Toby Manchip, tanned, trim, taking one for the team by responding to a Saturday night SOS to play in goal. He must have been hoping for the call as he had a new pair of gloves ready.

If Wickham Park had been expecting another stroll in the park, and on their turf, we quickly put that notion out of their head. We were tighter, better organised, more resilient and combative. Our wide midfielders Ian Shoebridge and Michael Ugwumba gave good support and used the ball well to create dangerous situations for Andy Faulks. At the back we plugged gaps, covered for each other and competed. The centre held with Sinisa Gracanin, Colin Mant and Patrice Mongelard tackling and covering and taking care of the ball. We had the temerity to take the lead after about twenty minutes after good work by Ian Shoebridge to harry and dispossess a dallying Wickham Park defender in a dangerous area. He played the ball to Andy Faulks who looked up, let fly and the ball curled and looped into the net. Our rhythm was disturbed on the half-hour when Mick O'Flynn had to come off injured. He was to play no further part on the pitch, but was needed later on, off the pitch. 'Denzel' came on to replace him, taking over the holding midfielder role from Patrice Mongelard who moved to right-back. We continued to threaten the Wickham Park goal with long diagonal balls and deep free-kicks but were not able to add to our score.

At the other end, the Wickham pressure grew as they sought to make the most of the considerable slope. They forced a number of corners – from one of which Patrice Mongelard cleared off the line. They hit the bar and pressed us hard. We had lost some of our initial shape and tightness. They equalised with a well-taken goal after one of their nippy midfielders arrived on the edge of our box to pick a cut-back from the wing and steered the ball, low beyond Toby's reach.

Our mood at half-time was very positive. Roger French came on for Andy Faulks who was carrying a bit of a knock. It is difficult to say if Roger's arrival was a catalyst of sorts but gradually an edge crept into the game as we continued to frustrate Wickham Park. They hit the bar again and it is fair to say they had more of a goal threat than we did though Toby was equal to their

efforts. Ian Shoebridge went off having picked up a knock and Andy Faulks, though not quite a 100%, came back on in an unaccustomed left midfield role, and before the game's premature climax, Andy was to try another position.

Midway through the second half, and it is fair to say a bit against the run of play we had the audacity to take the lead again. Our second goal was a collector's item. A Farnborough cross ball from Sinisa Gracanin had been allowed to run by Roger French to the edge of the West Wickham box. This tempted the Wickham Park keeper off his line and he ventured out of the box, and attempted to play the ball out. The move broke down and Colin Brazier who intercepted the ball, looked up saw the keeper stranded and rolled the ball into the net from forty yards out, with his right foot which is only used for ambulation and posture normally. It was a joy to watch the Wickham Park covering defender fall short. This was a fitting reward for a player who was making his 600th appearance in Farnborough colours today. Five minutes later he burst forward as if making his 6th appearance for Farnborough and only the yard of pace of the covering defender denied him.

By then with about twenty minutes left things were getting tense on the pitch and a darker mood began to pervade the game. Denzel was taken roughly from behind and clumped "accidentally". The heated afters saw two players sent off – our own Roger French, and a Wickham Park player. Unwisely they both ended up on the same touchline, fifteen yards apart. In the midst of this we had to make one further change as Toby Manchip dislocated a finger and Andy Faulks went in goal after an absence of twenty years. We thought we could hang on but with eight minutes or so left Wickham Park equalised.

The last five minutes of the game were not played because of an unsavoury and unseemly fracas on the touchline. I was as far away from the incident in my right-back position as could be. I understand that the Wickham Park player who had been sent off with Roger had continued exchanging pleasantries, and on his way to the changing room perhaps had lunged at Roger. The added seriousness of the situation was that Roger had his arm around his daughter Isabelle's shoulders at the time. She took a knock and all hell broke loose. The ensuing ruckus involved about ten or twelve people who joined in to calm things down. There was genuine shock all round. All this was witnessed by Mick O'Flynn, other fans, women and children. No amount of apology will do. We are expunging Wickham Park from our fixtures.

It is not often, in fact I cannot remember ever doing it, that we walk away from food after a game. We understand that Wickham Park had laid food on but events on and off the pitch had left a bad taste in the mouth and we went back to our club to celebrate Colin Brazier's 600th game for Farnborough – a much more pleasant memory of the game.

Man-of-the-Match today – Steve Blanchard – though this was a great team performance.

Our solidarity and temperament will be further tested against Belvedere next week when we will seek to put another heavy defeat out of our minds on Remembrance Sunday. We could have done with the armistice spirit a week early.

10 November 2013: Belvedere Vets (H, 1-3)

Senior Vets remember to lose graciously as Belvedere overrun Farnborough trenches

Remembrance Sunday always reminds me of two things – (a) how time flies and we are a year older and (b) how football is just a social pursuit in a world where terrible things can happen. Of course, terrible things happen in football too, but they are very rare, and in the wider scheme of things football is not that important although not everyone sees it that way.

Commander Gearing, our referee today, always adds gravitas to the 2-minute silence that is customary on Remembrance Sunday games. He was showing some regimental insignia on his arrival at the ground, but had left his medals at home.

The starting XI were Tom Mihalea in goal; Ian Coles, Colin Brazier, Patrice Mongelard and Steve Blanchard in defence; Colin Mant, Michael Ugwumba, Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Andy Faulks in attack. Scott Dowie and Nick Waller were the reinforcements behind the lines.

Roger French was making his own personal contribution to world peace today by choosing not to play – a choice welcomed by our opponents who enquired about Roger's health before the game. We had our third goalkeeper in three games today as Gary Fentiman had done his back, retrieving a ball from a hole on his birthday, playing golf, I think. Before the end of the first half, we had a fourth keeper – more on that later.

We owe special thanks to grassmeister Bunny Beston who organised a forking party before the game so that we could play on today's surface. After the heavy rains of the last few days the surface was not quite like Flanders, but the going was very soft and squelchy in places and the grass was showing vigorous growth for the time of year.

When the game started, all the vigour belonged to Belvedere as they strung passes together, darting here and there with nippy runners, and put us on the back foot from the off. It was against the run of play that we took the lead after twenty minutes. Ian Shoebridge seized on a poor clearance from the Belvedere keeper to steer a header into Andy Faulks' path and Andy slipped his marker and did the rest with his left foot from twelve yards out. This was to be the brightest Farnborough moment of the half, if not the game. Once again, we had taken the lead against Belvedere but it was plain that we would do well to hold on to it because we felt Belvedere had a stronger team (than when they thrashed us 6-1 at their place a few weeks ago). Yet, their equaliser ten minutes later was not entirely convincing. We took our eye off the ball thinking the danger had passed as a Belvedere header from a corner was going wide. But that was until it was redirected into the centre of our goal, more of a mis-hit really, and trickled through Tom's hands, past Ian Coles who could not adjust his feet in time to intervene, and the ball was poked home from a yard out. It was a scrappy but deserved goal.

The next goal was a turning point. Belvedere scored it after their nippiest player ghosted behind our defence to dribble past Tom and give Belvedere the lead. It took us a little while to realise that all was not well with Tom. At first, we thought he'd lost a contact lens but it turned out that in going down he had caught the trailing knee of the Belvedere forward, an accidental clash, on the side of his face. His left eye was already closed, he was dazed and had a bloody nose. There was no question of him staying on and his next stop ought, we felt, to be the Princess Royal Teaching Hospital in Farnborough. (Thankfully I heard later in the evening that a visit to casualty was not necessary but Tom's face will be on ice for a while). Patrice Mongelard had already

slipped the green keeper's jersey on when Michael claimed it. Michael had come off after twenty-five minutes suffering from a thigh strain (to be replaced by Scott Dowie). We had never seen him play in goal but what a revelation he was: strong wrists, good feet, excellent positioning, powerful kicks, surprising agility for a well-muscled man and his crowning moment was to come later deep into the second half. Before the half was over, we had a good chance to equalise from a corner taken by Ian Shoebridge which found Colin Mant's forehead two yards out but Colin's backward glancing header just cleared the bar.

Nick Waller came on at half-time for Ian Shoebridge. Any hopes we had of getting back in the game were snuffed out fairly early in the second half. Belvedere won one of many corners which they infused with danger, and a far post header gave them an unassailable 3-1 lead. The header was not particularly strong but well-directed to the extent that the ball went through the legs of Colin Brazier standing on the post who did a very good impression of a marionette with an arthritic master. After that Belvedere had more attempts on our goal than we had on theirs but each time Michael frustrated them.

With twenty minutes left Ian Shoebridge came back on, for Chris Webb (before he himself was back on for Scott Dowie a little later), and it was noticeable how the game changed. Suddenly we had a presence up front and in fact the best two open play chances of the last ten minutes fell to Ian Shoebridge as we fashioned two one-on-ones which drew excellent saves from the Belvedere keeper. Ian had shown the folly of a 4-5-1 formation at home and there has to be a lesson here. Andy Faulks' game is not suited to the lone forward role. He does not give enough penetration. Our mindset was too defensive.

With ten minutes left, Belvedere earned a penalty, scrupulously and fairly awarded by Commander Gearing. The Belvedere forward, on a hat-trick, hit the ball true and hard to Michael's left, only to see a flying save which was greeted with great appreciation by Michael's three fans (and his astounded and grateful team mates of course).

In a sense we were all slowed down by the boggy surface but for some reason it seemed to affect us more than Belvedere. I think it is partly a case that we had older players in certain positions and Belvedere had more pace in their side, particularly in their offensive play. It is also partly that our positional play, anticipation, football intelligence and general appetite were not of the same level as our opponents. This is a worry, with so many more games left.

A different kind of appetite was satisfied by Pam Shoebridge and Jane Martin as chicken legs, sausages, pork pies, crisps, ham, cheese and egg sandwiches, flapjacks, cake slices with flaked almonds, special "management" rolls appeared on our table d'hôte. The cake meant that I could not manage the last chicken leg. I hope Rebecca Coles had it, instead of Roger French who ran the line today like a trappist.

Man-of-the-Match today – Michael Ugwumba– with votes in double figures – a sensation in goal, and a true team player.

Next week the Met Police are coming to Farrow Fields for Roger French, and to play us of course.

17 November 2013: Met Police Super Vets (H, 3-2)

Singular goal gives Farnborough the edge

I would like to say that Farnborough Vets were superb against the Met Police Super Vets today but that would be perverting the course of justice. Not a good idea against the Met. The truth is, for all our superior possession and abundance of passing, our doughty opponents were never out of the game; and whilst we deserved our 3-2 victory, we were not entirely convincing in the final third, at the business end of the pitch and it took two goals from full-backs to breach the black and blue line.

The weather was dry, if overcast and although the air was crisp there was no wind. The pitch played true but still bore signs of last week's excessive precipitation. Roger French was back, with a promise of good behaviour, and we had others back to give us a crowded dressing room with fifteen players. The visitors' dressing room was less crowded and that is how we ended up loaning them two players – Nick Waller and Chief Super Chris Bourlet (in his natural environment so to speak) so they could match our starting XI, who were – Gary Fentiman in goal; Ian Coles, Colin Brazier, Patrice Mongelard and Steve Blanchard in defence; Colin Mant, Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Andy Faulks and Michael Ugwumba in attack. Scott Dowie, Waine Hetherington and Roger French waited in the van round the corner. Mick Gearing did his usual star turn with the whistle.

We started very well. The first quarter of an hour saw a dominant Farnborough moving the ball well, as we kettled the Met back into their half. We probed at will down both wings and put several crosses into the Met Police box to no effect. The final ball was never quite there and their rather good centre-half was always the last shield we could not break down and we did not fashion any clear-cut chances. It was with the run of play that we took the lead after fifteen minutes with Colin Brazier finishing emphatically high into the roof of the net from a yard out after Chris Webb had followed up his own shot which was parried wide by the keeper, and rolled the ball unselfishly and invitingly into the centre of the box for Colin arriving like the Bodiam Express. This was not the only success for a Farnborough full-back today – more on that later. Five minutes later Michael weighed an excellent pass into space behind the Met Police defence and Andy Faulks arrived to whip the ball first-time beyond the Met Police keeper from the edge of the box with a trademark vintage finish. Scott Dowie and Waine Hetherington joined the game midway through the second half as Ian Shoebridge and Colin Mant took a breather. Scott almost added to our score immediately after arriving as he placed a low shot from inside the box which the Met Police keeper did very well to parry, diving low to his left.

I am sure I was not the only one at that point who felt more goals would come. The trouble is they came at the other end. Suddenly the centre of our midfield went soft, more dominoes than dynamos, and the nippy Met Police forward darted into space to latch on to a through ball and squeezed the ball between Gary's outstretched hand and the near post. This was a crisp finish which gave the Met heart and they got their reward ten minutes later with an almost identical goal from the same player – except that this time he got closer to Gary and took a bit of a knock as the two players came together, without malice. Roger French dropped his linesman's flag, like a good Samaritan, to bring some watery relief, but thankfully the Met Police player was able to continue. There was an unwilling and collective suspension of disbelief on our part as we tasted the half-time oranges, with the score at 2-2. We knew why the scores were level but had not expected it – so all credit to our opponents who had two shots of any meaning at our goal and scored with both and never lost their belief. I should mention too the excellent spirit in which they played the game. Not even Roger French could disturb the peace today.

They had a new player, a late arrival, join them at half-time whilst we had an early arrival Roger French go up front in lieu of Andy Faulks. Ian Coles went to warm the bench and Jane Martin and Sinisa took a break, as Roger, Colin Mant and Ian Shoebridge came on. The pattern of the first-half repeated itself: more possession for Farnborough, plenty of forward momentum, several corners, many shots most off target as the Met soaked up the pressure and sought to play on the break with the nippy forward the end point. We had played about fifteen minutes of the second half when the high point of the game occurred. Patrice Mongelard, playing at right-back, had been going up whenever possible to provide service to his attacking players, in particular Scott Dowie. From one such move Patrice picked up the ball wide on right about forty yards out and instead of passing wide to Scott he cut in, wrong-footing the full-back and pressed forward; a Met Police midfielder was sent the wrong way and still Patrice advanced; by then the Met Police defence was breached and parting like the Red Sea as Patrice shimmied past the last defender and found himself with the goal at his mercy but with the ball on his left foot (usually and exclusively used for balance and ambulation), and only the keeper between him and a moment of ecstasy. Patrice calmly stroked the ball past the diving keeper to spark wild celebrations, and a more muted response from his team mates one of whom (who will remain nameless) was heard to say, and I quote "Oh No, Oh No, **** No" as events unfolded. With apologies to my readers - I was not going to describe my goal in as much detail but there seemed to be some misunderstanding on the part of my team mates as to what happened.

We did not know at the time that this would be the winning goal. We were making heavy weather of it up front, Roger French was shooting from impossible angles and distances as he had realised that he had fallen behind in the goal scoring charts behind both full-backs. Andy Faulks came back midway through the second half, for Michael, to boost our firepower, and he was to produce an exquisite volley from the edge of the box that dipped too late. Ian Coles came back on to shore up our defence as Steve Blanchard departed the scene. Colin Brazier's superb contribution also ended as Sinisa Gracanin came back on to bring some savoir-faire to the midfield. We had to defend during the final quarter of an hour. Met Police had a very good scoring opportunity which drew a smart save from an under-employed Gary Fentiman. We came closest to extending our lead when Scott Dowie slipped through for a one-on-one that drew a very good save from the Met Police keeper. Roger French finally put the ball in the Met Police net but it did not count, sadly I think, because he was yet again off-side.

The après-match mood was most convivial with a cornucopia of goodies on offer from Pam Shoebridge. Not many of the Met Police were there, so some of us had to put in a double shift at the buffet. I had the last chicken leg today as I felt I deserved it! We were joined by Toby, Helen and Oliver Manchip (the boy has pace, takes after mum I suspect). Mick O'Flynn had appeared to Gary Fentiman, badger-like in the Farnborough woods and joined us in our sett. Toby paid his annual subs and offered his thoughts on football management, life, Croatian and Peruvian matters, and my goal even though he had not seen it. Roger French had the usual trouble adding up, and at one point sought help from Master Manchip. Thomas and Isabelle French were electronically engaged. Three weary Young Vets came back tails up from their 5-2 away win to Inter Vyagra, and Ian Couchman finally put the heating on. I was late home but Mrs M was magnanimous as I had scored, or maybe it was her shopping trip to Bromley.

Man-of-the-Match today – Patrice Mongelard.

24 November 2013: Reigate Priory Vets (H, 1-4)

Not much to cheer on and off the pitch at Farrow Fields

It is possible to play well and still lose, and individual performances can make an enormous difference in team games. Those were not the only lessons for us today.

Sixteen players became fourteen overnight with the usual absence of communication. Like last Sunday the weather was dry, overcast and there was no wind. The pitch felt drier this week. Our starting XI were Gary Fentiman in goal; Ian Coles, Colin Brazier, Patrice Mongelard and Steve Blanchard in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb, Waine Hetherington and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Andy Faulks and Colin Mant in attack. Roger French, Paul Bell and Nick Waller waited their turn; and we gave up waiting for Scott Dowie and Michael Ugwumba. Michael appeared (archangel-like with a flowing white scarf) at the start of the second half-time in his Sunday best, after a visit to church to pray for his injured knee to recover.

Club chairman Steve Viner, and a familiar face in Robin Lipscomb (accompanied by Mademoiselle Lipscomb) were there to lend his support. This was the first time Rob had watched us since his injury in the gym which required surgery, and after today he will have few worries about reclaiming his place in January. Other supporters were Jane Martin, Vicky Tanner, Rebecca Coles, and tent-dwellers Isabelle and Thomas French.

We thought our prayers would be answered as we dominated proceedings in the first twenty minutes or so. By then we knew that Reigate had the outstanding player of the match leading their attack, not much more than five feet, wiry, low centre of gravity, quick feet and quicker brain, blessed with a deadly left foot and pace to burn (and probably powered by Duracell batteries). Reigate were soaking all our pressure, letting us unfold the geometry of our passing particularly down the sides, and watching our blunt cutting edge fail to give us the breakthrough we deserved. I doubt if you would find more crosses in a priory than the number we laid on.

Instead, it was Reigate who took the lead – we lost the ball in midfield, it was transferred quickly to the Reigate Express who made the incision, advanced rapidly to the edge of our box and squared it for his partner unmarked in acres of space to lash the ball past Gary. The absence of a Farnborough defender near the scorer led us to believe the latter must have been off-side but linesman Roger French and referee Mick Gearing were not moved. Five minutes later things got worse for us as the star of the show unleashed a left foot shot from twenty-five yards that Gary could not hold. By the time Gary got off the ground twinkle toes had got to the ball, rounded him and steered it into the net, quick as a flash.

To our credit we kept our belief in our brand of football, and our faith was partly restored when with about ten minutes of the half left, we finally made one of our crosses tell as Ian Shoebridge set up Andy Faulks to sweep the ball into the net from six yards out.

After half-time we introduced our three substitutes as Nick Waller, Paul Bell and Roger French replaced Ian Shoebridge, Chris Webb and Colin Mant. The pattern of play did not really vary. We had more of the ball whilst Reigate continued to seek their dynamic outlet, either to create something for himself, or for others. The best scoring opportunity of the second half fell to us about ten minutes in. Steve Blanchard had found himself in an accustomed area of the pitch after a rampaging forward run and was able to measure an exquisite cross from the right. Sadly, the quality of the cross was not matched at the other end. Roger French and Nick Waller were

both unmarked at the far post and between then were responsible for the tame glancing forehead Roger applied to the sphere.

Midway through the half Ian Shoebridge, Chris Webb and Colin Mant returned with Patrice Mongelard, Colin Brazier and Waine Hetherington making way. We then had arguably the pivotal moment of the game. Colin Mant was tackled roughly from behind, the penalty was given, Andy Faulks stepped up with the confidence borne out of eighteen goals in twelve matches this season for us, and the sprightly and youthful Reigate Priory keeper saved the kick. I had closed my eyes at that point in silent prayer but clearly could not compete with a priory. A few minutes later, Reigate pulled further ahead with a smartly taken goal from you know who after he showed our central defenders a clear pair of heels. Our heads dropped. 3-1 became 4-1 not long after with a deserved hat-trick for the outstanding player of the match. We were told by the Reigate linesman that the player in question “had played at a higher level”. These are possibly the last words you want to hear on a Sunday morning in a Vets game. But there was no denying the cutting edge that had sliced through our hopes. I do not think that anyone watching the game would argue against the contention that if the Reigate Express had been stuck in the sidings today Farnborough would have carried the day. Patrice Mongelard came back on for Ian Coles for the last ten to fifteen minutes – Ian’s hamstrings had been stretched by the Reigate Express – who oddly answers to the name of “Stretch” to his team mates.

I am afraid more disappointment awaited us when we got back to our dressing room. It turned out that we were burgled today – the first time I have known this to happen at our home ground in the seventeen seasons I have played football for Farnborough. Some of us lost money, car keys, and a phone too was taken. Clearly there are two lessons here – things like that happen even in community-based family-friendly clubs like ours – all valuables must go into the valuables bag, and we must lock our dressing room door and the back door into the club for good measure. This affected us far more than the game, and the mood was sombre despite Pam Shoebridge’s food and the Farnborough Old Boys Guild merchandise that Roger had on display. The latter keeps expanding – noted Mrs M as I came home in my beanie hat, to go with my sweatshirt and hoodie. Gloves are possibly next - I’ll need a pair with special gripping properties to take throw-ins as I found out today (to my team mates ‘amusement). I am not sure I will extend to the cravat requested by Steve Blanchard.

Reigate Priory stayed in numbers to enjoy our hospitality, and there were more handshakes when they left than I can remember from any visiting team. We look forward to playing them again.

Man-of-the-Match today – Steve Blanchard (and not just for that nosebleed-inducing edge of the box far post cross which deserved far better).

1 December 2013: Old Tamponians Super Vets (A, 2-2)

A game of two periods as Old Tamponians check Farnborough flow

In the end a draw was a fair result but we were left wondering what might have been.

The Old Roan pitch in Kidbrooke Park Road is larger than it appears to the motorist's eye. It had been some time since we played on that particular turf. It remained an excellent surface to play on, conducive to a passing game, and the occasional opportunity to hit a passing car. The air was mild for the time of year, there was no wind and the atmosphere between the two teams before the game was very cordial not least as several players on either side knew each other. Our former striker Andy Smith was now plying his trade for Old Tamps, and he was not the only big unit in their side – noted Colin Brazier, and he was not looking at furniture at MFI.

We mustered fourteen players for this away fixture – good thing we did, but no fans. Our starting XI were Gary Fentiman in goal; Mick O'Flynn, Colin Brazier, Patrice Mongelard and Steve Blanchard in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Webb, Waine Hetherington and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Andy Faulks and Colin Mant in attack. Roger French, Nick Waller and Mehmet Bozyigit temporised in the dug-out. Mehmet was a living testament to the healing properties of curry, or possibly kebabs, after we thought injury had ended his playing days for us (and after we gave him a decent send-off on our website!).

The policemen looking into a vehicle of interest in the road parallel to the ground will have seen a game of no little quality unfold in the first half. Both sides played an unhurried cohesive brand of football mostly to feet and were evenly matched in the opening quarter of an hour though Farnborough had the greater forward momentum and there was more action in the Old Tamps box than in ours. Still, they were soaking our pressure and looked to build dangerous breaks via their crafty midfield players, all comfortable on the ball. We were forced to make two changes before the half hour was up as Mick O'Flynn and Ian Shoebridge were forced off with injuries, after giving us quite a bit of joy down our right. Mehmet Bozyigit and Nick Waller gave us a new reconstructed right side.

Old Tamps had a touch of good fortune when their last defender brought Andy Faulks down from behind, with Andy clear and his sights on goal (until a large wardrobe fell on him from behind!). Still, we were pressing hard and from a free-kick on the half hour swung in by Chris Webb ten yards from the goal, almost like a faux corner, Mehmet Bozyigit got his head to the ball and directed it downwards towards goal where it was re-directed into the goal by Steve Blanchard diving like a salmon at the far post, putting his head in a dangerous place. Ten minutes later the two Colins combined as Brazier harried the Old Tamps keeper into making a mistake away from his goal line and Mant collected the ball, and finished as cool as a mint to give us a 2-0 lead. I'd like to say we deserved it, but our opponents had great quality of their own which had not borne fruit, yet.

We had had an excellent first-half playing collectively, with lots of yardage and effort put in by everyone. We cannot recall Gary Fentiman having to make a serious save in the first half. The second half was a different affair. Waine Hetherington feeling a back injury made way for Roger French at half-time and Roger was sent to toil up front, with Colin Mant dropping to left midfield (though many of his team mates did not appear to register his presence given the number of times passes did not go to him). We struggled to apply the same pressure on Old Tamps. Their mobile midfielders gave them the upper edge and we were pegged back. We had lost a cutting

edge up front and where we had strung four or five passes before our moves were now breaking down after two or three passes.

Inevitably, Old Tamps got a goal back after fifteen minutes when the ball was fired in through a crowd of players from the edge of our box after we had blocked the initial danger. Gary was possibly unsighted but the Old Tamps goal was with the run of play. We had to withstand quite a bit of pressure for the next quarter of an hour. On the half hour, Patrice Mongelard was in the right place to steer an Old Tamps over the bar after Gary Fentiman had ventured to the edge of the box and had not managed to clear the ball, leaving an Old Tamps forward with an unoccupied empty goal to loft the ball into, and a certain goal but for the 56-year-old springs in my hamstrings. Sadly, this clearing header turned out to be worth one point not three. Old Tamps equalised with ten minutes left with a very good header into the top corner from a cross on the left of our defence after we had failed to clear the danger. Roger French and Andy Faulks had shots that came to nothing in the final moments and in the end both teams had to settle for an honourable draw.

The bar hosted four teams – us and three other teams that we play against – Erith, Old Tamps and Avery Hill, and so had a familiar feel. It also provided us with refreshments, an update on the Man U – Tottenham game, and more importantly sausages in rolls with assorted condiments, and potato products. Our thoughts turned to next week's derby against Orpington Vets and memories of the wacky races that preceded that fixture last year on the Beckenham circuit – and to whether we would be able to replace the four or five players from today who would be unavailable next week.

Man-of-the-Match today – Steve Blanchard for the second week running, and despite having played for the 4ths yesterday.

8 December 2013: Orpington Vets (A, 2-0)

Farnborough win, but do not quite convince

We had a bit of a player availability crisis this week. Waine brought his mate Phil, Colin called on Norman, and Roger reached out to another planet (that of eternal youth) to get Simon (who was in the last two Dr Who episodes – no joke) so we could field a side for this “local” derby, played at the Park Langley Sports Ground, overseen by suburban trains linking Eden Park and Wickham Park. Pity it was not Wicked Park I thought – robbing me of some biblical references.

In the end, we parked fourteen players for this away fixture – but not all were there for the start. Once again sadly we had no fans. There are some growing concerns about the continued absence of the French enfants.

I got there first today and found the place very busy and a tad confusing. The changing rooms were not logical in their layout and it was a case of grab what you find. I secured the last changing room available furthest from the pitch, occupying it with my bag, our water bottles, first aid kit and three footballs. I went to “flex some paper” to calm pre-match nerves, in an adjoining cubicle and when I came out there was another team in the changing room but overcome by breathing difficulties they left quickly.

We were not exactly quick ourselves as the player with the kit had gone to the wrong ground and not everyone had arrived when we had to make our way to Pitch Number 5 where our opponents had been waiting for us, and waiting, on a bright sunny morning in the mild air (for the time of year) waving at passing trains.

Our starting XI were Tom Mihalea in goal; Chris Webb, Patrice Mongelard, Phil Anthony, and Steve Blanchard in defence; Waine Hetherington, Roger French, Simon Thomas, Mehmet Bozyigit in midfield; Andy Faulks and Colin Mant in attack. Toby Manchip had been in the changing room but was nowhere to be seen. I was hoping he had not had a mishap in that cubicle, like some ex-canary down a mine. Colin Brazier was, we knew, going to be late. having had to take photos of our Sunday XI, in their new kit sponsored by McDonald’s, with short sleeves, back in Farnborough. Norman Harris was on the way.

The first fifteen minutes or so were quite disjointed from our perspective. It could have the new players or may be our opponents were fully warmed up and more cohesive. We had a solid back four, a sharp front line but the middle bit was a work in progress. Orpington got a grip on the game quicker than we did. We made early changes as Colin Brazier and Toby Manchip came on for Roger French and Phil Anthony. The game was evenly balanced for long periods without any serious scoring opportunities being created. We enjoyed slightly superior possession but without really imposing ourselves on the game, and we were vulnerable to the counter through a vacant midfield. However, cometh the half hour cometh the man as Patrice Mongelard broke an Orpington move on the right of our defence and the ball was fed to Mehmet Bozyigit on the wing and he had the time and poise to measure a perfect cross to the far post which was met emphatically by Andy Faulks with a sharp header, without breaking his stride, to give us a 1-0 lead. It was the sort of move that you would wish to see from a passing train. Not long after Patrice Mongelard and Andy Faulks were replaced by Phil Anthony, and the vocal and muscular presence of Norman Harris. We did not threaten another goal and in fact were a little relieved to preserve our advantage until the break. We had some hairy moments in defence and Tom’s sure handling came to our rescue more than once.

At half-time, Roger French, Patrice Mongelard and Andy Faulks returned with Steve Blanchard, Simon Thomas and Colin Mant joining the mums on the touchline watching the kids' match on the adjacent pitch. I cannot say that we got better. In fact, if truth be told, we had a lot to thank our keeper for in that second half as he made several point-blank saves, putting himself in harm's way to block and parry shots like the five-a-side keeper he normally is. A few weeks ago, Tom had caught a glancing knee in the eye and been forced to come off with a bloody nose, black eye and swelling – today he caught the eye. Orpington deserved an equaliser but instead it was Farnborough that edged further ahead. Once again, the service was provided by Mehmet Bozyigit, and what service, on a plate with all the trimmings like a succulent kebab for Andy Faulks to prod home from a yard out after Mehmet had bamboozled his markers and advanced deep into the Orpington box before squaring a sitter to Andy. That was Mehmet third goal assist in the two games since his return from "retirement". To think Mehmet operates on only one good knee, just imagine if he had a pair of them.

Colin Mant and Simon returned for Toby Manchip and Waine Hetherington for the final third of the game and towards the end Waine came back on for Mehmet who would have come off to a standing ovation if we'd had any fans. We created more chances in the last ten minutes of the game than in the previous eighty. Most of these fell to Andy Faulks – now in search of the perfect hat-trick, again, shooting with his left foot on several occasions and wasting several good chances.

Watching the news this evening I could not help wonder if a train passenger watching Andy might harbour suspicions that Andy was doing a spot of match-fixing with all those missed opportunities! Nor can I confirm that some Far East betting syndicates have been hoping for a Roger French sending off!

2-0 remained the final score, and we felt that we had got away with it. The young referee had a trouble-free game to manage – I cannot recall a single bad tackle in the game. Orpington were disappointed but gracious in defeat.

The changing room was to prove eventful again – this time when the water just ran out with some with shampoo in their hair, those who have hair that is, and others just hanging their towels about to go in. The only one of us who did mind was Andy Faulks, renowned for his services to water conservation. That was my cue to go home, eschewing the après-match refreshments.

Man-of-the-Match today – Tom Mihalea for a superb and brave display in goal.

15 December 2013: Old Tamponians Super Vets (H, 3-1)

Farnborough pressure too much for Old Tamponians

Less than twenty-eight days had elapsed since our last encounter with Old Tamponians, and here we were again, half of that period later – to play intelligent passing football without tension. Of the fourteen Farnborough players who had featured in the match a fortnight ago – only eight were back today. In fact, I felt a bit like I had been dropped in it by absent co-manager Roger French when it became clear that we would have not only the bare twelve players today but we would also be without a recognised goalkeeper. But we were hailing the return of Rob “Arnie” Lipscomb after a long lay-off due to a body-building injury who said he would be back, as well as of Ian Coles after a shorter absence due to a troublesome hamstring.

We had a few more fans than in recent weeks (though sadly still no sign of the French kids, allegedly out on a Christmas treat with papa). The Farnborough home crowd consisted of Ian Shoebridge (who took care of a few other bits round the clubhouse), Jane Martin, Rebecca Coles and club President Ian Couchman. The latter was enjoying one of the perks of the job – a sausage sarnie prepared by Pam Shoebridge, which he munched happily, and with too much relish for my liking, as half-time approached.

So, I took one for the team today by going between the sticks. I did something even more risky with the kit, more on that later. Our starting XI were therefore Patrice Mongelard in goal; Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier and Mehmet Bozyigit in defence; Chris Webb, Waine Hetherington, Martin Warwick and Robin Lipscomb in midfield; Andy Faulks and Colin Mant in attack. Paul Bell was out in a well-ventilated area, running the line, chuckling to himself about the gasification of brassicas in his lower intestine. I had made the schoolboy error of sitting next to him earlier in the changing room.

Old Tamps were much the same squad to me, with the addition of a regular keeper whilst Farnborough had gone the other way with an irregular keeper. If my team mates had any anxieties about me playing in goal, they kept them quiet, at least until the quarter hour when Old Tamps forward (ex-Farnborough) Andy Smith sprung the off-side trap about forty yards from goal and was able to carry the ball deep into our box to score from close-range with a smart finish preceded by the usual dummy. That was to be the last time our off-side trap would fail today.

We knew we could match our opponents – we were enjoying the greater possession and it was a matter of getting behind their defence and of being patient. And so, we probed down both flanks, with the full-backs joining in and we kept the ball in the Old Tamps half as much as we could. After twenty-five minutes Martin Warwick made way for Paul Bell, and Robin Lipscomb brought his energy and verve to bear in the centre of midfield. Our equaliser followed on the half hour – and it was a superb twenty-five-yard volley from Chris Webb’s left foot as the ball dropped from a great height. The Old Tamps keeper played a part in the goal, but then again you could say that about most keepers who attempt a save and get their hands to the ball. There was no need for the dubious goals committee to adjudicate.

The flow in the last quarter of an hour was heavy towards the Old Tamps goal. Wayne Hetherington had a good chance to give us the lead but put his shot from five yards out against the crossbar. Waine was to make amends five minutes later with a delightful through ball that played Colin Mant in behind the Old Tamps defence. Colin applied a minty-cool finish to give us a 2-1 lead which we held until the break.

Martin Warwick came back on after the half-time oranges at right-back whilst Colin Mant went to exercise his arm flagging Old Tamps players off-side. I cannot remember a game with so many off-sides given against our opponents. The Old Tamps players protested of course but their own management could see the absolute fairness of the decisions. One of their repeat offenders was cheered off by both sets of players when he left the club house. Thinking on it after the game it struck me that I was, as often, the last defender but I could not be playing anyone on side because I was the goalkeeper. Simple.

The second half was if anything even better from our perspective. The off-side trap worked a treat. The central pairing at the heart of our defence were solid and mobile. We had good platforms to build on through the full-backs and the midfield was competing well with the strongest elements of the Old Tamps side. Colin Brazier went off after twenty minutes to be replaced by replaced by Colin Mant, with Waine Hetherington slotting into the left-back position with ease, another brilliant tactical move by today's manager. A little after midway through the second period, we scored the best collective goal of the match to give us a much sought after two-goal cushion. It was clear that the fourth goal of this match would be crucial – we could not rule out Old Tamps getting it because of their all-round quality but I think we wanted it just a bit more today. There was good interplay between the midfield and the forward line, with four or five passes strung together before Andy Faulks crossed from the left; the connection was missed in the centre of the six-yard box only for Martin Warwick who had ventured deep into Old Tamps territory to lash the ball home from a tight angle wide on the right – so tight in fact that the ball came off the inside of the near post before nestling into the net at the other extremity of the goal.

There was time in the last ten minutes for Colin Mant to practise the Ronaldinho “blind pass” which according to the piece in the Sunday Times today consists of “- eyes glance one way, very deliberately, and foot sends the ball another”. Andy Faulks had broken through in a one-on-one and the Old Tamps keeper had made the save but Andy got to the rebound and crossed to the far post to the unmarked Colin Mant. As they say in football my granny would have scored that one. That was a glaring miss – good thing it did not matter by then. What mattered more for Colin though was his near miss today. He had just enough time to retrieve his “precious” from inside his glove, inside the pocket of his missing FOBG rain jacket, inside the kit bag, before I took it away. I would not have enjoyed explaining the absence of my wedding ring to Mrs M. I had, however, to explain to Mrs M why I had taken the kit home today – “twice already this season and it is not even Christmas”. “I am glad you mention Christmas” I said in reply – “Father Christmas is good to those who show forgiveness and tolerance”.

The mood in the club house was very good – not only because of the excellent spirit in which the game was played, under the stewardship of referee Mick Gearing, but with many Old Tamps players enjoying our hospitality, including the hot sausages which the Club President had not managed to eat, and other usual delicacies provided by Pam Shoebridge, with help from Jane Martin and Ian Shoebridge.

Man-of-the-Match today – three of them, like the wise men who start to do their packing at around this time of year - Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles and Waine Hetherington.

22 December 2013: Wellcome Super Vets (A, 1-6)

Farnborough gift-wrap six goals for the opposition

I know it is Christmas and all that, and it is better to give than to receive, so my family tell me, but what we did today was taking the Christmas spirit too far.

Apart from being the first day when the days start to get longer, today also saw that rare planetary alignment when both Farnborough Vets Teams found themselves playing the same opposition away at the Beckenham Cricket Club in Foxgrove Road, Beckenham, BR3 5AS – and with contrasting fortunes. Farrow Fields was under water like most of the BR postcode, except for the exceptionally well-drained pitches at the Beckenham Cricket Club.

We had assembled fourteen turkeys for our last game before Christmas. Our starting XI were Darren Burkett in goal; Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Nick Waller, and Robin Lipscomb in midfield; Andy Faulks and Colin Mant in attack. Paul Bell, Roger French and Graham Curry waited to bring the drinks on. Graham was Paul's mate from the north east, down for the Palace game yesterday. You could say that this was first time Paul Bell had brought a curry to a Farnborough game and it did not smell. Once again though we had no fans – the French kids having gone, we were assured, to Chessington even though there was a fire there yesterday.

What a game of two halves we served up. We were 1-0 up after only five minutes – a swift incisive move that saw us defending a corner one moment, followed by a quick ball to release Sinisa Gracanin down the right flank, who looked up and slid the ball invitingly behind the Wellcome defence for Andy Faulks to stroke home crisply first time, with Colin Brazier's boot. Andy, singing Karaoke at Beavers until sunrise had left his football boots behind, not a very serious approach to the game you might think, but as this was Andy's twenty-second goal in seventeen outings perhaps it did not matter. Still, Colin's boot was glad to score.

What did matter though was the catalogue of missed chances that we served up in the first-half-hour. The referee confided in us later that had he been officiating at a boxing match he would have been tempted to stop the contest – though he did compel the Wellcome management to replace a recalcitrant player, the only false note of a game played in excellent spirit. Andy Faulks, Sinisa Gracanin, Nick Waller all had good chances to add to our score, as did Patrice Mongelard who muffed a close-range header from a yard out from a Sinisa Gracanin corner. The most serious moment at the other end had come from a very powerful Nick Waller back pass, his best shot of the game, which Darren scuffed just past the post.

Our failure to pull further ahead had emboldened our opponents and they began to put pressure on us. On the half hour, a Wellcome corner was spilt by Darren Burkett and the ball was hooked into our net from close range. Although pegged back we were still optimistic at that point even though we were still not converting the many chances we were creating. Paul Bell was the latest addition to the long catalogue of missed chances as he was clean through but the ball was not on his best foot and he screwed the shot wide.

We made a lot of changes as we do when we have such numbers. One can debate whether they help or hinder the team but they have to be made. I lost count of them. I am told it went like this today:

20 mins	Paul and Graham for Patrice & Robin
HT	Robin, Patrice & Roger on for Wayne, Sinisa & Colin M
60 mins	Wayne, Sinisa & Colin M on for Ian, Nick & Andy
65 mins	Ian on for Darren.

What this means is that the only two players who had a full game of eighty minutes today were Colin Brazier and Steve Blanchard. Moreover, Patrice Mongelard found himself experiencing five positions, more than he can remember in any weekend, at right-back, centre midfield, left midfield, centre half and in goal.

The second half was a disaster for us. Words fail me. We were abysmal, amateurish, atrocious, awful, casual, catastrophic, diabolical, disgraceful, error-prone, inept, lethargic, shambolic, slow, wasteful. Playing without co-ordination, hunger, intelligence, passion, pride, skill and solidarity - we got the stuffing we deserved. Wellcome rattled five goals without reply from Farnborough. We assisted them with at least four of those goals. We even injured our own keeper at 4-1 down when Steve Blanchard's stud connected with the bridge of Darren Burkett's nose and that is how I ended up with the keeper's gloves and top, for a second consecutive game. At times it felt like I was playing against twenty-one players.

We had three or four half chances to score at the other end but messed them all up – mostly tame headers even though Colin Mant hit the bar. Our performance was summed up when Roger French and Robin Lipscomb jumped into each other as they contested a high ball between just the two of them and fell to the ground like a pair of entertainers in a Christmas panto. At least things did not boil over – despite Roger's nascent efforts, which would have been a pity because Wellcome play a clean and fair game, have wonderful facilities and are hospitable. Santa certainly came down their chimney today.

Our changing room was a glum place indeed with dark mutterings and despondent sighs – only lifted by the arrival of the Young Vets with a 5-3 win to their name. At least they had not disgraced the shirt.

I think some of us had more beers than usual after the game – it was Christmas after all, and the hot chip butties gave one a thirst.

As the time of New Year resolutions approaches, it would be good after today, for everyone to take a long hard look at themselves and consider if we are doing our best for the team and the club. Our performance today, individually and collectively, left a great deal to be desired. Managers have been sacked and players dropped indefinitely for less.

Man-of-the-Match today – yes, we must have one, whatever the result, was Colin Brazier.

12 January 2014: Inter Vyagra Super Vets (N, 1-3)

Senior Vets cannot do it on Astro Turf with Inter Vyagra

To sum up our performance, “that was a bit limp” as the actress might have said to Bishop Justus. I mention the bishop because today we played our home game at Bishop Justus CE school, in Magpie Hall Lane, Bromley BR2 8HZ, on their 3G Astro Turf pitch. The Bishop in question, if you are wondering, came to England in 601 A.D. to convert Anglo-Saxons from their native paganism. There was a fair bit of Anglo-Saxon spoken on the pitch today.

The gifts of meteorological foresight and methodical planning granted to Roger French had resulted in us playing this home game on a pitch unlikely to be waterlogged, unlike Farrow Fields. We believed the 3G surface less likely to give us “carpet burn” but we still had to be careful when we put our tackles in (nothing horizontal), and the bit of moisture from the sun acting on the morning frost helped. It is fair to say though that the pitch was a tricky surface to play on – passes had to be just right and any weight on them would see the ball run away, the bounce was not easy to read and any attempt to dribble and carry the ball over two or three yards was unproductive. We also had two zip wires stretched across the pitch which referee Mick Gearing had decided to take account of by stopping play every time the ball hit the wire and an advantage accrued. You would be surprised how many times that happened over 90 minutes – at least six times if I recall correctly.

Like for our last (dismal) performance, on 22 December, we presented with fourteen players. Our starting XI were Gary Fentiman in goal; Steve Blanchard, Chris Webb, Nick Waller and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Mehmet Bozyigit and Robin Lipscomb in midfield; Andy Faulks and Colin Mant in attack.

Andrew “Denzel” Washington (ADW like his number plate), Roger French and Ian Shoebridge waiting to go into orbit, watched anxiously as Inter Vyagra, tails up, came at us in the first ten minutes. They pressed us hard and forced errors – one of which led to their first goal when one of their two quick forwards closed Steve Blanchard down after an unwise back pass, took control of the ball and beat Gary Fentiman. The Inter Vyagra keeper had not yet touched the ball at that point such was our lack of penetration. Yet, we managed to show a little vigour of our own and fashioned a number of chances but as now seems to be the pattern of our performances we failed to capitalise on them. Andy Faulks hit the post. Sinisa Gracanin and Andy Faulks drew good saves from the excellent Inter Vyagra keeper with his feet from close-rangeshots. Waine Hetherington was played through behind the Inter Vyagra defence on his favourite left foot and blasted the ball wide from five yards. It was not until the half hour that we drew level. A corner from Patrice Mongelard connected with Chris Webb’s left knee in the middle of a crowded penalty area and we were back on terms. We huffed and puffed our way to half-time, nearly got caught again with a dodgy triangulation of passes at the back only to be rescued by a great one handed save by the big man in goal. We were finding it hard to cope with the zip of the two Inter Vyagra forwards and their hard-working midfield. We could not match the cohesion of their collective play and our game became a loose collection of individual cameos punctuated by errors and frustration as half-time came.

The first of numerous changes to come were made as Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant and Sinisa Gracanin made way for Roger French, Denzel Washington and Ian Shoebridge. We never got into it the second half. Inter Vyagra took the game by the scruff of the neck and wanted it more than we did. As the actress might have said to the bishop, we looked like we were out of practice.

We had not played since 22 December and the surface was challenging but it was probably the same for our opponents. It was all about desire, hunger and pace. Inter Vyagra had more of it than we did. Crucially too, they played with more solidarity and did not have a go at their own players. We, on the other hand ...

We were saved by the wire, so to speak when Inter Vyagra took the lead again early in the second half but referee Mick Gearing true to his pre-match steer, disallowed the goal because the ball had hit the wire. It did not matter as about a quarter of an hour into the second half Inter Vyagra took the lead again after one of their hard-working midfielders found himself in no man's land on the edge of our box and calmly steered the ball home. Relations between certain individuals in our defence and attack were strained at that point and remained so beyond the match, I think. All music to the ears of our opponents of course who watched us make a series of further adjustments in the last twenty-five minutes, a bit like re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. Nick Waller, Mehmet Bozyigit and Rob Lipscomb made way for the return of Patrice Mongelard, Sinisa Gracacin and Colin Mant. Before the game was over Rob Lipscomb was back on for Ian Shoebridge (tight hamstring) and Ian was to have to limp on when Andy Faulks came off. Andy was a bit out of sorts today and generally when he is off his game and drops deep, we make no impression on our opponents. I cannot help thinking that Andy's preparation for the game had been sub-optimal: there was evidence captured on camera, a selfie if you like, of Andy thrilling himself with dance moves to Michael Jackson music, in a superman costume at 4:40 AM

With ten minutes left, the inevitable happened after a quick Inter Vyagra break following a Farnborough corner and their two quickest players combined to give them a 3-1 lead that in the end was well deserved. We were sloppy as much as our opponents were sharp today. Certain bad habits came back into our play and the rest of the season could be quite taxing as our shortcomings and short tempers mean that we lose and draw more games than we win. I hope we are all prepared for this.

Eight of us came back to our club with a similar number from Inter Vyagra to enjoy Pam Shoebridge's excellent spread: ham, cheese and pickle, tuna rolls, sausages, potato croquettes, plum tomatoes, crisps, tea on demand etc. I was glad to see that Inter Vyagra player who kindly climbed two lots of wire fencing to retrieve three out of our five balls, tuck in with gusto.

There was also quite a bit of analysis of the game – including a copious and perceptive piece from Denzel, on his first visit to our den, about how our game today was proof that England could not win the World Cup. In a funny sort of way that cheered me up, almost as much as news of a 2-1 win for our Young Vets who did it on grass.

Man-of-the-Match today – or should that be astronaut – Chris Webb.

23 February 2014: West Farleigh Vets (H, 2-2)

Farnborough the unready earn well-deserved draw

After eight consecutive Sundays of waterlogged pitches at Farrow Fields, play resumed today on the heavy clay of our home turf, against our visitors from West Farleigh themselves pleased to get away from the watery Kentish Weald. We expected some rustiness in our play but there was rustiness too in our overall organisational efficiency. We had a job finding the key to the container to get the goal nets and we were past kick-off time, a player entrusted with getting two match balls failed dismally. Another, tasked with putting the hot water on for the showers proved equally ineffective as we found out later; next time we'll have to ask a woman if we want the job done, his mum in fact, not least as the boiler controls are located in the ladies' toilets.

Still, we were all very pleased to be out in the fresh air, and there was quite a stiff breeze, conditions were overcast and the pitch was playable though understandably soft in places.

For our third consecutive game, in two months, we assembled fourteen players. Our starting XI were Gary Fentiman in goal; Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Mehmet Bozyigit and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Robin Lipscomb and Colin Mant in attack. Roger French, Nick Waller and Mick O'Flynn were held in reserve.

The ever-reliable Mick Gearing was the referee and was to do something unexpected in the course of the game, more on that later. There were many spectators including our usual fans Isabelle and Thomas French, Rebecca Coles, Jane Martin. Three games were to take place on our two pitches in just over three hours, and it was good to see what we would class as a big crowd, all sharing in the exultation of local grassroots football being played after so much rain.

Although we had won the away fixture 4-1 earlier in the season, we could sense early doors that West Farleigh had brought along a fair number of decent players. One stood out in particular; 5 foot 2, 9 stone, very feisty, pacy, ginger-quiffed, and for a small man not afraid to put himself about. I seem to recall playing against him before and saw him as Tintin in my mind's eye.

The first twenty minutes were very even, with defences on top but the direction of travel more towards the West Farleigh goal than ours but without any clear chances being created. We were missing our own superman – Andy Faulks, 22 goals in eighteen games, last seen frenetically advertising Duracell batteries in a Super Man, or possibly Bat Man, costume at four in the morning. We got our breakthrough after twenty minutes when Sinisa Gracanin was felled from behind by Tintin in the box, and even the usually reticent Mick Gearing, had no choice but to point to the spot. Robin Lipscomb repaid the faith of about half of his team mates by expertly slotting the ball home.

West Farleigh were playing mostly on the break but were gradually dominating the play. Before we made our first mid-half substitutions – there was time for one half of the Farnborough Senior Vets Management to get involved in a little contretemps with Tintin who took exception to being handed some of his own medicine. No, it was not the half you'd expect (tut tut) as he was not on the pitch. Colin Mant and Patrice Mongelard made way for Nick Waller (our new secret weapon up front) and Mick O'Flynn. West Farleigh were to score twice before the half-time break. Although we had a part in both goals it was, on reflection, no more than they deserved at that point as they showed more desire and hunger, were more mobile all over the pitch and as often happens made whatever luck came their way. Gary Fentiman and Steve Blanchard created

a farcical moment which saw Tintin nip in between them as they left the ball to each other on the edge of the box on the half hour. Five minutes later we were trailing behind as another moment of hesitancy saw Farnborough overrun on the right of our defence and the ball was stroked into our net with a deft finish by their other mobile, but taller, centre forward.

At half-time we took comfort from the knowledge that we would be playing with the wind. More changes were made as Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant and Roger French came on for Steve Blanchard, Ian Shoebridge and Waine Hetherington. The pattern of the second half was not really that different. We had more of the ball. West Farleigh could be dangerous on the break. There were few clear chances created. We earned several corners, as well as a couple of free-kicks around the West Farleigh box which Patrice Mongelard punted towards goal from thirty-five yards out, on target. We had a better grip on the game and the changes we made midway through the half with Steve Blanchard, Ian Shoebridge and Waine Hetherington replacing Ian Coles, Mehmet Bozyigit and Colin Brazier did not check our momentum. Mehmet looked like he could do with some of those batteries that Andy has been advertising; I know that with the state of his knees every game is a bit of a gamble, but I understand his pre-match preparation for a game on a heavy pitch after a long lay-off, was not what his managers would recommend.

We got back on terms after a neat three-man triangulation of passes between Sinisa Gracanin, Nick Waller and Robin Lipscomb as the latter finished from close range. The dubious goals committee decided that the ball was over the line when the West Farleigh defender put in the roof of the net – and so Robin now has five goals to his name, only seventeen needed to catch Bat Man. We had one good further scoring opportunity in that half when a goal-bound pile driver from Sinisa Gracanin inside the box was intercepted by a sore West Farleigh body. A draw was a fair result in the end, and apart from Tintin's tantrum this competitive game was played in excellent spirit.

The showers were not very busy but the clubhouse was. The Young Vets returned from a 4-1 away win, and there was time for the latest Farnborough signing – Daniel Nott, 10 days old (7 lbs 1 oz at birth) to be unveiled by his proud parents. We congratulate them and wish all three of them well.

Pam Shoebridge (our new boiler operative from next week) laid on the usual cornucopia of food and at one point had as many orders for teas as she might have had over the last eight weeks. The long lay-off had done Roger French' brain cells a bit of good too, as he added the match monies correctly at the first time of computing. Master Thomas French' brain cells too are doing well as he can now post hand-written comments on the changing room white board immediately after the game. He wants us to play better next week. Better music than Roger's eclectic mix might help. You will have a new match reporter next week and I hope they remember to get the match balls, bring a valuables bag and the half-time oranges, and sweep up the dressing rooms but not the two used for the Sunday team match.

Man-of-the-Match today – Sinisa Gracanin, a masterclass in the art of midfield play.

9 March 2014: Charlton Rangers Vets (H, 2-0)

Normal service resumed as Farnborough re-discover the art of winning

After last week's pale imitation of a match report your usual scribe was back today, and with more of a tan than usual. There was more colour in our play too as you will hear shortly. Unlike last week, and despite the fact that I was actually here this time, today's match report is not about me. This said the memory of winning last night's Farnborough Old Boys Guild Quiz, with my new partners in the intelligentsia, Mick and Asiyah O'Flynn, was still fresh in my mind. I will not bore you with the item of quiz wear I was sporting today.

What a glorious day for football we had this Sunday morning, after all the rain, mud, gloom and postponements etc. that we have suffered over the past three months. Both our pitches were in good nick, a testament to the good work put in by our grassmeisters Keith and Bunny Beston. We were apprehensive about the game, such was the reputation of our opponents that had preceded them (from the games they had given to our Young Vets), and in the recess of our minds we were conscious that our last win was as far back as 15 December, even though we had played only five games since then.

The sun brought out fifteen Farnborough players today, with a starting XI of Gary Fentiman in goal; Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Colin Brazier, and Mick O'Flynn in defence; Patrice Mongelard, Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Rob Lipscomb and Ian Shoebridge in midfield; Andy Faulks, our lone wolf, who told me he'd coughed up a hair ball, don't ask - in attack. Roger French, Nick Waller, Colin Mant and Paul Bell waited to make their contribution to what turned out to be an excellent collective performance, with much discipline and organisation on our part. Off the field too, our organisational game was up to the mark today, aided by Roger's long checklist of things to do on match day which starts with putting the hot water on, and closes with locking the dressing room. Thomas French, Jane Martin and Vicky Tanner were the three graces in our fan club. Nick Kinnear stepped in to referee the game in Commander Gearing's absence, and did his usual fair and competent job with a smile.

The plan was to defend well, and to play a dedicated holding midfielder in the bronzed shape of Patrice Mongelard. More to the point, we wanted a performance of solidarity, support, hard work and without errors and I am pleased to say we delivered. What surprised us a little after the initial exchanges was how well we could penetrate the Charlton Rangers defence. I am not saying this was an Emmental of a defence, it had undoubted quality in its midst and the Charlton keeper was more than useful, but we were finding space and perforation. In fact, you could say that we were following the advice posted at the entrance of our clubhouse which states that "Players must use the rear entrance", as we had quite a bit of joy round the back coming from behind the sides of the Charlton Rangers defence. That is how we crafted our first goal after twenty minutes or so as Andy Faulks played left-footed Waine Hetherington in on goal. Waine had ghosted behind the full-back and surprised everyone, including the opposing keeper, by using his right foot at the crucial moment to propel the ball high into the net from five yards out. We forced several corners and put our opponents on the back foot. But it was not all one way. Gary Fentiman was called into action, and what action that was as he pulled several blinding saves some from point blank as Charlton Rangers pressed for an equaliser. We held firm though – the only false note in our defensive display was a mis-hit clearance cum cross field pass from Patrice Mongelard covering his defence which went for a corner. Apart from that, we were quite sound defensively and the midfield – with Sinisa Gracanin and Rob Lipscomb full of running, were watchful and disciplined. Even Andy Faulks was spotted doing a bit of defensive work at some point and he let everyone know about it. We had lost Ian Shoebridge on the half hour with injury

and Colin Mant came in to do the job he normally does, holding the ball, linking up play and not letting the Charlton Rangers defence settle.

We were thankful at half-time for the shift that Gary had put in and generally we were quite positive. Paul Bell, Nick Waller and Roger French came on for Andy Faulks, Waine Hetherington and Patrice Mongelard. The initial phases of the second half were not to our advantage and Gary's excellence was called upon more than once. Yet, we knew that we could get through the Charlton Rangers defence and it was a little against the run of play when Colin Mant broke through on the left and had the presence of mind and skill to cross the ball to Paul Bell arriving with deadly intent into the box. Paul was deceptively agile and poised as he produced a deft first-time volley to beat the advancing keeper – to give us the cushion of a two-goal lead. At one point it looked like the keeper was going to clatter into him but Paul kept his eye on the ball and his uncanny ability to be in the right place at the right time did the rest. That same ability deserted him not long after as he got his head to a deep Roger French cross a yard out from goal but appeared to have lost the use of the muscles in his neck, unlike Alan Pardew the manager of the team he supports, and the ball rolled harmlessly off him in a perplexing geometry. That was not the only clear scoring opportunity we had in this half – Waine Hetherington had two one-on-ones which his trusty left peg wasted – or rather we should give credit to the Charlton Rangers keeper. Paul Bell, Sinisa Gracanin, Colin Mant and Andy Faulks all had half chances to add to our score but to no avail. A third goal would have been harsh on Charlton Rangers because there was undoubted quality in their game and we had to defend as well as we ever have.

Midway through the second half, Patrice Mongelard, Waine Hetherington and Colin Mant came back on with Rob Lipscomb, Mick O'Flynn and Colin Brazier making way. Rob seemed hard-of-hearing, unlike Mick, or was reluctant to go, as Roger French overruled his clipboard asking Rob to stay on, to give us momentarily, twelve players against Charlton Rangers' eleven. We continued to defend well, punctuating our play with half chances. Colin Brazier came back on with about ten minutes left to replace Steve Blanchard and was heard to say he'd found it easy to play in that position (well not as easy as last night's quiz) as we preserved that rare thing – a clean sheet. We finished the game with only one out of five match balls – and with a great feeling of a job well done, pride restored and all being well in the world. There was not a single bad tackle in the game – a credit to our opponents, who will have felt hard done by.

The clubhouse was buzzing. Pam Shoebridge put copious amounts of tasty food on the table. The sunshine was streaming in, and our Young Vets were basking in the warmth of a 3-2 win, from 2-0 down at half-time.

Man-of-the-Match: overwhelmingly, Gary Fentiman – for a towering performance in our goal, who caused the Charlton Rangers management to say that they could have played for another whole day, and not score against Gary in the form he was in today. He told me this almost made up for not being able to join my quiz team last night.

16 March 2014: Reigate Priory Vets (A, 2-2)

Wry smiles in Reigate as Farnborough help opponents snatch draw

Another glorious Sunday morning for football with the mercury touching twenty, and the rains of winter were a distant memory as we began to wonder if it was time to get the mould out of the mouldeds. Today was our first trip to the Reigate Priory and Cricket and Football Club. The sense of discovery was heightened by the complex parking arrangements and the presence of other sports – lacrosse, bowls, tennis, croquet, rugby all taking place simultaneously in a green and leafy area about a hundred yards away from Reigate High Street. The setting was superb and the magnificent clubhouse will look a treat when the refurbishment is done. It took everyone a while to park their cars - in my case I had to do so twice after being watched by a group of elderly and knowing tennis players who told me after I parked my car that I could not park in their enclave. I could still do so, of course, I was told with a wry smile, but I should not be surprised to find the gate locked when I came to retrieve my wheels.

We could only muster twelve players today. This gave us a starting XI of Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Waine Hetherington, Ian Coles, and Mick O'Flynn in defence; Paul Bell, Nick Waller, Sinisa Gracanin, and Rob Lipscomb in midfield; Andy Faulks and Colin Mant in attack. Roger French was our twelfth man, supported by our two loyal fans Isabelle and Thomas French. Mick O'Flynn had an admirer on the scene, more on that later.

When the game started, we were relieved that the Reigate Express was absent – some of you may recall a particular Reigate player who caused us no end of grief on 24 November at our place. But it was clear after the early exchanges that this would be a tough competitive game. In fact, after ten minutes we had no illusions about that. Mick O'Flynn cushioned a lovely header *behind* our defence, not what he intended of course, but it played a lively midfielder from Reigate in. It was telepathic how he had anticipated Mick's assist as he made his way untroubled by markers from the left midfield position to end up as a right winger in our box, whence he lofted the ball over Gary's 6 ft 3 frame. Mick had a difficult first half, uncharacteristically unsure, hesitant, lax, inaccurate. I could not help wonder later if Mrs O'Flynn, Asiyah, who was there at the end when we were taking post-match refreshments in the sunshine, might have watching all along, thus affecting Mick's game – a bit like a teenager keen to impress his sweetheart whose nerves got the better of him.

Anyway, we settled down, sorted out our marking at the back, and went looking for an equaliser. Well, most of us – we are not sure what Colin Mant was looking for when he was seen to take a tumble after controlling the ball and shaping to go forward – he was a long way from the box, there was no one near him, there was no sudden gust of wind, no earth tremors from fracking in Surrey, no sniper on the grassy knoll. This said even Reigate would agree that we were playing the more cohesive game, stringing moves of four or five passes, but the incision was not quite there. The approach play was good but we were not committing enough players into the box. We crafted some early chances none the less. Waine Hetherington floated a delightful cross which Paul Bell met with a glancing header from four yards out that went wide. Colin Mant had a good half chance on his left foot from five yards out which on another day would have yielded more. Robin Lipscomb, Paul Bell and Andy Faulks had shots saved. Reigate were doing enough to defend and attack on the break and force corners. On the half hour though the equaliser we deserved arrived. Waine Hetherington had spotted Andy Faulks out on the right and threaded a pass to him. Andy was about twenty yards from goal and to most of us it looked like the distance and the angle were not propitious but he had spotted space on the near post as

the Reigate keeper was not quick enough to close the window of opportunity. Andy shot early, low and true and the ball was in the net.

At half-time we were optimistic. We had held our own and had more possession and with a bit more belief and penetration could prevail. Roger French came on for Paul Bell (nursing a bloody shin – one of several knocks that we took today). The half was barely ten minutes old when Andy Faulks produced another contender for goal-of-the-season. We had been reviewing some entries for this season's competition earlier in the week, with the help of yet another of Roger French's spreadsheets, and Andy had asserted confidently that he still had one or two contenders in his locker before the season was out. Imagine him on the corner of the box where he had received the ball – looking diagonally at the goal, there was room for him to go forward but what would be the point of that when you can strike a ball like he can – he looked up, saw where the keeper was, made up his mind before defenders closed him down and produced an audacious shot that had the Reigate keeper utterly flummoxed, as the ball sailed over his head and dipped into the far corner, striking the inside of the post and putting Farnborough 2-1 up. Andy immediately asked for the goal to be entered in the register.

We then entered a phase of the game when we pressed for a third goal which never came whilst Reigate sought to hit us on the break. They came close to scoring but for Mick O'Flynn putting his body in the way of a point-blank goal-bound shot (I hope Asiyah saw that). Mick went off injured soon after and Paul Bell came back on. The Reigate equaliser owed much to Farnborough. With fifteen minutes left Reigate had earned a rare corner. They managed to score direct from it. Gary Fentiman and Roger French managed to confuse each other and the ball was last seen glancing off Roger's head into the net. We could have re-taken the lead in the last quarter hour but could not quite find the final finish. Sinisa Gracanin carved open the Reigate defence and shot just wide across goal. Andy Faulks had an outrageous volley, from a pinpoint Patrice Mongelard forty-yard free-kick to the far post, that was not far off – and would have won the goal of the decade if it had gone in.

In the end both teams settled for the draw, a fair result. We felt we had lost two points but an away point against an opponent who beat us convincingly on our turf in the autumn was not to be sniffed at. Some of our players felt that we had not reached the heights of last Sunday's performance. I am not so sure. We only had twelve players today, some took knocks during the game, and we all had to put in a shift. The manner of the two goals we conceded was disappointing but we have to give credit for the skill that our opponents showed in their execution. We came back from a goal down, and had the greater possession and created more chances than Reigate. We were less compact in our play but this was a bigger pitch and the surface was more like you get in the spring, bobbly, and a ball that runs away from you.

I'd like to thank the referee who handled a difficult game well and fairly, and who doubled up as barman later. His patience was tested by a couple of feisty and over-excited Reigate players who got a bit heavy but they were the exception, and the handshakes were genuine at the end. Our hosts were as hospitable as we hoped, with hot pasta bake with farfale shapes coming round. I did not have time for a second helping but I am sure Reigate made sure Roger had a generous second plate. Talking of food, Paul Bell shared with us his local knowledge of Geordie matters when he revealed what passes for a "club sandwich" in the north east – a bit too much tough meat for my liking.

Man-of-the-Match: Andy Faulks for two strikes - one great, one superlative.

23 March 2014: Glendale Vets (H, 1-0)

By George, Farnborough edge close contest

The beginning of spring in the northern hemisphere was four days ago, and in a week's time British Summer Time will be upon us. All this felt a bit fanciful as temperatures were at least twelve degrees lower than last Sunday, and at one point it was hailing as the sunshine struggled to impose itself. The wind added to the chill factor but we were all very pleased to be playing football today, none more so than one of our number. Roger French had been up glen and down dale to find us opponents after it became clear very early in the week that diamonds were not for ever – yes Diamond Vets once again could not get a side, but the Vets football bush telegraph had found new opponents for us in the form of Glendale Vets.

We could only muster twelve players today – it would have been thirteen with a better sense of direction. Injuries, and the lure of Geordie cuisine, deprived us of several players. So, the starting XI consisted of Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Colin Brazier, Ian Coles and Ian Lyons in defence; Nick Waller, Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington and Rob Lipscomb in midfield; George Kleanthous and Colin Mant in attack. Roger French was our twelfth man, whilst a thirteen, Norman Harris, was trying to find his way to Farnborough via Maidstone from south east London, allegedly.

The Farnborough family welcomed in particular the return of George Kleanthous after serious injury, several ankle operations and a few seasons not knowing if he would ever play football again. The last time I looked at an ankle that was bandaged like George's, I was in the Egyptian section of the British Museum. The Pharaohs have gone but George is still playing football.

We had a good number of fans today: Steve Blanchard Sr and Jr, Ian Shoebridge, Rod Lowe scouting the opposition for the Met Police Super Vets, Bunny Beston, Isabelle and Thomas French, Jane Martin, Rebecca "four-sausages" Coles. Glendale had brought along a big squad and some vocal fans. The silent and strong Mick Gearing was the referee.

Both sides were evenly matched and it was clear from the off that this was not going to be a goal fest. Glendale were well-organised, with a solid defence, and some big units at the back. They were playing on the counter with a darting and busy dynamo up front. The first save of note came from our Gary who palmed off a dangerous Glendale header from close range. I cannot recall Gary having to do much more after that except for dealing with corners that were a strong point of Glendale's play. Corners allowed them to move their big units into our box and they had the required quality from the dead ball to trouble us. Indeed, one corner came off the apex where bar and post intersect. Gary's kicking was as good today as we had ever seen it and his goal-kicks, particularly down the left allowed us to build many of our attacks from that flank. I do not recall that we created any decent scoring opportunities in the first half. But I do recall that twice the Glendale keeper, resplendent in fluorescent orange, came off his line to punch, the ball, and Sinisa Gracanin and Colin Mant had to take a count.

Roger French came on for Ian Lyons at half-time with Colin Brazier dropping at centre half, smoothly, and like a natural. The second half was just as even but with Farnborough testing the new Glendale keeper a bit more. We still had to defend well and watch out for Glendale breaks but our defensive line held. Gary was not really troubled in the second half. We were able to cope with the loss of Ian Coles to a knee injury by restoring another Ian, Lyons, to the centre of our defence. Although it was Lyons' first run out for us, he fitted in quite well and put on a rampant display. With about twenty minutes left we got our breakthrough – the keeper could not hold a

George Kleanthous shot and Waine Hetherington glided into the box to snaffle the rebound and tuck the ball away. It was no more than we deserved at that point. We had half chances to add to this but they were not taken. Colin Mant had a shot from four yards out that looked very tame when the ball was crying out to be leathered. He also had a disoriented header from three yards out which did not interfere with the Glendale goal. George – putting in quite a shift, both physically and psychologically, almost squared the ball to an unmarked Colin a yard out. Interviewed after the match Colin revealed to your match reporter how nice it felt to have a real partner up front, who would pass the ball to him. Glendale had a good go at drawing level, and with a bit more luck on another day might have done so but we managed to hold out for a clean sheet and maximum points.

As we made our way back to the changing room after the usual post match tasks we were surprised, and a little amused, to see Norman Harris, who had finally made it to our ground. Next time Colin Mant will have to orient Norman but at least Norman now knows where we are.

Although this was a closely contested match there were no bad tackles in it, the only discordant note coming from a Glendale player who took George's legs away, and remonstrated with Mick Gearing for awarding a free-kick against him. It was good to see so many Glendale players in the bar afterwards, and to see the jug they bought passed round. We look forward to playing them home and away next season.

The food was quite a hit I am told. Alas, I had tarried, sweeping our dressing room, and was saved from starvation by Pam Shoebridge who put aside a cheese and pickle roll, and half a dozen potato croquettes, for me. I should note that the usual management bread roll, egg mayonnaise today, was annexed like a military base in the Crimea, by "Rob Lipski" whose eyes were bigger than his stomach as he failed to do the roll justice, to my chagrin. There had been sausages too, allegedly, although Miss Coles was quite coy about that.

Man-of-the-Match: Waine Hetherington, for his care of the ball, quick left foot and a quicker brain when it mattered in a narrow window of opportunity. George's courage too should not go unnoticed even if we do not usually vote for this.

30 March 2014: Catford Wanderers Vets (A, 5-0)

New striking partnership blossoms in Catford sunshine

Mother's Day thumb, clocks changing, an earlier kick-off of 10:15, injuries etc. meant that we were mildly uncertain about our turn-out today. In the end twelve were there and we even had two fans in the form of Millie Cobham and Karen, Steve Palmer's partner. As the oldest Young Farnborough Vet, Andy Cobham had answered our SOS, and had brought along daughter Millie, who showed better touches on the ball in the warm-up than some of our players. Steve Palmer had come back from holiday only yesterday although partner Karen looked a lot more tanned than he did. Co-manager Roger French was caught up in the exigencies of Mother's Day, and this gave the team a chance to play a more expansive brand of football under co-manager Mongelard (see his advice at end of report).

And what a glorious morning it was for football. Low twenties on the thermometer, gentle zephyrs on the barometer, and a feeding frenzy for Catford midges. The Catford Wanderers pitch was as good as any we have played on all season.

So, the starting XI consisted of Steve Palmer in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Colin Brazier, Andy Cobham and Steve Blanchard in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Colin Mant and Rob Lipscomb in midfield; George Kleanthous and Andy Faulks in attack. Nick Waller, joint 5th on the list of Farnborough Old Boys Guild glory boys with a pedigree going back to the late 70s, was our twelfth man.

It took us a while to get going. Catford competed well in the first twenty minutes or so and had decided to play their best player up front, which kept our defence busy initially. They also had a robust presence at the centre of their defence but that muscular unit pulled a hamstring midway through the first-half and, sadly, took no further part in the game. By then we were 2-0 up. George Kleanthous had played Andy Faulks in on the edge of the box on the quarter hour and Andy, looking sharp after Geordie cuisine, rounded his marker and shot with his left foot, crisply and unerringly low against the post and into the net. Five minutes later Andy had converted an assist from Rob Lipscomb to give us a 2-0 advantage. These goals were not against the run of play but came at a time when Catford were themselves looking to make an impression on our goal. Steve Palmer dealt ably with the little that came his way. Our third goal, five minutes or so before the end of the 40-minute half, came after George Kleanthous, like a fox in the box, was first on the scene to pick up the loose ball after the Catford keeper had spilled an Andy Faulks shot.

At half-time Nick Waller came on for Colin Mant and slotted into the central midfield berth. Catford had more substitutes and made more changes and this seemed to unsettle them. It was clear that their players were not as accustomed to playing with each other as the well-oiled machine that Farnborough had become. We were more dominant in the second half, created more scoring opportunities and it is a mystery how we added only two more to our score. Another mystery was how the referee deemed a Patrice Mongelard throw-in to be a foul throw. Nick Waller blazed the ball over the bar from five yards out from a by-line cutback that was a tad too far back for him. George got his second, and our fourth after determined work by Robin Lipscomb who challenged for the ball in the Catford box, and George was left with a crisp half-volley into the roof of the net from three yards out.

George came off soon after as Colin Mant came back on. However, George was not to be denied, and was off the pitch for barely a few minutes. Steve Blanchard felt a twinge in his knee

and came off with a quarter of an hour left. Nick Waller dropped back to centre half and produced a calm, dominant display. George returned, like a bad penny to the Catford defence, and added our fifth, to complete his hat-trick after doing what he does best - harrying defenders in the corridor of uncertainty, picking up loose balls, snaffling 50-50s, intercepting loose passes - to advance on goal and slot the ball home.

We had more chances – Waine Hetherington had a shot from two yards out which caused the Catford keeper's cap to leave him, when (as Waine himself admitted in a post-match interview) a less selfish move might have brought dividends. Andy Faulks, had a header two yards out from an exquisite Sinisa Gracanin cross, that should have brought us a second hat-trick. We had numerous corners, and tried out several corner takers, with Robin Lipscomd, Sinisa Gracacin and Patrice Mongelard all having a go. Even if I say so myself, I think next time Robin and Sinsa will have to leave it to the specialist.

At the other end Steve was not over-worked. He had to make one good save to spare our blushes after the ball went through Patrice Mongelard's legs. All in all, we put on a dominant display against opponents who had quality in places, and moments, but not in sufficient quantity to trouble us. The miraculous return of George Kleanthous has given our forward play an intensity, intelligence and hunger that we have been lacking and the team was set up astutely by co-manager Patrice Mongelard to exploit this. Andy Faulks, and our faux-forward Colin Mant, who was keeping mum after the match, having been misquoted by the media last week, must secretly welcome the competitive edge that George has infused into our forward play, and long may it continue.

As always against Catford Wanderers the game was played in excellent spirit and their hospitality was also up to the mark afterwards though for once I could not partake – given that I had a delightful Mother's Day Sunday roast, and a couple of bottles of 2010 Montagne St Emillion, to go back to. It would not do to offend Mrs M by not doing it justice, on a day like today.

A tip from the wise: if you want to play football on Mother's Day, and get a Sunday roast, make sure that every day is Mother's Day in your household, and don't make a fuss about Father's Day!

Man-of-the-Match: George Kleanthous, for a seriously smooth hat-trick, and for revitalising our forward play.

6 April 2014: Met Police Super Vets (A, 2-1)

Farnborough nick the three points for Vic

You might think that playing the Metropolitan Police Super Vets on their turf would not be the right time to indulge in a spot of larceny. You would be right, and our opponents would have been left wondering about the daylight robbery that took place under their noses as Farnborough mounted a successful smash and grab raid to pocket all three points. Once again, the weather from one Sunday to the next was a meteorological conundrum wrapped in a mystery that would have taxed the finest brains in the Met. The rain was less unwelcome than the wind but we knew we would be playing on one of the best pitches on our calendar, and in a rather grand setting.

While we were getting changed, we reminisced about Farnborough/Met Police games of the past, and it was fair to say that long arm of the law had prevailed more often than not because of their robust no-nonsense tactics and their disciplined approach to the game. Talking of discipline, we commented on the North Korean situation whereby the ruling dictator, the management if you like, had imposed his hairstyle on the male population with the smack of firm government. Colin Mant noted that the Senior Vets management hairstyle – short, receding, graying – was now embraced by half the team and soon local hairdressers would know exactly what was required if one asked for a “Farnborough”. I mention this simply so you can note the breadth of analytical discourse among the Farnborough Senior Vets.

The Met Police team had not aged at all since we beat them 3-2 at our place on 17 November. Indeed, there were several new faces which would account for the improved performances they had been registering this season. They had a good mix of less experience and more experience and they provided an excellent approachable referee – “call me Clive if you wish or if you are in the forces it is “Sir””, who took the trouble to explain the off-side rule to both teams before kick-off. He also kindly allowed us a minute’s silence, impeccably observed, to mark the passing, exactly a year ago, of Vic Farrow, our much-loved Club Secretary. Vic would have enjoyed today’s result.

We had fourteen players for this job: Gary Fentiman in goal, Patrice Mongelard, Colin Brazier, Ian Lyons and Nick Waller; Sinisa Gračanin, Waine Hetherington, Colin Mant and Rob Lipscomb in midfield; George Kleanthous and Andy Faulks in attack. Roger French, Chris Bourlet and Steve Palmer completed our raiding party. Isabelle and Thomas French were the sum of our away support.

When the game started, it felt like it took us quite a while to get a feel of the ball. The Met had a good number of ball players in their midfield, a couple of tricky wingers, a solid black and blue line at the back which kept us at bay. We had the advantage of playing with the wind and that was a help to us, as it would help our opponents later. It was not a half of many chances. We scored first after about fifteen minutes thanks to Andy Faulks, wearing unfamiliar and oversize footwear, on account of having mislaid his boots as he could not remember where he’d left them last night. Andy had slipped behind the Met Police defence, sprung the off-side trap down the right wing where there was plenty of space unutilised, and advanced unchallenged on goal from a lateral position which made a direct shot too selfish. So, Andy squared the ball to Waine Hetherington who had read the opportunity and he was left with a tap-in. If Waine’s celebration appeared a tad muted it was because he had scored against his employer, not a good career move, and in the context of today’s game, I suppose you could call it an inside job.

We had a very good opportunity to edge further head when a classy back-heel by George Kleanthous on the edge of the box played Colin Mant in on goal unchallenged. From three yards out Colin steadied himself and sought to apply a mint-cool finish by placing the ball low to the keeper's left but he had sacrificed power for guile and the keeper was equal to the tame shot. On the half hour though, Andy Faulks capitalised on a defensive lapse, raced clear of his markers, and showed Colin how it is done, with a low precise finish that entered the net in the bottom corner. We nearly got a third after a corner from Patrice Mongelard led to some frantic moments in the Met Police box with bodies being thrown in the way of several successive Farnborough attempts on goal. At the other end, there were not too many scares for Gary. Our defence marshalled by Ian Lyons took pride in limiting our opponents. When they did avoid the off-side trap, their crosses were over-hit and they never committed enough players forward to capitalise on whatever came their way.

Although we led 2-0 at half-time, we were anxious about the second half. The Met now had the wind in their favour, in fact the wind had strengthened, they brought on a big unit to play up front while we made three changes with Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant and Colin Brazier making way for Roger French, Chris Bourlet and Steve Palmer. This gave us three new players in defence. It is fair to say that we were under the cosh as the Met kept us kettled in our half and the shots and crosses rained in on our goal. Gary Fentiman was immense as he pulled off save after save – from close-range, long-range, high, low. It was good to watch from a neutral point of view but there were no neutrals there. We struggled to reverse the flow. George Kleanthous, Andy Faulks and Rob Lipscomb worked hard to carry the ball into the Met Police half. The midfield was congested, our penalty box crowded and we had to dig deep. Roger French took one in the midriff from one of our own clearances and was winded.

We weathered the onslaught until we made changes with twenty minutes left as Colin Brazier, Colin Mant and Patrice Mongelard came back on for Waine Hetherington, Rob Lipscomb and Nick Waller. We still had to defend but had a greater degree of control as we pushed the play back into the Met Police half. We earned a couple of corners, one of which was muffed by the self-proclaimed corner specialist, Patrice Mongelard. And just when we could see the finishing line, in the 90th minute, the Met got their reward. Colin Mant assisted the Met with their endeavours by dwelling on the ball in a dangerous area and from the ensuing offensive move our defensive line was breached and the ball was tucked in under Gary's body at the near post from close-range (a bit like Cech against PSG last week). There was barely time to re-start the game.

The Met Police hospitality was in keeping with the grand Victorian splendour of The Warren as two trays of tasty sandwiches and roast potatoes appeared in our midst. We all tucked in, some more than most – Roger French had the last two roast potatoes – to join the other eleven he'd had on top of the sandwiches. That will do wonders for his midriff. "Off the record", on the comfy leather sofa, Colin Mant confided in your match reporter that he was obviously pleased that George was doing such a good job, but his confidence was low and the golden chance he missed was one of those where he had had just too much time and space. However, he was determined not to let Waine Hetherington or Rob Lipscomb score more goals than him.

Man-of-the-Match: Gary Fentiman.

13 April 2014: Avery Hill Vets (H, 2-1)

Farnborough master the art of winning ugly

All week I had been pondering this deep metaphysical question: Is God a Liverpool fan? I guess I had my answer today but it seems he is a Farnborough fan too, or else Vic Farrow is up there managing things. The Avery Hill Vets, mostly PE teachers, always pose a stiff test in the Spring, and we have often not been up to the mark, against their physical presence.

We had thirteen players for this examination but in the end only used twelve: Steve Palmer in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Colin Brazier, Ian Coles and Nick Waller in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Wayne Hetherington, Colin Mant and Rob Lipscomb in midfield; George Kleanthous and Michael Ugwumba in attack. Andy Faulks was late for class, and became our twelfth man as he ambled up the hill nonchalantly, after kick off.

Roger French was our thirteenth, but became Avery Hill's eleventh player for a full ninety minutes as they had only ten players. Afterwards, there was talk of Roger having had his best game for Farnborough as Avery Hill's centre forward. I could not possibly comment on this – only to say that we are the kind of club that will make our substitutes available if the opposition are short. Roger toiled manfully for Avery Hill, gave us at least two uncomfortable moments when better finishing could have satisfied his obvious desire to score against his team mates.

We would have had another player today – in the form of Mick O'Flynn. but he revealed to Roger French in an intimate email, that he had withdrawn due to anxieties about his performance on Sunday mornings, and he was not sure if would be able to raise his game. Still, we were very pleased to welcome Michael back, after an extensive break on international duty. Michael was to put on a solid display against a physical side.

Mick Gearing was our magisterial referee. In class today were our fans Isabelle and Thomas French (Master French moved up a year this week); Rebecca Coles who did not have a single sausage today; Pam Shoebridge and Jane Martin who were on canteen duty with their award-winning tucker, and Ian Shoebridge (still injured but carrying out various janitorial tasks which we do not think involved putting the showers on today, unless we got there after the hot water ran out). Chris Webb and two Webb pupils were glimpsed on the touchline, but did not stay for extra-curricular activities. Steve Palmer's partner Karen had her own sun lounger on the touchline as she caught the rays on this beautiful sunny morning.

Make no mistake this was not an easy test. The Avery Hill invigilators may well have gone away thinking we had cheated. A draw would probably be the result if this Farnborough performance was re-marked but we'll take the points – the second week running when we have scraped through, without achieving the highest grade.

To say both teams laboured to establish a pattern of play in the first fifteen minutes would be fair comment. Both sides struggled to master the bouncy ball on an unyielding surface and there was not much fluency to be seen, passing moves rarely went beyond three phases. There was also very little to separate the two teams. Avery Hill were dangerous on the break particularly with the ball over the top for their nippy right winger to latch on to, and they had a number of big units who could block out the sun at corners. The balance of play was marginally in our favour, but without clear chances being created. Colin Brazier produced our most eye-catching early attempt with a shot from an overlapping run that was not too wide of the post.

The introduction of Andy Faulks (replacing Michael) after twenty minutes (after he had sat his detention for poor time-keeping) gave us more of a menace up front but it was Avery Hill who took the lead midway through the half. This was a text book move – we lost the ball in a hesitant midfield action, it was recycled quickly over the top to the Avery Hill express on the right – who penetrated our box, drew a good save from Steve Palmer but the rebound fell to another Avery Hill forward who shinned the ball home from three yards out in the bottom corner, beyond the reach of the covering defender Patrice Mongelard.

Our reply did not take long – five minutes later Andy Faulks broke free on the left and planted a firm right-footed drive low into the bottom corner from just inside the box. This was our crispest moment of the half, before the end of which we saw a very good save from the keeper in response to a Wayne Hetherington right foot shot, an acrobatic volley from Colin Mant which did not quite hit the target, and an outrageous left foot shot from Patrice Mongelard which would never hit the target in a month of Sundays.

Colin Mant made way for the second coming of Michael at half-time. We took the lead fairly early in that half – after George Kleanthous was felled in the box, and the normally penalty-shy Mick Gearing was left with an easy choice. It was telling that Avery Hill did not dispute the decision. George grabbed the ball before anyone could claim it and gave us the lead. I never watch penalties being taken, whether for, or against us. I was told it was not a convincing strike but it did the job. Normally we would push on from this but to their credit it was Avery Hill who showed the greater desire and energy from then on. We had to defend furiously. We were saved by the woodwork twice; Steve Palmer produced two blinding saves, and we even managed to survive a scrum when the Avery Hill front row nearly carried the ball into the net amidst a tangle of bodies from a corner. That is not to say that we did not create chances of our own – the trouble was that they fell to the wrong player, or at least to the wrong foot as George Kleanthous' neat crisp shooting deserted him as he put two decent half-chances in the woodland behind the Avery Hill goal.

Colin Mant came back on for the last twenty minutes for Rob Lispcomb, who had stiffened up, with tiredness, after doing it three times this weekend, having played a double header for Andy Faulks' team the day before. Rob had to rise to the occasion again before the game was played out as he had to come back on for an injured Wayne Hetherington with ten or so minutes left. There was time for Colin Mant to be taken roughly from behind as he was hacked down by an increasingly frustrated Avery Hill defender who could see the sands of time ticking away. The final whistle brought the sort of relief one feels after coming out of an examination hall, knowing that revision had paid off.

The clubhouse was buzzing, in part as our Young Vets, under the stewardship of Paul Tanton, a living Farnborough Old Boys Guild legend, had registered their twelfth consecutive win, a tremendous achievement, possibly unparalleled in Farnborough history, which would have pleased Vic Farrow enormously. We munched contentedly on a vast assortment of goodies, laid on by Pam Shoebridge and Jane Martin (though, inexcusably Ian, Jane had to buy her own drink).

Man-of-the-Match: Nick Waller who was immense today, but refused to add to his immensity by having only a small surplus roll at the end, when there were larger baps there.

20 April 2014: Riverside Wanderers Vets (A, 2-2)

Eynsford Easter eggs shared as Farnborough earn draw

This year's test series against Riverside Wanderers began in the Eynsford Superbowl in surprisingly damp and wet conditions. But this 2-2 game was no damp squib, in a match that went with the slope so to speak.

Easter is always a difficult time to get 100% commitment from players who, after all, have a life and families outside the Farnborough Senior Vets experience. In fairness, it is probably no different for our opponents.

The thirteen Farnborough Easter bunnies out there were John Alliston in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Colin Brazier, Ian Coles and Nick Waller in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Michael Ugwumba, Colin Mant and Rob Lipscomb in midfield; George Kleanthous and Andy Faulks in attack; Roger French and Chris Bourlet in reserve.

The plan was to kick up the hill in the first half, and acting captain Nick Waller, a good tosser, secured the end we wanted in the first half. The Riverside twelfth man, the slope – was not out of place in the agricultural setting but incongruous with the markings of a football pitch and set the pattern of play. We had to defend and make the occasional sorties up the slope. We felt that we took greater care of the ball in the first half. Certainly, our game seemed more measured, less rushed but the pressure from Riverside was building. They were to hit the post and bar in the first-half and before their first goal which came off a corner as their centre forward got ahead of his marker to glance the ball home at the near post. Until then we were quietly satisfied with our resilience. Robin Lipscomb had also cleared off the line in a moment which goal-line technology would have ruled in Farnborough's favour.

At the other end, our chances were few but encouraging. Colin Mant came close to getting at the end of a cross that flashed across goal from the hard-working Robin Lipscomb who was looking to shake off his groin strain from last week's exertions; Andy Faulks had a clear unmarked header from a Patrice Mongelard cross which deserved better. What did deserve better, and got it, was a George Kleanthous cross which was met by an unmarked Colin Mant who had ghosted in the box, unmarked, to apply a deadly finish from three yards out to glance the ball into the bottom corner. Colin had earlier had a pat from the management in a private moment in the car park which appeared to have restored his confidence. This equaliser was no more than we deserved.

Yet just when we were looking to convert marginal ascendancy into goals, we contrived to let Riverside edge ahead again as a clearance from John Alliston was not as he would have wished, from an unnecessary back pass I hasten to add, and the ball was put through our net by a Riverside forward who got lucky. This was a minor blemish on John's performance which otherwise was assured and confident and we should not forget he was helping us out on a day when several of our regular keepers were absent. Still John broke the jinx of our replacement keepers getting hurt this year.

Before the half was out, we were able to savour a moment when a Riverside defender who fancied himself as a big unit was nearly bounced off the pitch by our own muscle man, Michael Ugwumba, thus illustrating one of the laws of football which is that no matter how hard or tough you think you are, there is always someone out there who is a tad more.

As we chased an equaliser there was a vintage moment as Sinisa Gracanin measured a through ball over the top into Andy Faulks' path behind the Riverside defence and Andy's first-time volley over his shoulder was clean, instinctive, powerful, but off target. Before the half was out Patrice Mongelard wasted two corners, one diverted onto the near post by a Riverside outstretched boot, the other woeful.

At half-time, Patrice Mongelard and Michael Ugwumba made way for Roger French and Chris Bourlet. Riverside made more changes as they had more substitutes. Now that we had the slope, we were quietly confident of restoring parity at least. Our nerves were settled early in the half when an Andy Faulks emphatic strike from the edge of the box, as he squeezed in between a pair of Riverside defenders, crashed against the inside of the post and nestled into the net on the opposite side of the goal. And we still had most of the half to claim maximum points. We did not – partly due to the quality of our opponents, and partly due to our own poor finishing. On balance we had more chances in the second half with Riverside now playing on the break. Patrice Mongelard, who ran the line nonchalantly, and Michael Ugwumba came back on midway through the second half for Nick Waller and Rob Lipscomb, to preserve what we had. The final minutes were frantic but inconclusive.

Roger French and Michael Ugwumba had their own private competition to see who could put a ball over the roof of the Five Bells public house behind the goal. Roger won the competition for the most slippery head as several throw-ins were propelled into touch off said bonce, like a hard Easter egg.

A draw felt like a fair result in the end. As usual between our two sides, the game was played in excellent spirit and was refereed well and fairly, even a dodgy decision over a Riverside back pass was not enough to change our view.

I made my customary late surge for the Dot Cotton Award by taking the kit home for the third time this season. So did Colin Brazier but he does not count as the kit in his case was clean.

Going by our past experience in Eynsford, the hospitality from Riverside Wanderers would have been generous, lavish even, in either the Five Bells or the Castle, but only a small number of us could attend, excluding yours truly who had an appointment with a moveable feast of roast leg of lamb and some decent claret back at Chateau Mongelard. Neither could Roger French who had an appointment with a Roger Rabbit costume to secrete and dispense Easter eggs. Still, we had Buffet Ambassador Extraordinaire in the shape of his immensity Nick Waller, to show our appreciation to our hosts.

We are looking forward to next week when we hope to have a special welcome for our visitors, responsible for our heaviest defeat this season, 6-1 last December, and this after we took the lead at their place.

Man-of-the-Match: Colin Mant

27 April 2014: Wellcome Super Vets (H, 3-2)

Farnborough trickle over winning line

There is winning ugly, and then there is winning like we did today. Good thing our underage fans had adults with them on the touchline, as this was a Farnborough performance with a PG certificate. The performance mattered more than the result. The mood in the changing room after the game was flat, even though we had reversed our 6-1 loss against the same opponents four months ago. For long periods our play was no better than it was then, even though Wellcome appeared to have struggled to get the bare eleven out, and they had to swap their injured keeper with an outfield player midway through the first half.

With our numbers boosted by the return of Mehmet Bozyigit, Gary Fentiman and Ian Shoebridge there were fourteen in our welcoming party: Gary “butterfingers” Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Colin Brazier, Ian Coles and Waine Hetherington all over the place in defence; Sinisa Gracanin, Michael Ugwumba, Colin Mant and Rob Lipscomb at sea in midfield; George Kleanthous and Andy Faulks fleeting in attack; Roger French, Ian Shoebridge and Mehmet Bozyigit were poised to join the carousel of changes we went through in the 90 minutes played by referee Mick Gearing.

For today’s horror show, we mustered good numbers in the stands: Isabelle and Thomas French, Jane Martin and Rebecca Coles, Madame Fentiman, Vicky Tanner, old boys Mick O’Flynn and Trevor Stewart, Michael Jnr (and friend). Mick and Trevor will be thinking hard about making a comeback given what they saw with their own eyes today.

There was a disjointedness and poverty of touch in our play from the start. Our opponents had decided early doors to rely on the quick break led by *their* Roger who was fleet of foot and to capitalise on defensive mistakes which we began to gift to them just as we had three days before last Christmas. In his last game for us against the Met Police Super Vets Gary Fentiman had caught everything including the Man-of-the-Match award, but that was then and the actualité today was very different. Indeed, he suggested my match report today should just give the score and skip everything else. But then I thought of you, my dear readers.

We had an early opportunity to take the lead when a free-kick from Patrice Mongelard found Rob Lipscomb a yard out from goal with the keeper to beat but having brought the ball under control Rob just failed to connect as he was put off balance by a defender. We had a number of shots from distance but it was Wellcome who broke the deadlock. I think it was Waine Hetherington who started it (just as he would finish it – more on that later) with a back pass or back header that did not have enough on it – allowing the nippy Roger to unsettle Gary and manage to thread the ball to another Wellcome forward who tucked it away with the covering Colin Brazier agonisingly close from clearing the danger on the goal line. Thankfully, before our frustration could get to bilious levels, George Kleanthous had latched on to a Colin Mant through ball to slot home neatly within five minutes.

But we had not yet purged the mistakes out of our game. We got away with spillages at corners from Gary’s lubricated digits, poor distribution from goal-kicks, dodgy back passes before we were punished again almost in a similar fashion as Wellcome edged ahead, once again against the run of play. We had a good appeal for a penalty turned down when Waine Hetherington was brought down in the box. The decisions were not going our way – in the build-up to the second gift we gave Wellcome, Colin Mant had been taken roughly from behind in the centre circle under the referee’s nose but the tantric whistle did not go off. Colin Mant did go off after twenty-five

minutes or so as we introduced the flying wing-back Mehmet on the right of midfield, hopefully to slice through the Wellcome defence like a kebab knife although injury and rustiness seem to have blunted that cutting edge for now. However, Colin was back on for five minutes while our other Colin (Brazier) that is, went off for some emergency boot repairs, and ponder the wisdom of investing in a new pair of boots amidst the tripe we were dishing up.

Half-time was a blessed relief – perhaps more so for the three players who went off, Michael, Rob and Waine – to make way for the third coming of Colin Mant, the return of Ian Shoebridge and the introduction of our Roger (less fleet of foot though than the other Roger and with much less hair). Thankfully it was not long before we drew level – George Kleanthous lashing a classy left foot finish to crown a Roger French flick added to a perceptive through ball from Colin Brazier. Moments before that Roger French had applied his right foot to a ball on the edge of the box which drew a good save from the ersatz Wellcome keeper.

We dominated the second half more than the first in that, thankfully, Gary Fentiman was not tested in that half – instead it was relatively one-way traffic as we laid siege to the Wellcome box. George thought he had given us the lead when he slid in to convert a dangerous cross from the left but was given off-side by the overzealous Wellcome linesman (and manager). We continued to miss half chances, over-hit crosses. and we wondered even harder where our goals were going to come from after Andy Faulks (30 goals for us this season, and George Kleanthous 6 goals in 6 matches) both went off with twenty-five minutes left – leaving us with a midfielder Rob Lipscomb as our lone forward – not the finest tactical moment for the management you might think, and two other midfielders Waine and Michael back on.

In fact, Andy Faulks left us when we were drawing 2-2, and went to finish the match for our Young Vets who were short on the adjoining pitch – that game was 0-0 when he joined it but ended with Farnborough losing 2-0 – you could say Andy had the worst day of all the Farnborough Vets out there today. Waine Hetherington came close, particularly after he missed a sitter when the ball was played back to him unmarked three yards from goal and his ineffectual left foot slice epitomised our pallid display. Yet with ten minutes left Waine was to have the last laugh as his innocuous looking shot (*“I leathered it I thought”*) defeated the Wellcome keeper, brought to his knees as he appeared to scoop the shot and propel it behind him, and the line, through his legs. Colin Mant, using his contacts with the management, appeared to suggest that our winning goal could be considered to have been an OG, but did not gather sufficient votes for the idea. We limped on to the end and got away with it.

In the absence of Pam Shoebridge, it fell to Jane Martin to feed the Senior Vets and their guests today, and she did it so well that we struggled to finish the vast assortment of rolls, potato croquettes and other nibbles (in the absence of Buffet supremo Nick Waller). The other good experience we had today, apart from the food, was the showers, unusually hot even after forty+ blokes (though excluding Andy Faulks) had passed through.

Man-of-the-Match: George Kleanthous for possibly our only two bright moments of the game.

Next week – Riverside wander over to Farrow Fields, and the management will bring in an American striker, and a clown, as we look abroad to freshen things up.

4 May 2014: Riverside Wanderers Vets (H, 0-2)

Quality beats quantity

To make our overseas player, Eric Johnson, feel at home - today in glorious spring sunshine, we mustered numbers more suited to American football – eighteen players, but without the specialist skills that go with it. We could have had yet more, if Mick O’Flynn and Steve Blanchard, two supreme jokers who threatened to add to our number, had turned up.

Our opponents however had the bare XI – unlike when we played them at their place two weeks ago on a very wet Easter Sunday. That, as well as the weather, was not the only difference since this last and recent encounter. Then we fought for a well-earned draw, today we were not good enough even for that, and got what we deserved.

In effect we put two different teams out in each half. In the first-half we lined up like this:

Gary Fentiman in goal; Ian Coles, Ian Lyons, Colin Brazier and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Rob Lipscomb, Sinisa Gracanin, Colin Mant and Waine Hetherington in goal; George Kleanthous and Ian Shoebridge in attack. We made one adjustment to this line-up after half an hour when Rob Lipscomb went off injured to be replaced by Mehmet Bozyigit (who was probably carrying an injury himself).

In the second half we had Gary Fentiman in goal; Ian Coles, Ian Lyons, Roger French and Denzel Washington in defence; Mehmet Bozyigit, Nick Waller, Michael Ugwumba and Colin Brazier in midfield; Eric Johnson and Andy Faulks in attack. This team sheet was tweaked later on when Sinisa Gracanin and Waine Hetherington replaced Colin Brazier and Ian Coles. I’ll spare you the positional changes that these adjustments required.

Once again, we had a good number of fans and well-wishers: Thomas and Isabelle French, *comme toujours*, Rebecca Coles and cousin Jodie, Jane Martin, Vicky Tanner and Nathan Johnson. Even Pam Shoebridge strolled up to watch her boys for a bit. Also watching his boys and dispensing copious tactical advice, was self-appointed club captain, Toby Manchip, sporting, inexplicably, a Farnborough sweatshirt with the initials CP (captain? or perhaps something else – answers on a post card please, and keep it clean). You could say Toby was our non-playing captain as he tossed for ends with referee Mick Gearing (to whom I explained the joy of tantric refereeing before kick-off).

What can I tell you about the football? I played the first-half only, and watched the first and last ten minutes of the second half. I saw Riverside score their two goals in my extracts of that second half – both fairly similar efforts with Gary Fentiman having parried the initial efforts, but the more alert and hungrier Riverside attackers scoring from close-range in a crowded area. This was a tight affair and the first goal was always going to make a difference. The second was a matter of time but did not come until near the end of the game. I was told, having slipped away for a solitary shower, that we did not create much between the two Riverside goals. Indeed, it was reported that the Farnborough player who came closest to scoring an equaliser in the second half, Colin Brazier, had come off before Riverside got their second. Colin, like Nick Waller, was right to invest in new, and possibly identical, boots.

We were not at our best, we lacked cutting edge and defended for longer periods than we wanted. There were very few clear chances for either team in the first half. I recall a decent passing move

which put Waine Hetherington through for a shot on goal but the Riverside keeper was a sharper specimen than we are used to – good positioning, quick off his line, good hands, youthful. George Kleanthous was finding the robust Riverside central defence difficult to get round and we never really got behind them. Their muscular presence was a challenge for Rob Lipscomb too. We had probably more of the ball and strung more passes together but Riverside had the more direct style of play and seemed able to get numbers up in our box faster than we could do the same to them. You could say that both defences were on top in that half. The seven changes we made at half-time put us on the back foot understandably. The pattern of play though was not much different. However, Riverside wanted to win the game more than we did. We matched them in most areas but could not find a way round or through the river bus they parked in front of goal. This was our first defeat in since 2 March – eight matches ago, and only the third time this season – in twenty-nine matches that we have failed to score.

What can I tell you about the après-match? very little as I was not there. I am sure Pam Shoebridge and Jane Martin returned the splendid hospitality our visitors usually extend to us at their place, and that the “James Dyson of the buffet area” Nick Waller stood in for me admirably. If I close my eyes, and ears, I can almost hear Toby Manchip’s corruscating analysis and trenchant views on the management.

Next week – we play our cousins the Farnborough Young Vets, to celebrate the vibrancy of Vets football at Farrow Fields. This traditionally used to be the last game of the season for both teams. It will be for the Young Ones but for the Old Ones, and in a World Cup year, Roger French has prolonged our season to 25 May to make up for the winter floods. By the way, the Young Vets limbered up for next week with a 7-0 win on the adjoining pitch. I saw several of their goals go in. I was naturally pleased for them but wish I had not witnessed such incision and clinical efficiency, given the blunt display on the other pitch.

Next week the management will also make a number of awards as a thank you not only to some of our players, but also to the support team that contribute much to the Farnborough Senior Vets experience. Acceptance speeches will be heard for the Managers Player of the Season; Golden Boot; Goal-of-the-season; Dot Cotton Award; Catering Award, Referee Award and Supporters’ Award. This prestigious occasion will also be marked by a two-hour speech from Roger “Fidel” French – I jest of course, but not entirely.

Man-of-the-Match: Ian Coles.

11 May 2014: FOBG Young Vets (H, 0-5)

Farnborough Vets football the winner but Young Ones much happier than Seniors

I woke up this morning wondering if miracles happen in football. My two prayers to the football gods were (i) Liverpool to win the Premier League and (ii) for the Farnborough Senior Vets to win the annual Vets Challenge match against their younger counterparts. I am now in the football agnostic/atheist zone.

This club occasion, and possibly news of the giant buffet, had brought the Senior Vets out in huge numbers and there was a good showing from the Young Vets and their families too. In all there were around thirty Farnborough Vets on show today. In the ageing society which we live in, the elderly are more numerous: we were certainly not sixteen any more but there were sixteen of us booted and kitted out. We would have had twenty but three withdrew during the night, and Colin Brazier's love of football photography won the day – he took 441 pictures of our match today and a splendid selection of them were reviewed afterwards, to much amusement. The camera did not lie and confronted us with images we'd rather not see.

Dressing room banter was OK – a couple of Palace fans (39 points behind Liverpool in the final reckoning after conceding a 90th minute equaliser today), and a smattering of Chelsea and Arsenal fans (2 points and 5 points behind respectively) were giving it large, but I kept a dignified silence, whilst repeating one of my prayers silently. The suggestion that Ian Coles had taken part in the Eurovision song contest last night, in drag, seemed to titillate some.

Anyway, we started with Gary Fentiman in goal; Ian Coles, Ian Lyons, Mick O'Flynn and Patrice Mongelard in defence; Rob Lipscomb, Sinisa Gracanin, Colin Mant, Ian Shoebridge and Waine Hetherington in midfield; lonesome George Kleanthous in attack. The five substitutes mingling with our fans were: Roger French, Steve Blanchard, Michael Ugwumba, Nick Waller and Andy Faulks. The fans mingling with our subs were Thomas and Isabelle French, Rebecca Coles and Jane Martin, Michael Junior and American cousin.

We made one adjustment to the starting line-up after midway through the half when Ian Lyons went off to clear his head from the night before and Steve Blanchard came on. Apart from that what was the story of the first-half – a 0-0 draw? The Young Vets had more of the play, building well from the back and using their big midfield units to good effect and created more danger in our box than we did in theirs. Gary made a couple of good saves and was, I am pleased to say, twice the presence he was in our last game – the eventual 5-0 defeat would have been hard for him to stomach. Referee Mick Gearing's award of a dubious penalty to the Young Vets was sportingly declined. A shot from George Kleanthous after he had created space for himself a few yards out in a crowded box; a 35-yard free-kick from Patrice Mongelard; and a dipping 30-yard half-volley from Waine Hetherington were frisson-inducing for us. The Young Vets had more thrills and spills to look back on but the half-time stalemate felt right. There were a few free-kicks for both sides in a well-contested game particularly in midfield but no malicious intent, at that stage. There were a lot of passing moves, and attempts to retain the ball, and all the game lacked really was a goal. That was to come later, all at one end.

We wrung the changes at half-time – Ian Lyons came back on in lieu of Waine Hetherington. Mick O'Flynn, Ian Shoebridge, George Kleanthous and Colin Mant came off too – replaced by Roger French, Nick Waller, Michael Ugwumba and Andy Faulks. More changes followed midway through the second half as Patrice Mongelard, Rob Lipscomb, Sinisa Gracanin and Ian Lyons

made way for the return of Ian Shoebridge, George Kleanthous, Waine Hetherington, and Colin Mant. The last set of changes were master-minded by Mick O'Flynn, his first time in charge of the clip board – but to be honest given how the second half turned out – it felt like we were just re-arranging the deckchairs on the Titanic.

So how did we hit the iceberg? Colin Brazier later reported that the Young Vets' goals came in the 52nd, 64th, 68th, 84th and 90th minutes – I seem to recall. Their first goal came from a corner when a parry from Gary Fentiman in the six-yard box fell fortuitously to Paul Tanton in a crowd of Senior Vets and Paul finished emphatically as he chalked yet another off his looming target of 400 goals for the Guild – only about a score left. The second goal was a personal tragedy for Rob Lipscomb (scorer you may recall of our equaliser last season in the corresponding fixture) as he slid an unwise back pass in the path of jet-heeled Ben Clunn and splitting our defence. Ben did the rest. Colin Brazier captured the sad sight of a prostrate Robin on his back cursing the football Gods. The third goal was not long in coming again using the pace and penetration provided by Ben for him to latch on to a through ball and advance to beat Gary.

At that point, things almost turned ugly as Roger French caused a stir with a robust challenge on Ben (perhaps momentarily forgetting that Ben now played for Farnborough and not the Buff). There was one other unsavoury moment in the early part of the half when Mick Gearing was berated unnecessarily and loudly for not awarding a corner to the Young Vets. Seeing how badly they wanted a corner, Sinisa Gracanin duly rolled the ball out for them to have their precious corner. When they scored their fourth goal off another corner you could see why they made a fuss – as Simon Davies used his physical presence to lash the ball home from close-range again in a crowd scene after an initial parry by Gary Fentiman.

The last Young Vets goal was a piece of individual brilliance by Barry Grainger who turned his marker in the centre of our defence and sped towards goal to slide the ball home. It could have been worse – the Young Vets could look back on some misses which on another day would have added to the score. Jim St John in particular seemed to have displeased the football Gods. And who could forget the flying save made by Gary with the score at 1-0, to palm wide a fierce Barry Grainger left foot volley from a central position just inside the box. Did we get close to scoring ourselves I hear you ask? Well, there was half chance for Waine Hetherington with the keeper off his line which drifted wide; and a three-quarter chance for George Kleanthous who put the ball over the bar from three yards out. In the end, after the draws we achieved in the last two corresponding fixtures, this was normal service resumed and we were well-beaten by a superior team.

The buffet was quite something, a vast spread, copious, varied – sausages, chicken thighs and wings, at least four kinds of sandwiches and rolls, crisps, cheddar chunks and cake, lots of it – almond slices, iced sponge, lemon drizzle, flapjacks. It was a good thing that Nosh French and Buffet King Nick Waller brought their A game to the buffet, though Nick's wolfing was curtailed as he had to go back to look after the family dog. Yet still that was not enough, allied with the modest intakes from others. In the end there was food left over – though the portions of cake on offer found good homes, including maison French.

Today's "end of season" occasion is usually marked by our awards presentation (excluding the Player's Player of the Year which is awarded at the club's presentation evening in June). The awards made today, with a two-page speaking note from Roger French, were the Manager's Player of the Year – to ever-present Colin Mant; the top scorer and goal-of-the-season awards -

both naturally to Andy Faulks; the refereeing award to Mick Gearing (something which may well give more pleasure to Mrs Gearing – a rocking cockerel garden ornament); the catering award to Pam Shoebridge (a clematis climbing plant) and to Jane Martin (Lucy & Lee Campervan wine rack); the Dot Cotton award to Rob Lipscomb despite a prolonged absence through injury (a Dot Cotton Che Guevara t-shirt); the supporters' award to superfans Isabelle and Thomas French (Helix trophy and Match Attax cards) – witnessed by mum Jackie French on a rare visit to the hallowed place.

Man-of-the-Match: Gary Fentiman.

18 May 2014: Lloyds TSB Super Vets (A, 6-2)

Farnborough birthday boy signs off with a handsome win

Club Langley, 2 Hawksbrook Lane, Beckenham BR3 3SR was the place to be for football today, on a gloriously sunny day under the bluest skies we'd had for a while. We thought it odd to be asked, at the entrance, if we were there to play football. Of course, we were, and with some style, but we were some forty to fifty years older than the 200 or so kids, who were there for a massive tournament. I was hoping (a) that the parents would behave, (b) that our own players would show more maturity than on the adjoining pitches, and (c) that we might teach the youngsters how the granddads do it. All three boxes were ticked.

Our opponents Lloyds TSB Super Vets were unknown territory, but not the ground as we recalled a 2-0 win there against Orpington Vets in December. We are certainly glad to have added them to our fixture list late in the season and I am not saying that because we won – it was the whole atmosphere in which the game was played and we look forward to playing them again, including we hope back at our place.

We were down to the bare 12 although at some point the day before we had a potential 16 but those who failed to turn up will remain nameless. They can read this report and weep. The 12 happy few were Gary Fentiman in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Ian Lyons, Steve Blanchard and Mick O'Flynn in defence; Colin Mant, Robin Lipscomb and Waine Hetherington in midfield, George Kleanthous in the corridor of uncertainty between midfield and attack; and the heavy artillery of Barry Grainger and Andy Faulks up front with 58 goals between them for Farnborough Vets this season before today's match. Roger French ran the line, keeping an eye on our two fans Isabelle and Roger French, blending in the background, for once heavily outnumbered by their peer group.

What an agreeable game of football we had. Both sides aspired to a passing game, played fairly, without malice and the excellent referee kept things moving with calm authority and good humour. I cannot recall a single bad tackle or controversial incident during the whole game. The first quarter of an hour was quite an even affair even if we had marginally more possession and the heavier traffic was towards the Lloyds TSB goal. They had several players who could play a bit as they say, and they defended in numbers, as Barry, George and Andy buzzed round their box, aided and abetted by Robin and Waine. Our first goal was not unexpected but the manner of it was. After twenty minutes or so, Waine Hetherington produced an in-swinging corner which was headed into his own goal by the biggest Lloyds player on the pitch. Ten minutes later Andy Faulks shot low into the net from five yards after making room for himself. At 2-0 up, we were comfortable but there were reminders towards the end of the half of what Lloyds could do, as Gary Fentiman used all of his six-foot three frame, and corpulence to pull off a stupendous point blank save to parry a close-range shot at his near post.

The half-time oranges were more welcome than usual as was the eau de Orpington in seven large bottles. Patrice Mongelard made way for Roger French and went to run the line with his shirt off. Our parts were certainly refreshed as the second half was barely five minutes old when George Kleanthous outpaced his marker to master a through ball from Andy Faulks, advance on goal, and prod the ball home. Ten minutes later Waine Hetherington produced an exquisite finish to lob the Lloyds keeper after good approach play from George in the box. At 4-0 up we were at our most dominant. Mick O'Flynn came off to be replaced by Patrice Mongelard, and five minutes later Mick was the only Farnborough player with a clean sheet today. Steve Blanchard lost his

footing at a crucial moment in a dangerous area, as we overplayed it at the back and LLoyds capitalised to narrow the deficit.

We then produced the best goal of the game, as our three attacking players combined to great effect. Barry Grainger produced not one but two successive nutmegs in the middle of the park to send Andy Faulks through on the right; Andy crossed low and George applied the gloss finish. It was sweet as a nut, clinical, and if I may be forgiven the analogy – it was like watching Brazil.

There were two more goals in the game but I am not sure of their order although both were easy on the eye. Our six-foot three keeper was chipped from twenty-five yards. Andy Faulks provided yet another assist as he crossed the ball low to the far post where supreme predator Barry Grainger was lurking with deadly intent to add to his tally for the season.

It was a long walk back to the changing room through the throng of impromptu games and all the cars parked on the grass but we did not mind it such was our feeling of well-being. Roger French was even happier as he revealed at the end of the game that it was his birthday today but he had kept it quiet as he did not want to put us under any pressure. Silly boy! We are under pressure every game he plays but he was glad to mark the day with a win. In fact, if you add the figures in today's score, 6-2, you get the same number as you would adding the figures in Roger's age. I'll give you a clue – it is not 44 and it is not 71 either.

The buffet was excellent: a vast tray of round chips, ribs, chicken legs and wings, sausages and what tasted like a thousand island dressing as a condiment which earned compliments for the chef. There was nothing left on the tray when I left – in fact I had the last bit of sausage. Had buffetmeister Nick Waller been there I could not have done that.

Man-of-the-Match: Colin Mant, cool as a mint in the middle of the park on a hot day, whose Manager's Player of the Year award seems to have brought out a new dimension in him.

Next week it is our last fixture of 2013-14, and without Roger French, as we catch the last bus home after a 32-game season – despite the waterlogged pitches of January and February, a very distant memory in today's blazing sunshine which saw several players have ice creams after the game – but no one bought the management one, not even from Colin, and not even for birthday boy.

25 May 2014: Brixton Bus Garage Vets (H, 7-3)

Ten-goal thriller closes Senior Vets season

Brixton Bus garage is not in Brixton, and Farnborough is a long way from Streatham Hill but we were pleased to host the visit of Brixton Bus Garage Vets for the football match – but we were no Basildon Bashers – more like the Farrow Fields Finishers. Our usual match fixer, Roger French, had arranged this novel fixture for us and then gone on the kids' outing to Centre Parcs. We wondered if Roger knew something we did not as our opponents gathered. There was a smattering of Vets in their midst, but some did not look old enough to be driving buses, let alone the 'L' bus. We looked forward to testing our experience and team work against the exuberance of youth. To allow time for our visitors to travel to Farnborough, we decided the early shift of 10:30 would not do so we opted for an 11:00 kick-off. That way we thought too none of our players would be late again.

Injury, the school half term, possibly the other woman, had reduced our numbers to 12 again. The 12 were Steve Palmer in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Waine Hetherington, Jim St John in defence; Colin Mant, Robin Lipscomb and Sinisa Gracanin in midfield; the used combination of George Kleanthous, Barry Grainger and Andy Faulks provided our attacking threat once again. Mick O'Flynn ran the line ready to flag the bus down, as did Young Farnborough Vet Rich Davies on the other side. Referee Mick Gearing had given up his gardening time, to combine the roles of the not new inspector and conductor for our last game of the season.

And so, we kicked off in glorious sunshine, not really knowing what to expect. As the initial minutes ticked away, we realised, as most footballers would, that if we played a measured passing game the strain would tell on our opponents. They had energy, pace in abundance of course, but by going steady and applying the squeeze in the right places we thought we would show that organisation and experience count for much in Vets football at least, and so it proved. To their credit our opponents did not park the omnibuses in front of goal but opted for an expansive attacking game. This yielded quite a spectacle and even Lord Lucan, aka Toby Harlow ex-Farnborough Vets manager permanently on the comeback trail, was tempted to watch some of the first half with his golden retriever. He waited a bit to see a goal but then like buses, two came along for us. First, Robin Lipscomb produced a crisp finish from five yards out after being teed up by Andy Faulks. Then Andy himself showed there was no smoke without fire as he fired a low shot to give us a deserved two-goal lead. This was a fair reflection of the game, given the amount of possession we had. Whatever threat Brixton Bus garage had was dealt with by the defence with Jim St John in particular prominent in his pursuit of safety first – almost to the point of causing the injury of the season, in his thirty-second game, to ever-present Colin Mant. A dazed and confused Colin, yes, we can tell the difference, got up gingerly after getting in Jim's way - a bit like stepping in front of a double-decker, not a good idea, but there was no need for first aid. On balance, the Brixton Bus garage forwards had a thin time in front of our goal and we found that they had nowhere to go if we defended in numbers with the midfield in support. We could have had more than two goals in the bank at half-time - Jim was a threat at set-pieces, George and Andy could have added to our score and there was a scorching free-kick from Barry that was very easy on the eye. The Brixton Bus Garage keeper, under strain, had some dodgy moments with his kicks but we could not quite capitalise on these.

The only change we made at half-time was Mick O'Flynn coming on for Patrice Mongelard who went off looking for some lost property – our valuables, thankfully locked away in our dressing

room by Vicky Tanner who provided excellent support to the Senior Vets, not least by taking delivery of the pizzas!

The second half was a goal fest – eight goals, almost an epidemic. Five of these were scored by Farnborough and three by our visitors. I am not sure I can remember all of them but the score evolved like this: 2-0 became 2-1, then 3-1 and 3-2, followed by 4-2, 5-2, 6-2, 6-3 and finally 7-3. Numbers cannot tell the full story. Our opponents scored early in the second half after a defensive mix-up. But the Barry Grainger – Andy Faulks axis combined to climax in a crisp top corner finish by Andy. Steve Blanchard went off injured and Patrice Mongelard came back on midway through the second half to see Brixton get a very good goal with a shot from the edge of the box nesting in the top corner. Any anxieties we might have had at that point were eased away in spectacular fashion, as Rob Lipscomb embarked on a run straight from the kick-off taking out three defending players and setting Andy Faulks up for a trademark finish barely a minute after the deficit had narrowed.

The wheels then came off the Brixton bus as Andy Faulks again, he could get used to the excellent service provided by Barry Grainger, drove us further ahead before a Brazilian solo run from Barry gave him a well-deserved notch on the score sheet. At 6-2 we probably got complacent and were rightly punished by speedy opponents, despite a smart initial save from Steve Palmer. At 6-3 we, and our opponents, were ready to enquire of the referee how long was left but we were not done. Barry Grainger, again, provided the service from the left with his cultured left foot, Mick O'Flynn appeared mysteriously in the Brixton six-yard box, dummied the exquisite cross, so he says, and Andy Faulks finished emphatically to register his thirty-sixth goal of the campaign. The sense of a journey's end, a bit like the loop on a bus route, was complete as Andy had scored our first goal-of-the-season on 1 September.

Reluctant left-back Waine Hetherington was quick to point out that most of our goals today had their origin on the left. This is not only a fair point but also a well-made one. This will have been of some comfort to him after a difficult week in May in Bournemouth.

I have rarely seen opponents take a heavy defeat so well. The game was played in excellent spirit, perhaps showing that playing the game with the right attitude is more important than winning or losing. In a way, you could say there had been no dangerous driving at all. The canteen was not in service today as canteen girl Pam Shoebridge was away but we had seven super 15" pizzas plus garlic bread and chips on order from Ollie's kebab and Pizza in Farnborough Village (we support local businesses) and with both Roger French and buffet monster Nick Waller away we were unlikely to go hungry.

All in all, this was an excellent way to end the season. We did not even mind that there was no hot water in the cistern today owing to a problem with our boiler. We wished our visitors bon voyage on the way back and look forward to another fixture next year. So, for now the Senior Vets go back to the depot before training starts at the end of July, with the matter of world cup duty in between. The prize of today's victory gave us figures for the season of P32, W17, D5, L10 GF 87, GA 65 – going steady, perhaps more than that, you might say.

Man-of-the-Match or the best man - Andy Faulks with 50% of all the goals scored today, to bring his tally to 36 goals in 30 games, his usual allowance that we have got used to. Some attribute Andy's sharpness today to the benefit of his intellectual exchanges with Mehmet Bozyigit

on social media this week. I prefer to think it was more due to the service from his team mates, a bit like having friends in high places.

A final word from your match reporter: to mark the occasion of our first ever match against Brixton Bus Garage Vets, and the last match report for this season, I have inserted about thirty titles of episodes of On the Buses in this match report. There is beer waiting for the first person who identifies these references.

Season 2014-15

14 September 2014	CUACO Vets (H)	1-2	Pressure of defenestration grows on management as Senior Vets slump deepens
21 September 2014	Sanco Super Vets (A)	3-1	Farnborough put on a show in Dulwich with clown, American, Jack Russell and more
28 September 2014	West Farleigh Vets (A)	1-3	A chequered performance as Farnborough Senior Vets wilt in West Farleigh
5 October 2014	Belvedere Vets (A)	3-3	Farnborough check poor run of form with a victorious draw
12 October 2014	Inter Vyagra Super Vets (A)	1-1	Senior Vets get no satisfaction from Inter Vyagra in limp draw
19 October 2014	Peckham Rye Vets (A)	1-4	Senior Vets morale high despite harsh scoreline against much younger opposition
26 October 2014	CUACO Vets (A)	4-1	Senior Vets faith restored in St Dunstan's Lane
2 November 2014	Lads of the Village Super Vets (N)	3-0	The only 40-goal-a-season striker in the village grabs a fine pair
9 November 2014	Belvedere Vets (H)	3-2	Faulks remembers the key to maximum points
16 November 2014	Met Police Super Vets (H)	2-2	Farnborough foil Farrow Fields daylight robbery by Met Police
30 November 2014	Old Tamponians Super Vets (A)	2-0	Old Tamponians fail to staunch Farnborough flow
7 December 2014	Orpington Vets (A)	3-3	Farnborough and Orpington share 6-goal derby thriller
21 December 2014	Wellcome Super Vets (A)	5-4	Senior Vets deliver bumper Christmas edition
28 December 2014	Orpington Vets (N)	3-5	Farnborough find themselves a very long way from Orpington
11 January 2015	Inter Vyagra Super Vets (N)	2-2	Farnborough Senior Vets come twice from behind to frustrate Inter Vyagra
18 January 2015	Baltic Exchange Vets (A)	4-1	Farnborough master the conditions and Baltic
25 January 2015	Glendale Vets (A)	2-3	Farnborough on top in tight affair
1 February 2015	Diamond Vets (A)	2-3	Farnborough have only themselves to blame for lacklustre performance
15 February 2015	Catford Wanderers Vets (H)	2-2	Farnborough tied up in knots by Catford Wanderers
1 March 2015	Santos Vets (N)	6-2	Farnborough Seniors stun Santos in Sunday sunshine
22 March 2015	Glendale Vets (H)	2-3	Farnborough slump deepens
29 March 2015	Catford Wanderers Vets (A)	3-2	By George, Farnborough get back to winning ways
5 April 2015	Eagles Fitter Fans Vets (H)	5-1	Farnborough win Eagles' Dare
19 April 2015	Riverside Wanderers Vets (A)	0-6	Farnborough Nightmare in Eynsford

Season 2014-15 (contd)

26 April 2015	Wellcome Super Vets (H)	2-2	Welcome result for both sides
28 April 2015	Santos Vets (H)	7-2	Paul Scotter and thirteen team mates too strong for Santos Vets
3 May 2015	Riverside Wanderers Vets (H)	1-4	Farnborough woes continue against Riverside
5 May 2015	Eagles Fitter Fans Vets (H)	6-0	Eagle Fitter Fans Vets see Farnborough history in the making
17 May 2015	Lloyds Super Vets	2-3	Lloyds profit as Farnborough fizzle out

14 September 2014: CUACO Vets (H, 1-2)

Pressure of defenestration grows on management as Senior Vets slump deepens

My Kindle brought the sting of defeat in our first two matches to the fields of Bali where your match reporter was working on his tan, while the lads were getting browned off at Farrow Fields. Surely, the return of the prodigal oldie of the squad would re-ignite our season. Little details off the field would be sorted out: valuables bag, water bottles, corner flags, half-time oranges, match balls etc. Whether big details would be sorted out on the field was uncertain as we were still quite under-strength. The three Farnborough Ss were configured like this:

Starting XI:

		Gary Fentiman	
Paul Scotter	Ian Coles	Steve Blanchard	Patrice Mongelard
Simon Thomas	Ian Shoebridge	Robin Lipscomb	Jim Grimley
	Andy Faulks	Colin Mant	

Substitute: Roger French.

Supporters: Isabelle and Thomas French, Louie Dwight, Rebecca Coles, Jane Martin, Pam Shoebridge, Vicky Tanner, Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Lyons, Mick O'Filth (aka O'Flynn), Michael Ugwumba and Michael Jr. Four of our walking wounded were there, and before the end of the match one of them would rise like Lazarus, in vain, to dig us out of trouble.

Once again, our numbers were low due to an epidemic of injuries and absenteeism – a shortcoming we were to pay for later. As we warmed up in the balmy sunshine waiting for referee Mick Gearing to start proceedings, I noticed that high netting had been erected behind one the goals at last. I wondered who would make first use of it. It turned out to be Roger French, with one of his trademark flicks.

The start was an even affair – both sides probing and seeking to move the ball around. We had more possession but did not do much with it. Generally, defences were on top but there were early signs that Simon Thomas could travel in space, at pace, and cause the CUACO defence some discomfort on our right. The first clear sign of danger though was created by our opponents with a cross from their left which was met by a diving bullet header from their big unit up front which whistled a foot above the top corner of Gary's goal.

Our injury troubles worsened quite early in the game – Robin Lipscomb crumpled to the ground with a twisted knee in the middle of the pitch and was replaced briefly by Roger French. Robin came on ten minutes later, unwisely as it turned out. We opened the scoring after about twenty minutes when Simon Thomas cruised inside the CUACO full back to latch on to a through ball, and advance on goal before poking the ball past the CUACO keeper. This was no more than we deserved. We also deserved the CUACO equaliser which was not long in coming – our lead lasted barely five minutes. A Farnborough move broke down as Rob Lipscomb crumpled to the ground for a second and final time; and it looked like some of our players stood still expecting the referee to halt play. That is the only way I can explain the ease with which the burly CUACO forward strolled through the middle of our defence to collect a through ball and slide the ball under Gary.

Before the first-half ended CUACO were to score a second after we took too long to clear the ball on the edge of our box – the ball was hooked back in over the defence, to a CUACO forward

who was ruled onside by the Farnborough linesman and we were behind. Yet that is not the full story of the first-half – we had three or four good half chances to score again. The best opportunities came from set-pieces. If Simon Thomas could travel back in time, he would surely do better with the point-blank header in the middle of the goal from a corner that he contrived to miss. Ian Shoebridge was an inch away from converting a Patrice Mongelard free-kick. Andy Faulks – yet to fire in open play this season, lacked his usual sharpness and was tentative in good positions.

At half-time we felt we were not out of it at 2-1 down. We had enjoyed 60-40 possession, and created more half chances than our opponents who had been better organised and more clinical when rare opportunities had come their way. Tellingly though, we had no substitutions to make whereas CUACO did and some of their changes caught the eye. We were to rue our numerical inferiority even more early in the second half when Roger French was injured by a selfie and hobbled off to join our sick bay on the touch lines. Despite this setback we did not feel we were out of it. More of the game was being played in the CUACO half but it was all foreplay – neither Andy Faulks nor Colin Mant could penetrate. We were now more stretched and CUACO threatened once or twice to overrun us but we somehow managed to keep out of trouble.

In fact, things perked up when one of our walking wounded Mick O'Flynn answered the call and came on to bring some order and composure to the centre of our midfield. With a quarter of an hour to go, composure was certainly lacking when Patrice Mongelard gave away a penalty. His tired and late agricultural tackle – which filled Roger French with admiration, had scythed down the quick CUACO right winger after one too many twists and turns in the box. I cannot take issue with referee Mick Gearing about his decision – this was not the dodgy penalty he awarded to our opponents in our first match, allegedly. I have always seen such tackles punished with a penalty, and sometimes a red card. Thankfully, Gary was equal to the shot. Five minutes after the same winger crumpled in the box, with Patrice Mongelard close by, but tantric Mick must have felt he had reached his penalty quota for the season.

This was our first defeat to CUACO. They deserved the points and the better team won.

The copious buffet lunch served up by Pam Shoebridge and Jane Martin reminded me of my most recent buffet performance, a week ago at breakfast on holiday. Tucking into my second plate of fried noodles I said to a disapproving Mrs M “Well it is paid for, might as well go the whole hog” – only to be reminded “You are the whole hog”. Our own Lord of the buffet – the much-maligned Nick Waller, absent today like many others, will appreciate that perceptive remark. Still, my buffet excesses must have been forgiven as I returned home to the smell of apple and cranberry turnovers in the oven - made a change from being turned over.

Man-of-the-Match: Ian Shoebridge

21 September 2014: Sanco Super Vets (A, 3-1)

Farnborough put on a show in Dulwich with clown, American, Jack Russell and more

The signs were not good at the beginning of the week – a run of three straight defeats, more injuries and absences but, in our hour of need, our overseas player Eric Johnson flew over from the US, and Toby Manchip, aka the Clown, dug out his boots. Moreover, for the first time in my seventeen seasons as a Farnborough Vet, we had a real mascot in the canine form of Caesar, a Jack Russell there to watch the artistry of his master Phil Anthony. Once Caesar realised that Patrice Mongelard was not going to eat his dog biscuits, as one or two of the lads had tittered – he settled down to enjoy the lovely Dulwich sunshine which bathed the excellent playing surface at the Griffin Sports Club in SE21 7AL. If Caesar could talk, I mused to myself, his tactical analysis would probably be sharper than Toby's. The three Farnborough Ss were configured like this:

Starting XI:

		Gary Fentiman		
Phil Anthony	Ian Lyons	Steve Blanchard	Patrice Mongelard	
Simon Thomas	Ian Shoebridge	Paul Scotter	Waine Hetherington	
	Andy Faulks	Colin Mant		

Substitutes: Roger French, Jim Grimley, Eric Johnson, Toby Manchip.

Supporters: Sinisa Gracanin and Caesar.

Sanco SuperVets play an attractive brand of football, a measured and passing game, without a hint of malice or rough edge and this suited us too. We set the pattern of play quite early on, with defensive solidity, short passes, good movement, and probing the Sanco defence particularly down the right. Simon Thomas was having a field day and giving his marker a torrid time. In the first twenty minutes alone, he had two or three shots on target, and twice as many crosses which failed to find an unmarked Farnborough player in the Sanco box which we were getting to know fairly well. Waine Hetherington came close with a cunningly disguised shot which faded just past the top corner. The lack of an end result to cap our dominance was mildly troubling for us. The Sanco keeper had a quiet confidence, and competent air, about him and he was equal to all our efforts – in particular a shot from Paul Scotter which he dived low to divert past the post. At the other end, Gary Fentiman had a relatively quiet time. In fact, unless my memory fails me, I do not recall a single Sanco corner in the first half, or the second.

Midway through the first-half Roger French brought on Jim Grimley and Eric Johnson in lieu of Andy Faulks and Waine Hetherington. The pattern of our play was undisturbed. In fact, we were to achieve a breakthrough soon after. Patrice Mongelard took a corner which kept low and was cleverly dummied by our soccer player Eric at the near post. The ball travelled undisturbed through a forest of legs before connecting with Ian Shoebridge' boot and we had a 1-0 lead. We perked up and tried hard to pull further ahead. Eric Johnson had a shot which would have been good in American football, and Ian Lyons got his mane to yet another cross from Simon but his header was just over. A deep free-kick from Patrice Mongelard found Ian Shoebridge at the far post but his header back across the goal was prevented from reaching unmarked Farnborough players by the well-positioned and unflustered Sanco keeper. We were not able though to increase our lead before the half-time oranges; and, a pleasant surprise, a cup of tea and Jaffa cakes from our hosts.

Paul Scotter, Colin Mant and Ian Shoebridge took a breather at half-time; Andy Faulks and Waine Hetherington returned to the fray and we also unleashed Toby Manchip, or if you prefer, we brought on the clown. As often happens, our opponents seemed to sense some uncertainty in our game as the second half got under way and they were to draw level. A ball over the top put a burly Sanco forward the wrong side of Steve Blanchard and with a clear run on the goal unless Steve could catch him. The chase seemed to happen in slow motion, over thirty yards or so, and did not go our way as the ball was rolled past Gary, with just enough on it to dribble over the line.

Here we go again – we must all have thought. Thankfully, we were to restore our advantage fairly quickly as Simon Thomas harried a dithering and unwise Sanco defender in a dangerous place, dispossessed him and stroked the ball past the keeper. That moment lifted a weight off our shoulders, I thought I heard Caesar bark, and we began to play with greater confidence and purpose. What followed was mostly one-way traffic as we lay siege to the Sanco goal. Final changes were made with twenty minutes left as Patrice Mongelard, Phil Anthony, Steve Blanchard and Simon Thomas made way for Paul Scotter, Ian Shoebridge, Colin Mant and Roger French. We had two goals – from Eric Johnson and Andy Faulks, disallowed for off-side in a five-minute period. Toby Manchip met an Eric Johnson cross with an acrobatic – yes, I'll repeat that acrobatic, volley from twelve yards out which crashed against the post with the Sanco keeper beaten (just like Gareth Bale I thought but with a tenth of the pace). Andy Faulks, Waine Hetherington, Ian Lyons, Eric Johnson all went close before Andy Faulks wrong-footed the Sanco keeper from close-range, to score our third goal a few minutes from the end, and give us a well-deserved first victory this season. For the spectators this was an attractive game of football in warm autumn sunshine, in a great setting, played in excellent spirit by both sides – a great advert for Vets football on Sunday mornings.

I cannot report first-hand on the après-match hospitality in the picturesque club house. Family business took priority in the form of my mother-in-law's 85th birthday lunch. To celebrate this, and our victory, today I tackled the challenge of the Ultimate Mixed Grill at the Queen's Head in Green St Green. This was no Caesar salad and it took the biscuit. Ever mindful of my "David Gandy" diet, however, I did not clear my plate – I left the mushroom.

Man-of-the-Match: our show was so good we had two of them - Ian 'Lionel' Lyons and Eric 'Magic' Johnson.

28 September 2014: West Farleigh Vets (A, 1-3)

A chequered performance as Farnborough Senior Vets wilt in West Farleigh

This away game is probably the furthest away from home on our fixtures list but nonetheless one that we look forward to greatly, not least because of the picturesque pitch in the Kentish Weald, and also the quality and demeanour of the opposition. Surprisingly perhaps, we all arrived in good time and without fuss though with at least one very loud shirt, to enjoy the setting, livestock included, and the superb weather. Once we had changed, and made our way through three sets of gates across well-fertilised fields, we took in the expanse of the pitch, felt the sun on our backs, enjoyed the company of a young cocker spaniel (sadly not Caesar), and those who had moulded footwear would have felt wise on the green but firm pitch.

The Farnborough contingent was arranged like this:

Starting XI:

		Gary Fentiman		
Paul Scotter	Ian Coles	Steve Blanchard	Patrice Mongelard	
Simon Thomas	Ian Lyons	Nick Waller	Waine Hetherington	
	Andy Faulks	Colin Mant		

Substitutes: Roger French, George Kleanthous, Mick O'Flynn.

Supporters: Sinisa Gracanin, Jane Martin, Rebecca Coles, Isabelle and Thomas French, Louie Dwight.

We were expecting a tough but fair game and that is what we got. The opening exchanges were even with defences on top, the midfield congested and the goalkeepers untroubled. West Farleigh had two quick and mobile forwards (arguably their two best players) supplied by a midfield who could play a bit, ahead of a good defence. We took the lead after a quarter of an hour with a trade mark strike from Andy Faulks. He controlled a cross field ball from Simon Thomas on the edge of the penalty box, cut inside his marker and unleashed a crisp twenty-yarder that curved beyond the keeper into the top corner. This was vintage "Compo". Alas, this was to be our brightest moment. Five minutes later, we lost midfield anchor Ian Lyons. George Kleanthous came off the bench (that should be beach perhaps) and we re-arranged the deck chairs on the Titanic, so to speak. Slowly West Farleigh tightened their grip in midfield and began to probe the right of our defence in particular, with Gary pulling off a couple of very good saves to preserve our slim advantage.

Colin Mant then did an uncool thing in checking the momentum of a West Farleigh forward in our box and the penalty was awarded. We were not entirely convinced about the decision and, as footballers do, felt justice was done when the spot kick was blasted high and wide. Our relief did not last long, as yet another injury occurred on the half hour and Ian Coles shuffled off, and Mick O'Flynn, himself just out of convalescence, arrived on the scene. Five minutes before half-time, Mick O'Flynn and Nick Waller attempted some trigonometry on the edge of our box which did not go as planned. The ball was intercepted, recycled quickly by West Farleigh and their equaliser was struck with barely five minutes to go to half-time.

We were thirsty and flustered at half-time. We felt that we had matched West Farleigh but for a final ball to make the difference. The absence of water bottles for yet another week was particularly noticeable given the scorcher of a day. It is a mystery why a club like ours cannot obtain a set of water bottles in over two weeks and more so perhaps why the players cannot do

something about it. I had brought two bottles of water and six Jaffa oranges. We had Jaffa cakes though.

Roger French came on at half-time for Colin Mant as our only “fit” substitute. Whatever hopes we might have had as the second half got under way were dashed fairly quickly. Naturally, we pressed forward and in one such move on the right Mick O’Flynn, lively but unlucky perhaps, lost the ball and the West Farleigh Express, quick, ginger, feisty – I have referred to him as TinTin in previous encounters, took over with a thirty-yard dash and hit a superb twenty-yard shot beyond Gary’s hands which made contact with the ball, into the top corner. Five minutes later, a West Farleigh midfielder contrived to lob our 6 ft 3 Gary from the edge of our box and that was it. We had another half of an hour to endure and by then Paul Scotter had left the field, yet another injury, and we were down to the bare XI with Colin Mant returning. Our bench now had four injured players on it – all out like the patients of some cottage hospital in the Kent countryside wheeled out, by nurse Jane Martin, to enjoy the morning sun.

The last hour was actually quite well-contested. Our heads did not go down. Our defending got more last-ditch than composed. Yet, we played some good stuff but the final ball was never there – for example we seemed reluctant to cross the ball from the right when in good positions after clever approach play (it was all sizzle like the weather, but no steak). I cannot recall a clear scoring opportunity for us in the second half. West Farleigh had made the most of their few chances and in the end, they were worthy winners who made home advantage tell.

The après-match was centred on the Good Intent public house. Roger French joined us even though his mate Simon Thomas had lost his car keys and was left alone with his worries, to retrace his steps, possibly to find the cowpat that held the object of his desire. Roger seemed more concerned about getting at the hot food, worried perhaps by the ravenous presence of Nick Waller in the buffet area. No doubt Roger was relieved to see Simon arrive in his car or maybe he was just happy inserting his hot sausage in two onion rings. Yes, hot sausages, chips and onion rings had been brought out with Colin Mant providing the table cloth. He and Paul Scotter had arrived together like the Blues brothers gingham style (certainly not gangnam despite the shades) and we were greatly cheered by this – thanks lads – keep up your crimes against fashion.

Man-of-the-Match: George Kleanthous, refreshed after his long and unexpected holiday.

5 October 2014: Belvedere Vets (A, 3-3)

Farnborough check poor run of form with a victorious draw

This away game is undoubtedly one of our toughest assignments, and with only twelve players available to tackle a giant pitch and a team usually bristling with substitutes, the omens were not good. Moreover, as we were 2-0 down after only ten minutes, you will understand why a draw feels like we took maximum points. This has done wonders for morale – more than the half dozen check shirts and shades on display, our homage to the Mant-Scotter school of stylish Sunday attire in suburban noir. Fourteen players had overnight been whittled down to twelve, as Phil Anthony had gone dogging with Caesar in Margate, and Toby Manchip had told everyone but the two muppets in charge of the team that he was now unavailable – despite wearing his Farnborough Old Boys Guild sweatshirt when his lift to the ground turned up – another stylish bit of Sunday attire for the fashion hotspot that is Farnborough Senior Vets.

The weather was in keeping with the name of the place – Belvedere (beautiful view in Italian), glorious autumn sunshine against shades of brown and yellow and the morning dew – not quite Tuscany but it would do. This is how we were arranged in the sunlight and still air:

Starting XI:

		Gary Fentiman	
Mick O'Flynn	Steve Blanchard	Patrice Mongelard	Nick Waller
Ian Shoebridge	Jim Murphy	Colin Mant	Waine Hetherington
	Andy Faulks	George Kleanthous	

Substitute: *seulement* Roger French

Supporters: Sinisa Gracanin, Isabelle and Thomas French. Sinisa has been to every game this season. His serious ankle injury must be a great disappointment to him. We miss him of course, but he seems to be keeping trim for his return – a diet of seaweed only he tells me.

Roger's team talk had been a succinct afterthought, and it was a very distant memory after ten minutes. By then Belvedere were 2-0 up. Their first goal after only five minutes came when Gary got down to a low shot that skidded off the wet surface from twelve yards out but the ball spilled out of his grasp and the Belvedere right winger who had drifted into the box unencumbered by left-back Nick Waller had a tap-in. Five minutes later, the shorter of the two Belvedere stocky forwards had converted a cross from the left with a classy first-time touch to produce a scoreline of 2-0 that was not a fair reflection of the game. Even in these early exchanges, we showed signs of a passing and cohesive game allied with good movement that gave us great comfort. Andy Faulks put a rebound just over the bar from four yards out. On the quarter hour we were back in the game when George Kleanthous chested down a deft cross from Jim Murphy inside the box, turned and slid the ball home beneath the advancing keeper. More finesse followed ten minutes later, when Colin Mant, showing rare subtlety, slipped the ball behind the Belvedere defence for Ian Shoebridge to run on to, round the keeper and slot the ball home. We pressed hard for the rest of the first-half with the Belvedere keeper the busier of the two No 1s. The passing was good, the final ball was not quite there but we looked more likely to edge ahead as we had the momentum even though we were playing against the very noticeable slope. In fact, I think we are going to have to reassess the myth that playing with the slope on that pitch confers an advantage. Belvedere held firm though and at 2-2 the half-time whistle was probably more welcome to them than to us. The running of George Kleanthous, Andy Faulks and Ian Shoebridge had stretched Belvedere and we had a measure of control in the midfield with Jim

Murphy and Colin Mant that we do not usually enjoy at this ground. We forced several corners – two of which were met dangerously by Nick Waller's meaty forehead, and Mick O'Flynn's crossing got better as the half ticked away.

For once we did not make any substitutions at half-time – our bench was thin, well not the player on it, only that we did not have the numbers to play with. We began the second half with a spring in our step but to their credit Belvedere rallied, pushed us back and created a number of dangerous situations in our box, with the twisting and turning two-footed big unit, which drew the best out of Gary. After a quarter of an hour, we had the nerve to take the lead – a poor Belvedere clearance had the keeper off his line and the ball at Waine Hetherington's feet about twenty-five yards out. Waine sized the situation, looked up and his cultured left foot did the rest and he had a classy chip to celebrate on the anniversary of his debut for us at the same ground a year ago – and what a different experience today was. Midway through the half, Roger French came on for Nick Waller and was quickly involved in some "Norman Hunter" moments.

We hoped we could hang on for a rare and unexpected win but it was not to be. With about ten minutes left Belvedere got their equaliser. The ball pinged off several defenders before finding its way wide to the left of our defence a yard out from goal. For a moment it looked like Roger French would clear the danger but the ball eluded him and a Belvedere player forced the ball home from a tight angle. Roger later claimed the ball had taken a slight deflection which threw him off balance – perhaps a butterfly had flapped its wings in the Amazonian rainforest to create some turbulence in the Woolwich area. In the end the teams could not be separated – a draw was a fair result. This very competitive game had been played in excellent spirit.

The cosy club house, and bar where Mick O'Flynn asked for Czech beer to go with his shirt, was enhanced by a wide screen TV which kept our attention until the hot potatoes, sausages, and an array of sandwiches appeared. I had the last sandwich, an improvised egg mayonnaise and sausage combo, Waine Hetherington had the last potato, whilst Jim Murphy had the last sausage. Buffet slayer Nick Waller was subdued, perhaps miffed that Patrice Mongelard did not have a Maybelline pencil case for him, and Roger French took voracious advantage.

Man-of-the-Match: Steve Blanchard (his check shirt was not bad either). In fairness several performances caught the eye today – Gary Fentiman pulled off a couple of worldies in the second half. Jim Murphy was immense in midfield. It was a great team performance with quite a few individual cameos. Next week we are playing away at Inter Vyagra and after today our tails should be up for that one, and we'll be wearing something blue.

12 October 2014: Inter Vyagra Super Vets (A, 1-1)

Senior Vets get no satisfaction from Inter Vyagra in limp draw

This is a fixture we all look forward to given the setting, the quality and conduct of the opposition, and their hospitality. It is certainly one of my favourite games to report on, from a linguistic point of view. We were without our two main artificers – Andy Faulks and George Kleanthous but we hoped we would not be firing blanks at the barracks as we had the SAS with us – Simon Thomas was back and he had brought along Stephane Anelli to play a part. Colin Brazier too was a welcome sight, back from a long absence which included a trip to the Antipodes. A very nice touch from the opposition was to put individual water bottles in our changing room. They must have read about our difficulty in sourcing water bottles. Their hospitality even extended to a bag of quartered oranges.

This is how our blue-coated troops were arranged in front of architect James Wyatt's 200-year-old Royal Artillery Barracks at Woolwich.

Starting XI:

		Gary Fentiman	
Patrice Mongelard	Steve Blanchard	Ian Coles	Colin Brazier
Simon Thomas	Jim Grimley	Nick Waller	Waine Hetherington
	Colin Mant	Ian Shoebridge	

Substitutes: Roger French and Steve Anelli.

Supporters: Isabelle and Thomas French.

We had cause to feel pleased with our first-half display even though we felt we had done enough to go beyond the slender advantage of one goal. We attacked down both flanks, dominated the centre of midfield, with Nick Waller and Jim Grimley, and coped well with the rare breaks Inter Vyagra mounted. Yet, for all our expert foreplay the penetration was lacking and the final consummation of good moves never came. Inter Vyagra caused the first frisson with a good twenty-yard free-kick which Gary tipped away acrobatically. I think that was his only serious scare of the first half. The first clear opportunity for Farnborough was fashioned by Patrice Mongelard as he put a low ball deep across the Inter Vyagra box – to the far post where Colin Mant arrived as if on a zimmer frame to muff the moment. Ian Shoebridge was doing a lot of good work in and around the Inter Vyagra box and we had some shots from distance from Waine Hetherington and Jim Grimley that confirmed the degree of control we had. The introduction of Stephane Anelli midway through the half, to replace Simon Thomas, galvanised us – his injection of youth, pace and twinkle toes, gave us fresh energy and he came close himself with the Inter Vyagra keeper pulling off a point-blank save after Stephane had weaved his way into a shooting position from only three yards out. The deadlock was broken when Patrice Mongelard threaded a ball through the Inter Vyagra defence for Stephane to run on to. He squared the ball unselfishly to Ian Shoebridge and Ian tucked the ball away to take the lead in the golden boot stakes. This had been coming but it had taken its time and we could not do it for a second time before half-time.

At half-time, Roger French came on and Simon Thomas returned. Jim Grimley had groin trouble before the game and Inter Vyagra did not help, and he went off, to watch the second half from a horizontal position on the sidelines. Waine Hetherington too went off, to run the line and keep one eye on the group being put through their paces by a personal trainer nearby. He later reported that one of them gasped as she witnessed Roger French going in. Indeed, Roger got

stuck in. One of his tackles, punished by a dangerous free-kick on the edge of our box, got the ball (as Norman Hunter would say). But to the neutral it looked like this: imagine a ball in a box, inside a cupboard, on a sofa. The only way Roger got the ball was by upending the sofa. Still no harm was done and the whole game was played in an excellent spirit as they usually are between our two sides. Roger would have been disappointed with the Inter Vyagra equaliser which came within ten minutes of the re-start. We attempted some passes deep in defence and the move broke down at the point where Roger was – the ball was recycled quickly by Inter Vyagra's two very lively forwards, and a low well-placed shot from twelve yards which eluded Gary's long arms was the climax. Roger's frustration, brought on by a lack of control, ball control that is, saw him boot the ball fifty yards into touch. We looked like a spent force in the second half. The connectivity in our game had gone. We felt like we had less time and space on the ball. Our play got disjointed and the chances we created can be counted on one hand. The best of our chances was fashioned by Colin Brazier, thrusting forward into the Inter Vyagra box coming through two challenges including the keeper's, but then going down under no apparent challenge, with the goal seemingly at his mercy. There was a header from Nick Waller that went close and a good shot from distance from Ian Shoebridge which the keeper did well to hold on to. There was a shot from Colin Mant that was very far from close – and no trouble to the Inter Vyagra keeper, the connection was good, powerful even, but the shot was aimed at the corner flag. At the other end the nippy Inter Vyagra forwards kept us on our toes but we managed to hold out.

Midway through the half the children's refuge that is the French tent was seen running away from Isabelle French who made half-hearted attempts to retrieve it. It lacked a stiff tent pole and had broken its moorings. We wondered if Thomas French was inside it pedalling like a furious hamster. Roger's words had no effect on Isabelle so I ordered her to do it. It is years since I acted tough with a young girl called Isabelle. Anyway, it had the desired effect. We've had French tent trouble in the past in games with Inter Vyagra but this time all went well.

In the end a draw was a fair result. We had the first half, Inter Vyagra had the second. The rain held off, the showers were good, the referee even better and the bar had a cosy atmosphere. I am not sure who won the battle of the buffet as chip butties, sausages and chicken nuggets were hit for six, in the cricket pavilion, even though we had buffet General Nick Waller on our side.

Man-of-the-Match: even that was a draw – Nick Waller and Ian Shoebridge.

19 October 2014: Peckham Rye Vets (A, 1-4)

Senior Vets morale high despite harsh scoreline against much younger opposition

This was our second trip to sunny Dulwich this autumn and without disrespect to our previous opponents, today we travelled with less hope. Our new opponents, Peckham Rye Vets had had the better of our Young Vets twice narrowly in recent times. We all arrived on time though in reality looking at our opponents we felt we were, on average, ten to fifteen years late for this game. We have played younger teams before but we expected a lot of savoir-faire to face us, and so it came to pass.

When the referee started proceedings between the yellow and blues, and the yellow and reds we were arranged like this:

Starting XI:

		Gary Fentiman	
Mick O'Flynn	Steve Blanchard	Ian Coles	Patrice Mongelard
Simon Thomas	Colin Mant	Ian Shoebridge	Waine Hetherington
	Andy Faulks	George Kleanthous	

Substitutes: Roger French, Steve Anelli, Phil Anthony, Paul Scotter

Supporters: Isabelle and Thomas French. Louie Dwight

Our worst fears were confirmed after only ten minutes when Peckham Rye took the lead as we failed to clear the ball from a corner. The shot was tame but had been well-placed and it looked like it had taken Gary by surprise as he gave the clear impression that he thought it was going wide. In those first ten minutes the pattern of play had been set. We packed the midfield but our younger and quicker opponents found time and space to move the ball about. They had a couple of forwards who were quick on their feet, and even quicker with the ball, which kept our defence busy and anxious. The next half hour though was evenly contested, in the midst of which we introduced Stephane Anelli and Paul Scotter for Ian Shoebridge and Ian Coles. True we were limited to isolated raids and their back four had a lot of composure and could pass their way out of a paper bag. Gary was the busier keeper undoubtedly and Peckham had at least one fine example of woeful finishing but it was not a one-sided affair. Mick O'Flynn combining well with Simon Thomas on the right, almost got through and Andy Faulks had a decent shout for a penalty midway through the half. Colin Mant threw himself heroically, kitchen sink/crown jewels and all, to block a shot on the edge of our box (this earned him at least one Man-of-the-Match vote I believe). The fact that it took Peckham another half hour before they could score again gave us a lot of heart. Steve Blanchard had cut out a through ball acrobatically only for the ball to fall in the no-Farnborough-midfielder's land in front of our back four, and the resulting Peckham shot was low and again well-placed but Gary would have been disappointed to get a good hand on it but not divert it around the post.

Roger French, Phil Antony, Ian Coles and Ian Shoebridge came on at half-time as Patrice Mongelard, Mick O'Flynn, Andy Faulks and Waine Hetherington took a breather. We were all pleasantly surprised that we set about making a contest of it – George Kleanthous was immense in his new, self-financed, special edition No13 shirt. Roger "Pickfords" French set about introducing the Peckham whippet on the wing – who sported a ginger beard to make him look older, to the fine art of the forklift truck defence – that is when a forward is not only hit by a truck but there is also lifting action which can relocate the forward in time and space. But there was

no ill-feeling. In fact, the only bad tackle came with a quarter of an hour left when Phil Anthony was the victim of a two-footed lunge that ended his participation (and brought Steve Blanchard back). Good thing that Phil's dog, Caesar was not there or we could have had the curious incident of the dog in Dulwich - Caesar had thoughtfully sent some of his biscuits for Patrice Mongelard.

The second half was a tad different from the first with Peckham perhaps lacking the cutting edge of the first-half and we were able to play more of the game in their half. We made more changes midway with Patrice Mongelard, Waine Hetherington, Andy Faulks and Mick O'Flynn coming back on for Simon Thomas, Colin Mant and Steve Blanchard. Yes, you read this right, it was four for three, and for a brief minute we played with twelve men such was George Kleanthous' appetite for the game that he did not hear the call to step down. George was not out of the game for long as a few minutes later he was back on for Ian Shoebridge, and harried the Peckham Rye centre half who was show-boating a bit, into an error and Andy Faulks was on hand to intercept the ball and beat the young Peckham Rye keeper (in front of his watching dad). For a brief while we dared hope that we could get an equaliser. It was not to be – we were undone by two very good bits of finishing in a space of five minutes towards the end as we pressed to get something out of the game. The big unit leading the Peckham Rye line showed great finesse first in lobbing Gary from the edge of our box, and then curling a shot against the inside of the post to give a final scoreline that was a tad harsh on us. Yet there was a spring in our step at the end. We did not even mind the cold showers – it was twenty degrees outside after all, on 19 October.

The platter of chips, sausages and buttered isosceles slices of white bread without crust did not last long even though buffet Czar Nick Waller was not there. I had no need to chew on Caesar's biscuits as my positioning for the buffet was as usual excellent.

The **Man-of-the-Match** voting seemed more tactical on this occasion but, I think, not Zimbabwean in any way, and in the end, we had two of them: Roger French and George Kleanthous, that's democracy for you.

26 October 2014: CUACO Vets (A, 4-1)

Senior Vets faith restored in St Dunstan's Lane

Today's opponents, CUACO Vets, had beaten us 2-1 on our home ground on 14 September. We were keen to deny them a double. We had sixteen players available potentially but yesterday afternoon we lost our regular goalkeeper Gary Fentiman to a knee injury. Efforts to find a replacement had come to nothing – so the plan was that Waine Hetherington and Patrice Mongelard (not GK, guess who?) would share the job between the sticks. Fifteen became fourteen when Andy Faulks failed to appear for the start. We are used to players being late when clocks go forward - but the clocks had gone back overnight. A clue appeared on the dressing room wall in the form of a photograph of Andy's post at 3 am, on Facebook, showing him modelling the latest Ann Summers range, perhaps from their Bromley store. Young Thomas French learned a long word today which I will not repeat here in case he decides to tell teacher about it, after the half term break. I'll give the rest of you a clue – it is not Transylvania. Andy, we surmised, had had trouble finding the right smalls, or difficulty undoing the clasp.

Our opponents are based at the Old Dunstonian's Sports Ground in St Dunstan's lane in Beckenham. St Dunstan as some of you may know was once Archbishop of Canterbury. The ground is punctuated mostly with rugby posts – cue for a social comment après-match from Ian Lyons about the egg-chasers taking over the universe. There were some funny markings on the pitch – the penalty area was delineated in red. Still Roger French would have felt at home sporting his England Rugby team shirt - quite fitting for his brand of football, I thought, and pity the final score was not 0-2. We arranged our XV, and barmy army like this:

Starting XI:

		Waine Hetherington	
Mick O'Flynn	Steve Blanchard	Ian Coles	Patrice Mongelard
Simon Thomas	Paul Scotter	Ian Shoebridge	Colin Brazier
	Colin Mant	George Kleanthous	

Substitutes: Roger French, Nick Waller, Ian Lyons – and eventually Andy Faulks.

Supporters: Isabelle and Thomas French; Louie Dwight; Phil Anthony & Caesar (once again our lucky mascot – two appearances, two wins) and the three Anthony Graces – Freya, Kathleen and Thea; Andy Faulks' girlfriend Jo.

Today we registered our biggest win of the season and we meant business from the first whistle. The passing was crisp and mostly short, with defence, midfield and attack connecting well. The neutral would have observed that Waine was not very busy – and in fact he found his clean sheet in the first-half so much to his liking that he opted to play the second half in goal too. He was a natural – his kicking long and true, and as they say he knew where the posts and bar were. An instinctive save to palm the ball over the bar in the second half was quality.

We were patient and probed down both flanks, with Simon Thomas and Colin Brazier on fire, as we kept CUACO cooped in their half. The half chances started to come. We broke through on the quarter hour when George Kleanthous showed his number thirteen to his marker, got down to the byline and floated a cross to the far post where our tallest player Simon Thomas arrived to head the ball home off the keeper. We had not noticed how tall he was, until he came into the dressing room as we were pondering the goalkeeper situation. He wisely went next door to get changed. We proceeded to create a number of half chances – Ian Shoebridge putting a powerful

header just over, and Paul Scotter meeting a cutback from Simon Thomas with a powerful shot from six yards out that went between the rugby posts behind the goal. Patrice Mongelard had cut in from the left-back position, shifted gear, and advanced on goal before lofting a thirty yarder that the keeper just managed to palm over the bar. A quarter of an hour later Patrice repeated the move with much less success, shall we say. After twenty minutes we replaced Mick O'Flynn, Ian Coles and Ian Shoebridge with Ian Lyons, Nick Waller and Andy Faulks who had used the French tent to change out of his lingerie. We remained in control and on the half-hour saw our domination crowned with a superb thirty yarder into the top corner from Andy Faulks. I hope Jo had a good view of it – she might need her eyes tested I suggest, as it was reported to me that she thought Mick O'Flynn, our own Archbishop of Banterbury was wearing some sort of ecclesiastical cap (a bit like St Dunstan perhaps). We could not find a third goal despite pressing for it. The referee was very good, communicated a lot with the players and on the whole, even-handed. The iffiest tackle he had to deal with in the first-half was when Patrice Mongelard lifted a big CUACO unit off the ground in a fifty-fifty. But there were no hard feelings – the whole match was played in excellent spirit and it was very sporting indeed of our opponents to give us three cheers at the end.

At half-time Roger French came on for Colin Brazier. It is fair to say that we had a bit of a wobble in the first five to ten minutes. CUACO got back in the game with a good finish that would have taxed even our Gary. However, we rallied and before further changes were made there was time for Patrice Mongelard to produce a 70-yard dash that left the nippy CUACO winger trailing, ghost past the full-back, and pull the ball back for Andy Faulks on the edge of the box to produce a disappointing finish. Next time I'll push on. Soon after Patrice Mongelard and Simon Thomas were replaced by Mick O'Flynn and Colin Brazier, and five minutes later we made our final changes as Steve Blanchard and Colin Mant made way for the return of Ian Coles and Ian Shoebridge. The last quarter of the match saw Farnborough dominant again as we hit the bar and post and also hit the rugby bar behind, twice. We got a bit frantic and a bit more composure and less selfish play would have yielded greater dividends as good moves and positions were wasted. Paul Scotter and Mick O'Flynn buzzed in and out of the CUACO box. The relief of a two-goal cushion was restored with a crisp finish from George Kleanthous. With a little over five minutes left Paul Scotter produced a peach of a cross from a free-kick that was met with a diving header from Andy Faulks that the CUACO keeper could not keep out.

The weather was much cooler today and there was a bit of a breeze as we watched the archers set up and start shooting arrows, even though there are no toxophilites among us. We have some cricketers though as Colin "smooth" Mant recalled he played his first cricket match at Farnborough decades ago. One day he'll play football there too. The beer was good and we purchased fifteen chunky beef and ham rolls from the bar. By happy coincidence I had two beef ones with red onion and cucumber. On the way home I wondered whether any of our players had a rabona in their locker – probably none. Not frilly enough for Andy Faulks, I suspect.

Man-of-the-Match: deservedly and overwhelmingly, with a bustling, bristling, bulldog of a performance - Paul Scotter.

2 November 2014: Lads of the Village Super Vets (N, 3-0)

The only 40-goal-a-season striker in the village grabs a fine pair

Today was technically a home game for us but three teams cannot go into two pitches at Farrow Fields so we ended up playing this match at Goals in Eltham. Referee Mick Gearing also travelled from Farnborough village today. There were plenty of parking bays for everyone even if Mick found his not deep enough, as he could not go all the way in. And what a pleasant surprise this place was. Our last visit to this facility a few years ago when it was under different ownership and management caused me to coin the word stalagshite. Today we experienced superb facilities, helpful staff, and excellent pitches even in difficult playing conditions. We should have guessed things were on the up for us as we also had five new match balls, and a full set of new water bottles. We also had five substitutes. Overnight our number had increased – usually it goes down. Michael Ugwumba, a man of impeccable judgement in my view, had declared himself fit to play after a long absence due to injury, and he brought a muscular presence to our midfield. Thankfully, our performance matched these improvements and we recorded our first clean sheet this season. Our last clean sheet was on 30 March.

In the thin drizzle, once we had pitched the French tent to keep our things, and the French *enfants*, dry - we faced the elements like this:

Starting XI:

		Gary Fentiman	
Paul Scotter	Steve Blanchard	Ian Coles	Patrice Mongelard
Simon Thomas	Colin Mant	Ian Shoebridge	Colin Brazier
	Andy Faulks	George Kleanthous	

Substitutes: Roger French, Nick Waller, Ian Lyons, Michael Ugwumba, Phil Anthony.

Supporters: Isabelle & Thomas French; Paul Parsons, (briefly) Jane Martin and Rebecca Coles.

Our opponents made a bright start with fluent passing mostly in their half. But once we got a grip of the game, we started creating chances. George Kleanthous and Andy Faulks were a real threat, aided and abetted by our midfielders down both flanks and through the middle. Lads of the Village were playing on the break and they had midfielders who could thread a ball but our off-side trap worked well to the dismay of the Albanian forward on the other side, who had a lot of trouble with it, despite Paul Scotter's translation. After fifteen minutes, a slick passing move saw George Kleanthous tee up Andy Faulks in a central position on the edge of the box. Andy's smooth finish did the rest and we thought more goals would come in the now teeming rain. Colin Brazier, Andy Faulks, George Kleanthous, Ian Shoebridge and Simon Thomas were all buzzing in and out of our opponents' box and all had shots on target. Several good crosses went begging. It is a mystery how we failed to increase our lead but the fact is that the goalkeeper and defence facing us were no village idiots. It is also a mystery how Simon Thomas managed to squeeze through the railings to retrieve a ball that had gone over the 8-foot fencing. Only two of our sixteen players today could probably do this. Nick Waller agreed he was not the other one. Ian Lyons came on for Steve Blanchard to give us three Ians, (on top of two Colins), midway through the first half, and had some initial trouble finding his feet but we got away with it. It remained to be seen whether we would be made to pay for not taking more of the opportunities we had created, not least as we made five changes at half-time:

OFF - George Kleanthous, Patrice Mongelard. Ian Shoebridge, Paul Scotter and Ian Coles;
ON - Steve Blanchard, Roger French, Michael Ugwumba, Nick Waller and Phil "sniper" Anthony.
The sniper takes out forwards when they get within Phil's range.

These changes unsettled us and for a third of an hour an equaliser must have seemed within grasp for Lads of the Village, especially when we kept missing chances. Roger French put the ball over from three yards out with his wrong foot. Andy Faulks rolled the ball against the base of the post. Simon Thomas forced two good close-range saves from the keeper. Roger French had cunningly disguised a lay-off by appearing to fall over when he set Andy Faulks up for a twenty-five yarder that went just over. At the other end, Steve Blanchard in particular helped us weather the storm. Once again, the explosive Faulks provided relief – with twenty-five minutes of the second half gone, Andy capitalised on a defensive error and rounded the keeper to give us a two-goal cushion from a tight angle. Seconds later, the same ruthless substitutions policy that saw Roger French replace George Kleanthous up front, saw Andy Faulks yanked off, like some unsuitable undergarment.

We made final changes to our line-up returning Ian Shoebridge, George Kleanthous, Patrice Mongelard and Paul Scotter, in lieu of Colin Mant, Colin Brazier, Andy Faulks and Simon Thomas. That seemed to finish our opponents off, who lacked our resources to bring on subs of their own, and our game once again became assured and we set about creating new chances. Ian Shoebridge and George Kleanthous in particular gave us fresh impetus with their direct running and busy style. It was no surprise when they combined, with George flicking the ball expertly into Ian's path, for him to burst into the box and deftly lift the ball over the keeper from a yard out. Ian also forced a great one-handed save from the keeper who dived to his left to keep a pile driver out. There was time for Roger French to connect well with a corner from Patrice Mongelard at the near post, this time with the right (left) foot but the keeper saved it.

Today we had our first sense that football is a winter game as we stood shivering in the heavy rain on the touchline. This made the hot showers even more welcome and we were all quite long in the showers. Colin Brazier wins the prize for taking home the heaviest kit of season. It took two of us to heave it to his car. Colin resisted the temptation to go to the huge Topps Tiles opposite the ground and instead went for the beef burgers, pizza slices and hot dogs in the comfy sports bar. After a dogged performance at right-back in the second half, Phil Anthony did go to the shop, in this case the adjoining Pets at Home, to get Caesar (who was at home) a new lead as he keeps chewing them. We have often choked on a lead but not today. When all the food was gone, I left, just as a steward's enquiry started into the single Man-of-the-Match vote awarded to Patrice Mongelard – a tad mean I thought on my 461st appearance for Farnborough Vets – but then I'll admit to ruffling a feather or two in my match reports.

Next week we are back at Farrow Fields where Colin Mant once played cricket. We will have a bit longer to find our way there, as it will be an 11:02 kick off on Remembrance Sunday. We may get to see Mick Gearing's war medals. I hope to see some chicken legs. Before then there will be bonfire night. Today our own Faulks was on fire in the rain.

Man-of-the-Match: Ian Shoebridge for a great engine in driving rain, and a smart Shoey shuffle that made the scoreline emphatic.

9 November 2014: Belvedere Vets (H, 3-2)

Faulks remembers the key to maximum points

A crisp, clear morning, punctuated by a flypast by WWII aeroplanes from Biggin Hill perhaps, in blue skies – saw Farnborough welcome Belvedere at Farrow Fields on Remembrance Sunday. The damp and wet conditions of the previous days were a distant memory but for the lush grass and the single large puddle which was forked furiously by four of our players. We could not remember the last time we had got the better of our opponents. We had sixteen players and the plan was to give all fifteen outfield players sixty minutes each – injuries permitting. Sixteen was just one more than the number of pints Nick Waller had reportedly downed in the Maxwell the day before, to mark the start of the rugby internationals. All that drinking had left little time for eating, and Nick threatened to do terrible things to the buffet (to Roger French's alarm).

Eight weeks had passed since we last played on our home pitch and we had forgotten how much there was to do before the game, in and around the clubhouse, and on/off the pitch. It was a good thing we had agreed to delay the kick-off by half an hour. We had done so in order to have Referee "Commander" Mick Gearing use his whistle to lead the two-minute silence at 11:00, once he had remembered to get his mints so he could keep his cool during the game.

Starting XI:

		Gary Fentiman	
Paul Scotter	Ian Lyons	Ian Coles	Patrice Mongelard
Simon Thomas	Colin Mant	Ian Shoebridge	Colin Brazier
	Andy Faulks	George Kleanthous	

Substitutes: Roger French, Nick Waller, Waive Hetherington, Phil Anthony, Mick O'Flynn.

Supporters: Isabelle, Thomas and granddad French; Louie Dwight; Phil Anthony & Caesar (once again our lucky mascot – three appearances, three wins) and the three Anthony Graces – Freya, Kathleen and Thea; Vicky Tanner; Jane Martin and Rebecca Coles; Sinisa Gracanin; Chris Webb.

We made as good a start as we have had against this Belvedere side, with crisp short passing and good movement. It was not long before the chances kept coming and it was not long before we started missing them. Andy Faulks, Simon Thomas, George Kleanthous all had decent opportunities as we got a lot of joy playing the ball in space behind the Belvedere defence. Ian Shoebridge and Colin Mant anchored the midfield with selfless running, with Simon Thomas and Colin Brazier providing good penetration down the wings. A number of our shots went narrowly wide and the Belvedere keeper was the busier of the two goalies. With just under a quarter of an hour gone we took the lead as the smallest player in a crowded box, our own George Kleanthous, got his head to a precise Simon Thomas corner, to force the ball home despite an attempted save by the Belvedere keeper. Quite how we did not add to our score in the first-half, we'll never know. We missed one-on-ones, cut-backs to unmarked players in the six-yard box, and Ian Lyons put a header against the angle of post and bar. On the half hour we made five changes as planned: Patrice Mongelard, Paul Scotter, Andy Faulks, Ian Shoebridge and Simon Thomas gave way to Roger French, Nick Waller, Waive Hetherington, Phil Anthony and Mick O'Flynn. Barely ten minutes later, Patrice was back on for the injured Ian Lyons. The pattern was largely the same. Roger French – watched by French père, had the ball in the Belvedere net but from an off-side position. It was not all one way. There was too much quality in the

Belvedere side for that. In particular they had two quick, skilful forwards of their own and we had to be vigilant as their midfield sought them out with long balls.

The second half proved more eventful. We made an unplanned change during the break with an injured Ian Shoebridge coming off to be replaced by Simon Thomas. The early part of the second half was not dissimilar from the pattern of the first, with Farnborough creating and missing a catalogue of chances – George Kleanthous and Simon Thomas, came the closest to giving us the much sought-after cushion of a second goal. I am sure I was not the only one who was wondering if we would be made to pay for this. Football is like that, and so it nearly proved again. With half an hour left the last chapter of our substitutions policy was played out as Andy Faulks, Colin Brazier and Paul Scotter replaced Ian Coles, Colin Mant and George Kleanthous. The irrepressible George would come back with ten minutes left for Phil Anthony, seemingly dogged by a dodgy groin.

Andy Faulks was not long into his second spell before he, once again, provided satisfaction, latching on to a defensive mistake to steer the ball wide of the Belvedere keeper from the edge of the box. This was more comfortable we thought – but how wrong we were. The Belvedere team have a lot of spirit and with nothing to lose began to throw players forward. There was a controversial moment when referee Mick Gearing, no doubt sucking on his mint, ignored shouts for a Belvedere penalty (I have seen these given but the tantric whistle did not blow) to Belvedere's fury. Roger French then tangled with the feisty Belvedere midfielder who had been giving his own players a tough time and for a brief moment there was not much armistice spirit about. Roger's mood will have darkened further when he failed to score when he was clean through on the Belvedere goal, on his favourite left foot – and did not give papa French something nice to remember. The nearest a French came to score today was when Isabelle nearly put a ball through the Farnborough Trophy cabinet in the clubhouse.

To add to the general tension, a few minutes later Mick Gearing awarded Belvedere a penalty for an accidental hand-ball from Waine Hetherington, who had found himself in the unusual position of helping out his defence. Gary Fentiman saved the initial kick but as we all stood back to admire the save a nippy Belvedere forward had time to reach the rebound, control it, look up, choose his spot, pose for the cameras and stroke the ball home. Things got worse five minutes later when Belvedere got a smart equaliser. We felt like we were being turned over, in slow motion, but could not do anything about it (except missing more chances – as Andy Faulks hit the ironwork with an attempted lob). The defence started blaming the midfield – with Simon Thomas arguing back that he was a winger who saw absolutely no need to help out defenders and midfielders who were decades older than him.

With five minutes left, and tensions high at 2-2, we produced a Dad's Army moment during the game on the pitch as we tried to locate the key to the dressing room. Who had it last? Who passed it to whom? Whose fault it was we could not find it? all questions that were inaudible to the person who actually had the key – the hard-of-hearing Mick O'Flynn. It was like a French farce. Tragedy was avoided, however, as with a few minutes to go, Simon Thomas doing what a winger does, harried the Belvedere defence into an error on the edge of their box, and Andy Faulks did what he does best as he stroked the ball home. This was the second time in two games that Andy has bagged a brace – and the goal was, of course, Simon's second assist in this game, as a winger. The final whistle, soon after, was not quite the relief of Mafeking (Mick Gearing would know as he was there, allegedly), but very welcome.

I think the Belvedere players would agree this was a fair result in the end. There were no hard feelings as many of them stayed behind (almost outstayed us) to enjoy our hospitality and especially Pam Shoebridge's home cooking. We had missed that. As I munched on my umpteenth chicken leg, I could not help noticing that Nick Waller was having only lime and soda (the Bishop must have wagged his finger at him reproachfully), and that Paul Scotter was scoffing one of the special bread rolls reserved for the management but the armistice spirit in me let it go, on this occasion. Talking of armistice spirit Roger French pointed ostentatiously to the poppy he had bought to make up for his contretemps during the game - he'll need more than that at the end of his career – I suspect, perhaps half a moat at the Tower of London.

Man-of-the-Match: George Kleanthous – for a performance to remember.

16 November 2014: Met Police Super Vets (H, 2-2)

Farnborough foil Farrow Fields daylight robbery by Met Police

First, we have a public service announcement for the benefit of the teams that play us. Our co-manager Roger French was delighted to announce earlier this week that he had successfully completed the FA First Aid training Course. Whilst this is more cure than prevention – this form of victim support is a huge step in the right direction, for Roger. It is also in tune with modern policing, as today's visitors to our turf, the Met Police Super Vets, would no doubt agree.

Games against today's opponents are now closer than they used to be, something not unrelated, as the finest minds in the constabulary would deduce, to the number of players with a full head of dark hair, now in their ranks. They say one gets older when policemen look younger – well the same holds for their Super Vets. To be fair they had four or five players whose full heads of hair were last on parade a very long time ago. I doubt though if the combined age of their back four was 216, like ours, and they did not have to face two very nippy forwards with a combined age that was probably less than Mick Gearing's. Talking of Mick, it was good to see Mrs Gearing in the clubhouse after the game, there to support Mick of course, but also perhaps to investigate reports of what Mick has been doing with his tantric whistle.

The conditions were milder than could be expected, but quite overcast. The pitch was very heavy and bore signs of recent rolling, and a cut. This was no hiding place for dodgy groins, hamstrings, suspect knees and stressed calves – as we were to find out.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Paul Scotter	Steve Blanchard	Ian Coles	Colin Brazier
Mick O'Flynn	Colin Mant	Ian Lyons	Waine Hetherington
Andy Faulks	George Kleanthous		

Substitutes: Roger French, Nick Waller, Patrice Mongelard, Simon Thomas.

Supporters: Thomas French (who did not miss sister Isabelle), Vicky Tanner; Jane Martin and Rebecca Coles; Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Shoebridge.

We started sluggishly but fashioned the better chances. The usual story of missed Farnborough opportunities started to unfold whilst at the other end we could be undone by a quick break. Andy Faulks was playing like a man preoccupied by an out-of-date tax disc – his touch was very poor, and not as sharp as usual. Andy and George had one-on-ones that were not converted. On the quarter hour though Mick O'Flynn broke through on the right and crossed the ball into the box for George leaping like a salmon, to steer the ball over the keeper into the net. George has waited years to score with a header and now two had come in consecutive weeks. Soon after, Mick O'Flynn found himself alone in front of the Met Police goal six yards out after collecting an Andy Faulks through ball but elected to pass the ball to the Met keeper. The worst miss came from Andy Faulks after twenty-five minutes as the Met Police keeper muffed a goal-kick and Andy found himself on the edge of the box, unencumbered by defenders, and his shot on goal went out for a throw-in. Patrice Mongelard's scream of "Aaaaaagh Useless" made an impression on young Thomas French who rather amusingly, was to use the same expression later to describe some of Patrice's corners.

At the back we creaked a bit but we were getting away with it. Gary did very well in a one-on-one but the warning signs were there. The four changes we made on the half hour – with Patrice Mongelard, Simon Thomas, Nick Waller and Roger French – coming on for Andy Faulks, Colin Mant, Mick O’Flynn and Andy Faulks – did not help. The Met sensed their opportunity as hesitancy crept into our game and they found themselves with more time in midfield. Their equaliser on 35 minutes was a well-worked goal, with a smart finish at the far post as one of their nippy forwards crept up behind Colin Brazier to steer the ball into the net from close range. Five minutes later, the Met edged ahead as a good through ball pierced the heart of our defence and the ball was rolled into the net beyond Gary by the other nippy one. By then Simon Thomas had left the scene with a groin strain and Colin Mant made his first come back of the game.

The second half was not dissimilar from the first except that the Met did not really have a clear chance to edge further ahead. Instead, we applied ourselves to search for an equaliser. We had several half-chances, forced several corners, breached the blue line more than once but our finishing was poor (Roger) and the Met Police keeper grew in stature and confidence and pulled off great saves (for example from George). On the hour, Mick O’Flynn and Andy Faulks replaced Ian Lyons and Colin Mant, and this gave us more forward momentum and more missed chances. Ian and Colin and were not done yet though as injuries to Mick O’Flynn and Colin Brazier brought them back. Ian though waited for us to defend two set-pieces with ten men, and for his embossed crested invitation to be hand delivered by the High Sheriff of Farnborough, before Patrice Mongelard bellowed him back on (good thing Thomas French did not pick up that pithy Anglo-Saxon epithet). As the final whistle approached and the equaliser remained elusive our tempers frayed. Patrice Mongelard chided Colin Mant for not retrieving a ball that had gone out of touch, with greater celerity. Colin replied advising Patrice to do a spot of perambulation. But with five minutes left, Wayne Hetherington played our get out of jail card to prevent a smash and grab raid by his employers. Wayne might have to help his colleagues with their enquiries into an inside job tomorrow but we were grateful for his deep long cross that was met at the far post by a sliding Andy Faulks to steer the ball into the net. There had been no miscarriage of justice. We deserved this, and there was even time for Andy to try an outrageous 45-yard howitzer of a lob that was not far off.

The Met will feel they gained a good point while we thought we had lost two points. The injuries cost us and I am not sure that we deployed our substitutes to our best advantage. The game was played in very good spirit bar two minor incidents involving the main suspect (no photo fit required there). First a tackle from Roger French had a Met Police defender writhing and rolling but before Roger could apply his new skills, and after the usual verbal pleasantries, the defender made a miraculous recovery. The other incident was when the same serial offender offered to give the Met Police keeper a manicure with his studs in a 50-50 in the box.

The clubhouse buffet was sumptuous as ever with Pam Shoebridge and Jane Martin serving up many copious treats. I thought it wise to show some restraint after eight chicken drumsticks, two sausages, a cheese roll and an egg mayonnaise sandwich (and surprised Pam by returning a ninth chicken drumstick to the kitchen). But she was not as surprised as Nick Waller who was told that drinking twenty-six pints in two Saturday sessions was not good enough for the England rugby hospitality box sponsored by Roger French’s employer.

Man-of-the-Match: Ian Coles, who did more than most to obstruct the Met Police.

30 November 2014: Old Tamponians Super Vets (A, 2-0)

Old Tamponians fail to staunch Farnborough flow

Make no mistake. This was a very good away win against a good footballing side. Unlike last season, we did not throw away a 2-0 lead against the same opponents, and the bonus was a rare clean sheet for us, not for Old Tamponians. We were, of course, very pleased that this fixture, always scheduled for around this time of the month, was played after last week's waterlogged landscape. The quagmire in part of the car park was a reminder of that. Added satisfaction came from the long-awaited return of our midfield maestro Sinisa Gracanin, playing his first game this season. Andrew "Denzil" Washington too, had got over a catalogue of niggling micro-injuries, and had informed half the management where he thought he would be most effective in his first outing of the season.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Phil Anthony	Steve Blanchard	Paul Scotter	Patrice Mongelard
Simon Thomas	Colin Mant	Nick Waller	Waine Hetherington
Andy Faulks	George Kleanthous		

Substitutes: Roger French, Michael Ugwumba, Andrew "Denzil" Washington, Mick O'Flynn, and Sinisa Gracanin

Supporters: Thomas and Isabelle French, Ugwumba Junior

The two periods of the game were quite different. Old Tamponians had the better of the first but with nothing to show for it. We had the better of the second particularly as they appeared to tire and could not match the copious substitutions which we were able to make. The game was barely two minutes-old when a piece of nifty footwork from Nick Waller and a smart lay-off from George Kleanthous set Andy Faulks up, twenty yards out, no defender in sight, looking straight at the Old Tamponians keeper but Andy screwed his shot wide. Ten minutes later Andy's radar was off beam again as he was played clean through by George Kleanthous but from five yards out shot with his left foot which is less deadly than his right. Those early chances for us were followed by twenty minutes of sustained pressure from Old Tamponians which we did well to absorb. Their defence marshalled by two quite big units was probably as old, if not marginally older than ours, but they had clearly played to a high standard, and could play themselves out of trouble whenever needed and their hard-working midfield kept us busy. In the midst of this, there was a great point-blank save from Gary Fentiman to deny our opponents. Gary was surprisingly sharp today, quick off his line, alert, agile, and his kicking was not to be sniffed at either. Old Tamponians were unlucky with a couple of good headers in promising positions.

On the half hour, we made our five planned changes with Patrice Mongelard, Nick Waller, Phil Anthony, Andy Faulks and Colin Mant making way for Sinisa Gracanin, Roger French, Denzil Washington, Mick O'Flynn and Michael Ugwumba. After the usual period of acclimatisation, we sensed that we were turning the tide. A crisp six-man passing move, without interference by Old Tamponians, involving Mick O'Flynn, Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Denzil Washington, Simon Thomas and finally George Kleanthous was crowned by our first goal. The final contribution was a whipped cross deep to the far post from Simon Thomas which George controlled on his chest and advanced to beat the keeper from close-range with about ten minutes left to half-time. We felt that in the last ten minutes we had started to push Old Tamponians back. We had reversed the flow of play and that was much evident as the second half unfolded.

There was a sweet moment when Waine Hetherington's cultured left foot found George Kleanthous unmarked in the box with a forty-yard cross field pass; George controlled the ball expertly but then seemed unsure which foot to use to strike the ball on goal and the moment passed. At the other end, we had a measure of control and Gary was the less busy keeper as the defence held firm with Roger "Pickfords" French doing some heavy lifting. On the hour we made another five substitutions with the five who had gone off on the half hour returning for Paul Scotter, Steve Blanchard, Simon Thomas, Waine Hetherington and George Kleanthous. Our dominance increased. Andy Faulks could smell blood in his second spell and tried a couple of long-range shots that looked good on the eye. With a quarter of an hour to go Old Tamponians could not withstand our pressure as Michael Ugwumba muscled his way into the box from the left, went past two defenders, before being brought down from behind. Andy Faulks stepped up and despatched the penalty with calm assurance. We had the cushion of a second goal and our resolve to defend it was great. We brought Simon Thomas back on in the last quarter of an hour after Mick O'Flynn was indisposed with a recurrent calf injury – to the chagrin of an Old Tamponians defender who declared himself old enough to be Simon's granddad – in jest, I think.

Andy Faulks took the kit home despite his personal aversion to water and cleaning products. I was not the only one hoping he would treat the kit better this time. Last time it was rumoured that a cleaning technique last used by the Romans, was applied by either Andy himself or one of his guests, looking to relieve a full bladder in the dark in the early hours of the morning where they thought the toilet bowl was.

We'll be playing Old Tamponians Super Vets again in less than twenty-eight days, at home, and we expect an equally tight game. We hope to return their hospitality. I made the school boy error of sitting next to buffet Black Hole Nick Waller, facing the tray of exquisite sandwiches, cocktail sausages and roast potatoes. Still, I had a lovely puff pastry mince pie waiting for me when I got home. Here is a statistic for the anoraks out there: we have never lost a game this season, or last, where both Andy Faulks and George Kleanthous have scored – and long may it continue. You won't get that bit of "analysis" from Roger's management tools.

Man-of-the-Match: Sinisa Gracanin, who played like he had hardly been away, bringing much needed craft, composure, pace and football intelligence to our midfield, and nearly scoring with a low shot that the Old Tamponians keeper just managed to fingertip round the post late in the game.

As this was only our second clean sheet of the season, votes were cast too for the defence: Gary Fentiman, Steve Blanchard and Roger French – the latter for mistiming his full-blooded tackles, without seeing red, which meant they were, for once, on time. It would not do to be late with Old Tamponians, not least because of the excellent spirit in which they play the game. I nearly voted for Mick O'Flynn who claimed to have saved my life after he alerted me and the driver of a big blue van who had started to reverse his vehicle, unsighted, against my shoulder in the muddy car park. The driver wished me swifter movement on the pitch and I wished him better vision in return.

7 December 2014: Orpington Vets (A, 3-3)

Farnborough and Orpington share 6-goal derby thriller

This local derby was in fact played neither in Farnborough nor in Orpington, but in the environs of West Wickham at Langley Park Sports Club. We have a good record there, two wins in two visits last season, but today's opponents had bested us in our first game of the season. So, we were respectful, but not over-awed as our recent form had been good. The freezing temperatures of the previous evening had given way to less cold but damper conditions, but the playing surface was excellent. We mustered fifteen – with Steve Palmer playing his first game in goal this season and looking understandably in need of WD40 (Gary Fentiman having been removed from the scene by family business). Another returnee was Stephane Anelli – back from singing in the rain in Japan to playing in the rain, as was Ian Shoebridge who had recovered from injury, now back to rib our opponents.

Starting XI:

Steve Palmer

Patrice Mongelard	Ian Lyons	Ian Coles	Nick Waller
Simon Thomas	Colin Mant	Sinisa Gracanin	Waine Hetherington
Andy Faulks	George Kleanthous		

Substitutes: Roger French, Michael Ugwumba, Ian Shoebridge and Stephane Anelli

Supporters: Thomas French, Louie Dwight and Michael Ugwumba Junior

We did not start well. Our play was tentative, disjointed, sluggish and we ceded the initiative to Orpington who looked livelier and more composed. Our display was not helped by an early injury after only five minutes to Nick Waller, who was replaced by Michael Ugwumba in an unfamiliar position at left-back. Oddly we felt we had weathered the initial thrust by Orpington and were gaining a measure of control when they scored first after a quarter of an hour. It was not entirely without our assistance. Sinisa Gracanin failed to clear a ball on the edge of our box, the shot came in, well-placed and although Steve Palmer had it covered, he could not hold the ball and only managed to palm it in the path of a nippy Orpington forward who did very well to squeeze the ball home from a tight angle off the base of the post. Our riposte did not take long – ten minutes later Waine Hetherington picked out George Kleanthous who controlled the ball on his chest, twenty-five yards out, before delivering an exquisite left foot volley that was too good for the Orpington keeper.

On the half hour, we made three changes with Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard and Waine Hetherington making way for Stephane Anelli, Ian Shoebridge and Roger French. Once again, we had to withstand Orpington pressure and they looked the more likely scorers but we managed to edge in front with a quick break. Andy Faulks had latched to a through ball from George Kleanthous to create a one-on-one opportunity which the Orpington keeper saved with his legs only for the ball to fall to Ian Shoebridge twenty-five yards out, wide on the left. Ian was able to curve the ball high into the Orpington net with their keeper unable to prevent the ball going in despite getting a despairing hand to it.

We led 2-1 at half-time – and felt we had done well to reverse the situation but Orpington would have felt hard done by. It did not take long for them to get back in the game. In fact, within ten minutes of the re-start they were ahead, with two quick and smart goals. Their best player arguably, the dangerous front man had capitalised on a Farnborough defensive lapse to sweep

the ball above Steve Palmer from the edge of the box into the back of our onion bag, and restore parity. Five minutes later the same player drew an unnecessary foul just outside our box. What followed was the best goal of the match, a sumptuous free-kick arrowed into the top corner of our goal beyond Steve Palmer's reach. Thankfully it did not take us long to get draw level. Michael Ugwumba won the ball on the edge of the Orpington box, in a central position, muscled his way to a shooting position, looked up and lashed the ball home to the beaming delight of Michael Junior. Nick Waller, now showered and hobbling on the touchline, said he knew it was a goal as soon as the ball left Michael's boot. Footballers just know these things.

With half an hour left, we made our final changes with Sinisa Gracanin, Simon Thomas and Michael Ugwumba coming off to allow Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant and Waine Hetherington back in the fray. The neutral will agree that we had the better of the final quarter of the game even though Orpington could be dangerous on the break. We forced several corners, got behind the Orpington defence several times to deliver crosses that almost came off. Ian Shoebridge hit the post from three yards out and Andy Faulks was inches from a telling connection in the Orpington six-yard box and took a bit of a knock from the last-ditch Orpington saving tackle. I think Orpington would agree that the final whistle would have been a greater relief to them than to us. It was one of the games where footballers intuitively feel that another ten minutes of play would have produced a winner. In other words, Farnborough ran out of time to claim all three points. Over the allotted playing time, a draw was the right result.

The game was played in excellent spirit once again between our two sides. The referee was very fair we thought. We play Orpington again in three weeks, soon after the three wise men have done their stuff, on 28 December - another thriller like today will do nicely.

Man-of-the-Match, the wise George Kleanthous – for whom the day got better as his match subs for next week will now come out of Waine Hetherington's musty wallet (after George won their bet). Serve Waine right I thought, later, as he had munched his way through all of the only food on show today – a packet of salted peanuts. Not a lot for fifteen people you might think and Nick Waller, the President of the Farnborough Buffet Trenchermen's Society did well to hide his disappointment. There will be food next week, as we are at home, but the weather might yet intervene on the Farnborough clay. Some will be missing from today's XV, including Roger French who is rumoured to be putting his family first next Sunday. Others will be back, including we hope the Farnborough Old Boys Guild Renaissance Man, Mick O'Flynn, to raise the tone of our pre, intra and post match conversations. I cannot believe I wrote that last sentence with a straight face, must be the season of goodwill.

21 December 2014: Wellcome Super Vets (A, 5-4⁶)

Senior Vets deliver bumper Christmas edition

There was no danger of this game being called off on the well-drained pitch at the Beckenham & Sydenham cricket club – so much so that we have already booked the same pitch for next week's game, such is our faith in the drainage at Farrow Fields marshes. Bunny Beston will no doubt agree this is a smart move – he was glimpsed today pitch-side casting envious eyes at the well-drained surface.

What will not be on display next week will be the kaleidoscope of Christmas jumpers sported by Farnborough today – as fine a catwalk collection as you will see outside Lapland. Where to begin – the his & hers combo from Jane Martin and Ian Coles (Ian's had an appendage which Jane fondled in full view later); Colin Brazier's had been moth-balled since the 1967 Val Doonican Christmas Special; Waine Hetherington's and Ian Lyons' will never win prizes for understatement in this, (or anything else); Simon Thomas' and Mick O'Flynn's were relatively tame (Mick does not do loud); Patrice Mongelard's was subtle; Roger French's only made sense if you were a Canadian moose; Colin Mant's fetching ensemble came with assorted hat with ear flaps and tassel. George Kleanthous' was five minutes away, whilst Gary Fentiman's jumper had merely been bought at Christmas. Louie Dwight won the junior category and I noted the barmaid in the clubhouse had a Christmas jumper too, with a fine pair of tassels.

After last week's postponement, the numbers available for today's game were high – sixteen, including Roger French who had recovered from a dead leg. When I heard he had picked up a dead leg in our last match – my first thought was "he must return it, surely" but this was not one of his usual Norman Hunter fantasies. There was an affected part, and watching the Jingle Belles at the Royal Albert Hall will no doubt have helped with his circulation.

Now – what about the game I hear you groan. It was a cracker. Four goals in the first half, five in the second, a second half that seemed interminable, at least one own goal, last-ditch tackles (mostly from Roger French like a present delayed in the Christmas post), a careless linesman (Roger again), a first foul throw in 466 appearances for Farnborough Vets for yours truly to Colin Brazier's Christmas delight, a kick in the nuts for Paul Scotter, Mick O'Flynn and Colin Mant collapsing under their own weight – it had everything.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Patrice Mongelard	Ian Lyons	Ian Coles	Colin Brazier
Mick O'Flynn	Michael Ugwumba	Sinisa Gracanin	Waine Hetherington
Colin Mant	George Kleanthous		

Substitutes: Roger French, Simon Thomas, Paul Scotter, Andy Faulks, and Stephane Anelli.

Supporters: Jane Martin, Louie Dwight, Michael Ugwumba Junior and Bunny Beston.

Our last visit to this ground, a year ago, to play the same opponents had been a painful experience (a 6-1 defeat after we had taken the lead) and we were wary. The first exchanges confirmed the difficulty of the task but we took the lead after ten minutes after a nifty back heel from Mick O'Flynn had teed George Kleanthous up for a shot which the Wellcome keeper could

⁶ If you are Colin Mant the score was 4-4

only parry into Mick's path and Mick caressed the ball nonchalantly into the net with the outside of his right foot to give us the lead. That lead would have lasted longer if faux-linesman Roger French had been paying attention. The Wellcome equaliser was not long in coming but had more than a suspicion of off-side. However, any off-side claims we entertained were nullified when linesman Roger French said "I was not watching" and that was it. I wondered if he said the same thing last week as the Jingle Belles shook their skimpy tasteful tasselled outfits. Still, we pulled ahead midway through the first-half when George Kleanthous, ably assisted by the Wellcome centre half, lashed a twenty-yarder home.

We made five changes midway through the half with Ian Lyons, Sinisa Gracanin, Mick O'Flynn, Colin Mant and Michael Ugwumba making way for Roger French, Andy Faulks, Paul Scotter, Stephane Anelli, and Simon Thomas. Wellcome got more of a grip in midfield where we had an unfamiliar operator in Roger French, threatened on the break, got a few corners, tested Gary Fentiman once or twice but on the whole we got away with it. Our resilience was crowned by a superb strike from the tardy Andy Faulks, slow to rise this morning after hunting beavers all night, I think. Andy's twenty-yard half-volley arrowed into the net as it whistled past the transfixed Wellcome keeper. The assist came from Stephane Anelli. 3-1 at half-time was a fair score. We felt we could add to it but, unwisely, forgot our opponents.

However, there were no goals in the first quarter of an hour in the second half. In truth Wellcome were making a better fist of it, having introduced some new players including a big unit up front who began to put himself about and some of the tackling on the edge of our box got tasty. Gary Fentiman survived a dead leg in that period. We kept true to our substitutions policy by making a further five changes after fifteen minutes or so. Our opponents must have felt there was an element of time-wasting on our part – in which case perhaps we should have made single repeated substitutions. Three defenders – Ian Coles, Patrice Mongelard and Colin Brazier went off, as did George Kleanthous and Waine Hetherington to make way for the return of Ian Lyons, Sinisa Gracanin, Mick O'Flynn, Colin Mant and Michael Ugwumba. The score was 3-1 to Farnborough then, as Colin Brazier pointed out, modestly later. But five Christmas presents were on their way.

It was not pretty from the sidelines. Yet we edged further ahead when Andy Faulks threaded a delightful through ball for Simon Thomas to run on to and slide home. Our relief was short-lived. Wellcome got back in the game when their right winger made the most of the vacant spaces appearing in our defence to beat Gary Fentiman through his legs at the near post. Panic was well set in our midst when a succession of blunders in midfield and poor tackling allowed Wellcome to score a superb twenty-five yarder into the top corner of Gary's net. Paul Scotter took one in the Brazils to add to our concerns, and the Christmas spirit drained away from Roger French's tackling. Surely, there was no way we could lose this game - was there? We had our doubts – especially after a great cross from Andy Faulks to the far post was not allowed to ruin Simon Thomas' hair as he went instead for a front full half-pike with his legs and a golden opportunity was missed, like an actor fluffing his lines.

Andy Faulks brought the relief of a two-goal cushion when his shot from the edge of the penalty box was fortuitously deflected into the Wellcome net for an OG - sorry Andy, the Christmas Jumpers Society voted to deprive you of this strike. The excitement was not over – this match kept giving – as Ian Lyons lashed a mighty clearance against a Wellcome player only to see the ball cannon off the attacker, and travel in a deadly arc past Gary, into the Farnborough net. The referee showed no sign of blowing the whistle, so it felt, but in the end, we held on to claim maximum points.

As we sat round the table in the bar in our Christmas jumpers – it felt like we were sat round some burning logs in a yuletide fireplace – but the heat came from the hot sausages and chips. Papa Buffet, Nick Waller, was absent today but his big elf Roger French was there to tuck into the chips and sausage butties. Colin Mant seemed a tad morose despite his festive attire, and we found out that was because he'd counted only eight goals in the game.

This being the season of gifts Roger French and Patrice Mongelard were very touched to each receive a 10-year single malt scotch whisky, and a 200ml can of WD40, from the team. There had been a lot of technical discussion during the week among the squad on the lubrication of rusty nuts.

The festive atmosphere extended to the changing room where Mick O'Flynn's immensely thoughtful Christmas playlist, entertained us before and after the game. The least risqué lyric I heard was about daddy being spotted kissing Santa Claus. There was some other song about a wishbone, I think.

Man-of-the-Match: George Kleanthous – though votes were distributed widely, not quite widely enough to Roger French's liking, and including a sympathy vote for Andy Faulks from the striker's union.

28 December 2014: Orpington Vets (N, 3-5)

Farnborough find themselves a very long way from Orpington

This was a most disappointing end to the year, not only the result, but more so the manner of it. We deserved to taste defeat for the first time since 19 October, and to complete the circle of gloom our season started with a 2-1 defeat against today's opponents on 31 August. So, in a sense we have not progressed at all. In the brutal light of a cold, sunny day it felt to me that we played without cohesion or solidarity, energy or intelligence, composure or purpose, appetite or pride - and got what we deserved. My team-mates might disagree, and point at one or two bright moments and missed opportunities. They'll have to write another match report if they are to convince me that I am being harsh. This said, Orpington had the one outstanding player of the tie who tipped the scales in their favour, but their collective play was superior to ours. So – there are plenty of New Year resolutions for the Farnborough Senior Vets to work on. The only prediction I will make is that things could get better, or they could get worse.

We brought fifteen players to the Beckenham & Sydenham cricket club this week – one fewer than last week. Orpington had a similar number I thought – including one individual we had not encountered before, and whom we will certainly not forget. As Paul Scotter put it to me afterwards in the bar – that player had been brought in to do a job, a bit like a specialist contractor, and footballers will understand what I mean when I say that player was at least one league above us. Roger French sported one of his Christmas presents – a football T-shirt with a quote from French existentialist philosopher Jean Paul Sartre pointing out that in football everything is complicated by the presence of opponents. Our life was certainly complicated by one individual today, and you do not need to be a philosopher to work that out. We lined up like this:

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Patrice Mongelard	Ian Lyons	Ian Coles	Nick Waller
Simon Thomas	Michael Ugwumba	Colin Mant	Waine Hetherington
Andy Faulks	George Kleanthous		

Substitutes: Roger French, Paul Scotter, Ian Shoebridge, and Steve Blanchard.

Supporter (s): Louie Dwight (mum Amanda and baby sister Daisy also appeared during the game, I think).

We did not start well when referee Mick Gearing first blew on his whistle. Correction, I did not start well. After only three minutes I contrived to make a terrible hash of a clearance, ignoring the call to leave the ball for Gary Fentiman, only to tee up an Orpington forward who just had to roll the ball into the empty net with Gary stranded thanks to me. If my team-mates had shouted taxi for Mongelard, I would have gladly got into it and gone straight to the retirement home. I played a minor part in our equaliser five minutes later when I put Andy Faulks through on the right and he squared the ball across the box for a smart finish by Waine Hetherington. I also cleared the ball off our line from an Orpington corner but these contributions could not make up for what I felt I had done to my team.

As the first-half unfolded, we came to appreciate the football being played by our opponents- in particular their two front men – both were tricky, skilful and well-supported by their midfielders. Gary Fentiman was called upon more than once to keep us in the game – including an acrobatic save to claw the ball out of the top corner to his left, which brought him into contact with the post.

Midway through the half, Orpington regained the lead from a corner that we failed to defend. Gary Fentiman felt that he had been fouled in the process but when you are the size that he is most referees will need some convincing, let alone tantric ones. We were not totally out the game but could not find the final ball – George Kleanthous will no doubt wish he had made a better connection with a cut-back from Andy Faulks that could have brought us level.

On the half hour, Patrice Mongelard, Simon Thomas, Waine Hetherington and Ian Lyons departed the scene making way for Ian Shoebridge, Roger French, Paul Scotter and Steve Blanchard. We experienced the usual difficulties adjusting and could have conceded more in that period of uncertainty but Gary was excellent when called upon and Michael Ugwumba and Colin Mant made notable blocks on the edge of our box. In the midst of this we had two gilt-edged chances to score – first Andy Faulks had a close-range shot well-saved by the Orpington keeper diving low to his left, and then Andy rolled the ball just wide of the post in a one-on-one.

At half-time we made an unplanned change when Ian Shoebridge came off, suffering from a cold that he had been unable to shake off and Simon Thomas resumed his wing play sooner than anticipated. We were to draw level ten minutes into the half when Andy Faulks contrived a shot from a central position, twelve yards out that appeared to move through the air, disturbing the balance of the Orpington keeper. Louie Dwight was particularly pleased as he had advised Andy to shoot. We were back in the game and were looking to build on this by bringing Ian Lyons, Waine Hetherington and Patrice Mongelard back for the last hour – for Colin Mant, Michael Ugwumba and Nick Waller. Instead, things went downhill. We were undone by two quick Orpington goals – one simply brilliant and the other avoidable. Their third goal was a worldie as the best player on the field, five foot nothing, two quick feet, low centre of gravity, great balance and appetite, received the ball with his back to goal, turned his marker and rifled an unstoppable shot past Gary. Soon after, poor defending allowed an Orpington shot to get through which Gary spilled and Orpington were left with a simple tap-in to get a two-goal cushion.

By that point the game was quite open and both teams were creating chances. Waine Hetherington grabbed his second, another classy finish, converting an Andy Faulks assist. Any hopes we might have entertained then were dashed by the Orpington pocket dynamo up front as the wee man repeated the trick with an equally good finish after giving his marker the slip. He was to miss a sitter shortly later but his work was done at 5-3. We were not quite done though, almost, as George Kleanthous earned a penalty which Mick Gearing gave, without protest from Orpington. (Mick was sharp today even spotting a Roger French foul throw). Andy Faulks ignored whispers of a Waine Hetherington hat-trick and took the penalty but not without some disturbance of his mind which meant his kick was saved. Roger “Stato” French has recently introduced a “fantasy football” scoring system for our goals, assists, clean sheets etc, which appears to have affected Andy Faulks more than closely than any of us. I am not sure if Roger’s system deducts points for missed spot kicks.

The buffet was just the same as last week – and the barmaid the same too (though without her Christmas jumper on which I complimented her (she has promised to model a new jumper for next Christmas) - but I did not feel the same way towards it. However, the presence of the Farnborough Buffet Man of the Year, Nick Waller, and of football philosopher Roger French, ensured that in the bar at least we put on a good performance. Not everyone was there. Simon Thomas had left early, depriving several of his team mates of the opportunity to explain to him that having our tallest player taking free-kicks outside the Orpington box was a luxury that the team could not afford. You do not need to be a philosopher to work that out.

Colin Mant, sensing my downbeat mood, kindly offered to be the muse for my match report. I am not sure the next bit will be quite what he had in mind. We were reminded earlier in the week of the 2005-06 season. These were terrible times indeed for the Farnborough Vets. That season our figures read P26, W0, D4, L22, GF 35 and GA 101; Colin Mant and Roger French scored a third of our goals between them with Colin claiming the mantle of FOBG Vets Top Goal Scorer. How times change. To provide a bit of perspective our figures this season stand at P16, W6, D4, L6, GF37 and GA38 – and I suppose that going into our first game of the New Year we will be able to claim to be unbeaten in 2015. If we play like today that record won't last beyond Twelfth Night.

Man-of-the-Match – Gary Fentiman – the reasoning I suspect being that without him we would have shipped far more than five goals. I would have preferred a clean sheet and I think Jean Paul Sartre would agree.

11 January 2015: Inter Vyagra Super Vets (N, 2-2)

Farnborough Senior Vets come twice from behind to frustrate Inter Vyagra

And so, we turned up, fifteen of us, to play our first game of 2015, unbeaten this year, hoping to avoid the despondency of our last visit to what has become our second home pitch in Foxgrove Road in Beckenham. The day was cold, bright, dry, and with a bit of a breeze. The playing surface was excellent, much better than usually encountered at this time of year, or at Farrow Fields in Farnborough (the richest village in Kent according to a Wellcome Vet who wondered why the millionaires of Farnborough could not look after our pitch). Inter Vyagra are much harder opposition these days – our last encounter almost exactly three months ago had ended in a draw. We had been a bit limp on that day and obviously hoped to perform better today.

Starting XI:

Steve Palmer

Paul Scotter Steve Blanchard Ian Coles Patrice Mongelard

Simon Thomas Michael Ugwumba Colin Mant Ian Shoebridge

Waine Hetherington George Kleanthous

Substitutes: Roger French, Nick Waller, Colin Brazier, Andy Faulks.

Supporters: Louie Dwight; Isabelle & Thomas French, Michael Ugwumba Jr and Jo Colyer.

Ian Coles did the talking before referee Mick Gearing blew his whistle, mainly to stiffen the defence. This seemed to work as we took the game to Inter Vyagra in the opening exchanges. Waine Hetherington and George Kleanthous linked up well in our attack and the Inter Vyagra keeper was busier than ours. We found out quite quickly how good he was - he looked a bit like a younger version of our own keeper, and we all felt after the game that without him, you could have been reading about Farnborough experiencing the joy of six against Inter Vyagra. I expect he was their Man-of-the-Match, and deservedly so.

The early chances were ours, with Waine and George testing the keeper. Simon Thomas probed down the right to good effect and most of the play was in the Inter Vyagra half but without the sort of penetration we wanted. We forced a few corners and from one such set-piece Patrice Mongelard produced a volley from the edge of the box that drifted a yard wide of the post with the keeper elsewhere. Even though we were playing against the wind, we applied the greater pressure. Of course, we had to be vigilant because Inter Vyagra were not without a threat of their own from their nippy forward and compact midfield. They had some muscle in there too as we were astounded to see our own Michael "Akinfenwa" Ugwumba brushed aside with ease.

Defences were generally on top for the first twenty-five minutes or so. We made four changes at that point with Andy Faulks, Roger French, Nick Waller and Colin Brazier coming on for Waine Hetherington, Patrice Mongelard, Simon Thomas and Ian Shoebridge. Things livened up quite quickly from then. Almost immediately we contrived to score an own goal as Steve Blanchard guided a ball back towards our goal just as Steve Palmer had started moving into the other direction after calling for the ball. We watched agonisingly as Steve's deft touch carried the ball over the line without an Inter Vyagra player within ten yards. More dangerous times followed five minutes before half-time as Roger French (no doubt eschewing any New Year resolutions having to do with world peace) got tangled up with two Inter Vyagra players after a Norman Hunter special. Thankfully, wiser heads prevailed as others stepped in to prevent more unseemly scenes as the red mist dissipated in the morning zephyrs. Roger French accepted referee Mick

Gearing's invitation to go to the sin bin, and Waine Hetherington came back on. This was technically a red card, not good for Roger's OPTA stats, and whether there will be more of them this year for Roger is probably a no-brainer, you might think. I couldn't possibly comment.

From there we went to finish the half very strongly. We equalised after George Kleanthous applied an exquisite touch to volley an Andy Faulks cross over the Inter Vyagra keeper for a classy finish. Far less classy was the touch that Colin Mant applied when he sent the ball crashing against the bar from three yards out, with an empty goal and a stranded keeper at his mercy after excellent work on the left from Waine and George. Andy Faulks had another good opportunity to give us the lead as he latched on to a through ball to race clear of the Inter Vyagra defence but his touch was heavy, and the opportunity was gone.

We started the second half more brightly and had more cause to rue the excellence of the Inter Vyagra keeper as he pulled off top notch saves to deny Andy Faulks and George Kleanthous from close range. Michael Ugwumba had a pile driver saved on the line and we forced a string of corners. However, with a quarter of an hour gone Inter Vyagra re-took the lead from a simple corner which was nodded in by one of the smallest players on the pitch at the near post. The Farnborough defence had switched into Easter Island mode.

More changes were made on the hour as Paul Scotter, Colin Mant and Michael Ugwumba made way for the returning Patrice Mongelard, Simon Thomas and Ian Shoebridge. We continued to search for an equaliser even when Roger French came back on for Waine Hetherington with twenty minutes left. It is to their credit that Inter Vyagra did not object to Roger's return. Lesser teams might have done. They also took it well when Patrice Mongelard produced a vigorous lateral thrust to take their nippy winger down roughly. Some of the more juvenile members of the team had wondered before the match if Colin Mant would be taken roughly from behind by defenders like most Sundays but I am glad to say he was not interfered with. Inter Vyagra kept us at bay and as the final minutes ticked away, we roused ourselves for a final attack. A throw-in from Patrice Mongelard was helped on by Ian Shoebridge, George Kleanthous and Nick Waller – and the ball landed in central space twenty yards from goal, just right for the predatory Andy Faulks who moved sharply, not slowed down by his beard (what he calls his winter coat) and drove the ball home beyond the Inter Vyagra keeper. This was a great climax. There was barely time to re-start the match as we snatched a deserved draw from the jaws of harsh defeat.

The changing rooms were busy with four Vets team vying for space and there were no ladies from the Beckenham & Sydenham cricket club hockey team in the showers (but you could see them in that setting au naturel, on their calendar behind the bar). The buffet would have been very nice I expect. I arrived late from the showers, as did buffet Czar Nick Waller, to find a virtually empty platter, save for one chip and a solitary sausage. The lads made a great show of having left the sausage "for Pat", but in the end Andy Faulks' predilection for a buttered sausage got the better of him, with girlfriend Jo close by. I was left to the comfort of a few crumbs from a packet of Honey Mustard & Onion pretzel pieces (from Snyder's of Hanover - America's pretzel bakery since 1909).

Man-of-the-Match – a fine pair – in the form of Ian Coles and George Kleanthous.

18 January 2015: Baltic Exchange Vets (A, 4-1)

Farnborough master the conditions and Baltic

Our last two matches against Baltic Exchange Vets in 2011-12 were not good for us: 6-0 and 6-3 defeats. So, you can imagine what a relief it was to win this game, away from home, but the manner of it was even more of a tonic for us. The team responded well to the earlier kick-off of 10:00, an unfamiliar venue, the John Fisher Sports Ground in CR6 9RD, and the warning about parking spaces. In fact, I was the first to arrive at 9:18, followed two minutes later by Colin Brazier who parked next to me after a fashion. Others soon followed, including Gary Fentiman sporting a grey herring bone flat cap – considered stylish only by breeders of whippets, ferrets and racing pigeons (and Gary). Roger French arrived waving a big bar of dark chocolate, as medical advice to cure Roger's "Hunteritis" which flared up in our last game. It is probably not as effective as sedation but it does allow him to play a part in the game – as he did, with much credit later. Once again, we mustered fifteen players on a cold, but this time very damp, morning – it was to rain for most of the first half. The pitch was on the soft side and by the end of the game it was well squishy, an energy-sapping surface which football commentators call a great leveller.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman			
Patrice Mongelard	Paul Scotter	Ian Coles	Colin Brazier
Simon Thomas	Michael Ugwumba	Colin Mant	Ian Shoebridge
Waine Hetherington	George Kleanthous		

Substitutes: Roger French, Sinisa Gracanin, Nick Waller, Andy Faulks.

Supporters: Louie Dwight; Isabelle & Thomas French, Michael Ugwumba.

We started full of purpose. The back four were solid as a unit, the midfield firm and composed, whilst our two forwards, Waine Hetherington and George Kleanthous, were a handful of foxes in the box. Baltic too had undoubted quality in their side and the opening exchanges were even. Farnborough fashioned the early chances, however. A header from George at the end of a Patrice Mongelard corner was encouraging, as was the wing play of Simon Thomas, at last also putting in a defensive shift. Yet, after about twenty minutes it was Baltic who took the lead. We failed to defend a set-piece effectively and the ball fell invitingly for a Baltic player on the edge of our box and his shot took a deflection off Colin Mant, I think, to wrong-foot Gary. To mention own goal then would have been most unfair to Colin. This felt harsh such was our share of the play at that point. Thankfully, we bounced back within two minutes. Patrice Mongelard intercepted an attempted through ball with a volley which lobbed the ball over the Baltic defence for Waine Hetherington to run on to. Waine applied his usual cool finish and although the keeper got a hand to the ball which was lifted over his head, he could not prevent the ball from crossing the line. We had a very good spell then. George Kleanthous drew a great save from the Baltic keeper from three yards out. Colin Mant had a shot that was three yards out horizontally after a cut-back from Ian Shoebridge. Colin then produced a sublime back heel in the box to play George in. He said he hoped this would get a mention in the match report as a sign that he was capable of subtlety. I have mentioned it, but would add that with Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* on BBC2 next week, you will be able to see what I mean when I say that Colin is usually as subtle as a codpiece. But George was not to be denied for long – he was taken roughly from behind on the greasy surface, in the box, and the referee had no hesitation in pointing to the spot which was not very visible. George grabbed the ball, did the business and we were now in front. That did not stop

George from getting an earful from a fired-up Colin Brazier after he had failed to “play the simple ball” back to Colin.

On the half hour we made four changes with Ian Shoebridge, Waine Hetherington, Simon Thomas and Michael Ugwumba making way for Roger French, Andy Faulks, Nick Waller and Sinisa Gracanin. We wobbled a bit then as Roger and Nick in particular were playing in unfamiliar positions but we got away with it because we all played for each other. At half-time we brought back Simon Thomas as Paul Scotter had felt something stiffen in his groin after a heavy tackle.

The second period of play was more notable for the amount of defending we had to do as Baltic searched for an equaliser. We needed to be resolute and resilient. There was always a Farnborough shirt in the way making a last-ditch clearance, or a vital interception or block, picking up the second ball. We were also more disciplined in playing the off-side trap. Baltic had upped their game and for about half an hour they looked like the most likely scorers even though there were no great or clear scoring chances being created. George Kleanthous, Colin Mant and Colin Brazier made way on the hour for Waine Hetherington, Ian Shoebridge and Michael Ugwumba. There was some initial clipboard confusion about who would make way and at one point we had twelve players on the pitch but the moment passed. The “fresh legs” were to have an even more effective second spell. A mellow but spent Roger French made way for another Colin Brazier spell to bolster our defence for the last twenty minutes. Neither side pulled out of challenges and the surface meant a lot of sliding tackles, closely contested 50-50s and physical contact – for example the clash between the nippy bearded but youthful Baltic left-back who overran the ball and the once nippy, clean-shaven and not so youthful Patrice Mongelard, which saw the younger man helped off the pitch.

In the midst of furious defending, we could sense that with a bit of composure we could exploit the gaps behind the Baltic defence with the pace of Simon Thomas, Andy Faulks and Waine Hetherington. With about ten minutes left, we made a quick incision down the right and Andy Faulks was able to conjure a shot from the edge of the box. The keeper could not hold the ball and Waine Hetherington arrived to snaffle the rebound and give us a two-goal cushion. To their credit Baltic did not give up. We needed a great saving header from Ian Shoebridge to deny Baltic at the far post. They had a couple of shots that went narrowly wide. And to cap it all with less than five minutes left – Andy Faulks again turned provider as his low shot came off the post and Waine Hetherington was on hand to steer the ball home for his third, and our fourth.

Two Baltic players refereed the game (one in each half) in the absence of a neutral third party, but you would not have known it if their part-covered kit had not given them away. We all congratulated them on their fairness and even-handedness. It was not a game for the faint-hearted but the way these two referees handled the game meant that there was no malice in it and the handshakes at the end were sincere.

We had three regulars missing today – all defenders. Steve Blanchard (plumbing), Mick O’Flynn (RSI) and Ian Lyons (thumb – his partner’s) will all rue missing such a battling display. Mick’s injury, wrist, I think, is incurable but he’s taken it well. The other notable absentee who would have relished this game was Rob “Arnie” Lipscomb, who came through his knee operation on Friday. Obviously, Rob had a serious injury and our advice is not to rush back. We could not recall a better performance this season in terms of collective spirit, endeavour, solidarity, hunger and sheer doggedness. Some even harked back to the days of playing at Tugmutton Recreation

Ground, on pitches very much like today's. This grit was in Farnborough Old Boys Guild's DNA. There will also be much grit in Sinisa Gracanin's washing machine if he does the kit at home.

Our hosts produced two mountains of cool sandwiches: cheese and red onion, and ham and mustard. In the end only two sandwiches were left in front of buffetmeister Nick Waller and the resident dog as I departed. My money was not on the dog.

Man-of-the-Match: Waine Hetherington, for our first hat-trick this season, our top goal scorer in 2015, five goals in our last three games, and all without taking a penalty. And he bought a jug – he had to. I am glad that co-manager Roger French had resisted siren calls from a faux-forward during the week to play him up front instead of Waine.

25 January 2015: Glendale Vets (A, 2-1)

Farnborough on top in tight affair

This week we were back in almost the same postcode, where we would have played last week, at the Croydon Postal Sports Ground in Trenham Drive, in Warlingham. A week on, and two hundred yards away as the crow flies, we now had a completely different, and much better playing surface, on a cold, crisp, dry but overcast morning. We had some changes to our squad too. Sixteen players had dwindled to fourteen, overnight. Two notable absentees were Andy Faulks, our top marksman unavailable because of a bit of moving in and out, and Gary Fentiman, our goalkeeper, who had injured his back when he fell off the sofa as the Chelsea score came in. The players who stood in for them were excellent – we never missed Gary and Andy. Waine Hetherington, hat-trick hero last week, went in goal; Barry Grainger (from our Young Vets whose game at Farrow Fields was off – and an over-45) put his lethal left peg at our service, a most welcome addition particularly as our other marksman George Kleanthous was missing too, having gone somewhere even colder in search of the white stuff.

Starting XI:

Waine Hetherington			
Patrice Mongelard	Steve Blanchard	Ian Coles	Colin Brazier
Simon Thomas	Michael Ugwumba	Sinisa Gracanin	Ian Shoebridge
Barry Grainger	Colin Mant		

Substitutes: Roger French, Nick Waller, Paul Scotter.

Supporters: Isabelle & Thomas French, Michael Ugwumba Jr

It was clear early doors that this game would be hard. We had the edge in terms of momentum and the direction of play. However, Glendale had a lot of quality in their team, particularly in midfield with two or three very technical players adept at finding time and space and not slow to run at us with the ball, overdoing it a bit at times. The Glendale keeper was immense and equal to what we threw at him. Early chances fell to Colin Mant, twice, not for nothing called a faux-forward, and we also had Barry's artillery firing howitzers at the Glendale man mountain who was very good with his hands and feet. We had a degree of control in the first-half hour that we never quite regained in the game. We passed the ball more, and in truth Waine had relatively little to do in our goal.

We took the lead after twenty minutes or so. Simon Thomas, our tallest player, took advice and left corners to Barry's cultured left foot and was at the end of one such delivery to head the ball from two yards out. The Glendale keeper kept the effort out but Simon had wisely followed through and poked the ball home from short range. Soon after, Steve Blanchard had a free header from a Barry Grainger corner that he failed to connect with properly arriving late at the back post. We lost a bit of momentum and shape when we made three changes on the half hour: Patrice Mongelard, Ian Shoebridge and Colin Mant making way for Roger French, Paul Scotter and Nick Waller. Barry Grainger dropped deep, and Glendale began to attack us more. We played on the break down the left in particular where Colin Brazier was prominent and in one such exhilarating move, he nearly went all the way to the Glendale goal. Waine was called upon to make two good saves to preserve our advantage to half-time.

When the second half started, we were a bit more organised and compact – with Sinisa Gracanin and Michel Ugwumba nullifying the Glendale threat in midfield, but without creating much

ourselves except for Barry's fizzers and corners. On the hour, Patrice Mongelard, Ian Shoebridge and Colin Mant came back on for Simon Thomas, Michael Ugwumba and Steve Blanchard. Ten minutes later, we had the cushion of a two-goal lead as Ian Shoebridge threaded the ball to Barry Grainger who had taken an intelligent unmarked position on the left. Barry controlled the ball with a deft touch, advanced into the box, shrugged off the covering defender (who was quick but not quick enough) and rifled an unstoppable shot into the top corner. We had threatened a goal like that as Glendale, looking for an equaliser, left spaces at the back and we just needed the right pass to Barry and let him do what he does best.

With a quarter of an hour left Roger French departed the scene and Simon Thomas returned to give us more of a threat on the break and give Glendale something to think about. Despite going two goals down Glendale heads did not drop and with ten minutes left it was a Glendale head that got to a mis-hit cross to guide the ball past Waine to set up an exciting finale. The last ten minutes or so were frantic. It was not quite the Alamo but we had to dig deep and find some of the spirit that got us through last week. One tackle from Patrice Mongelard to stop a Glendale player from breaking through our lines was as tasty as they come. In fact, I'll probably be a tad late for work tomorrow as I expect I'll be quite stiff in the morning. Ian Coles, Colin Brazier and Paul Scotter were also hard and the midfield dropped back to help us as Glendale forced several corners, a couple of which were dealt with nonchalantly by Waine. Glendale pressed us hard and left themselves vulnerable to our counter-attacks but we could never find the right through ball. As the final whistle went a win for us by the narrowest of margins felt right, but our relief would have been almost as great as Glendale's disappointment.

The buffet came and went quickly – cheese and tomato sandwiches, ham sandwiches, crisps and nuts. Buffet Terminator Nick Waller arrived just in time to have the last sandwich and the last nut too. He said he would be back – at the Bricklayer's Arms for a decent lunch, on the way home. He still had a wafer-thin cheese string from Thomas French's lunchbox as Papa French, a Buffet Predator of note himself, equally ravenous, tucked in – wrap, ham and cheese were wolfed down. Thomas and Isabelle French watched Terminator and Predator slug it out, from the cold outside the clubhouse with their faces pressed against the glass. The scene was almost Dickensian in its pathos.

The game was played in excellent spirit, refereed most fairly by two Glendale players in turn. The only discordant brief moment came when a Glendale player took exception to the score Paul Scotter gave him for artistic merit when he dived in the box under an innocuous challenge.

Next week we are on the road again before we have a run of five home games. We dedicate today's victory, and last week's, to the rain gods so they can spare Farrow Fields.

Man-of-the-Match: Waine Hetherington, in a completely different position this week, but still on top, and with the same mark of quality.

1 February 2015: Diamond Vets (A, 2-3)

Farnborough have only themselves to blame for lacklustre performance

Our unbeaten run in 2015 lasted one month only. This statement fails to capture the full sense of our disappointment today, particularly after our last two performances. I hesitate to say today's opponents, Diamond Vets, were poorer than Baltic or Glendale. The figures do not lie after all. We were complacent, made elementary mistakes, played without hunger until it was too late, and were rightly punished. We failed to sparkle against Diamond and lost our shine.

There were sixteen of us on a cold, blustery overcast morning sharing what must be the smallest amount of space per player in any of the changing rooms we frequent. That is not because of the size of the players (though that does not help) but because of the size of the facilities that Bexley Council deemed adequate to support three full size adult football pitches (all in use today) at the King George's Recreation Ground in Sidcup. Once again, we were without regular keeper Gary Fentiman still nursing an injury allegedly, although we received intelligence that he played yesterday for another team. So, loyal Waine Hetherington took one for the team again.

Starting XI:

Waine Hetherington			
Paul Scotter	Steve Blanchard	Ian Coles	Colin Brazier
Simon Thomas	Michael Ugwumba	Nick Waller	Ian Shoebridge
Andy Faulks	George Kleanthous		

Substitutes: Roger French, Sinisa Gracanin, Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant, Ian Lyons.

Supporters: Louie Dwight, Thomas French, Michael Ugwumba Jr, Chris Webb.

We started sluggishly and timidly. Our opponents will not have seen much to trouble them in the early stages. We had more possession but did little with it. Fluency, energy and drive were all missing from our game. The pitch was heavy which did not help the pace of the game. Both defences were generally on top. Scoring chances were few and far between. The Diamond keeper was a little gem, not the tallest but quick, alert, with good hands (and much youth on his side). There were some robust defenders in front of him and we found it difficult to create any decent scoring opportunities. Ian Shoebridge came closest with a deep cross after some good work on the left that was headed off the line with the keeper beaten. Then came the miss of the game – George Kleanthous broke through on the right, entered the box, and squared the ball for Andy Faulks unmarked three yards out with the goal seemingly at his mercy, with the Diamond keeper lured out of position. The normally assured Andy was casual in his approach and his shot sailed over the bar, almost catching the 10:45 to Cannon Street from Sidcup. Football being a cruel game, barely five minutes later a quick Diamond break and cross into our box saw Waine beaten by a towering forward who got to the ball first and nodded it into our net. This was against the run of play. We huffed and puffed to no effect. Diamond took heart from their goal and set about defending their lead. Our first raft of changes on the half hour – with Paul Scotter, Steve Blanchard, Simon Thomas and Ian Shoebridge making way for Patrice Mongelard, Ian Lyons, Sinisa Gracanin and Colin Mant did not improve our fortunes. Colin Mant came closest to scoring but the keeper smothered the shot. Nick Waller turned neatly on a banana skin in the Diamond box but could not unload.

We were frustrated at half-time but hoped for better things. Roger French came on for Andy Faulks despite a heavy head cold, keen on keeping his number of appearances for Farnborough

ticking over. We had started to create chances when we took a huge step backwards. Ian Lyons put his hand up for his enormous contribution to the second Diamond goal after a defensive mistake. We bounced back fairly quickly with Patrice Mongelard crossing the ball for Roger French to head home from close range. This was Roger's first goal-of-the-season. What should have been a pleasant memory was marred later by another technical red card for Roger – after a contretemps with the opposing centre half – which left the referee with no choice but to issue both players with what I would call a SHIT – Substitute Himself Invitation To. Ian Shoebridge came back on for Roger. Before then, on the hour, we had made a second tranche of substitutions with Ian Coles, Nick Waller, Colin Brazier and George Kleanthous off for Paul Scotter, Steve Blanchard, Simon Thomas and Andy Faulks.

Once Roger departed, our game improved markedly despite gifting a third goal to Diamond. At 3-1 down and with only twenty minutes to go we played our best football. A Paul Scotter cross into the box was almost wasted by Andy Faulks before Ian Shoebridge pounced on the loose ball to narrow the deficit to one goal. The last fifteen minutes or so were not comfortable for Diamond who kept asking the referee how long there was to go. We forced several corners, got behind the Diamond defence, had several shots on goal that failed to give us what would have been, at that time, a deserved equaliser. Andy Faulks, Sinisa Gracanin, Simon Thomas and Ian Lyons all had a go but to no avail. In our eagerness to get back on level terms Colin Mant mounted a Diamond player in the centre circle but there was no malice in it. Diamond dug deep and with their assured keeper at his best we were frustrated. We underestimated our opponents and paid the price. By the time we were back to our normal selves, time had run out. The game was played in good spirit for the most part bar the incident which the referee had to deal with. On the whole the referee was as fair as Mick Gearing is when he does our home games, albeit with a bit more to say than Mick. Rumours that the showers were freezing were unfounded and in fact they did not feel crowded despite around ninety players (minus Andy Faulks) in need of ablution.

Eight of us made it through the Sidcup one way system to gather at the Alma public house in Alma Road. I reminded myself that the Battle of Alma was the first engagement of the Crimean War. In those days the French were on our side, and Lord Lucan was in charge of the cavalry. Buffet-wise this was a lean occasion. Buffet Buster Nick Waller scavenged for free cheddar and nuts at the bar but there was not enough there for a growing man, and this week Thomas French hung on tight to his lunch box. The buffet outlook for next week is much brighter for the rest of the team as Nick is unavailable for selection.

Your match reporter too will be absent. Colin Mant is picking up his (poison) pen. I can only hope he writes about the game, and thinks less about settling scores by writing about those who are not there. Come to think of it – if he could just score that would be great, and he could then have the added joy, as some of us have experienced, of writing about it. That is assuming that the game is played – we are back at home at Farrow Fields for the next five matches. I hope someone was joking when they said – see you in five weeks.

Man-of-the-Match: Michael Ugwumba – inspired by the Africa Cup of Nations perhaps, and almost as good on the ball as Michael Jr.

15 February 2015: Catford Wanderers Vets (A, 2-2)

Farnborough tied up in knots by Catford Wanderers

After last week's ersatz match report from Colin Mant - this week you get the genuine article, after what many deemed the shortest retirement in Farnborough Old Boys Guild history. Rumours of my retirement are grossly exaggerated although the knee injury I picked up soon after coming on is telling me something perhaps. First, a brief half-term report on my talented apprentice: "Nobody complained about Colin's match report; he shows much promise but needs a bit more grooming".

Roger French's weather forecasts (no – they are not from the red planet) had pointed to the wisdom of switching this home game away from Farrow Fields. So, we wandered off to Catford, where our opponents had kindly agreed to host this fixture, leaving behind the locked gates of Water World at Farrow Fields. There were sixteen of us, on the morning after Valentine's Day, and after that film which everyone is talking about, under a sky which had several shades of grey. Simon Thomas had pulled out last night, after being pulled off three times last Sunday; George Kleanthous was still enjoying the white powder, and in his absence, there was no binding tape to be seen in the changing room. Barry Grainger joined our number from the waterlogged young Vets, and at 45 was our youngest player today.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Paul Scotter

Des Lindsay

Andy Faulks

Steve Blanchard

Michael Ugwumba

Barry Grainger

Ian Coles

Ian Shoebridge

Colin Brazier

Waine Hetherington

Substitutes: Roger French, Sinisa Gracanin, Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant, Nick Waller.

Supporters: Thomas French, Michael Ugwumba Jr, Rebecca Coles, Jane Martin, Mick O'Flynn, Ian Lyons.

Referee Mick Gearing – a sprightly seventy-seven years of age (a milestone celebrated during the week – must be the DIY that keeps him young), had wandered to Catford too, to take charge of the game. To say we did not start well would be an astronomical understatement. We had to wait twenty-eight minutes before Michael Ugwumba forced the Catford keeper to make a save, and even that was from a long-range shot. To the neutral only one team was going to score in that opening phase and it was not Farnborough. We were fortunate not to concede in that period, and seemed determined to help our opponents do so. We had never seen so many misplaced Farnborough passes in such a short period of time, as we struggled to connect in all areas of the pitch. The normally effervescent Paul Scotter was struggling with his breathing and kept asking for a pump (was that in the film I wondered?). There were more moans and groans from the Farnborough contingent in that half hour than from Anastasia Steele in the whole of that film. Catford had only twelve players against our sixteen, and they surprised us – quality not quantity as Christian Grey might say. They had added some Italian flair and steel to their outfit and we had great trouble throughout the game dealing with the long ball behind our defence.

Slowly Waine Hetherington, Andy Faulks and Barry Grainger began to put pressure on the Catford goal. Andy created space on the edge of the box only to blast his shot deep into the

tennis courts behind the pitch. Barry's whipped corners to the far post were proving to be our most potent weapon. On the half hour Ian Shoebridge, Paul Scotter, Andy Faulks and Steve Blanchard made way for Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant, Sinisa Gracanin and Nick Waller. Five minutes later Waine Hetherington put Barry Grainger through and Barry's trusty left foot was unerring and we were 1-0 up. Our lead did not last long – as a long ball over the top had Gary caught in two minds and the Catford Italian forward's finish was assured, giving them a deserved equaliser just before half-time.

This week the citrus supply line was restored although I noted the Jaffa cakes were going quicker than the Jaffa oranges. Roger French came on at half-time for Des Lindsay. We dominated the early stages of the first-half without really creating much. Once again corners were our best chance of scoring but several good balls into the box came to nothing. We took the lead midway through the second half with a bullet header from Nick Waller. The ball into the box was in fact a deflected cross from Colin Mant. We decided to deny Colin the assist as it would have been unintended. Nick was tickled many shades of pink with his first goal-of-the-season. Soon after we made our final set of changes as Barry Grainger, Ian Coles, Waine Hetherington and Colin Brazier came off for the returning Steve Blanchard, Paul Scotter, Ian Shoebridge and Andy Faulks.

We failed to build on this lead – partly as we now had less of a cutting edge up front. Ian Shoebridge missed a gilt-edged chance as he chose to shoot with the wrong foot with an open goal at his mercy. Roger French was shoved in the back as he was looking to turn a loose ball into the net but referee Mick Gearing's eyes had wandered off elsewhere and no penalty was forthcoming. Andy Faulks produced a dangerous dipping volley from the edge of the box which just dropped the other side of the bar, his best effort of the day. Gary Fentiman had to pull off two or three-point blank saves in one-on-ones to keep us ahead. With five minutes left there was not much he could do as a splendid left foot free-kick from the Catford left-back, from twenty yards, nestled into the top corner via Gary's hand. We survived a late scare from a Catford corner to take a point from the game.

As we trudged off the pitch Andy Faulks confided in me that he was having trouble getting going this season. He also could not remember where he had left his car, but he was quite sure it was his birthday next Wednesday – so many happy returns to Andy. If you are thinking of getting him a present, I would suggest some nice shower gel.

In the end a draw was a fair result. I think it was a draw too for the number of bread rolls eaten (cheese and ham and unlimited Branston). Each side had sixteen – leaving four rolls uneaten despite the attentions of the Buffet Solutions firm of Waller & French. These made the journey back to Pam Shoebridge's bird table in Orpington, along with a large green cucumber that had appeared mysteriously (a film prop?) in Colin Mant's vicinity.

Man-of-the-Match: bound together so to speak, Gary Fentiman and Michael Ugwumba, both sporting stylish headwear today. Michael also won Thomas French's admiration for his calm, unflustered manner under pressure, something which Thomas found refreshing and mature.

1 March 2015: Santos Vets (N, 6-2)

Farnborough Seniors stun Santos in Sunday sunshine

This was yet another “home” game switched to the Beckenham Cricket Club in Foxgrove Road, away from Farrow Marshes because of the interaction of clay and anticipated precipitation. I would wager that none of us expected the dry and sunny morning that we had. There was a fresh breeze but not enough to remind us of winter, and somehow sunshine feels even better in a setting that accommodates both cricket and tennis. There were “only” fourteen of us on this occasion, including the player that had come the furthest, Eric Johnson all the way from the USA. Andy Faulks had only come from Chislehurst but he needed two cars – beginning with Sinisa Gracanin’s to take him where he thought he had left his car the night before. Among those missing were George Kleanthous struck again by the Mummy’s curse – more bandages required, this time for broken ribs sustained against East Farleigh on 22 February but we hope this will not be the end of his season – so you could say the Mummy will return. I think George sent a pre-match message to Roger via Colin Mant to wish us well. Another absentee was the man from TN32 5UB, Colin Brazier; as was the levitating match winner from last week, Nick Waller; our midfield muscle Michael Ugwumba and also Mick O’Flynn celebrating a wedding anniversary (Roger – take note). I say we had fourteen – in fact that number became thirteen after Phil Anthony gallantly offered to play for Santos who had only ten players – and that he was to do with his usual dogged spirit. The referee was Nick Kinnear – a very fair and no-nonsense individual who still has drinks bought for him, for once sending Roger French off.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Patrice Mongelard

Paul Scotter

Andy Faulks

Steve Blanchard

Sinisa Gracanin

Wayne Hetherington

Ian Coles

Colin Mant

Ian Lyons

Ian Shoebridge

Substitutes: Roger French, Eric Johnson.

Supporters: Thomas and Isabelle French, Jane Martin, (injured) Simon Thomas and partner Amanda Sim with a little porcelain doll called Daisy, Louie Dwight, Jo and Isabella Mant, Jo Colyer and Toby Manchip.

Santos started the better. They had a dynamic midfield with several technical players who put in a lot of effort to close us down and deny us time and space. They had two quick wide players who also had a physical presence about them and who were not slow to get behind us chasing enormous kicks from their keeper who made the most of the following wind. We struggled to make an impact on the big units in their defence. Andy Faulks was dropping deep to forage for the ball, not a good sign usually. Yet, it was Farnborough who fashioned the better early scoring opportunities. After a quarter of an hour, Andy Faulks engineered a one-on-one which was met by a smart save from the Santos keeper diving low to his left. The keeper was to do even better five minutes later with a triple save. First, he stopped a low Farnborough shot, then he got in the way of the follow-up from a yard out from Colin Mant who had pounced on the ball with the energy and urgency of an inflatable. Maybe this is harsh on Colin – but the keeper deserves a lot of credit. The ball was still in play in the Santos box and was struck against the post by Ian Shoebridge, coming back into the centre of goal where Sinisa Gracanin applied the connection but it was not as clean or powerful as he would have liked and the keeper was in the right place to gather the ball.

Not long after that, we paid the price for these misses. A good cross into the centre of our box from the powerful right winger who was having a mighty tussle with a bullish Ian Lyons, was glanced smartly beyond Gary in our goal, who had until then excelled. The changes we made on the half hour, bringing on Roger French and Eric Johnson for Ian Shoebridge and Paul Scotter, did not do the trick as we fell behind further after Santos pounced on our defensive misdemeanours to squeeze a shot low into the bottom corner. We had an opportunity to reduce the deficit when an exquisite cross from Patrice Mongelard found Andy Faulks in the centre of the Santos box, between their twin towers and Andy's header found the crossbar with the Santos keeper beaten.

It was not clear at half-time how we would get back in the game. We now had the wind in our favour though but the first ten minutes or so of the second half were even. Just before the hour though we had a free-kick on the edge of the Santos box, about twenty yards out – ideally suited for a left footer of distinction. We had the man for the job in Wayne Hetherington and he delivered the jewel in the crown of our six goals today as he found the top corner, with the ball kissing the underside of the bar as it dropped behind the keeper into the back of the net. This was a thing of great beauty that footballers dream of.

How do you score six goals in half an hour? Quickly. No, it is not, as someone quipped later in the changing room - with Colin Mant off the field. On the hour we brought Ian Shoebridge and Paul Scotter back on for Ian Lyons and Colin Mant. That switch gave us a new energy, shape and purpose particularly in midfield. Our opponents had no subs to bring on and I think that counted against them. It is very true our fortunes improved markedly after Colin departed but any causal relation between the two events is, I think, entirely coincidental. In fact, Colin is a team man par excellence, and he will undoubtedly have been delighted to see that three of us today – Patrice Mongelard, Eric Johnson and Sinisa Gracanin, joined what Sini called the exclusive club of players who have scored for us this season. Colin may yet join us.

We blitzed Santos with an avalanche of goals. Our equaliser was struck by Patrice Mongelard, a twenty-yarder from the edge of the box, which Patrice, with the power of thought alone, had convinced the other twenty-one players on the pitch was going to be a cross but the ball sailed into the top corner beyond the reach of the flummoxed Santos keeper. Historians among my readers may recall that we beat Santos 6-2 before, on 9 March 2008 – I was only FOBG scorer today left from that game. I scored a cracker then and I did today also. See you in 2022.

The goals came quickly: Andy Faulks made the most of a through ball from Ian Shoebridge to lash the ball into the net from the edge of the box. We were now 3-2 up and hungry for more. But it was Santos who were thrown a lifeline as referee Nick Kinnear gave a penalty against Patrice Mongelard. The Santos forward had tangled with Patrice, got away with the ball, taken a stride, looked up, computed his angles, waved at the crowd, fired off his shot, before falling to the ground and that was enough for referee Nick Kinnear. Thankfully – the Santos penalty taker was unnerved by the “Gary, Gary” chants from our young supporters, and his kick was saved brilliantly by Gary who had taken Toby Manchip's touchline advice to go right. Soon after, Eric Johnson, played in behind the Santos defence by Andy Faulks, feinted to shoot with his right foot, dragged the ball back to his left and curled it into the opposite bottom corner. Wayne Hetherington was then put through by Patrice Mongelard and after cutting in Wayne produced another classy finish to make it 5-2. There was still time for Sinisa Gracanin to get on the score sheet with a crisp half-volley from the inside the Santos box. Ian Shoebridge nearly made it

seven after controlling a lofted pass from Andy Faulks at the far post but he fell over at the point when goal-bound contact with the ball was needed.

The après-match conversation in the clubhouse was sparkling as ever – ranging from how many sausages and chips Roger French could eat in the absence of buffet Walrus Nick Waller; to the cultural impact of Renaissance art from a mid-week trip to Florence, on Toby Manchip (nil); to the benefits of showering after exertion, to the importance of celebrating wedding anniversaries. I imparted advice on the latter to Roger French (here Mrs M was highly amused to hear later that I had advised putting the family first over football).

There was further joy from the day for myself and Master Thomas French as we watched the Liverpool-Man City game on the big screen in the clubhouse. Thomas clutched his lucky Easter egg throughout.

Man-of-the-Match: Waine Hetherington – for two of the smartest finishes you will ever see in a single game (almost just like at Anfield!).

22 March 2015: Glendale Vets (H, 2-3)

Farnborough slump deepens

The return of several players who were absent on Mother's Day, prompted some discussion earlier in the week between the four members of the FOBG Senior Vets Philosophical Society about gynocracy and androcracy. This exclusive coterie has four members: Roger "Descartes" French, Mick "Onan" O'Flynn, Colin "Kant" Mant and Patrice "Plato" Mongelard. In case you are wondering – it is Descartes because of all the red and yellow cards Roger keeps accumulating; Onan (not really a philosopher) represents a way of life which Mick O'Flynn champions; Plato, no - not a juvenile buffet reference, but because it has five letters and three of these come from Patrice's first name, and three from his surname, and $3+3=5$ is a key tenet in Greek philosophy. One of these explanations is fanciful – guess which one. As for Kant, I cannot go there as the guardian of good taste among the FOBG Senior Vets. We were left in a philosophical mood today. This was a third consecutive defeat, and like last Sunday this was a rueful game so nearly won. Roger French and Patrice Mongelard – the big beasts of the Farnborough technical area, were back in charge after last week's failed managerial experiment, but their position is now precarious.

The day was overcast, a bit breezy but it felt good to be back on our home pitch after a seemingly interminable run of games played elsewhere. We had forgotten how much there was to do for home games, in the clubhouse and elsewhere, handling various sets of keys, moving goal posts etc. But we did not mind. It was a labour of love.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Mick O'Flynn

Colin Mant

Andy Faulks

Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin

George Kleanthous

Ian Coles

Michael Ugwumba

Colin Brazier

Ian Shoebridge

Substitutes: Roger French, Nick Waller, Des Lindsay.

Supporters: Rebecca Coles, Jo Colyer, Thomas and Isabelle French, Rob Lipscomb, Toby Manchip, Jane Martin, Vicky Tanner, and Michael Ugwumba Jr.

We beat Glendale 2-1 at their place on 25 January – so we knew today would be a tight affair with the quality they have. Moreover, we were missing our second top goal scorer Waine Hetherington – who warned several of us last night at the Dog & Duck in RH1 5QU (landlady, Donna Hetherington), not to lose this game. There is no ducking it, we will now be in Waine's doghouse.

When referee Mick Gearing got the game started, we were quicker out of the block, showing more hunger, cohesion and attacking intent than our opponents, who themselves did enough to show their quality – in particular with "Bingo" or "Deano" up front, quick, sharp, skilful. We had "Compo" though in our attack and it was he (Andy Faulks) who opened the scoring about ten minutes in when an enormous clearance from Gary Fentiman dropped behind the Glendale defence, was controlled by Andy who advanced into the box before tucking the ball away with his left foot. This was no more than we deserved at that point. We were dominant and the inter-passing in midfield in particular was crisp and purposeful, with neat back heels from Mick O'Flynn and Sinisa Gracanin delighting the home crowd, and we created space more than once for twenty-five and thirty-yard shots that tested the Glendale keeper from Ian Shoebridge and Sinisa

Gracanin. Michael was having his usual effective muscular game. Full backs Colin Brazier and Mick O'Flynn were thrusting forward eagerly and still attending to their duties at the back. It was a purple patch, and as often happens we created chances that we spurned – George Kleanthous will be ruminating all week on his opportunities in that half, like some Greek philosopher.

Our lead lasted only about ten minutes as a long ball over the top had been anticipated by Bingo and his number came up as he got to it first, took Gary out of the equation, and rolled the ball into the empty net to level the score (legs eleven?). I cannot recall another Glendale opportunity of note in the first half. We made changes on the half hour with Des Lindsay, Roger French and Nick Waller coming on for Patrice Mongelard, Ian Shoebridge and Colin Mant. We lost a bit of momentum but were still looking the more likely to score. Mick O'Flynn could not see the half out as a recurrent calf injury caused him to trundle off and Patrice Mongelard was back in the fray, after having barely had time to warm up in what Mick had earlier described as the Des Lindsay range of sportswear for the discerning gentleman. The half-time oranges were greeted along with the welcome sight of Rob Lipscomb, out for several months with injury. Rob may one day get back in the side. I do not think his presence jinxed us although students of coincidence will point out that he was last at Farnborough on 14 September, when we suffered a third consecutive defeat at the start of the season.

The second half was more eventful. Glendale made some half-time changes which worked for them and they put us on the back foot. We took a while to get going but by then were 2-1 down as we failed to cope with a Glendale corner where bar and post were struck before the ball went in off the biggest player on the pitch who was left standing on our goal line (with we assume the linesman, our man, having his view obscured). It was a deserved lead, however, feeding off the malaise we are experiencing in defending set-pieces, as we had cause to regret again later. Roger French went off injured after having flickered for fifteen minutes of the second half – and Ian Shoebridge came back on to give us a clear threat down the left, composure on the ball, and running power and we started to ask more questions of the Glendale defence. Des Lindsay was posing a threat of his own down our right and the chances and misses started to come. Our equaliser came with the run of play after George Kleanthous hooked the ball over his shoulder towards goal – we think it was a cunningly disguised cross-cum-shot to the far post where Andy Faulks came on cue to apply the climax. Any hopes we had of snatching victory from the jaws of defeat were snuffed out as Glendale regained the lead from another set-piece as the Easter Island curse struck again and only Glendale players had the power of motion as a wave of them drifted beyond our defensive line and the ball was poked home from a yard out. What the/our linesman, Roger French, was doing at that point will remain one of life's mysteries.

With ten minutes left we were treated to the sight of Gary Fentiman going right up into the Glendale box for a Farnborough corner. Worse was to come as with five minutes left Andy Faulks was played in on the right after a classy back heel from Des Lindsay, took aim and fired low with power, only to see the ball hit the base of the post as it flashed by. There was just time for Colin Mant to bring down a big Glendale unit with hollow legs. It was a case of so near and yet so far – and that was it – Glendale did to us what we did to them two months ago.

The mood in the dressing room was subdued but without recrimination. Not even the unexpected presence of Toby Manchip could cheer us up though he did his best with tales of his foot having been bitten by a lion while he was searching for pampas grass in the suburbs of Orpington. Nick Waller was possibly the least down-hearted among us as he had not scored a third consecutive O.G, the bar having stopped his header while he “defended” a Glendale corner. It seemed harsh

to remind the Buffet Poursuivant that he could claim an assist for the Glendale goal that ensued, as he munched contentedly on a sausage from the wonderful spread which Pam Shoebridge and Jane Martin served up. I was rebuked by Colin Brazier for the unfairness of six chicken drumsticks on my large buffet plate but I ate them all, and more.

Man-of-the-Match: Sini Gracanin, who speaks the language of football fluently, though many could not understand him.

29 March 2015: Catford Wanderers Vets (A, 3-2)

By George, Farnborough get back to winning ways

After a run of three defeats, this away game at a much-improved outfit this season in the form of Catford Wanderers, with whom we drew 2-2, in mid-February, was a prospect not without some anxiety. The dismal start to British Summer Time under leaden skies in very blustery, wet, conditions added to the degree of difficulty, as did the clocks going forward overnight. The horologically-challenged Andy Faulks had earlier in the week interpreted this as an opportunity for an extra hour in bed, but in fact he was only moderately tardy. Roger's tent was a refuge and we were tempted to get the team line-up in there, but it was no tardis.

The playing surface was very good, in fact better than in February, we thought, and conducive to a passing game on the springy grass and well-drained soil.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Phil Anthony

Colin Mant

George Kleanthous

Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin

Des Lindsay

Ian Coles

Michael Ugwumba

Roger French

Ian Shoebridge

Substitutes: Nick Waller, Andy Faulks, Paul Scotter, Simon Thomas and Waine Hetherington.

Supporters: Louie Dwight, Thomas French and Michael Ugwumba Jr.

We started like a brazier on fire. Des Lindsay hit the post in the first minute and that set the tone for a very dominant half hour from Farnborough, with the direction of play inexorably towards the Catford goal. George Kleanthous was determined to break into double figures this season and he had the early half-chances. We played a high line and attacked down both flanks. The Catford keeper was no Peter Bonetti though I believe he was of Italian extraction, and was not really a keeper as he gave us a tough time playing up front in February. Still, he got in the way of what we could throw at him and what he could not catch he parried and spilled, safe in the knowledge that only Colin Mant would be following up.

It was inevitable that we would take the lead and so it came to pass after about a quarter of an hour of high intensity pressing from us. Michael Ugwumba capped a midfield muscular moment with finesse to release George Kleanthous into the Catford box on the left. George advanced and lashed the ball into the far corner. It was no more than we deserved. Soon after Des Lindsay felt something stiffen in his groin and he went off, with Andy Faulks taking up the position he would have if he'd moved with the time. It was not long before the George-and- Andy combo worked like clockwork as George broke clear on the right and squared the ball for Andy to beat the keeper with a cool finish – wham bam thank you.

To their credit Catford did not roll over to be tickled. We made a number of changes that checked our momentum a little, as Michael Ugwumba, Ian Shoebridge, Patrice Mongelard and Phil Anthony made way for Waine Hetherington, Nick Waller, Paul Scotter and Simon Thomas. Soon after coming on, Nick Waller took off his wedding ring (which went into Patrice Mongelard's coat pocket). For a while there, Nick looked he'd taken a weight off his shoulders though he was later to have to put ice on a shiner as he was caught accidentally on the cheekbone by an opponent's ring. Make of that what you will – I call it a sign. There was still excitement left in the first-half, Roger French came off with a dead leg after a heavy tackle, his own leg I hasten to add, and

was replaced by Patrice Mongelard who for the second week running was having to come back on to replace an injured team mate. Roger's tackle had led to a free-kick which resulted in a corner, after an excellent diving save from Gary, from which Catford were to score a screamer with an unstoppable volley (though one of their own players tried) from just inside the box. It was a goal to brighten the gloom of a gusty wet morning. If anything, the weather was to get even more inclement.

The wind picked up markedly for the start of the second half, which had barely started when Andy Faulks picked the pocket of a Catford defender on the edge of their box, and was clean though on goal but the ball would not sit right for him and the opportunity was lost. What a blow that would have been, in perfect symmetry with Des's chance at the beginning of the first half. But the early stages of the half belonged to Catford, now playing with the wind behind them and in a different, more offensive formation. They put three up front (one of whom was the first-half goalkeeper) and we struggled to get out of our half. Gary's kicks were not achieving their usual distance. With Waine Hetherington and Simon Thomas playing more like wingers than midfielders we were outnumbered in midfield where Sinisa Gracanin and Colin Mant worked like Trojans. Let it not be said that Colin can't put in a shift. We tried to play the ball out of defence and when one such move broke down Paul Scotter was in the wrong place to prevent a shot coming in which curled into the top corner about fifteen minutes into the half. We had been pegged back and our two-goal lead had been but a dream. We could have lost the game at that point but for our solid defending and Gary's quality in goal particularly in dealing with the high balls. Gradually we started to reverse the flow of the game. Simon Thomas was able to restore our advantage after he converted an assist from George at close range. That was just the tonic we needed and we now had something precious to defend. Talking of precious, Roger French was now fingering Nick Waller's ring, in my coat pocket, and Roger said he felt like doing a Frodo Baggins every time Catford had a corner.

Michael Ugwumba, Ian Shoebridge and Des Lindsay came on for Sinisa Gracanin, Colin Mant and George Kleanthous. George was not off for long though as Des was still having groin issues and George sauntered back into the fray. Our desire to win was epitomised when Waine Hetherington stole a ball which Andy Faulks had teed up, only to shoot tamely at goal. Andy was not happy, like a grouchy toddler who had not had enough sleep, but the moment passed – though we noted later he would not pass to Waine when we had a promising move developing. Michael Ugwumba, had a bit of a contretemps with a combative Catford midfielder but the referee, excellent today I thought, made them shake hands. I could not help thinking at that point, how much Michael looked, and was built like, Joe Frazier. With five minutes left George broke clear of the Catford defence and unselfishly played the ball to Andy who could not put our minds at rest.

In the end we held on – but were asked some tough questions by Catford in the second half – a bit like in a quiz. Talking of quizzes, I must congratulate Vicky Tanner's team for beating another ten teams, to win the Farnborough Old Boys Guild spring quiz last night. My own team, which included Mick O'Flynn and Ian Coles from the Senior Vets, could not come from behind to defend our title and we finished third. It was good to see other Senior Vets - Ian Shoebridge, Colin Brazier and Nick Waller also taking part in what was another successful fund-raising and social evening for the club, courtesy of quiz master Keith Beston.

Our hosts put on what we all agreed was the best spread we have enjoyed at away grounds this season: hot sausages, sausage rolls, chicken satay sticks, chicken balls, samosas, chips, pizza, bread rolls, profiteroles, chicken nuggets, French bread, soft rolls, cucumber, plum tomatoes –

thanks to the lovely lady who also served in the bar, and I am not sure I have remembered it all. I distinctly recall having five samosas, including the last one which escaped the clutches of the Buffet Solutions firm of Waller & French who were the last ones left in the bar. I was glad Colin Brazier was not there to rebuke me again for my buffet footprint – though I am sure that as a fellow defender he would have welcomed my **Man-of-the-Match** award, as I wound the years back as the clocks went forward.

5 April 2015: Eagles Fitter Fans Vets (H, 5-1)

Farnborough win Eagles' Dare

When the Met Police Vets pulled out earlier in the week it meant that the Farnborough Senior bunnies would not be going to the Warren on Easter Sunday, but thankfully the eagles landed at Farrow Fields and we had a had a game on the sunniest day of this weekend so far. Before loads of twitchers turn up at Farrow Fields, I should point out that the eagles were Eagle Fitter Fans, aka Crystal Palace fans who would like to recover the fitness of their youth. We loaned them two players – one an ardent Palace fan, Waine Hetherington, who said wearing the Palace shirt was a dream come true, and another - an equally ardent Charlton fan, Nick Waller, who said wearing a Palace Shirt would be a nightmare come true, and as he could not find a palace shirt “big enough for him”, made do with a blue and red shirt from the club’s vaults.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Patrice Mongelard

Paul Scotter

George Kleanthous

Steve Palmer

Sinisa Gracanin

Andy Faulks

Steve Blanchard

Michael Ugwumba

Roger French

Ian Shoebridge

Substitute: Colin Brazier (who resisted the lure of the Bodiam Castle Easter egg hunt).

Supporters: Jo Colyer, Isabelle and Thomas French, Vicky Tanner and Michael Ugwumba Jr.

I will not mention the juvenile taunts that I and Thomas French had to endure from fans of clubs with smaller trophy cabinets, as we got changed.

When referee Nick Gearing (who got married 53 years ago, and during his National Service when the Berlin Wall went up) blew his whistle to get the game under way, we were not sure what to expect. One of the Eagle Fitter players had softened us up a bit by saying that having watched us play before he felt his team was only fit to play our 5th or 6th Vets team. This was a prime example of the kidology that football fans go in for. We did not fall for it – they were better than that, but we made hard work of it.

To the neutral, this was a one sided-affair but the half-time score of 1-0 to Farnborough reflected the effort which the Eagles put in defending their eerie. We had most of the play, passed the ball well and dominated over most areas of the field except the Eagles 6-yard box where it mattered most and where their keeper (who as they say had clearly played at a good level before) caught the eye. I think we had five or six corners in that half, against none for the Eagles. However, for all our dominance the clear-cut chances were not coming as the Eagles parked the proverbial bus, and mini-bus, in front of goal. We created many opportunities but none came to anything. That is until the twenty-fifth minute or so when Paul Scotter, a keen student of the game who had spotted that that the Eagles keeper coped with everything we had thrown at him, except for the high ball, decided to loft one from twenty-five yards after a pass from Sinisa Gracanin, and we had our breakthrough. I could not help think that this was probably the sort of analysis that Paul’s mate – absent today, but who will remain nameless, can’t do. I hesitate to leave the first-half without mentioning other incidents but in truth nothing really sticks in the mind’s eye except for (ahem) a couple of my shots and corners. The Eagles mounted a couple of forays in our half which led to long range shots from Waine Hetherington which did not really trouble Gary Fentiman in our goal. So relaxed was Gary that he swapped shirts with Steve Palmer in the second half.

The second half brought more to the spectator – five goals no less and it could have been more. Roger French made way for Colin Brazier. We went two up after Andy squared the ball for George to tap home from close range. I will resist another Wham analogy. At 2-0 we felt we could kick on and grow the score but we were surprised when the Eagles swooped to pull one back – with a bit of help from the Farnborough keeper, after the ball came back from the post and sat nicely for the Eagles forward who told me later, he could have been at home watching telly instead but I pointed out you can't hit the back of the net from the sofa.

2-1 became 3-1 after Ian Shoebridge hustled his way into the Eagles box before squaring the ball for George to convert at short range. That did not stop Ian being taken off soon after for Roger French who by then must have fancied his chances of scoring. We were very dominant at that point. We forced a string of corners and created many chances. Paul Scotter lashed the ball against George's forehead for our fourth goal, and George's hat-trick. Roger French had a goal-bound flick that looked close from a certain angle. Andy Faulks did not make the most of a one-on-one but with ten minutes left Sinisa Gracanin teed up Andy for a trademark finish into the top corner from fifteen yards to give us a 5-1 scoreline that was a better reflection of the overall game, played in excellent spirit and even good humour throughout.

The last scoring opportunity of note fell to the Eagles when Nick Waller had a shot that almost crept over the outstretched hand of Steve Palmer in goal until he palmed it off for a corner. Scoring against Farnborough would not have been a novelty for Nick this season, but for more reasons than one he would have been relieved not to score for the Eagles.

The Easter special buffet from Pam Shoebridge was sumptuous. I could only nibble at the edges – just two samosas and a sausage this time, leaving untouched the potato croquettes, pizzas, egg mayonnaise rolls, cheese, crisps, and tomatoes because an Easter Sunday roast had my name on it with a 2003 Medoc and a 2013 Bordeaux Supérieur, back at Chateau Mongelard. It was only a leg of Taste the Difference organic lamb (not a whole sheep as Nick Waller would have you believe). Before I left though, there was time for Colin Brazier and me to toast the memory of Vic Farrow (who passed away on 6 April two years ago). His framed shirt and photo were straight in front of us on the clubhouse wall. Vic is gone, but certainly not forgotten, and much missed. As we sat there looking out on a sunlit Farrow Fields, I got the wisdom of the Andy Faulks' views on marriage – my 33rd anniversary celebrated only yesterday was a "life-sentence" – "you get less for murder"; whilst Mick Gearing's 53 years was the tariff for "a triple murder". Andy's sense of humour is rather special, as you will have realised.

Man-of-the-Match – West Ham fan George Kleanthous, who confessed to being extra motivated to get a hat-trick against Palace, but who was just humble enough to acknowledge that it was all about the service, and he got a jug (but not of Bishop's Finger to Waller's chagrin).

Next week a stiff end of term exam awaits in the form of Avery Hill and some of Farnborough's star pupils (naming no names) will be missing. Before then, happy birthday to Thomas French, a wizard with a brush and dust pan, 10 next week, who now knows what being given the bumps means, and who will get over yesterday's disappointment because he'll never walk alone.

19 April 2015: Riverside Wanderers Vets (A, 0-6)

Farnborough Nightmare in Eynsford

Our annual visit to the Eynsford Bowl to play Riverside Wanderers Vets used to be a fixture we did not fear. But things have been getting gradually difficult for us against these opponents. Today's thrashing will not be easily forgotten – not just the score, but the manner of it. Riverside had quality all over the pitch and won most individual battles. We will have to raise our game an awful lot when they come to our ground in a fortnight.

Thirteen of us did well to get there on time, despite various traffic issues in the local area – including the well-equipped Colin Mant, who arrived with kit, match balls, water bottles and first aid bag. Our fourteenth player, Andy Faulks, was tardy as for most games, and just managed to get changed as the game kicked off but without, it seemed, having put the right footwear on. The playing surface was a challenge – lush, hard, of unpredictable bounce and roll, and with the kind of slope that should have a road sign, and well due a visit from the local sheep and cattle, or mower. It is about the same every April but we never seem quite prepared for it.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Phil Anthony Ian Coles

Steve Blanchard

Patrice Mongelard

Simon Thomas Sinisa Gracanin

Michael Ugwumba

Colin Brazier

Colin Mant Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Roger French, Andrew Washington and Nick Waller.

Supporters: Rebecca Coles, Louie Dwight, Isabelle and Thomas French, Jane Martin and Michael Ugwumba Jr.

We kicked uphill in the first half, or rather Riverside kicked downhill. That makes a huge difference on this pitch. If I tell you that we were 3-0 down after a quarter of an hour and that we had spent almost as long in exchanging bitter-sweet pleasantries with the referee you will get a sense of the tensions that built up. Riverside scored within two minutes of the start after carving a path on the right of our defence which gave their big unit up front the time and space to pick his shot. Five minutes later, they had a corner from which they scored again. In the defence of that corner Gary Fentiman felt he had been impeded in the six-yard box but our remonstrations with the referee fell on cloth ears. By then the mood on our touch line was dark indeed. Worse was to come. After another corner Gary Fentiman punched the ball away cleanly before asking the referee something along the lines of "Was that OK ref?" Result - a direct free-kick less than ten yards from our goal line – in fact the referee seemed prepared for us to form our defensive line behind our goal line – and the score swelled to 3-0.

We held our own for the next quarter of an hour or so but were having difficulty putting the Riverside goal under any sort of pressure despite some good moves particularly down our right where Simon Thomas looked our most dangerous player. Our best move came from a corner which Patrice Mongelard swung in which Colin Brazier nearly made something of at the far post. Patrice was fortunate to be on the pitch by then because the referee said he had not quite grasped the full meaning of Patrice's words when he was advised to take his organs of vision out of his fundament, as Riverside were about to take another corner. Just before the half hour we conceded again from a corner as the big Riverside forward did what big units do at corners. Of course, to some Riverside players the score was still 0-0 as one or two reminded themselves,

loudly. It's the sort of remark that referees should do something about I think – but we have all done it, if truth be told.

On the half hour Nick Waller and Roger French came on for Patrice Mongelard and Michael Ugwumba. Six minutes later Patrice was back on after Roger took himself off the field, before he could do or say something he might not regret, but which the rest of his team mates might. Yes, there had been yet another contretemps with the referee after he objected to Roger tackling the big unit. The referee mumbled something about being off balance, but in fact it was the balance of Roger's mind that was in the balance at that point.

Riverside had more chances to score before half-time and we were fortunate to be only four down when Andrew Washington came on for the second half. Sadly, Andrew only lasted 300,000,000 microseconds before he limped off injured, to be replaced by Michael Ugwumba (after five minutes). This was hardly worth the appearance fee one might think, but in fact Andrew is great value for his loquacity and perspicacity, tactical insight, strategic thinking, lifestyle advice and the general good humour he gives rise to. Andrew's day was to get better, unlike mine, more on that later.

I am glad to say we gave a better account of ourselves in the second half, and that was not just down to Newton's law of gravity. Andy Faulks, Simon Thomas, Sinisa Gracanin, Colin Mant and Michael Ugwumba all had shots on goal. We lost Colin Brazier to injury, possibly for the rest of the season, with twenty minutes left and Phil Anthony was back on for some dogged defending – a moment of which would not have been out of place in a Lucha Libre match, but without the malice. In fact, despite the refereeing issues there was hardly a bad tackle or harsh word exchanged between the players of both sides.

It was a bit against the run of play with a quarter of an hour left when Riverside notched a fifth – again from a corner. Our morning was epitomised when Ian Coles tracked back forty yards to produce a deft finish for the sixth Riverside goal in the 89th minute as a point blank save from Gary Fentiman rebounded off Ian's frame to nestle into our net. I cannot remember a season when we have had so many OGs. By then we were down to ten men as Simon Thomas had hobbled off with cramp and the only fit player who could have replaced him, Roger French, had gone for an early shower (of his own volition on this occasion). At the end of the game, I shook the referee's hand partly as I thought the referee had had a challenging game with several drop balls unusually, and partly also as co-manager Roger French was unlikely to. I am sure other Farnborough players did too because we are that kind of team.

Having knocked the stuffing out of us our opponents invited us to sample their hospitality at the Five Bells. As nine of us sat in the pub garden with the sunshine breaking through our moods improved. Colin Mant and Patrice Mongelard kissed and made up after Colin had not appreciated the remark that we had sorely missed George Kleanthous, Ian Shoebridge and Waine Hetherington to give us forward momentum as they had scored thirty-one goals between them. This was no aspersion on Colin who gave 110%, in a thankless, unrewarded 90 minutes playing up front mostly on his own, dealing with poor service, high balls, hospital balls and being taken from behind roughly by eager defenders. The Buffet Whisperer, Nick Waller, also cheered up, when he realised, he would not have to go on the two-week detox and Beaux Looks diet that Andrew Washington was advocating for the whole squad last week. Before I left, I just had time to grab a tuna and sweet corn sandwich, and a ham one too as well as a hot chicken goujon, which our opposition kindly brought out to us in the garden. Talking of Andrew – a Villa fan to whom I raise my glass of hemlock this evening, today I was painfully reminded of the words of

the German Philosopher Theodor Adorno that "Football Implies the Desire To Suffer". I have the Tee-shirt too. It will not surprise me to hear at some point that Andrew gave Tim Sherwood the benefit of his tactical genius for their Wembley semi-final.

Lastly, a word for our prestigious Senior Vets End of Season Awards – which came to mind after Jane Martin revealed that she had brought along, and used, the stylish Thermos Flask that she had won in these awards a couple of seasons ago. This season's awards will be on 10 May and Roger French has been working on his speech – one that will make Fidel Castro seem tight-lipped, if rumours are to be believed. Unbelievably, after thirty-one matches already played this season, we have seven more games left. The squad is showing signs of physical and mental wear and tear but we cannot take our minds to the beach just yet.

Man-of-the-Match: Sinisa Gracanin for a meritorious display in the midfield crucible of the Eynsford Bowl.

26 April 2015: Wellcome Super Vets (H, 2-2)

Welcome result for both sides

After last week's unwelcome turn of events, we needed to restore our belief and although we did not win today – we did not lose either. Both teams today came off the pitch with heads held high. We had the benefit of a rare outing on our main pitch with its surface softened and lubricated by the overnight rain. Although it was at least ten degrees cooler than yesterday, and overcast, we had drawn a good home crowd including a good turnout from our treatment table. The Wellcome technical area was almost as crowded as ours. Our opponents were more welcome than most – having enabled us to play “home” games at their Beckenham base when winter rains claimed our pitch.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Paul Scotter, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Patrice Mongelard

Simon Thomas, Sinisa Gracanin, Michael Ugwumba, Wayne Hetherington

Colin Mant, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Roger French, George Kleanthous and Nick Waller.

Supporters: Colin Brazier, Darren Burkett, Rebecca Coles, Ian Lyons, Jane Martin, Mick O'Flynn, Ian Shoebridge, Kieith Soilleux, (FOBG Club Chairman) Steve Viner, and Michael Ugwumba Jr.

When referee Mick Gearing got us under way, we had two well-matched teams facing each other, and so it proved right to the end. The early exchanges revealed hard-working defences and a dynamic Wellcome midfield formation that pressed hard with some athletic big units. The first incident of the game was an unwelcome sight as an accidental coming together saw Simon Thomas' participation end after only five minutes with what we suspected was a broken nose (confirmed later by text from Farnborough hospital A&E). Thespian Simon's face is, in a sense, his living, and we sincerely hope his dashing good looks will not become too rugged. Nick Waller replaced Simon, and we had to adjust our formation in a way that had been unforeseen by the Managerial Clipboard which was later handled by Colin Brazier with tactical advice from Jane Martin.

We had marginally more possession in the first-half but did not do much with it. The Wellcome semaphore running their line was busy as several Farnborough moves were deemed off-side. Our attackers had the better of their markers on pace but not positioning. The vigilance of both defences limited the goal-scoring opportunities and it took a set-piece to break the deadlock after thirty-five minutes. Michael Ugwumba was taken from behind in the box as he advanced on goal having broken through the Wellcome defensive line. When Michael went down it appeared late, and in slow motion, to our opponents. To us it was the act of a powerfully built man, taken by surprise, and going down reluctantly but without artifice. Michael later abandoned his usual strong silent man act to tell us about it at length in the changing room. Once the cacophony of voices had stilled George Kleanthous stepped up and finished clinically off the post. 1-0 it remained until half-time. We knew that one goal would not be enough but had not been able to secure the comfort of a second one.

Roger French replaced Patrice Mongelard at half-time at left-back (to play mostly with his right foot). The second half not only had three times as many goals as the first, and at least five or

six times as many scoring opportunities for both sides. The best chances of the early part of the second period fell to Farnborough as George Kleanthous and Andy Faulks threatened to make their superior movement, and intelligent running, pay. The Wellcome keeper was fortunate with a sliced clearance, a couple of rebounds and did well in at least two one-on-ones. He also pulled off a great one-handed save to tip a scorcher from Andy Faulks round the post. Nick Waller was unfortunate to see the ball cannon off his shoulder and over the bar as he moved in to finish a Farnborough move on the Wellcome goal line. Had Nick been at the other end that would have probably gone in. We failed to pull ahead, our opponents got their second wind, and we were on the back foot. It was not surprising when they got back in the game. Patrice Mongelard (who had come back on for Paul Scotter on the hour) cleared off the line from a corner.

The corners kept coming for Wellcome (we had none in the second half, tellingly). One corner saw Gary catch the ball and Colin Mant's head at the same time – like two glands in a sac. The first Wellcome equaliser came from – you have guessed it, a corner. Gary Fentiman called for the ball in a crowd scene, was impeded by a combination of Wellcome and Farnborough players. As the ball was hammered in sweetly, after a poor clearance from the edge of the box, Gary was in fact incapacitated, prostrate, immobilised, by the not inconsiderable weight of our Nick Waller resting on top of him – the Stonehenge defence you might call it. Referee Mick Gearing was unmoved, stone-faced, and we had to do it all again. And we did, as five minutes later we edged ahead again. Andy Faulks broke clear and squared the ball for George Kleanthous to tap-in ever so gently from half a yard out. We failed to hold on to this lead. Wellcome, in their last game of this season, were not giving up without a fight and they were rewarded when one of their forwards latched to a delicate defence-splitting ball over the top in the heart of our defence. It looked like Gary had done enough to get hold of the ball but somehow it squirmed out of his grasp and fell kindly to the forward who slotted home. Gary made amends later by diving at the feet of the same forward to retrieve the ball.

We made a number of changes in the last quarter of the game: Michael Ugwumba was replaced by Colin Mant (but Michael was back on for the last ten minutes for Nick Waller) and Paul Scotter finished the game after Roger French came off. Both teams had chances to win it but a late winner would have been unduly harsh on either side. The disputed off-side flag played a part in keeping the score at 2-2.

The après-match discussion featured news of Simon Thomas, to whom we sent our best wishes, and preparations for the first of our mid-week fixtures, in two days' time. We have five matches in a fortnight at the end of a long season to look forward to.

The buffet cornucopia served up by Pam Shoebridge and Jane Martin went quickly: pizza, bread rolls, cheese, crisps, pork pies, slow-roast sausages, samosas, spring rolls, potato croquettes, cherry tomatoes. Buffet Great White Nick Waller was circling so I cleared my plate pronto.

Man-of-the-Match: Paul Scotter for his usual brand of no nonsense defending.

28 April 2015: Santos Vets (H, 7-2)

Paul Scotter and thirteen team mates too strong for Santos Vets

I was mildly rebuked for not giving sufficient column inches to Man-of-the-Match Paul Scotter in last Sunday's match report. So, by way of an apology, today's report might well appear to be suffused with Paul's presence. This was the first of this season's trio of consecutive Tuesday evening games to get our own back for the waterlogged pitches of the winter, and get us very close to the 40-game mark for the season. The weather obliged, the light was good, the last warming rays of the day's sun could still be felt but there was a fresh breeze which dried the pitch. Septuagenarian referee Mick Gearing was back on duty just over 48 hours after his last game.

Our previous game this season against today's opponents (on 1 March) had been an 8-goal thriller and today's game went one better. We lined up like this for an 18:30 start.

Starting XI:

Steve Palmer

Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Ian Lyons

Colin Mant, Michael Ugwumba, Jim St John, Paul Scotter

Andy Faulks, Barry Grainger

Substitutes: Roger French, Sinisa Gracanin, Simon Thomas.

Supporters: Michael Ugwumba Jr who did a better job running the line for part of the game than Patrice Mongelard. There was no Louie Dwight today, and no French enfants either. Isabelle and Thomas have not been seen for two games now. I hope they are OK. Club President Ian Couchman was also there although the game he watched finished 8-2. George Kleanthous and Mick O'Flynn were also in attendance as was Match Photographer Colin Brazier whose action head shot of Colin Mant belonged to an identity parade.

The game took a while to get going. We were dominant early doors without creating any clear-cut chances. Santos were holding their own with their excellent keeper but having to defend deep, in numbers, and robustly, whilst experiencing difficulty taking the game into the Farnborough penalty area. A 25-yard free-kick from last Sunday's Man-of-the-Match Paul Scotter was not too wide. Steve Palmer looked confident in our goal - did well with his goal-kicks and overarm distribution and was not really troubled. At times we were rushing the play instead of slowing it down and picking our passes. Then our goals came quickly:

Barry Grainger on 25 minutes (stray back pass from defender) rounded the keeper and finished from a tight angle. Jim St John crowned a masterful midfield performance on 32 minutes by carrying the ball through midfield into the box and finishing his own move. Very soon after Barry Grainger harried a Santos defender into an error, dispossessed him and beat the keeper from close range. Simon Thomas then capped a fluid move on 37 minutes by gliding past his marker to latch on to a Barry Grainger through ball, entered the box, opened his body and curled the ball into the net with his left foot.

Yes, Simon Thomas - only two days after suffering a broken nose - was back playing. His first action was to head the ball, minus phantom of the opera mask, before ghosting down the wing in his usual way. I even let him off defensive duty at a corner as I feared another knock to his proboscis would leave him auditioning for the *Ernes Efron Borgnino* biopic. The make-up department will have to do something about his hair though - greying it on Sunday mornings will

help suspend disbelief that he is over thirty-five years old. At that point Santos were not happy - there were grumbles about our relatively younger elements (i.e. Simon Thomas nosing past his marker at will) even though the average age of the squad yesterday was 47.35 years (48.3 without baby-faced Simon). There were one or two niggly tackles, and suddenly the game did not seem such a good idea for a group of adults enjoying an evening friendly game in a rural setting. However, to the credit of both sides there was an outbreak of maturity and things never got out of hand and football won. In fact, once Santos stopped being angry – their game improved as there was quality in their squad. Nevertheless, George Kleanthous agreed with my assessment that it was the wrong time to bring Roger French on, so Roger's introduction was delayed until the second half.

Before the half-time oranges (which had been quartered by Mick Gearing) Santos got a goal back after a good move. Steve Palmer saved the initial effort but the ball squirmed out to a Santos forward who lashed it home from close range. At that point Santos had rallied, stopped complaining, were playing some good stuff and deserved their goal.

The substitutions we made looked like this:

30 minutes: Patrice Mongelard and Michael Ugwumba off for Simon Thomas and Sinisa Gracanin.

40 minutes: Patrice Mongelard back on for Ian Lyons

45 minutes: Roger French for Patrice Mongelard, Michael Ugwumba for Jim St John.

60 minutes: Patrice Mongelard for Paul Scotter

70 minutes: Jim St John for Sinisa Gracanin

85 minutes: Sinisa Gracanin for Patrice Mongelard

Santos had regained their poise and looked a stronger proposition in the early part of the second half (playing with the breeze). There were some scares in our box which needed some last ditch defending from us - Steve Blanchard's posterior, and Roger French's upper body with a soupçon of metacarpal action, bailed us out - the latter almost tempting tantric Mick Gearing to come to a decision about a penalty. The height of Jim St John came in useful, as did Michael Ugwumba's impression of a brick wall to shield the ball just inside the box with a Santos player rebounding off him. We remained a threat on the break though and more goals came, as Andy Faulks decided to put some clear blue water between himself and the hungry George Kleanthous snapping at his heels for the golden boot. On the hour Andy finished from close-range after an assist from Barry Grainger. Five minutes later he repeated the dose with the service provided by Simon Thomas who got behind the Santos defence and squared the ball unselfishly to Andy.

Santos were by no means out of it and they reduced the deficit on seventy minutes with a well-taken penalty in the bottom corner after Roger French almost "caught" a Santos cross in the box. That was not the end of the scoring. On eighty minutes Andy Faulks profited from a poor clearance by the Santos keeper to squeeze the ball home, for his hat-trick (unbelievably his first this season) which was duly marked with the proverbial jug later. I am sure George will have been pleased for Andy, and only George's bruised ribs prevented him from joining in the celebrations. The same injury incidentally befell a Santos player early in the game after a coming together with Ian Lyons which brought on their only substitute. We had three substitutes to play with today and that contributed to the difference between the two teams.

We were all showered and in the bar by 8:30. The food eventually arrived at 9:00 - good thing Buffet Buff Nick Waller was not playing today - he would have been gnawing at the Montessori

table legs as Roger French made increasingly frantic calls to ask about the ETA of pitta, chips and kebab meat which might not have been the diet of athletes but was very welcome.

I got home just after 11:00 and struggled to explain to Mrs M why it took five hours to play 90 minutes of football, without using the word Oranjeboom. Still unlike Simon Thomas I did not have to find a late-night petrol station that sold chocolates. I suspect neither did last Sunday's Man-of-the-Match Paul Scotter. Paul astounded the changing room with the revelation that his pre-season training might be curtailed because he was going to get a new hip over the summer. Out of respect for Paul's big heart and love of the game, I will not name the team mate who suggested Paul should ask for a faster hip this time round.

It was good to get back to winning ways. Riverside visit Farrow Fields in five days and we want to give a better account of ourselves this time but injuries are taking their toll and only ten fit players could be pencilled in for that game as things stood last night. Paul Scotter will be one of the absentees.

Man-of-the-Match: Barry Grainger – with two goals and two assists, with Paul Scotter's mate - Colin Mant, whose search for a goal goes on, not far behind.

3 May 2015: Riverside Wanderers Vets (H, 1-4)

Farnborough woes continue against Riverside⁷

So much for making home advantage count, and Roger French's tactical master stroke to not play in yellow stripes. We came up short again. In a sense, I am relieved that I can only report on the first hour of this game. My apprentice Colin Mant will cover the last half hour as I could not bear to watch ... no, I had to make a swift exit for a family event, so missed out on the après-match, and the buffet where I suspect Buffet Grandmaster Nick Waller might have been off his game. I had seen quite enough by then though. Riverside were good, of course, but we gave them quite a bit of help too.

Despite the overnight, and early morning, rain we had a good crowd. The grass was as long as we played on at Riverside two weeks ago, but the surface was softer and truer. We rushed through the pre-match preparations to make the 10:15 kick-off on a busy day at Farrow Field with three games scheduled. Injuries had deprived us of four or five regulars and we had called on a number of reinforcements by the time referee Mick Gearing blew his carefully-owned whistle.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Michael Ugwumba

Simon Thomas, Sinisa Gracanin, Neil Connelly, Colin Mant

Ben Clunn, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Roger French, Dave Green, Barry Grainger and Nick Waller.

Supporters: Colin Benningfield and son, Louie Dwight, Isabelle and Thomas French, George Kleanthous, Jane Martin, Mick O'Flynn, Ian Shoebridge, Amanda Sim, and Michael Ugwumba Jr. Also present towards the end were assorted FOBG Young Vets and the Grant Gable All Stars XI who were waiting to play on the same pitch immediately after.

Unlike a fortnight ago, we were not 4-0 down after twenty-five minutes. We were only 1-0 down. However, like then we did not really look like scoring. We defended better initially, had a more compact and competitive midfield, enjoyed more possession, but lacked a cutting edge. Riverside had edged ahead after about twenty minutes from a well-taken shot by their adventurous left-back with a low centre of gravity who came a long way to shoot from the edge of our box. He caught the ball right and the swerve was too much for Gary Fentiman who until then had dealt with everything Riverside threw his way, including a fantastic low one-handed diving save on greasy surface. We made the school boy error of thinking that there was a hand-ball, and also that the ball had gone out in the build-up, and could not recover the situation when there was no whistle.

At that point we felt we could get back in the game. Simon Thomas and Ben Clunn gave us penetration down the wings and put in crosses whilst Neil Connelly and Sinisa Gracanin gave us midfield craft and we were defending soundly. It was in the middle of the Riverside box that our problem was crystallised. The Riverside centre halves did not look that pressured particularly with Andy Faulks dropping back and the occasional forays from midfielders were not enough to sustain Farnborough pressure in a crowded penalty area where Riverside defended in numbers. The changes we made on the half hour to bring on Dave Green and Nick Waller for Colin Mant

⁷ The final four paragraphs were written with the assistance of Colin Mant

and Michael Ugwumba did not disturb the pattern of our play. In fact, Nick Waller was to have arguably our best chance of the half when he found himself at the far post, unmarked two yards out from a set-piece but lost his footing at the point of contact with the ball and he screwed his shot wide. Nick was not expecting to play today as he was due to attend an air show but the poor weather had cancelled the flights. Nick was to look to the skies for other reasons before long.

The game turned on a period of about ten minutes at the start of the half. In that time Neil Connelly saw his close-range shot, following a Farnborough corner, beat the Riverside keeper only to hit the bar and we suffered not one but two pieces of misfortune. The first was an own goal of terrible beauty scored by Nick Waller. One own goal is unlucky, two unfortunate, three tragic (the season is not over so the criminal stage might yet be reached). Yes, today Nick Waller completed a hat-trick of own goals this season – all crackers. Today's gem was the pick, I think. Following a Riverside corner Gary and the big Riverside double wardrobe of a forward had come together – the ball dropped a foot or so from the goal line, in a pocket of space occupied only by Nick Waller. Nick shifted his weight from guarding the post and shaped to clear the ball; and in so doing sliced it, spinning it with great force against the underside of the crossbar behind him into the net. As I looked at his face, I thought I could see a smile cross it as he raised his eyes to the skies to look for the Spitfire he would have been watching if the weather had been better this morning. In that moment I was struck by the wisdom of Colin Brazier, sadly missed today along with a few others, who always advises left-footed players to defend corners from positions where they can use their left foot. What I am trying to say is that had Nick Waller used his right foot the outcome would have been different.

Five minutes later – Dave Green got between a bulky Riverside centre-half, up for a set-piece, and the ball and was running back towards our own goal when he was bull-dozed from behind, flung to the ground and the Riverside player stepped over his prostrate body and lashed the ball into the net. Referee Mick Gearing turned towards the centre circle and we were 3-0 behind having witnessed the closest thing you'll see to a mugging on a football pitch. By then our linesman, or linesboy, was Michael Ugwumba Jr. I have no doubt he is keen and honest like his father but there are things that children should not have to deal with – with the numbers we had we should have been able to give the flag to an adult.

There was just time for me to make a terrible hash of a free-kick before we made four changes on the hour: Patrice Mongelard, Neil Connelly, Ben Clunn and Simon Thomas were replaced by Barry Grainger, Roger French, Colin Mant and Michael Ugwumba.

We threw more resources forward but Riverside had the bit between their teeth. They had a comfort in their play which we lacked, and it was a blow as they added a fourth. Gary Fentiman's spaffed clearance went straight to their 'big unit', still reeling from the force of a French challenge moments earlier, but he managed to push through the pain barrier, advance unchallenged towards Gary, to finish with panache.

There was time for a consolation as Barry Grainger collected a Colin Mant throw-in and lashed in a 35-yarder from the right-side of the box in a rare moment of Farnborough quality on the day. The final whistle blew and Riverside completed a 10-1 aggregate win over the course of the two games we'd played, and well deserved too. If reading that scoreline doesn't hurt, then it should.

In those games they worked harder than we did, played for each other and wanted it more. We need to look at ourselves and get back to those very qualities if we want to end the season on a high. We can't just turn up hoping to win, it takes graft.

It felt rather flat in the bar afterwards, although there was a fair bit of mirth at Nick's oggie. The Great White Buffet Shark had plenty of choice today, especially as the Buffet Barracuda had left him to his own devices. The girls (and Shoey!) had done quite a spread...various rolls, samosas, pizza, sausage rolls, Des' favourite...slow cooked sausages, veg spring rolls, potato croquettes, tomatoes, crisps...a feast to lift the mood. My mood lifted somewhat (as well as something else) as Simon revealed that he knew and had worked with Sheridan Smith, a fine actress in my estimation. He showed me a clip of him working with her in 'Legally Blonde', snogging the Lincolnshire beauty spawny git.

Man-of-the-Match: Steve Blanchard, a beacon of hope on a grim day.

5 May 2015: Eagle Fitter Fans Vets (H, 6-0)

Eagle Fitter Fans Vets see Farnborough history in the making

In years to come this match report will be known as the Colin Mant special edition for the 2014-15 season. Colin is Paul Scotter's mate though Paul denies it. The Eagles landed at Farrow Fields for a second time this season, and for the second of our mid-week games. Gale force winds came too, and made for interesting playing conditions but thankfully the heavy rains had abated after softening the pitch. This was our 35th game of the season, and Colin Mant's 34th. It was the first game of the season for Chris Bourlet. There was a first also for Gary Fentiman who played at right-back after arriving as if dressed for Wembley, an incongruous sight playing in an outfield position, a cross between Lurch and Uncle Fester. Another first was a clean sheet at Farrow Fields for Steve Palmer, as was the sight of the Eagle Fitter Fans holding their AGM in our clubhouse to discuss their forthcoming European Tour. But these firsts paled into insignificance in Colin Mant's world.

Starting XI:

Steve Palmer

Paul Scotter, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Ian Lyons

Simon Thomas, Sinisa Gracanin, Patrice Mongelard, Michael Ugwumba

Colin Mant, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Chris Bourlet, Gary Fentiman and Roger French.

Supporters: Mick O'Flynn, Vicky Tanner and Michael Ugwumba Jr.

We decided to play with the gale in the first-half, the reasoning being that the wind would drop as the evening lengthened. So, we expected to put a lot of pressure on the Eagles goal and to build a healthy lead. But only half of that came to pass. We had probably 60-70% possession but not many clear-cut chances in the first half. The problem I think is that we rushed it with long balls whilst the Eagles waited, shortened the game and set about frustrating us. It took us almost twenty minutes to break the deadlock when Sinisa Gracanin carved out a shooting opportunity in the box and his shot was deflected into his own net by an unfortunate Eagles defender. Chances came and went – Patrice Mongelard crashed a 25-yarder against the bar and had one or two other worthy efforts; Simon Thomas drew a good save from the keeper in a one-on-one; Andy Faulks and Michael Ugwumba too went close but we lacked real penetration in the Eagles box. Andy Faulks and Michael Ugwumba were having difficulty reading each other's mind on the left. At the other end the Eagles could still scare up with breaks and saw a shot come off the base of one post. We needed a second goal and about five minutes before half-time Andy Faulks delivered.

It was uncertain whether two goals would be enough when we made changes at half-time with Michael Ugwumba and Sinisa Gracanin coming off for Chris Bourlet and Roger French. Sini actually nipped off home to set up a webinar (according to Mick O'Flynn). Eagles expected to do better with the gusts and so it proved in the first quarter of an hour or so as they fashioned one or two good opportunities. They might have sensed some rustiness in one of our players in particular whose first touch was that of someone who had not played for a long time, or else cunningly disguised his skill – no, not Roger French, who made a last-ditch interception at one point to deny a good Eagles opportunity.

The telling blow we felt was our third goal on the hour – fashioned against the run of play, on the break, against the wind which showed we could score at both ends. A Chris Bourlet clearance released Andy Faulks who outpaced the Eagles defence before slotting the ball home. We made further changes at that point with Patrice Mongelard and Paul Scotter making way for Sinisa Gracanin and Gary Fentiman.

In his last match before he goes into a casualty department, for real, to restore his looks Simon Thomas used the fluorescent monogrammed lime green espadrilles which he calls boots to lay on a copper-bottomed cross for Chris Bourlet to nod home for our fourth goal. At that point Ian Lyons left the field and Michael Ugwumba was back on marauding down the left where he finally achieved an understanding with Andy Faulks to play Andy in for his hat-trick with about a quarter of an hour left. At 5-0 down, Eagles did not give up and we would not have begrudged them a goal when one of their more skilful players was clean through on our goal only to see Steve Palmer make a point blank save.

But we had saved the best until last. With five minutes left Colin Mant's season eventually came to a climax as he scored his first goal and our 92nd goal this season to date. Put it another way, a pent-up Colin, the Farnborough Old Boys Guild top goal scorer in the 2005-06 season, had watched his mates get plenty, 91 goals, until it was finally his turn. No wonder he'd been a bit grumpy. Andy Faulks was the provider as he burst through on the left wing entered the box and squared the ball for Colin who contrived to make the finish look difficult. The Farnborough crowd erupted and all three of them had respectfully to explain to the Eagles Fitter Fans fans why. Colin Mant had taken forty-two hours and 39 minutes to do what Chris Bourlet achieved in twenty-five minutes.

Colin was elated and dishevelled in the showers when a bloke came in asking for money. This was for the food, and in case you are wondering sausages were not on the menu but chips, pitta bread and allegedly kebab meat, were. I regret to say the après-match food was a disappointment for me - only chips and pitta bread. An anorexic baby lamb had furnished the kebab meat for twenty-five hungry blokes and all the protein had gone by the time I turned up. As a protest I eschewed the food, a first for the Buffet Barracuda you might think, safe in the knowledge that a chicken Korma hand-crafted by Mrs M was waiting for me at home. And I did not have to explain to her why it took five hours to play a football game because by the time I got home it had been five and a half hours (and past her bedtime). I had my defence ready, if called to account: I was going to blame a couple of Italian blokes called Peroni and Moretti.

I cannot complete this report without praising our plucky opponents who played some good stuff, had more than a little craft on show, allied with much experience, and who played the game the right way, with a smile even when letting in goal after goal. There was not a single bad tackle in the game – there was not much whistle action for referee Mick Gearing. In fact, his only excitement came when a stray pass nearly blew his whistle, out of his mouth.

Man-of-the-Match: the voting gave a working majority to Andy Faulks for another hat-trick on a second consecutive Tuesday (like buses they are). This puts him only one strike away from the 30-goal a season benchmark (and you'd be right to think he could look a bit happier about that). There was some odd voting going on – better now than on Thursday, I thought.

As we sat late in the club house there was a nostalgic, end-of-season feel pervading the atmosphere. Yet another season was drawing to an end, and some of us were closer to

milestones, including our own final whistles. There was sympathy too for the few returnees from our first team who had that evening lost a cup final 2-0. They say nobody remembers losing finalists. That is not the Farnborough way – so, well done lads for getting there. To mark the occasion the club brought out two special edition scarves in Farnborough colours – and I promptly added the classic design version to my collection of club merchandise. Also out of the trophy cabinet for the occasion, was Vic Farrow's original vintage scarf sported by Club Chairman Steve Viner. Indeed, the heartbeat of the Farnborough management were in the clubhouse chewing the carbohydrate (all the meat was long gone) – President Ian Couchman, Chairman as mentioned, Treasurer Steve Blanchard, IT Officer and Photographer Colin Brazier, Fixtures Secretary Paul Parsons. I understand most of them got home well after midnight, like Roger French, because of those two Italians who wanted to celebrate Colin Mant's historic goal.

17 May 2015: Lloyds Super Vets (H, 2-3)

Lloyds profit as Farnborough fizzle out

And so, it ends on a glorious sunny Sunday morning – 37 games later since it began on 31 August, to give us symmetrical figures for the season of P37, W15, D7, L15, GF93 and GA93. The manner of today's defeat was worrying but that had to do also with our opponents who fully deserved their victory, and who probably left thinking, rightly, that they should have banked more goals. We were missing a few, including Roger French who was putting family first finally, but he had ordered the pizzas for today and his parting instructions to co-manager Patrice Mongelard were, in order of priority, to make sure there was no pizza left and that we won the game. Despite our best efforts we failed on both counts.

Pre-match planning was discombobulated by news that Andy Faulks picked up an injury playing yesterday and would arrive late, possibly to not play. This gave us a bare twelve – almost as many as our fans.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Dave Green, Phil Anthony

Sinisa Gracanin, Chris Bourlet, Michael Ugwumba, Wayne Hetherington

Colin Mant, Nick Waller

Substitutes: Andy Faulks and Andrew Washington.

Supporters: The three Graces - Freya, Kathleen and Thea Anthony, Colin Brazier, mascot Caesar, Rebecca Coles, George Kleanthous, Jane "I'm going to miss this" Martin, and Michael Ugwumba Jr.

We all sensed there was something not quite right from the beginning – a lack of penetration and incision and a failure to hold up play and find a team mate with the right pass. Lloyds had not one but two target men and they could rely on midfielders to support them in numbers. There was passivity and a lack of urgency and movement in our play – and that included Andy Faulks who appeared ten minutes into the game, ambled up to the pitch, watched a bit of the game before shuffling back down to his car to get his bag, and eventually getting changed.

Unsurprisingly, the early chances fell to Lloyds and had they been more clinical in front of goal they would have opened their account much sooner. The base of the post and Gary's reflexes saved us, until about the 20th minute, when a quick break led by the handful of a forward Lloyds had, teed up a team mate at the far post to squeeze the ball in from a tight angle. Lloyds could have edged further ahead but for a good block by Patrice Mongelard, and a saving header by Dave Green, when our goal was at Lloyds mercy.

Yet, we managed to claw our way back into the game ten minutes later after a robust incursion in the Lloyds box by Michael Ugwumba saw the ball fall kindly for Nick Waller who applied a scissor kick while lying on the ground, or maybe he just fell over at the point of contact with the ball, to wrong foot the Lloyds keeper. Nick's relief was that of a man who had just been to the bank to pay off his overdraft – yes this was his third goal-of-the-season at the right end, to neutralise his three own goals. There was not much else for us to show in the rest of the half, bar a couple of very ambitious shots from distance from Michael Ugwumba.

Andy Faulks and Andrew Washington came on at half-time for Chris Bourlet and Phil Anthony. Andrew had made history by being the first Farnborough Senior Vet to warm up in Revo sunglasses (he'd always wanted good quality sunglasses he told me) and he made the most of the sunshine whilst running the line in the first half. Now he was on to run down the line, and we made two other positional changes to accommodate him. The introduction of Andy Faulks – one goal shy of thirty for the season gave us some hope but that did not last long. Lloyds were even better in the second half and caused us more problems, particularly as we were not tracking back in the same numbers as they were breaking through from midfield and from the back. Things looked bleak when they regained the lead with a goal that was not too dissimilar from their first – a quick break down the right, a ball to the far post finished by an energetic midfielder who wanted it more than the two Farnborough players within tackling distance. Our tempers frayed, but the frustration was directed at us. In fact, there was only one bad tackle in the whole game when Sinisa Gracanin was felled from behind after he'd raced clear of his marker. The referee (who had come over with Lloyds) gave us the free-kick, of course. Indeed, he had an excellent game with more whistle action than we are used to, all very fair and we all agreed it had been a good game to referee. I do not think the absence of any Farnborough players contributed to this. In the midst of our difficulties came a moment of pure class as Waine Hetherington beat two players in a central position from twenty yards out to place an unstoppable left foot shot in the top corner with fifteen minutes to go. There was still time for a winner and Andy Faulks came close twice with balls that were neither crosses nor shots and therein lay the problem.

Lloyds were still threatening our goal and got their reward five minutes or so from the end when a shot from the right, taken early from twenty-five yards, surprised Gary Fentiman at his near post to creep into the net. There was no time for us to get back in the black and Lloyds had a deserved victory for playing more collectively, with more hunger, and a sharper cutting edge.

The après-match was enlivened by the arrival of fourteen large thin crust pizzas (or 140 slices) from an outlet in Orpington which travelled via the M25, or so it seemed as it was twenty-five minutes late. Good thing Roger French was not there – no not because it meant more pizza for everyone – that was just a bonus. He has had fast food delivery issues this season. Buffet Eminence Nick Waller kept saying he did not like pizza, I think, as I could not make out what he was saying every time as his mouth was full. I was disappointed that Caesar did not have any pizza, fancy a Roman not liking pizza. Incidentally, I think today was the first time we lost a game with Caesar there, who came and saw us fail to conquer. Despite the glorious weather and the abundance of food and cold beer, the mood was a bit subdued due to the absence of familiar faces. There was an end-of-school-year feel to the atmosphere as – “see you at summer training, see you next season perhaps, another year maybe, depends on the Mrs, fitness permitting, got to lose some weight, we need new players, we need new managers” – could be heard. I made the last bit up.

Colin Mant made mathematically certain of the Dot Cotton award by taking the kit home yet again, and everything else.

Man-of-the-Match: a threesome - golden touch Waine Hetherington, golden tush Sinisa Gracanin and golden tumble Dave Green.

Season 2015-16

30 August 2015	Orpington Vets (H)	3-9	Senior Vets suffer bloody nose and shattered hopes in derby opener
6 September 2015	Erith Vets (H)	4-1	Things brighten up for Senior Vets
13 September 2015	CUACO Vets (H)	3-1	Senior Vets win by a good head
20 September 2015	Sanco Super Vets (A)	2-1	By George, Senior Vets nick it
4 October 2015	Belvedere Vets (A)	2-2	A point well-made by Farnborough Senior Vets
11 October 2015	Inter Vyagra Super Vets (A)	2-3	Senior Vets lack thrust for happy outcome
18 October 2015	Lloyds Super Vets (A)	3-4	Now we all need therapy
25 October 2015	CUACO Vets (A)	3-2	Clocks go back an hour, Roger French several years and to the clubhouse, but Senior Vets nick all three points
1 November 2015	Lads of the Village Super Vets (N)	7-1	Senior Vets answer questions with Faulks fireworks
22 November 2015	Reigate Priory Vets (N)	7-3	All smiles as Senior Vets team put past troubles behind them
29 November 2015	Old Tamponians Super Vets (A)	2-5	Old Tamponians stem Farnborough flow
6 December 2015	Orpington Vets (A)	5-6	Farnborough edged out in 11-goal derby
13 December 2015	Old Tamponians Super Vets (N)	4-4	Farnborough come from behind three times to share satisfaction
20 December 2015	Wellcome Super Vets (A)	3-4	Farnborough wake up too late
3 January 2016	Old Colfeians Vets (A)	1-3	Senior Vets lose 2016 unbeaten record
24 January 2016	Glendale Vets (A)	3-2	Senior Vets just about avoid sticky end
31 January 2016	Lads of the Village Super Vets (A)	1-1	Senior Vets snatch a draw from the jaws of defeat and victory
7 February 2016	Sanco Super Vets (N)	0-5	Farnborough Home Guard do not know their onions
14 February 2016	Catford Wanderers Vets (A)	2-1	Farnborough come out smelling of roses
21 February 2016	Cudham United Super Vets (H)	0-1	Bitter sweet return to grass and sand of home for Farnborough Senior Vets
28 February 2016	Santos Vets (N)	3-1	Farnborough go marching in
4 March 2016	Eagles Fitter Fans Super Vets (N)	5-2	Eagles dare but Farnborough clip their wings
13 March 2016	Reigate Priory Vets (A)	1-1	Farnborough pull it off in Reigate
20 March 2016	Glendale Vets (H)	1-4	Farnborough have a twelve-hour day to forget as Glendale get all the goals
27 March 2016	Catford Wanderers Vets (A)	8-2	Easter egg bonanza for Farnborough
3 April 2016	Met Police Super Vets (A)	3-2	Farnborough nick the points under Met noses

Season 2015-16 (contd)

24 April 2016	Wellcome Super Vets (H)	3-2	An eventful six-hour day at Farrow Fields: where's Waine, where's Des Lindsay's wallet, a birthday celebration in the buffet room, a challenge for the cleaners, rear entry and a hard-fought welcome win against tough opponents
3 May 2016	Eagles Fitter Fans Super Vets (H)	3-0	Farnborough win the game but lose the joys of football
8 May 2016	FOBG Young Vets (A)	0-3	Youth prevails but Vets football wins
10 May 2016	Cudham United Super Vets (H)	0-8	Farnborough taught a lesson
17 May 2016	Inter the Valley Vets (H)	1-2	Inter the Valley bury Farnborough at the death

**Farnborough Old Boys Guild FC
Senior Vets, Season 2015-16**



Back row, left to right:

Colin Mant, Michael Ugwumba, Simon Thomas, Gary Fentiman, Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Waine Hetherington, Andy Faulks

Front row, left to right:

Stephane Anelli, Sinisa Gracanin, Des Lindsay, Roger French, Mick O'Flynn, Patrice Mongelard, George Kleanthous, Rob Lipscomb

30 August 2015: Orpington Vets (H, 3-9)

Senior Vets suffer bloody nose and shattered hopes in derby opener

And so, it begins – the first game in a roller-coaster season of thirty-eight games for the Senior Vets. It will get better. It will get worse. Life mixes despair and hope in equal measure on the whole. Football does marginally more on the hope side, I think. The beginning of a new season promises a fresh start, a clean slate; new kit occasionally, new tactics, novel formations, sometimes new players or managers; past frailties are forgotten, injuries overcome, ambition and aspiration restored; time is turned back, and a new dawn. And then reality bites. We scored first and last in today's match – the problem was that our opponents scored nine times in between. It could have been worse – yes, we gave them some help, but Orpington Vets fully deserved their win, and they had the game's outstanding player who helped himself to at least four goals and a brace of assists. They were also more than the sum of their well-articulated parts. Both teams got what they deserved.

Starting XI:

Steve Palmer

Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Mick O'Flynn

Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Lyons, Ian Shoebridge, Simon Thomas

Colin Mant, George Kleanthous

Substitutes: Stephane Anelli, newly-engaged Andy Faulks, Michael Ugwumba, Roger French

Supporters: Isabelle and Thomas French, Jane Martin, Pam Shoebridge, Neil Connelly, Bunny Beston, Michael Ugwumba Jr, Teresa Blanchard and granddaughter Georgia; Emma, Santino and Sofia Anelli; Amanda Sim and Daisy Thomas

Steve Blanchard became the first granddad to play for the Senior Vets this season – thankfully little Georgia slept through the Farnborough performance (like many of our players you might quip). There are some things that infants should not witness. A few regulars from last season were missing – and they will be forgiven for thinking this was a good game to miss.

On an overcast but dry day, with not much breeze and on a lush surface referee Nick Kinnear got us under way. There was not much to choose between the sides, for the first five minutes. Then, briefly, we flattered to deceive. Ian Shoebridge lashed a loose defensive clearance into the Orpington net from twelve yards. Five minutes later Orpington drew level, and on the half hour the score was 4-1 to them. The keeper blamed the defence, the defence blamed the midfield, the midfield blamed the forwards, the forwards blamed everyone behind them – you get the idea. The truth was that individual and collective failures were compounded by the quality of the Orpington play. Andy Faulks, Michael Ugwumba, Stephane Anelli and Roger French came on for Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant, Sinisa Gracanin and Simon Thomas to steady HMS Farnborough. We had shipped two more goals when Nick Kinnear mercifully blew to end the first period. By then we had lost Ian Shoebridge to a calf injury and thespian Simon Thomas had resumed his role as a midfielder cum winger whose script lacked the words tackling and tracking back.

You will have noticed that I have not actually reported on much football so far. There is a reason for that and I trust I do not have to spell it out for you. The second half was marginally better from our point of view as we made the Orpington keeper work harder. It did not look too good though at first as two defensive lapses brought two more goals for Orpington Vets. First, Mick

O'Flynn, who used to play for Orpington Vets but please do not read anything into that, was flat-footed as he admired the flight of a cross, and the connection made with an Orpington forehead, to propel the ball into our net. Soon after Roger French brought an Orpington forward down in the box as only Roger can, and although Steve Palmer got a hand to the penalty it was not enough.

At 8-1 down all we could hope for was to keep it to single figures. To say otherwise would be a lie. Mick O'Flynn, Ian Lyons and George were pulled off on the hour for the second coming of Patrice Mongelard, Sinisa Gracanin and Colin Mant. Almost immediately we got a goal back – a sumptuous cross from Simon Thomas was met athletically on the volley by Stephane Anelli at the far post to reduce the deficit. This restored the bounce in Simon's coiffure since the end of season presentation evening when he had been miffed to lose the tiff of the quiffs as he came up against one that was longer, thicker and harder than his own.

The last quarter of an hour was incident-packed. We were forced to make two more changes. Simon Thomas who recently appeared in the BBC series "Casualty" fed a hospital ball to Roger French and the ensuing coming together with an Orpington player left Roger clutching a bloody nose and muttering accusations of an elbow. But any such contact would have been accidental, more nose to elbow than elbow to nose you could say, and the only intemperate moment of the game passed as Roger went off for nasal ablutions and Mick O'Flynn slipped back on for seconds. Orpington got a ninth goal and nearly added to it. Ian Coles went off injured for the last ten minutes and Ian Lyons was back on to see us get our third goal. A pile driver from Andy Faulks was parried and Colin Mant was in the right place to profit. His shot could have gone anywhere but it found the net with a finish that was crisp and technically difficult. Last season we had to wait until our thirty-fifth game for Colin to finally get on the score sheet. I hope we do not have to wait that long for his next goal.

We scored a third as many goals as the opposition but even in the absence of Buffet Turbo Nick Waller, we managed to eat three times as many sausages as them. French bread, crisps, celery sticks, spring onion, cherry tomatoes, potato croquettes and pork pie completed the comfort eating – all supplied by the catering firm of Shoebridge and Martin.

Man-of-the-Match: Stephane Anelli who gave us a bit of hope. We'll need it. We lost 5-1 to next week's opponents in the corresponding fixture last year. It can't get any worse, can it?

6 September 2015: Erith Vets (H, 4-1)

Things brighten up for Senior Vets

After the gloom and despondency of last Sunday, what a dazzling and luminous day the football gods bestowed upon us today. It was as if a light had been switched on by the miraculous intervention of a long-awaited electrician. We had to work hard for our win, and in the end deserved to win a fixture which, on many previous occasions, has cast a dark shadow on our day.

This was the first outing for our away kit (even though we were playing at home as the yellow in our opponents' kit would have clashed with the egg in our bacon and egg livery). Roger French had done a great job currying favour to secure sponsorship for the kit from Village Cuisine (again) and the all-blue kit was very easy on the eye, not unlike the blue of the Azzuri I thought. It was important in our superstitious footballer minds to avoid defeat on this christening.

Referee Mick Gearing was back in harness, and we welcomed back Gary Fentiman, Waine Hetherington and Des Lindsay – all of whom played a not insignificant part in the positive outcome.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Mick O'Flynn

Stephane Anelli, Ian Lyons, Michael Ugwumba, Simon Thomas

Colin Mant, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Roger French, Waine Hetherington and eventually Des Lindsay

Supporters: Bunny Beston, Isabelle and Thomas French, Vicky Tanner, Michael Ugwumba Jr

The opening exchanges were even, as Farnborough, mindful of last week's mauling, operated a safety-first policy with a compact formation in the middle of the park, and with our two wingers Simon Thomas and Stephane Anelli with strict instructions to track back, and help out their defence, and I have to say that both mastered their script today. Stephane even found time to get on the end of a Colin Mant lofted through ball to give us the lead after about fifteen minutes by cutting in and lashing a left foot drive into the far corner of the net from five yards out.

Erith responded of course as we knew they could and would. They hit the bar and went looking for an equaliser. Mick O'Flynn cleared off the line with his head. Ten minutes later all our good work was nearly undone. Referee Mick Gearing, with whom I often discuss the social and cultural importance of Spec Savers, was left with little choice but to award a penalty after Patrice Mongelard was a tad tardy with a sliding tackle in the box. Ian Lyons pointed out, sagely but unnecessarily, to Patrice that he had undone the good work which the team had put in over first twenty-five minutes. I cannot say that I got up today with the intention of doing that, but looking at it another way I gave Gary Fentiman an opportunity to show how good he is at stopping penalty kicks. The shot was low to his right but he got down and got a strong wrist (like a masseuse) to the shot and Steve Blanchard cleared the rebound.

We were still having the greater share of the play when, on the half hour, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard and Michael Ugwumba made way for Waine Hetherington, Des Lindsay and Roger French. Colin allowed himself a brief moment of petulant indignation at our substitutions policy

before reverting to his legendary team ethic. What was more concerning was the petulance on the pitch as Roger French (yes – him again) tackled and tangled with an Erith forward (the only awkward episode of a game played in excellent spirit). The free-kick was probably as much for the afters as for the initial incident. Ian Coles got his head to the ball but it fell to an unmarked Erith player on the edge of the box and his volley was very good and true and the ball travelled through a forest of legs to nestle into the corner of the net with Gary transfixed on his line. At that point it is fair to say Erith deserved to be level.

The half-time oranges found us in an optimistic mood. Des will have welcomed the hydration – it was noticeable that his kit was a much darker blue than ours – either he has overactive sweat glands, or back heeling the ball to himself, as he was to do several times in the game, you could say he was playing with himself, was too much on a hot day.

We had shaded the first half. The second half put a bit more daylight between the two teams but not until later when Erith tired and Waine Hetherington weaved his magic. Stephane Anelli once again made the difference by notching his second goal of the game after a neat exchange with Waine Hetherington on the edge of the Erith box ten minutes or so into the second half. We had the lead but the game was not won, as Erith were capable of getting back in the game. They had two good chances with players clean through but could not capitalise. On the hour, Colin Mant, Michael Ugwumba and Patrice Mongelard were back on for Ian Lyons, Mick O'Flynn and Simon Thomas. We had arguably our best spell of the game then, forcing several corners and it was Waine Hetherington again who unlocked the Erith defence with a lofted cross that Andy Faulks nodded in from close range. The cushion of another goal was reassuring, and we were to extend our lead further with ten minutes or so left as Simon Thomas (who had returned after dripping Des Lindsay had slid off) came from behind at pace to score at the end of yet another assist from Waine Hetherington low at the far post.

And that was it. There was time for Gary, on a roll today, to retrieve the ball from the trees (it just fell in his arms) behind the goal before showers, and the customary wait for fast food ordered by Roger French. Eight XXL pizzas, portions of garlic bread and dough balls appeared and disappeared like a mirage on a hot day, despite the absence of Buffet Immensity Nick Waller. It was good to see Thomas French cheer up with a pizza slice and he did a great job clearing empty glasses (after a mishap earlier in the day with another kind of glass which had threatened Roger's equilibrium – as if he needs it on a Sunday). It was good to see Erith enjoy the food and what our bar had to offer. Vicky Tanner thought they won the bar stakes, and that I think, was because of Nick's absence.

Lastly a special mention for Amanda Sim – Simon Thomas' partner, who had the kit washed (extra detergent for Des' shirt I expect) and out on the line in the sunshine by the time he got home at half past two. He sent her and daughter Daisy home with the kit, while he drank beer and ate pizza with his mates.

Man-of-the-Match: Stephane Anelli again, though Gary Fentiman with a penalty save, and Waine Hetherington with a hat-trick of assists, made a tight contest of it.

13 September 2015: CUACO Vets (H, 3-1)

Senior Vets win by a good head

We lost the corresponding game last season and whilst we hoped to build on last week's good result, we were respectful of our opponents, and we thought it would have to be more of a case of us winning this match than them losing it - if you can see the subtlety of the difference.

It was dry, mostly still, but the sun was shy. We spent some time before the game clearing the pitch of what looked like an exploded keyboard and the remnants of a drone – perhaps unseen from the seat of a motorised mower. It was all noted by Roger French in his new capacity as Pitch Maintenance Co-ordinator, and he got all technical later explaining the difference between holes and slits, from a drainage point of view. Roger will be organising forking parties in the winter, and I can think of at least one hard-of-hearing Senior Vet who will be up for this.

Our numbers had dwindled from sixteen to fifteen by the time referee Mick Gearing got us under way. Mick said he'd be watching me closely during the game following my quip about Spec Savers in last week's match report. I advised him that they do hearing tests too, but I am not sure he heard me.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Mick O'Flynn

Stephane Anelli, Michael Ugwumba, Colin Mant, Simon Thomas

Waine Hetherington, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, Roger French, George Kleanthous, Des Lindsay

Supporters: Emma, Santino and Sofia Anelli, Bunny Beston, Isabelle and Thomas French, Hanna Kleanthous, Jane Martin, Pam and Ian Shoebridge, Vicky Tanner, Michael Ugwumba Jr

We took the lead with the run of play, about ten minutes into the game. Andy Faulks belted the ball from the edge of the box, the CUACO keeper could not hold the shot, and Simon Thomas was quickest to the loose ball and he drilled it home from five yards out with his fluorescent, lime-green, monogrammed espadrilles. Quite how we did not extend our lead is a mystery – well not really, it was poor finishing rather than the lack of chances as Waine Hetherington, Andy Faulks and Stephane Anelli could not capitalise from good positions, after having, you could argue, done the hard work to escape their markers to get a clear sight of goal. Stephane clipped the base of the post with a flashing drive after breaking through on our right.

It was not all one way though. CUACO responded and found our bar too but mostly they found Gary Fentiman at the top of his game, making the most of his huge frame and good hands. Gary kept us in the game denying CUACO at least twice with reflex saves. The central midfield pairing of Michael Ugwumba and Colin Mant worked hard in the first half-hour to preserve our advantage. At that point we made four planned changes with George Kleanthous, Des Lindsay, Roger French and Phil Anthony coming on for Andy Faulks, Michael Ugwumba, Steve Blanchard and Mick O'Flynn. We re-organised our back four and lived dangerously for a while – Phil doggedly cleared off the line, but we restored our defensive platform to build on. George Kleanthous had a scoring opportunity that he would normally snaffle up but could not beat the keeper from close range. George undoubtedly has goals in his locker – he just has to remember to bring them on the pitch with him.

We all knew at half-time that one goal would not be enough. I think it is fair to say that CUACO shaded the early part of the second half but this time without really troubling Gary in our goal. We created good situations again but the final ball or the finish was not quite there and CUACO could see that we had only a slender advantage. We were able to double our lead though, with a sense of relief, when a long clearance by Gary Fentiman found its way to Andy Faulks who raced clear of his marker, steadied himself and placed the ball low against the inside of the post and into the net. Andy had not been back on the field long, after we made another quartet of changes on the hour. Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant, Stephane Anelli and Waine Hetherington had made way for the return of Andy Faulks, Michael Ugwumba, Steve Blanchard and Mick O'Flynn.

The last half hour was not without incident – it saw three goals scored. I have told you about Andy Faulks' strike. CUACO were not out of it though and they got a deserved goal back from a well-taken corner with the ball nodded home from close-range after some interesting defensive geometry on our part. We could have wobbled there and then, CUACO could sniff a draw and just when their hopes were at their highest, we applied the coup de grâce. The value of goals is not only their quality but also their timing and with ten minutes left we had both with what, at least one player, guess who, is already calling the goal-of-the-season. A CUACO goal-kick travelled about forty yards to be met by the meaty forehead of Des Lindsay who leapt prodigiously, arched his back and put his full weight behind the propulsion of the ball whence it came. The CUACO keeper, who in fairness had a decent game, was flummoxed. He could not decide whether to come for the ball or wait for it, or compute its trajectory and speed. Crucially, he allowed it to bounce in front of him and that was his undoing. The ball sailed into the top corner to everyone's surprise and to Farnborough's delight, none more so than Des', who did a very good impression of having meant the whole thing.

There was time for Stephane Anelli to come back on for the last five minutes after Simon Thomas whose normal style was a bit cramped today, limped off. There was no coming back though for CUACO and all three points were staying at home. We were content as we made our way back to the club house, with little Sofia Anelli doing her bit by carrying a corner flag back, like she was holding the hand of a teddy bear. Pound for pound and size for size she was carrying more than most of us.

The catering firm of Shoebridge and Martin did us all proud again – though I nearly missed it – for a moment I feared Buffet Raptor Nick Waller had swooped, but I was just late on account of having swept three changing rooms, including that used by the opponents of our Sunday Team (to Vince Wray's delight). I was just able to catch a couple of sausage sandwiches and a cheese and pickle morceau. There was room for a bit of cake – supplied by Jane Martin, perhaps, though I hope not because she deserves better, to remind partner Ian Coles that it is her birthday next week. Des was still there re-telling the story of his goal, increasing the distance from goal every time, and we could not keep him away from the cake – he even had a cup of tea to go with it. He deserved it.

Man-of-the-Match: Gary Fentiman who deserved a clean sheet for his performance, and who can treasure the memory of a rare assist.

20 September 2015: Sanco Super Vets (A, 2-1)

By George, Senior Vets nick it

First a correction to last week's match report – Roger French's new added responsibilities at the club are not those of a Pitch Maintenance Co-ordinator but those of a Terrain Improvement Tsar. Talking of terrain, what a lovely surface we played on today at the home of SANCO Super Vets in Dulwich Village, arguably the "Wembley" of all the grounds we play on. It looked even more glorious in the bright autumn sunshine and the warm still morning in leafy surroundings. Our number had dwindled to thirteen overnight – Phil Anthony being dogged by car trouble in Sheffield and no, before you ask, he does not drive a Rover.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Patrice Mongelard, Ian Lyons, Steve Blanchard, Michael Ugwumba

Des Lindsay, Waine Hetherington, Colin Mant, Simon Thomas

George Kleanthous, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Roger French, Sinisa Gracanin

Supporters: Jo Colyer, Hannah Kleanthous, Michael Ugwumba Jr

Supporter numbers were down for this away game: Jo Colyer had come to watch her intended Andy "Audi" Faulks (she showed me her ring); Hannah Kleanthous was taking a break from reading Harry Potter to watch dad George weave his magic; Michael Jr was there, as always, to see if he could pick up any moves from the old man (unlikely, he told me).

Both teams aspired to a passing brand of football – midfield was congested, but the greater attacking intent was with us as we took the game to SANCO. They defended in numbers and were compact up to the sixty-yard mark but had trouble penetrating our defence. To be fair we were not having much luck either. Too many high balls, sloppy first touches, over-dribbling and the very good SANCO keeper was vigilant. We forced a string of corners which were in truth wasted just as were the Hollywood balls we were playing from deep. To the neutral's surprise, against the run of play, SANCO took the lead on the quarter hour. Their big unit in midfield, playing with what looked like Polaroid goggles, caused some disarray in our box, the ball was recycled to their sharp forward who evaded two tackles, turned and finished smartly low in the bottom corner. SANCO had scored a good goal with their second serious assault on our goal. The first one, only five minutes into the game, had fallen to the same player (who has Farnborough connections I understand) after he sprung our off-side trap but he scuffed his shot.

We huffed and puffed to no avail, and it was difficult to see where our equaliser would come from. There was not much cohesion, method or solidarity in our play. Individual players were trying to do too much on their own where a more collective approach was called for. Sinisa Gracanin and Roger French came on for Des Lindsay and Michael Ugwumba on the half hour. We moved a few players about into more natural positions and there was a better rhythm to our play. The breakthrough came with five minutes left to half-time. Waine Hetherington cut in from the left, leaving two SANCO defenders in his wake. His shot was blocked but the ball fell to George Kleanthous in the D and he quickly wrapped his left foot round it to steer the ball low past the diving SANCO keeper. This was a deserved equaliser.

When play resumed after the free half-time oranges, we carried on where we left off and the pressure on the SANCO goal increased. Surely, it was only a matter of time we thought. SANCO were playing on the break but could never get the numbers required in our box to create real danger. So, we built from the back, through the middle, down the flanks and the chances kept coming and going begging. Simon Thomas, Sinisa Gracanin, Andy Faulks and George Kleanthous all had a go but their efforts were either saved or wide, particularly the many shots from distance. Waine Hetherington was a whisker away from giving us the lead after latching on to through a lofted through ball from Patrice Mongelard, nutmegging his marker, and seeing his dipping shot go inches wide.

On the hour, we brought Des Lindsay and Michael Ugwumba back on for Waine Hetherington and Colin Mant. Next time Des has a conversation with his GP he might want to mention the word hyperhidrosis, judging by the moisture he left in Roger French's Farnborough hoodie running the line on a hot day. The re-introduction of Des and Michael gave us a more muscular presence and we pressed on. Yet, as often happens in football SANCO nearly took the lead again, after a long ball was half cleared by Gary Fentiman, idle for most of the second half, only to fall to an unmarked SANCO player thirty-five yards out with an empty goal ahead. The shot went wide and we had our warning. Our efforts redoubled – Sinisa Gracanin had a low shot well saved by the keeper from a few yards out. Sini will probably feel he had not quite adopted the right body position. We drew two great saves from the SANCO keeper within seconds – first George Kleanthous got behind the SANCO defence and from three yards out he blasted the ball against the keeper's head at the near post. The rebound was volleyed at the far post by Andy Faulks but the SANCO keeper had somehow got to his feet and glided to the other post to make the stop. We were not quite sure how much time was left – the referee who had to change boots at one point, may or may not have been adding time, and there were interruptions for injuries to Sinisa Gracanin, and to the big SANCO unit who ran himself into the ground. Earlier the same player had a memorable, but innocent and accidental, coming together with Roger "Pickfords" French in the centre circle – both missing the ball, and making the sort of wince-inducing contact that keeps casualty departments busy on Sunday mornings. Thankfully, both emerged unharmed.

With barely five minutes left we played the ball out of our defence on the right – Patrice Mongelard deftly finding Des Lindsay in space and he combined with Andy Faulks to put George Kleanthous clean through. George did the rest with a crisp finish to give us a victory that was deserved on the balance of play. No doubt SANCO would then have been hoping for a draw, such was the resolute way they had defended, and how well their keeper played. Both teams competed well but without any malice.

Unusually, I was not able to partake in the après-match hospitality which I am reliably informed consisted of chips, sausages and buttered bread. My absence and that of Buffet Dyson, Nick Waller, will have left plenty for our team mates. The conversation probably turned to wedding bells at some point, at least between Andy Faulks and Simon Thomas, as Amanda Sim, Simon Thomas' fiancée, appeared with baby Daisy – she may even have flashed the engagement ring. Yes, dear reader, Simon had proposed just after the superb job Amanda did with our kit a fortnight ago. It all comes out in the wash, they say – clearly if you want to check if your partner is marriage material the Senior Vets kit is the supreme test.

Man-of-the-Match: George Kleanthous, with two goals that he pulled out of his locker. And to cap a good day for us, Steve Blanchard won the match card £10 jackpot in the bar.

4 October 2015: Belvedere Vets (A, 2-2)

A point well-made by Farnborough Senior Vets

With profound wisdom, our Terrain Improvement Tsar, Roger French, foretold this would be a game of two halves after his trained eye sized up the gradient of the huge Belvedere pitch. Also, as he was not in the starting line-up, he decided we would play uphill in the first half. Our substitutions policy, the subject of some robust exchanges in the week, was in full swing as we had sixteen players. This number included Rob Lipscomb, back after a serious injury who was so excited at the prospect of wearing the Farnborough shirt again that he spat his porridge out at breakfast (after thirty-eight weeks of abstinence). The warm autumn sunshine brought our young fans out in force, as well as mascot Caesar, come to watch master Phil Anthony do some dogged defending.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Phil Anthony, Sinisa Gracanin

Des Lindsay, Michael Ugwumba, Stephane Anelli, Simon Thomas

Andy Faulks, Colin Mant

Substitutes: Roger French, George Kleanthous, Ian Shoebridge, Nick Waller, Rob Lipscomb

Supporters: Freya, Kathleen and Thea Anthony, Isabelle and Thomas French, Hannah Kleanthous, Michael Ugwumba Jr

The opening ten minutes were a nightmare for us. We conceded after barely five minutes from a shambolic corner: we were caught napping, flat-footed, vacant of mind, and were rightly punished as we adopted the Gruyere cheese defence. Five minutes later, we still had not turned up when a Belvedere forward slipped into space behind our defence and finished smartly to give them what they must have thought was the beginning of a cricket score. This was not happy viewing for our substitutes and fans. I thought I heard Caesar howling or maybe it was just Roger barking. In truth, we were having great difficulty just moving up the pitch and stringing passes together, Belvedere appeared to have an extra player on the pitch and for the first half-hour we rode our luck, more than a bit, not least when Belvedere hit the post and missed close-range headers. There were rare glimpses of what we could do if we kept hold of the ball and could find the right pass in the final third.

We made five changes immediately before a Belvedere free-kick on the half hour as Andy Faulks, Ian Coles, Stephane Anelli, Michael Ugwumba and Simon Thomas made way for the five substitutes mentioned above. Normally such changes take something out of us – but not today. Although we failed to create a clear chance in the half, we had stopped the rot and George Kleanthous and Ian Shoebridge were starting to ask questions of the Belvedere defence. When half-time came we were in fact in a good frame of mind. We now had the slope in our favour and Belvedere had made changes to their line-up. They brought on a big unit on the right, a double wardrobe with casters, who kept Roger ‘Pickfords’ busy but the service to their forwards was now sporadic and mainly of the long ball variety as we seemed to have got a grip of the midfield. Belvedere appeared to pack their defence, including with some of their most dangerous players in the first half, and seemed content to sit on their 2-0 lead.

Early in the second half Des Lindsay went off and Simon Thomas came back on – this time on his favoured right wing, which eventually helped us a lot. If Belvedere had the first half-hour then

it can be said that Farnborough had the last half hour. The five Farnborough substitutes – after four changes were made on the hour to bring back Andy Faulks, Ian Coles, Stephane Anelli and Michael Ugwumba for Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard, Phil Anthony and Sinisa Gracanin – had a much better half hour to watch than the first five substitutes.

The momentum was with us. The combination of Andy Faulks and George Kleanthous had an effective period, with good support from Rob Lipscomb, Ian Shoebridge and Simon Thomas as an attacking force. Belvedere defended deep and we started to create chances in quick succession. Ian Shoebridge got a goal back for us after seventy minutes after a quick break and a clever ball across the box from Simon Thomas and “Shoey” tucked the ball away. A few minutes later Shoey rolled another shot agonisingly close to the post. More was to come – Andy Faulks was hacked from behind as he advanced on goal in the box and the penalty was ours. Unfortunately, George Kleanthous blasted the ball over the bar as he leant back at the moment of contact. Andy Faulks side-stepped two defenders on the edge of the box to create space for one of his pile drivers which was repelled by a Belvedere body thrown in the way.

In our dugout, we were going wild - shouting encouragement to our players: *“It’s men against boys! They (Belvedere) are finished, on the ropes. It’s like watching Brazil (well not against Germany obviously).”* We went wild as George Kleanthous was played in by Andy Faulks to beat the keeper and make amends – we were on level terms with eight minutes to play. Could we snatch a winner – no, but we came mighty close. Belvedere were giving away free-kicks all over the place – Michael Ugwumba swung one in from the right straight on to the meaty forehead of Nick Waller three yards out - Nick leapt like a pink Alaskan salmon (*Oncorhynchus gorbuscha*), the contact was good and true, the ball passed a hair’s breadth from the post. In the dugout Colin Mant noted coolly that if Nick had been in our box that header would have gone in like a bullet (for an own goal – another Nick Waller speciality).

The final five minutes were tense – Gary Fentiman had to tip a free-kick over but we held on for a well-deserved point – and we had made a point to ourselves about our resilience, and the value of substitutions. The handshakes were genuine at the end from our opponents; a keenly contested game had passed off without incident. A draw was the right result but, as all football teams do, we could not help wonder about the missed penalty. I must have been pondering this intently as I walked into a metal stanchion at the back of the goal on the junior pitch on the way back to the changing rooms. Roger French’s first concern was for the goal post.

The vast tray of sandwiches (egg mayonnaise, ham, and cheese and cucumber); hot sausages and roast potatoes, offered by our hosts in their cosy bar was very welcome – and despatched quickly as we had Buffet Maximus, Nick Waller, in our midst. Colin Mant looked very contented with a hot sausage in his mouth. I told the Anthony girls a joke about a dog (and an escape of wind) which I hope they will not repeat at school.

Man-of-the-Match: Michael Ugwumba, for a muscular midfield performance, and some Hollywood balls that came off and some that did not.

Next week it is Inter Vyagra - a stiff proposition these days.

11 October 2015: Inter Vyagra Super Vets (A, 2-3)

Senior Vets lack thrust for happy outcome

The pitch at Woolwich Barracks, home of our opponents today, Inter Vyagra Super Vets, is a superbly drained surface. I am hoping that our two pitches at Farrow Fields in Farnborough will become like that after Roger French gave them six inches this week. No, titter ye not, it is not Roger indulging in a spot of 'herbophilia'. In fact, he was instrumental in the application of a Verti-Drain procedure which spiked the soil to a depth of six inches and heaved it at the same time to crack the subsoil and address compaction, all to help us win against water in winter. The question today though was whether we'd have the tools to crack our opponents' hard nuts.

First though, to raise the tone, which you are perhaps not expecting, here is a bit of architectural history which might have escaped our team. The Woolwich Royal Artillery Barracks was built by architect James Wyatt between 1776 and 1802. When finished its southern elevation provided, at 329 metres, the longest architectural composition in London. And I am sure we would all like to be reminded that Ha-ha Road, from where we gained access to the ground is named after a ditch really. Purists will tell you a ha-ha (or ha-ha wall) is a recessed landscape design element that creates a vertical barrier while preserving views. The design includes a turfed incline which slopes downward to a sharply vertical face, typically a masonry retaining wall. The Crimean War Memorial in the grounds would have brought a lump to Mick Gearing's throat.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Patrice Mongelard, Sinisa Gracanin, Mick O'Flynn, Michael Ugwumba

Des Lindsay, Stephane Anelli, Ian Shoebridge, Wayne Hetherington

George Kleanthous, Colin Mant

Substitutes: Roger French, Rob Lipscomb, Simon Thomas

Supporter: Michael Ugwumba Jr

The pitch though well-drained was not even in places, and the bounce of the ball needed watching. There was more of a breeze than we thought and the sun was out. What can we say about the first-half? Farnborough edged it in terms of possession, in fact that can be said for the whole game, but Inter Vyagra showed more penetration. Our foreplay was good, down both flanks initially but it was in the centre of the Inter Vyagra defence where we were not coming through. Crosses went in but they were too short or too long, or too close to the keeper. Long range efforts did not really trouble the Inter Vyagra keeper. Inter Vyagra had nippy forwards to trouble us running with the ball and we held out until the 42nd minute when a quick low cross into our box evaded us all and the Inter Vyagra forward in splendid isolation was left with a simple tap-in. In truth we had begun to lose vigour on the half hour when Ian Shoebridge, Stephane Anelli and Michael Ugwumba made way for Roger French, Rob Lipscomb and Simon Thomas.

We had more oranges than we could eat at half-time and beyond, as our opponents had kindly given us a bag to add to the ones I had brought along – Des Lindsay did his best to prepare for his Spanish holiday next week when he'll be taking in lots of fluid. We did not start the second half well. Performance anxiety crept into our game and players started having a go at each other. Inter Vyagra doubled their lead after fifty-five minutes with a close-range header from a ball that we thought Gary would pluck out of the air. There was a muted call for off-side but I think the Inter Vyagra forward had showed that timing is everything. We were the architects of our

misfortunes largely – worse was to come. Mick O’Flynn had had enough and beckoned Stephane Anelli back on the pitch as he felt his calf begin to harden.

Things were not looking good on the hour when George Kleanthous and Des Lindsay made way for Ian Shoebridge and Michael Ugwumba. Roger French had been taken out by a sniper from the Barracks whilst attempting an overhead kick to put the ball into touch, and he also managed to almost knock himself out whilst heading a goal-kick. We could sense though that Inter Vyagra were starting to play conservatively and let us come on to them. Once Michael and Rob Lipscomb re-discovered the art of civilised conversation, we went looking for a way back into the game. It came from the cultured left foot of Waine Hetherington as he curled a twenty-yard free-kick where it could not be saved.

All the good work was undone when Gary Fentiman called for, caught and then dropped the ball at the near post from an innocuous Inter Vyagra corner. The ball fell on the smallest Inter Vyagra player standing next to Gary and Roger French on the goal line, and was bundled in. I had had enough as I felt something stiffen in my groin area, and George Kleanthous came back on for me to give us more of an attacking threat. We had a good penalty shout, we thought, turned down, though in the main the referee was fair to both teams but seemed to get more stick from Inter Vyagra. Shades of last week were felt as we pulled another goal back with less than ten minutes left. Ian Shoebridge had broken through on the left, entered the box and struck a low shot that the keeper parried but Waine Hetherington snaffled the loose ball and lashed it into the net. The last action of the game was a Farnborough player where we had nine players including Gary Fentiman in the Inter Vyagra box but it was too late.

Après-match hospitality was enjoyed in full view of the sunlit architectural marvel in front of us. A copious supply of hot sausages (more happiness for Colin Mant), buttered slices, cheddar chunks, faux prawns, sausage rolls were washed down as both teams chatted after a game where there was not a single discordant note between us and our opponents. Even Simon Thomas shook hands with an elderly opponent after a rare tackle from him.

Man-of-the-Match – Sinisa Gracanin, for a solid display at centre half in an unaccustomed position that he is growing into.

18 October 2015: Lloyds Super Vets (A, 3-4)

Now we all need therapy

I suspect not many of our fans heard the bells of St Giles in Farnborough this week, as news filtered through the parish that Roger French was finally going to seek therapy. Before you rush to praise the Lord, I should clarify that this is for orthopaedic and soft tissue injuries, and not for any other condition. Moreover, these are injuries to himself, not his opponents. They say that in sport the best therapy is winning and given our recent results we could have done with the three points today. I'll explain shortly why we did not get them. Where we go from here is another matter, and I venture, quite a challenge for any therapist.

So, what is the Farnborough Old Boys Guild Senior Vets challenge for a therapist? This is how I would analyse it: We have not won a game in almost four weeks. We have become a soft touch for other teams who have progressed while we have regressed. We play without pace in critical areas. We do not work hard enough, we have become lazy, many players are not as fit as they could or should be, we cannot convert the chances we create and we are not good at defending long balls over the top. We no longer enjoy our football. We do not play as a collective. We have got old together but cannot see it. And it is going to get worse. Apart from that, things are very good.

Starting XI:

Steve Palmer

Patrice Mongelard, Sinisa Gracanin, Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier

Michael Ugwumba, Colin Mant, Simon Thomas, Wayne Hetherington

George Kleanthous, Andy Faulks

Substitute: Roger French

Supporters: Isabelle and Thomas French, Michael Ugwumba Jr

Numbers dwindled over the weekend as players were dogged by injuries and hangovers. We reduced our playing strength further by lending the opposition a player as they only had ten. I cannot remember when an opposing team did that for us. Our generosity was so great that we let Rob Lipscomb go instead of Roger French. Rob played better for Lloyds than he has for us in a long time. The only time we smiled today as a group was in the team photo which club photographer Colin Brazier masterminded with his usual skill and flair. Colin was "enjoying" his first outing this season, and it was good to see him. He might not be back this side of Christmas, or at all this season, after today. The other Colin in our midst today will be back, and in fact is the only one among us who would be forgiven for having a day off today as he was mourning his father, Stanley Mant, who passed away at the ripe age of 91, last Tuesday. The team and the club have asked me to pass on our condolences to the Mant family.

So, when did it start to go wrong as we kicked off initially in overcast conditions, though the sun appeared later? We had a lot of possession and moved the ball about well in non dangerous areas. Lloyds packed the midfield and defence, playing one lone striker who had a very good game and was a handful throughout. I think we were lulled into a false sense of security. We were allowed a few shots from distance (including one from Colin Brazier that was very easy on the eye) which did not trouble the Lloyds keeper, who looked and played like a proper keeper. I thought we'd have to get very close to beat him.

A hamstring injury to Michael Ugwumba introduced Roger French to the game after about twenty minutes, on the left of midfield, a position unfortunately requiring mobility, energy, a cool head, and a minimum of flicks. By then, I think we had already been undone, against the run of play, by the usual weapon – a long ball over the top, a missed header, no defensive cover, a well-timed run from the forward and a smart finish. We worked hard to get back in the game. Andy Faulks broke clear on the right to latch on to a Wayne Hetherington through ball, drew the keeper and squared the ball for George Kleanthous to tuck away inside the post. We had a bit of a spell then. Patrice Mongelard had a thumping shot from the edge of the box, after a pull back from Roger French, which came off the post. At least one of my team mates expressed relief that he was not going to be reading about a goal (had the ball gone in off the post). Andy Faulks was provider again as he played Simon Thomas in on goal a few minutes before half-time. Simon drew close and finished clinically to give us an advantage at 2-1 after the first period. This felt right given the balance of play, particularly as one Lloyds defender had left the pitch midway through the half (though he was back on for the second half).

The second half did not start well for us. Lloyds were level within a minute. To say we were caught napping would be a travesty. We were in fact comatose as the centre of midfield and defence were undone by our own hesitancy, and the forcefulness of the run from one determined individual on the other team. Steve Palmer was lured off his line and was left stranded three yards out as a smart overhead kick did the rest. It took us a while to shake ourselves out of our torpor and we struggled to create clear chances. Worse was to come. Lloyds regained the lead on the hour as Steve Blanchard could not quite block a close-range shot and the ball trickled ever so gently and agonisingly over the line. It was only then that we showed signs of stirring. Andy Faulks equalised for us with a sharp drive from the edge of the box which took a slight deflection that wrong-footed the keeper. By then Lloyds had even had the nerve to swap keepers. The momentum was back with us. We forced several corners, drew a good save from the new keeper from an Andy Faulks header. Wayne Hetherington and George Kleanthous were getting in each other's way in the penalty area but at least we were making things happen. With about ten minutes left, we had the opportunity to nail the points. Simon Thomas found himself unmarked, with the goal at his mercy and with only the keeper to beat from two yards out. We'll never know if he was caught in two minds: to shoot or square the ball, to blast it or place the ball; left foot or right foot, follicles arranged this way or that – in the end he just rolled it to the keeper – a shadow of the player who had finished so smartly in the first half. The moment was to prove costly – five minutes later – the malaise returned in our penalty box and the Lloyds striker claimed his deserved hat-trick and win the game. There was just time for Andy Faulks to blast a free-kick towards the woods where it smelled like the mother of herbal relaxants was being enjoyed, as a form of therapy perhaps.

The walk back to the changing rooms was sombre. But the showers were good, the beer cold and the tray of sandwiches, mini-Cornish pasties and scotch eggs disappeared in no time, even though Buffet Crevasse Nick Waller was not there. Keen readers of my match reports complained about the absence of a mention for his Buffet Excellency Nick Waller in last week's reportage. He was not there but he has become a firm favourite among my readers. So, this week you get a double helping (Nick would have liked that). Talking of double helping – I could not resist the lure of a toasted chicken sandwich – another case for therapy, I am afraid. Even though he batted for the other side, Rob Lipscomb, the only Farnborough player on the winning side today, had to pay his match subs into the Farnborough coffers, and he even sought to cast a **Man-of-the-Match** vote (a case of no taxation without representation). Talking of **Man-of-the-Match** today that was Steve Blanchard – quite a feat in a defence that let in four poor goals. I suppose the argument is that otherwise it could have been worse. That is a fair point.

25 October 2015: CUACO Vets (A, 3-2)

Clocks go back an hour, Roger French several years and to the clubhouse, but Senior Vets nick all three points

It all started so well. Roger French had one of the opposition's balls from when we played them on 13 September but we made him give it back to them. The opposition had graciously agreed to switch their kit so we could play in our new blue kit ahead of our autumn curry festival chez Village Cuisine (our kit sponsor). The team photo replay (for the benefit of said sponsor) was a success – the sun was out drying the morning dew in the suburbs of Park Langley resplendent in autumn shades. We were back to a full complement of sixteen players. Even the horologically-challenged Andy Faulks, the only Farnborough player who could manage to be late when clocks go back, arrived in the nick of time. What could go wrong?

Well, the signs were there quite early on as I will explain shortly. First, I should record our full cognition that referees have a difficult job at the best of times, and that sometimes they, and the players, do not help. Trivial things like throw-ins can be enough for things to boil over. It is then down to the maturity of the players involved – sadly today we saw more mature behaviour among the 5 and 6-year-olds playing rugby on an adjoining pitch.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier, Mick O'Flynn

Sinisa Gracanin, Colin Mant, Simon Thomas, Wayne Hetherington

George Kleanthous, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Roger French, Rob Lipscomb, Patrice Mongelard, Stephane Anelli and Des Lindsay

Supporters: Isabelle and Thomas French, Michael Ugwumba.

We did not offer a great spectacle in the early stages of this game. Our touch seemed poor, confidence and composure were like hen's teeth, the link-up play was patchy, the passing approximate, the CUACO box was a no-go area and it was difficult for the five Farnborough substitutes to offer what Simon Thomas reproachfully termed "positivity from the touch lines". The referee was having a lot to say, too much if truth be told, and the first early incident came from a disputed throw-in, which saw both Colin Mant and Simon Thomas, usually relaxed to the point of being horizontal, have heated words with the referee who threatened to reach for the cards in the pocket of his well-pressed shirt. We should have heeded the warning.

Yet, we contrived to take the lead after ten minutes when Sinisa Gracanin timed his arrival in the box just right to connect with a George Kleanthous cut-back, and finish the move handsomely. To be fair this was at the time against the run of play. To give our opponents credit, they did not allow us to build on this, and went searching for a way back into the game. It took a great fingertip save from Gary Fentiman to keep the ball out of the top corner. When the equaliser came after twenty-five minutes CUACO did not have to try too hard – such was the degree of assistance we gave them. A Farnborough clearance was sent back into our box by one of our own, Wayne Hetherington, confusion in our box followed, three Farnborough players were involved (keeper + two defenders), with no sign of the opposition and one of the Farnborough defenders, Mick O'Flynn, applied a delicate and precise finish to steer the ball past Gary Fentiman, as if he meant it. Technically, it was a thing of beauty but of course at the wrong end. The half hour came and we made five changes with Patrice Mongelard, Rob Lipscomb, Roger French, Des Lindsay and

Stephane Anelli coming on for Steve Blanchard, Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Simon Thomas and Colin Mant. These changes gave us an injection of solidity and energy and we finished the half on the front foot. Des Lindsay was a whisker away from converting a sharp cross from the right from the industrious Stephane Anelli – with a bullet header.

We carried this momentum into the second half. Barely five minutes had passed when George Kleanthous got behind the CUACO defence to poke the ball past the advancing CUACO keeper. Within five minutes we were down to ten men. Yes, you have guessed it, Roger French was dismissed by the referee with great flourish, banished within a hundred yards of the pitch, after intemperate exchanges over a disputed throw-in by the half way line. Yes, a throw-in, not a goal, or a penalty or a bad tackle. The trouble could have been avoided if the CUACO player involved had come clean but the moment passed quickly and things were said that could not be taken back – it was not possible to turn the clock back so to speak. As Roger trundled back ever so slowly, we re-organised ourselves wondering if the extra man on CUACO's team would cost us with over half an hour of the game left. Mick O'Flynn's calf gave up around the 55-minute mark as usual, and Steve B. came back on to shore up our defence.

On the hour we brought on fresh legs as George Kleanthous, Andy Faulks, Ian Coles and Colin Brazier were replaced by Sinisa Gracanin, Simon Thomas, Waine Hetherington and Colin Mant. Waine, looking far more dangerous than in his first stint, made his presence felt almost immediately by curling a twenty-five-yard free-kick against the base of the far post whence the ball rebounded back into play to hit Colin Mant a yard from goal, and go wide. If it had been a case of Colin Mant hitting the ball the outcome may well have been different. Still, it did not matter as Waine's left peg did the trick five minutes later when a similar sort of ball beat the keeper and we had a two-goal cushion to defend.

CUACO brought on some big units to fill our box and while the chances did not come thick and fast for them, we had to defend stoutly and in numbers. With under ten minutes left CUACO pulled one back from a shot that trickled under Gary's body to his great annoyance, as he pummelled the pitch with his fist. We found out later that this outburst of emotion was down to Gary's poor arithmetic. He thought that was the CUACO equaliser. He had recovered his poise five minutes later to pull a great diving save to divert a bottom corner-bound shot wide. There was time for Des Lindsay to miss a sitter at the CUACO far post when he opted for a stretching acrobatic volley when a diving header would have done the job. It was a relief when the final whistle was heard – not only for our players, but also for the referee who did a "Joubert" as he exited the ground in a hurry, pausing I am told, to reject the apology proffered by Roger French.

We had the three points from the game, but also memories we wish we had not. The talk in the bar was not about the food, as there was none, but about other things like the number of games Roger would now be banned for, by his therapist, and the club, on top of the automatic three-match ban for a straight red card. There was also a mention of the tackle from a silent Patrice Mongelard which felled a CUACO player in the middle of the park which should have brought a response from the referee. There were one or two culturally dodgy jokes which I will not repeat partly as they were at my expense, but they served to lighten the mood.

We had two players who tied for the **Man-of-the-Match** – Waine Hetherington and Steve Blanchard.

1 November 2015: Lads of the Village Super Vets (N, 7-1)

Senior Vets answer questions with Faulks fireworks

Technically, this was a home game but as both our home pitches were being used by one of Sunday teams and our Young Vets, we made our first visit this season to our second home at Beckenham Cricket Club in Foxgrove Road. The pitch was immaculate as always, the surface had a bit of zip from the heavy morning dew, and the mist was heavy, almost fog-like in the still and relatively mild air, with visibility down to no more than fifty yards. Referee Mick Gearing assured me he had been to Specsavers, and had his night vision goggles on. Gary Fentiman was away adding another year to his age and so we had to juggle the side a bit to put Waine Hetherington between the sticks in the first half, with George Kleanthous scheduled to take over from him in the second half while Waine replaced George in our front line.

Starting XI:

Waine Hetherington

Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Patrice Mongelard, Roger French

Colin Mant, Simon Thomas, Des Lindsay, Rob Lipscomb

George Kleanthous, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Sinisa Gracanin, Nick Waller, Michael Ugwumba

Supporters: Jo Colyer, Thomas French, Hannah Kleanthous, Ian Lyons, Mick O'Flynn and Chris Webb + Cockapoo

As seems to be customary, it took us a while to get going. Possession was not a problem, penetration and impact were. Our opponents competed well in the initial phases with a compact, combative and technically able midfield and they defended in numbers. Andy Faulks provided the first breakthrough after ten minutes as he got behind their defence on the left to pick up a lay-off from George Kleanthous. He cut in, left his marker trailing, advanced diagonally on goal and arrowed a fifteen yarder into the bottom corner. Lads of the Village reacted – had a good shout for a penalty turned down. On a less foggy day it might have been given. Waine Hetherington had relatively little to do but what came his way he dealt with like a natural. Barely a quarter of an hour had gone when a Lads of the Village midfielder crumpled to the ground with no one around him. Roger French had been watching him but as far as we know Roger has not yet mastered the art of causing injury by the power of thought alone. The injured player told me later that he was wearing mouldeds to protect a metatarsal fracture sustained five weeks ago and had lost his footing on the greasy surface and damaged his knee. Midway through the half Andy Faulks powered a shot which the keeper could not hold and George Kleanthous was in the right place at the right time to snaffle the rebound like the fox in the box that he is, and we had a two-goal cushion.

On the half hour we made three changes as Patrice Mongelard, Andy Faulks and Colin Mant made way for Sinisa Gracanin, Michael Ugwumba and Nick Waller. These changes took place under the watchful eye of Mick O'Flynn who had appeared through the fog, like some Irish Druid, and who this week joined the Senior Vets think-tank to assist with tactical analysis and team planning. We remained dominant but could not break through to claim a third goal. The Lads of the Village keeper gave everyone a bit of a scare when he went down following an innocuous coming together with Simon Thomas' coiffure, but he got back on his feet. Lads of the Village came close with a near post header from a corner which we did not defend well but Roger French's embonpoint was put to good use on the line.

The only change we made at half-time was to swap Waine Hetherington for George Kleanthous. Waine's job was done with half a clean sheet and he was now looking to add to his tally of goals whilst George went looking for a clean sheet to justify his assertion that in his younger days, he had been a very good keeper. The service to Waine was not great, but he was still able to provide clever assists, and he put Simon Thomas through for a close-range shot which the Lads of the Village keeper saved brilliantly with his outstretched leg – but in so doing injured his knee and had to be replaced in goal. There was time before the hour for Roger French to get away with a tackle from behind which may well have been inside the box and again in less foggy conditions might have cost us. The tackle was late – indeed some might say it started in last Sunday's game.

The tipping point came on the hour when Des Lindsay, Rob Lipscomb and Roger French departed the scene and Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard and Andy Faulks returned. It was not long before Andy Faulks latched on to a throw-in from Patrice Mongelard, turned and entered the box before beating the replacement keeper with a low shot at the near post. More goals came quickly after that: Andy got his third, fourth and fifth goals in a devastating fifteen-minute spell – two from defensive errors and one from an assist by Michael Ugwumba. In the midst of this frenzy Lads of the Village picked up their third injury and another player had to go off. Des Lindsay sportingly joined their ranks. At 6-0, I already had visions of being able to use the expression "Joy of Six" in my match report headline but Michael Ugwumba took that away by getting our seventh. What a goal it was, and to think that Michael Junior was not there to see it, and he might just not believe what his dad tells him. The young can be like that. Michael had earlier had a powerful twenty-five yarder which might well have burst the net had it not been a foot wide – so he was hungry. Anyway, he intercepted a pass just inside our half, saw the Lads of the Village back four were flat and high and he carried on and on, the keeper came off his line and Michael produced a delicate floater with his wrong foot to crown a great solo effort.

With a few minutes left, the question was whether we would register our first clean sheet of the season, as a birthday present to Gary Fentiman. We had a scare when the ball rose high off the crossbar and came back down in the mix with George gazing up the sky with a Lad of the Village forward loitering with intent. That scare was dealt with but then with three minutes to go we could not clear a ball in the centre of our defence, partly because Des Lindsay was involved, and the ball was scooped into our net via George's wrist, which was not as strong it seems, as Waine's wrist. In a way it felt right. Lads of the Village deserved that goal.

The après-match was enjoyable in the lovely wooden clubhouse, with friendly bar staff and the Lads of the Village contingent in good spirits despite the result. Buffet Heavy Roller Nick Waller was on hand to give a master class to his team mates in finishing off chips, sausages and buttered slices. Nick's Man-of-the-Match vote went to the chef.

Lads of the Village were hampered by injuries and will no doubt wish they could have posed us harder questions. Talking of questions, modesty prevents me from writing at length about the triumph, by a country mile, of team Coles/Mongelard/O'Flynn + brainy other halves, at the Farnborough Old Boys Guild quiz last night. With typical understatement, I wore my T-shirt of Champions, you know the one that says to not bother with Google because the wife knows everything.

Man-of-the-Match – our chief artificer Andy Faulks who scored five times on a Sunday morning with partner Jo Colyer watching.

22 November 2015: Reigate Priory Vets (N, 7-3)

All smiles as Senior Vets team put past troubles behind them

Rather than play underwater Russian roulette with our Farnborough pitch, we switched this home game to Beckenham Cricket Ground in Foxgrove Road, to make sure we'd get a run-out this week. The new management team of O&M – no that is not some kinky practice, it stands for O'Flynn and Mongelard, had their first outing against very tricky opponents we could not recall beating in previous games. Readers of past match reports might recall references to the Reigate Express, and it may even have been one of those many games where we cannot beat any team that has a Deano playing for them. Anyway, we had to give our opponents maximum respect, but we had also to play without fear. Numbers fluctuated during the week but we ended up with fourteen players, with Colin Brazier a late addition to the squad, after Steve Blanchard declared himself unavailable (more on that later).

After the monsoon of recent times, it was a relief to be out on a dry, crisp November morning, playing on a well-drained pitch, dappled in sunlight at times. It was cold but there was a joy and a team spirit in our play that added to the feel-good factor. Our opponents played their full part in the occasion, and even though this was a competitive game, there was not a bad tackle throughout the ninety minutes and tantric referee Mick Gearing had his whistle in his mouth a lot, but no cause to blow. "Ranieri" O'Flynn arranged his chess pieces in this way:

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Ian Coles, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard, Colin Brazier

Simon Thomas, Des Lindsay, Rob Lipscomb, George Kleanthous

Waine Hetherington, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Sinisa Gracanin, Nick Waller, Michael Ugwumba

Supporters: Jo Colyer, Michael Ugwumba Jr

The surprise package was Colin Mant at centre half - and what a lovely package that was, like opening up a nice surprise on Christmas day. Whilst Steve Blanchard went shopping Colin Mant put himself in the shop window. And dare I say it, O&M have a selection problem now. It is a nice problem to have though. Colin ventured the thought he had played in more positions for Farnborough Senior Vets than there are in the Kama Sutra. Wishful thinking, I thought, and he must have the Ladybird edition.

What about the football I hear you say? This was a 10-goal thriller – make no bones about that and there were some cracking goals scored by both teams. This is how I remember it. Farnborough go 1-0 up about ten minutes in when the keeper found a Des Lindsay twenty-yard kick too hot to handle. It would be very harsh to give this as an OG, so we won't. Five minutes later we go 2-0 up after Andy Faulks releases Waine Hetherington in the box and Waine does the business. With twenty minutes gone, the one Reigate Express on show today back-heeled the ball into our box to set up a team mate who finishes with aplomb.

We made three changes on the half hour as Nick Waller, Sinisa Gracanin and Michael Ugwumba came on for Des Lindsay, Waine Hetherington and Colin Brazier. A hint of hesitancy creeps into our play and Reigate draw level after 35 minutes with another smart finish as we fail to clear the ball decisively on the edge of our box. We then came under the most pressure we experienced today and Gary Fentiman had to pull off a couple of great point-blank saves. We restored our

lead shortly before half-time as Simon Thomas crossed dangerously for Andy Faulks to make the most of a spillage by the Reigate keeper. So that was five goals before half-time.

With perfect symmetry another five goals followed in the second half – and there were some crackers in there. Our fourth was a thing of beauty, crafted in quick assured movements like a symphony, with a back heel from George releasing Andy Faulks to advance on goal and finish exquisitely. The Reigate third and final goal was a classy job too, as their incisive front man latched on to a defence-splitting through ball to power the ball home off the base of the far post. Andy Faulks, Simon Thomas and Rob Lipscomb made way for the returning Waine Hetherington, Des Lindsay and Colin Brazier although Colin did not last long in his second coming and Rob Lipscomb was ushered back on. The last twenty-minutes were a purple patch for us. We were to score a fifth through George Kelanthous, and a sixth again from George - both assisted by Waine Hetherington – the 6th involving a buttock trap by Waine which bamboozled the Reigate defenders. There was a final seventh goal from a Waine Hetherington header from a cross by George, well two headers actually, as the keeper parried the first one back on to Waine's forehead for him to have a second bite at the juicy cherry. What was remarkable about these three goals was that the same two players were involved. All involved quick passing, movement, in a limpid, fluid movement – a sort of liquefaction if you like, built on the solidity of our midfield and defence, and two quicksilver forwards weaving patterns around defenders.

The handshakes at the end of the game were genuine and both sets of players felt they had been involved in a classic. To the neutral, the scoreline might seem one-sided but it certainly was not, as there was quality on both sides. Until we pulled away in the last twenty minutes it was a close affair. We had decided that today would be, funny T-shirt day. There were many worthy efforts – the most abstract being Sinisa Gracanin's *tabula rasa*, but the award for sartorial mirth went to Des Lindsay for his total outfit – a Biggles, MC Hammer and Arran combo – almost as rib-tickling as what can only be described as his Cornetto shot. Des had muscled and hustled his way into the Reigate box, with the score at 5-3, and shaped up for a shot at goal, unencumbered by a defender, and decided to be flashy as he inserted his foot under the ball and lifted it in a scooping motion. He hoped the ball would go over and beyond the keeper for a spectacular goal but he had put too much on it – two scoops will not go into a one-scoop cone, and we were left with a vision of what might have been and a fair bit of fun at Des' expense, which he took very well in the bar afterwards.

Buffet Vulture Nick Waller was on fire – as buttered slices, chips and sausages vanished. He not only polished off our tray but also swooped down on the pickings to be had from our opponents' buffet tray no sooner had they walked out through the door. Nick had been perched on a bar stool, as if watching the last throes of a tasty morsel, and he even found room for bar snacks after the two huge buffet trays had been picked clean.

Man-of-the-Match today – the consensus was that the whole team deserved it and so it was one vote for each and every player. This said, it is fair to record that before the team motion was passed, Colin Mant was starting to get his head in front (no Kama Sutra jokes please) but even he would agree that today was a triumph of the collective over the individual.

29 November 2015: Old Tamponians Super Vets (A, 2-5)

Old Tamponians stem Farnborough flow

This was a bloody good game despite the conditions and if last week was about winning with style, today was about losing with grace. The game was switched by our opponents to a local artificial surface, at the Samuel Montagu Youth Centre in SE3, a 4G surface, to ensure the match would take place given the precipitation that was forecast. The 4G surface was wireless – by this I mean there were no high wires strung across the pitch, but immense, and this affected our reception in a number of areas. No such problem for Old Tamps who were sharper for most of the match but for an interlude in the second period. The wind and rain were the same for both teams, but the better passing, gauge of the bounce, incision, connectivity and feel for the surface belonged to our hosts.

Our numbers dwindled down to twelve overnight from injuries and other impediments.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Michael Ugwumba

Simon Thomas, Des Lindsay, Sinisa Gracanin, George Kleanthous

Waine Hetherington, Andy Faulks

Substitute: Rob Lipscomb

Supporters: Michael Ugwumba Jr, Jack Kleanthous (another West Ham fan, but thankfully with a Liverpool supporter for a mum)

It took us a good while to cross the half way line when the game got started. Old Tamps moved the ball better than we did, with shorter accurate passes and players who seemed half a yard quicker, and more switched on. We conceded two goals even before we had forced a save from their keeper. Both goals were well-taken but we played a part in the build up. The first came about ten minutes into the game after we failed to clear the ball on the edge of the box and it fell to a bustling forward with quick feet who peeled off, and finished high into our net from three yards out. The second Old Tamps goal ten minutes later was even better, a very good finish after a one-touch lay-off took an isolated Colin Mant out of the equation, and the incoming Old Tamps midfielder, free as a bird, picked his spot and finished crisply.

Rob Lipscomb replaced Simon Thomas on the half hour – our game improved a bit and we strung some shorter passes together but could never really penetrate their solid defence which had some big units in there, and a player who could shift the ball sixty or seventy yards with a wand of a left foot.

We thought the wind would help us more in the second period but barely five minutes had elapsed when Old Tamps got a third which was wind-assisted as a through ball over the top held up in the wind to delay Gary's intervention from his line, allowing just enough time for an Old Tamps forward to nip in and finish from a tight angle. It started raining at that point and that woke us up a bit though the sight of George Kleanthous leaving on the hour to go to the West Ham game left me wondering where a goal would come from. Simon Thomas was back on to give us more thrust down the right.

However, between the 60th and 80th minutes we had a purple patch. Waine Hetherington and Andy Faulks started linking up better and we began to get behind the Old Tamps defence, and

earn free-kicks on the edge of their box. With about seventy minutes on the clock Michael Ugwumba stepped up to take a direct free-kick from twenty-five yards out. The connection was sweet, powerful and unerring and the ball arrowed into the top corner via a limp wrist from the Old Tamps keeper who did well to get a hand to it. Better was to follow, ten minutes later, if such a thing was possible, with another free-kick from Michael from the same place – and this time there was no interference with the flight of the ball and the power of the shot was therefore amplified in our minds. I challenge anyone to name a sweeter sound in football than that of a net groaning and bulging to absorb the impact of a spherical rocket.

There were about ten minutes left. We had a good opportunity from a corner which Rob Lipscomb almost got the right connection with. That was to be our last scoring opportunity. Old Tamps had too much quality not to make us pay from lapses, and they scored twice in the last five minutes to extinguish any hopes we had of getting anything out of that game. In truth, the match ended with the right result. We never did enough to win this game and we'll have to see if we can do it on grass when they visit Farnborough in half of twenty-eight days.

Six of us made it back to the Old Tamps clubhouse in Kidbrooke Park Road, a short drive away along the south circular. We were treated to a feast: breaded chicken wings, quiche, prawn and tuna vol-au-vents, mini scotch eggs, pork pie, egg mayonnaise wraps, tuna wraps, bijou pastry cases with egg and tuna, and cherry tomatoes on a bed of crisp lettuce. We needed Buffet Reducer Nick Waller on a day like this. I hate to see food wasted.

There was plenty of room in the bar for Des Lindsay to tell us about the day Pele played football against his brother Mark (ex-Crystal Palace, and the footballer in the family), and the day Mohammad Ali met Des Lindsay. He had the photos to prove it, on his phone. Moreover, the Old Tamps manager confirmed Des' assertion that the artificial surface we played on today did indeed have a slope, as he was the groundsman there, if I heard him correctly. I am not sure what a 4G artificial pitch groundsman does, but we were grateful for his efforts to get us a game today.

Man-of-the-Match today – birthday boy Michael Ugwumba, 48 today, with two belters. You wait ages for a blockbuster of a free-kick and then two come along. I reckon the air displaced by either of these shots would blow out 48 candles on a cake. Michael was so delighted with his goals he took the kit home, probably gambling that Mrs U would wash it for him, as it was a special occasion.

6 December 2015: Orpington Vets (A, 5-6)

Farnborough edged out in 11-goal derby

If you want goals this is the game for you – there have been thirty-seven goals between these two sides over the past four games including today's bonanza, and all I would say is that we did not get half or more of them. This was once again a case of losing with grace, but this time giving a much better account of ourselves, and coming much closer to snatching a draw from defeat. It seems these days we do not start playing until we are four or more goals behind. It shows character you might think but we must not make a habit of it.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Michael Ugwumba

Rob Lipscomb, Des Lindsay, Sinisa Gracanin, Nick Waller

Waine Hetherington, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Ian Coles, Kypros Michael

Supporter: Michael Ugwumba Jr

Before the game we all signed a get-well card for Pam Shoebridge, including George Kleanthous who was not there; but Waine Hetherington gave voice to his thoughts which were lost in translation a little as George wished Pam a happy birthday. Still, it was all a sign of the affection the Senior Vets have for someone who has kept us, particularly Nick Waller, and our visitors well-fed for years after home matches. I added a French box of chocolates to the card.

Talking of boxes of chocolates, you are never quite sure what you are going to get with our team these days. We competed well for the opening ten minutes, even taking the game to Orpington, but then we had a poor twenty-five minutes which saw us concede four quick goals. The first was a penalty conceded by Colin Mant, harsh I thought, as the Orpington player had lost control of the ball which was out of play when Colin checked his momentum. The referee, the oldest Orpington player who had stepped in at the last minute, after the original referee had had become unavailable, had little choice. In fact, I should put on record that our team felt the referee had a good game, and was fair to both sides even if his whistle could not always be heard. Colin will also blame himself for the second Orpington goal after he missed a header but we have all done it. Colin is having a bit of an identity crisis, as the utility player of the team. He has been banished by the Worshipful Companies of Forwards and Midfielders and is looking for a home in the defence. He dazzled in his first outing but is still learning the craft. The Defenders Union is a less fickle one, I hope. Still Colin's boot scored a goal today, more on that later.

The third and fourth Orpington goals followed a pattern of quick breaks by the darting forward dynamo, well-timed and weighted lay-offs, and good finishes. We were not being outclassed but were just punished for mistakes by a team that took all the initial chances that came their way. Ian Coles and Kypros Michael came on after the half hour for Colin Mant and Des Lindsay, and we started to claw our way back into the game, and had a bit of luck when an Orpington shot crashed against the bar. Kypros had not been on long before he laid the ball off on the edge of the Orpington for Sinisa Gracanin to shake off his marker with a sinuous hip movement and open the way for a clear shot on goal which reduced the deficit to a mere three goals. Sini undid all of that good work moments later with an ill-advised back pass which set up a fifth goal for Orpington and we still had about ten minutes to go before the half-time clementines. Kypros and Andy Faulks combined well in the last five minutes of the half, with their direct running, to register two

more goals for us and give us a semblance of hope. First, Andy set up Kypros for a low left-footed shot from twenty yards which fizzed across the box into the bottom corner. Then Kypros returned the compliment with Andy finishing well – with the boots he had borrowed from Colin Mant, after leaving his own boots where he played yesterday, the exact whereabouts being not very clear to Andy. Colin's boots were very pleased to experience the unfamiliar feeling of scoring.

Orpington made several changes at half-time but competed well in the initial stages of the half. They had a dash of good fortune when a clearing header from Ian Coles hit their forward on the back of the head and he was on to the rebound quick as a flash to lash the ball home from just outside the box. Gary Fentiman got a hand to it but the audacity, technique and quick thinking behind the shot deserved a goal. Our heads could have dropped then but instead we rallied. Colin Mant and Des Lindsay came back on for Steve Blanchard and Waine Hetherington. Colin was to have a better second half hour than his first, and this included a remarkable goal line clearance when most of us had given up hope of not conceding again. I have seen him miss goals from the same position.

Kypros got our fourth after a long cross field pass from Patrice Mongelard at right-back found its way to him and he finished well. Kypros was denied five minutes later when his shot came off the keeper and trickled goalwards – I am told the keeper's scooping motion was a sure sign that the ball had crossed the line but we'll never know and we did not make a fuss. We were a tad unfortunate too when Andy Faulks powered a shot against the bar from the edge of the box after a clearing header from the many corners we forced. We pressed hard in the final stages and were rewarded with a penalty five minutes from the end after Des Lindsay was interfered with in the box. I am told Rob Lipscomb scored with aplomb. In the end we ran out of time and could not undo the damage done unto us in the first half. We won the second half you could say, and Orpington would have welcomed the final whistle more than we did.

The après-match was a light-hearted affair with musings about democracy, exotic cheroots, the weather, and why we play football on Sundays. There was an absence of food, and that was probably why Buffet Spotter Nick Waller kept asking us if we thought he'd lost weight. I must ask him where he purchased his mirror. It could be a best-seller with the festive season almost upon us.

Man-of-the-Match by a long chalk – new Kyp on the block – Kypros Michael, with two goals, two assists, and the promise of much more to come, not bad for a first 11-a-side game in 11 years.

13 December 2015: Old Tamponians Super Vets (N, 4-4)

Farnborough come from behind three times to share satisfaction

We were well beaten by today's opponents on an artificial pitch two weeks ago and were looking to avoid a repeat of that. The first thing we did was to switch this game to the Beckenham Cricket Club in Foxgrove Road to ensure (a) we would get a game, and (b) one on real grass at that. There was a fair amount of moisture about, the pitch was well lubricated, and the air was still and mild for the time of year. Our fifteen dwindled to thirteen as Mick O'Flynn was still out with his calf (no more jokes about dating a baby cow, please) and Phil Anthony, probably the best full-back we have as I said to the opposition, was loaned to the other side as they were short.

Starting XI:

Paul Kelliher

Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Nick Waller

Rob Lipscomb, Kyros Michael, Sinisa Gracanin, George Kleanthous

Waine Hetherington, Des Lindsay

Substitutes: Steve Blanchard, Andy Faulks

Supporters: Hannah Kleanthous; Freya, Kathleen and Thea Anthony and mascot Caesar.

Our generosity continued into the first ten minutes as we brought gifts for the opposition. That was not very wise of us you might think. Sloppy play from us and good finishing by our opponents saw us go 2-0 down before the ten minutes were up. It could have been worse but for a great one-handed save by debutant Paul Kelliher who did his best to fill Gary Fentiman's massive shirt. Once again there was torpor and a lack of composure in our play and we had trouble establishing a footing in the game, in the case of Nick Waller, literally as he gave a good impression of wearing Colin Brazier's "pantoufles", on ice. It took us a while to emerge.

Des Lindsay lifted the mood with a powerful shot that the Old Tamponians keeper saved well, and he was also on hand to tip a couple of Kyros Michael's low shots past the post. Kyros had at least two attempts at producing a spectacular volley. The momentum we were building was rewarded when George Kleanthous put the ball back in the mix for Waine Hetherington to poke home through a forest of legs from three yards out. Soon after, on the half hour Andy Faulks came on for Waine Hetherington – and we also brought Steve Blanchard on for Ian Coles at the back. It did not take Andy Faulks long to make his presence felt. First, he flashed a shot across the goal after bringing the ball down neatly wide in the Old Tamps box and he was there to play Kyros Michael through on goal, and Kyros' left peg did the rest. Old Tamps had to re-adjust their formation midway through the half when one of their players went off injured and they brought on a 72-year-old who had only come to watch, and hats off to the old boy who played his part in checking our flow.

We had clawed our way back into the game and finished the half with plenty of hope for the second period. But that is not the Farnborough Senior Vets way. We seem to attract adversity and early in the second half Old Tamps crafted a well-taken third goal after we made a hash of retaining the ball from a throw-in. Generally, throw-ins were difficult for both teams and referee Mick Gearing's whistle was not in tantric mode as, like some excited teenager, he kept blowing for foul throws, re-taken corners and free-kicks. We huffed and puffed, forced corners and rained crosses into the Old Tamps box all to no avail. Experience and nous abounded in their defence, and it was not clear where a second Farnborough equaliser would come from. Waine Hetherington and Ian Coles had come back on after sixty minutes for Colin Mant and Des Lindsay for the final push and that proved to be an inspired move by our Irish Druid Mick O'Flynn. Waine

was to be rewarded for getting behind the defence and crossing low into the box towards the far post. An Old Tamps player was unfortunate to divert the ball past his keeper with a deft touch. The football Gods would make up for this shortly. With barely ten minutes left, the same player produced a moment of sublime skill as he lifted the ball over and behind him, thirty yards or so from our goal in a central area, turned, left three of our players gazing at a star, as if Bethlehem-bound, and applied an exquisite finish to curl the ball into our top corner. It was a goal that deserved to win the game except that we had other ideas. In the last five minutes we created probably as many chances as we had in the previous forty. Andy Faulks had a long range shot and a close-range volley that went close. With only a few minutes left Ian Coles lofted a ball deep behind the Old Tamps defence and Andy Faulks slid in to steer the ball home. Old Tamps appealed for off-side even though the ball was in the air a long time. For a fleeting moment I was worried, as linesman Des Lindsay was waving his flag furiously, until I realised, he was in fact joining in the celebrations. There was still time for us to win this game, unbelievably. In the dying minutes Waine Hetherington and Kyros Michael both broke through, the Old Tamps keeper was in the wrong position and all it would have taken, seemingly, was for either of them to roll the ball into the net but they got in each other's way. Waine poked the ball towards the goal as he was off balance rather than stroking it confidently, or leaving it to the upright and goal-facing Kyros and the ball trickled harmlessly into touch as the final whistle went. In the end a draw was a fair result, for an enjoyable game played in excellent spirit.

I tarried in the changing room and showers and when I appeared in the bar area the two buffet trays of chips, sausages and buttered bread slices, were almost empty, much to the amusement of my team mates, including Buffet Barracuda Nick Waller, who will all swear as one that a look of panic crossed my face, allegedly. Playing the perfect host, I was driven to make conversation with our visitors, so I could find sustenance. The Anthony sisters also allowed me to have some of their chips, in return for a memorable joke about a dog I told them several weeks ago.

The bar area was initially packed as Wellcome Super Vets, our opponents next week, who are based at the same place, returned from their away fixture. They had played Catford Wanderers Vets and brought news of a new signing for that team. In the end there were five of us left – apparently in no great hurry to go home. Nick Waller challenged the whole bar to a bacon flavour fries eating competition. Colin Mant kept talking about being expected to produce an erection at home, with Rob Lipscomb and Steve Blanchard's assistance – something about a doll's house. I thought of Ibsen's play briefly – a work of social realism that explores domestic pressures.

Man-of-the-Match - Rob Lipscomb – after the votes were swiftly gathered in by Hannah Kleanthous, for a muscular performance in midfield, which got the Old Tamponians injured player on the touchline in a bit of an unnecessary lather, so his team mates thought. He had calmed down when we shared some bread later in the bar, as I have explained above.

Next week we are back at the same ground to play Wellcome Super Vets – we served up a 9-goal Christmas cracker in the corresponding game last season. And it was Christmas jumper day – as it will be again next Sunday. Mick O'Flynn mentioned something about a female elf stroking Ian Coles' carrot - another Christmas myth shattered I thought.

20 December 2015: Wellcome Super Vets (A, 3-4)

Farnborough wake up too late

Another game, and another mountain to climb in the last half hour, for Farnborough Senior Vets, after the usual seasonal gifts for the opposition (seasonal as in occurring all season, rather than for Christmas only). We were back at the Beckenham Cricket Club in Foxgrove Road but this time as visitors, and once again with thirteen players. The pitch was perfect, there was no wind and the thin spray in the air dissipated quickly as the excellent referee got us under way.

Starting XI:

Paul Kelliher

Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Colin Brazier

Rob Lipscomb, Kypros Michael, Sinisa Gracanin, George Kleanthous

Waine Hetherington, Des Lindsay

Substitutes: Steve Blanchard, Andy Faulks

Supporter: Hannah Kleanthous

Andy Faulks was still making his way to the ground when we had conceded our first goal. We had made a good start, we thought, matching a strong side with some big units. Barely ten minutes had elapsed when a hole appeared in the centre of our defence and the space was filled by a mobile Wellcome forward who timed his arrival just right, to volley the cross from the right past Paul Kelliher from two yards out. We did not dwell too much on the manner of this setback and set about looking for an equaliser. We thought we were about to get it when Rob Lipscomb was the first to the ball, and unchallenged, as the Wellcome keeper could not hold a George Kleanthous free-kick. Rob must have taken his real eye off the ball, or it came to his wrong foot, or the bounce or height was not optimal, or he was already day celebrating in his mind's eye, but he contrived to lift the ball over the bar from less than two yards out. Rob's inner groan increased five minutes later when he missed a better opportunity arguably. Kypros Michael earned a penalty after getting behind his marker and finding his angled run on the goal, cut short unfairly. Rob, who until today could claim he had never missed a penalty (without revealing how many he had taken) saw his tame and poorly-placed kick pushed onto the bar by the Wellcome keeper.

However, just when we were beginning to think it would be one of those days, Waine Hetherington produced a peach of a volley from a central position twenty yards out on the edge of the Wellcome box. The ball swerved, so did the keeper but in the other direction, and we had a well-deserved and handsome equaliser. At that point I think the Farnborough outlook was fairly positive, we were moving the ball well, had a compact midfield, and were creating half chances with Kypros Michael and Des Lindsay in particular giving the Wellcome defence something to think about. We made two changes on the half hour with Andy Faulks and Steve Blanchard coming on for Kypros Michael and Patrice Mongelard. We lost a bit of rhythm and Wellcome could sense it. They were to take the lead with about five minutes of the half left. From a Farnborough perspective the goal was not good. Waine Hetherington had volleyed the ball back into our defence, from the left wing, inside our half, mumbling the name Steve, only to see the ball knock Colin Brazier over, fall nicely to a Wellcome forward who quickly transferred it to the other side where the scorer of the first goal had once again uncannily ghosted into space without a Farnborough defender within spitting distance (not that we would, but you know what I mean) and he produced a tidy finish from two yards out into the bottom corner.

Any hopes we might have had of getting back in the game were dashed early in the second half when we failed to defend a corner. Our box was more crowded than a nativity scene and the

ball was bundled into our net. Worse came soon after when Des Lindsay got behind the Wellcome defence and went hard and low, with his shot, only to find his groin was not up to it. Des was helped off the pitch to restore circulation to the affected part and Kypros Michael was back on. The game was not an hour old when we made it even more difficult for ourselves. There was a mix-up at the back – and a header from Steve Blanchard intended for Paul Kelliher never got there, nor did Paul, and the same Wellcome forward who had already punished us twice, nipped in and steered the ball home to grab a deserved hat-trick.

Remarkably we hit back almost immediately as George Kleanthous skipped past his marker on the right, played the ball wide to Kypros Michael who advanced towards the by-line before crossing the ball on a plate for Rob Lipscomb to finish crisply. Patrice Mongelard then came on for Colin Brazier as we pressed to get back in the game. Rob Lipscomb combined well with George Kleanthous, for the latter to get our third goal with a low shot into the far corner from the edge of the box with eleven minutes left. Rob hit the base of the post soon after and we genuinely felt we could claw our way back in the game. Although Des had left the pitch his left boot was back on when Patrice Mongelard had to replace his left boot which had disintegrated. “Good luck with getting a new pair of boots past Mrs M” whispered Colin Brazier – it is done, if you are wondering, and she even sanctioned a more expensive pair this time – it must be Christmas!). We had one or two scares at the back but did not fall further behind and that gave us hope. The referee awarded us several free-kicks around the box as the Wellcome defending got more frantic. The last action of the game saw Sinisa Gracanin get behind the Wellcome defence to volley a lofted free-kick over the bar from two yards out. That was it – there was no more time left on the referee’s watch. Andy Faulks could not get the service he craved and his match was a frustrating affair. Once again, I would venture the thought that the whistle was more welcome to our opponents than to us.

Our Christmas jumper competition did not attract as many entries as we hoped but there were some splendid entries. The winner of the junior section was Hannah Kleanthous, whilst the Senior competition (without batteries) was won by Colin Brazier for a vintage effort, and Mick O’Flynn won the “with batteries” one. Colin Mant’s effort gets a mention too, as we almost managed to convince him, early doors, that the competition had been cancelled in an overnight email that he had failed to read. But he was not the Farnborough player to provide most amusement for his team mates today. I was.

The buffet offering was the now familiar sausages, chips and buttered slices with various condiments. Whilst I had access to more than the previous week, I was still under scrutiny for my consumption. My team mates’ idea of a joke was to produce photographic evidence of me swooping on last Sunday’s buffet on our opponents’ table. As if the visual comedy was not enough, there was a surprisingly witty caption which said “FOBG Senior Vets Appoint Patrice Mangetout as Head Nutritionist”. Mrs M was highly amused, and thought the pose was typical of the man. I hope this photo won’t be appearing on the club website with this report.

Man-of-the-Match - George Kleanthous, for a dynamic performance, and a Christmas jumper which was almost as good as his daughter’s.

3 January 2016: Old Colfeians Vets (A, 1-3)

Senior Vets lose 2016 unbeaten record

Dear readers, you will be as pleasantly surprised as we were to see this game was played. The vista of empty playing fields after empty playing fields along the A20 and elsewhere, under leaden skies in unadulterated diluvian gloom, on the way to the Old Colfeians ground in Eltham, did not exactly lift the spirit. Nor did the fact that the first ten players at the ground were ours but the opposition trickled in – and in the end they had fourteen players to our thirteen. They were also able to provide a referee from their number who did an excellent job.

The Old Colfeians manager had offered the view late last night that the weather had not been that bad, and he was hopeful the game would be played. It was not until I got talking to the first opposition player to get there today that I found out their manager was now based in Norwich. The key though was the amount of money they had spent on drainage in recent times – a lesson for Farnborough I thought, in the unrelenting drizzle.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Colin Brazier

Rob Lipscomb, Sinisa Gracanin, George Kleanthous, Simon Thomas

Waine Hetherington, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Ian Lyons, Mick O'Flynn

Supporters: Steve Blanchard, Michelle and Hannah Kleanthous, Roger French

We had a number of revenants in the side today after absences. Another revenant, not in the side, was Roger French who ran the line for the second half, having declined the referee's whistle on account of his poor knowledge of the laws of the game. It goes to show that you can still play the game without knowing its laws – and that, I would postulate, applies to most of us.

We started as well as Old Colfs and the initial ten minutes were even as both sides tested each other. Old Colfs had two double wardrobes in the centre of midfield and we struggled to penetrate their defence. They then showed the greater bite and incision in the opening period and were rewarded after twenty minutes with a well-taken goal by one of their two outstanding players today, and the one with the most striking coiffure we have come up against this season.

We did well to restrict them to one goal in the half, with a combination of good saves from Gary Fentiman, tackling and covering by our back four aided on rare occasions by a midfielder. We could see that we were not competitive or energetic, or positionally smart in midfield; that we lacked numbers and mobility in their box and that too often some of our players (who know who they are) were carrying the ball, looking to beat two or three opponents instead of passing the ball. Doing something about all that was complicated because of the presence of opponents as Jean-Paul Sartre once said. Old Colfs also seemed better able to use the width of the pitch which was not inconsiderable.

We brought on Mick O'Flynn and Ian Lyons on the half hour for Sinisa Gracanin and Simon Thomas. There was now more talking on the pitch, but also less penetration. The other outstanding Old Colfs player, a slight and youthful presence with a full head of dark hair in the centre of their defence was more than equal to our threat. Said player even allowed himself the luxury of an acrobatic bicycle kick to clear his lines, quite a sight for arthritic fifty somethings. It was far from clear as the half-time whistle went where a Farnborough goal would come from, as

it could not be said that we had tested the old Old Colfs keeper so far. However, Mick O'Flynn's half-time pep talk gave us heart.

Old Colfs made a number of changes at half-time and I think we took advantage of that as we had the better of the early exchanges in the second half. Gradually there was more of the play in their half and we limited them to occasional breaks. The corners and free-kicks started to mount up in our favour. On the hour Andy Faulks put a free-kick on a postage stamp at the far post for Rob Lipscomb to draw a point blank save from the Old Colfs keeper. The danger was not over as Mick O'Flynn recycled the ball back to Andy Faulks who let fly from just inside the box. The ball must have moved through the air as the Old Colfs keeper appeared to grab it but it squirmed out of his grasp and into the onion bag. The Committee on dubious assists will award the assist to Mick but some of the members might well vote for the keeper. At least this pass from Mick came off unlike the back heels which I think are best left to fashionista Des Lindsay.

Waine Hetherington and Rob Lipscomb made way for Sinisa Gracanin and Simon Thomas for the last half hour of the game. For the next fifteen minutes there was only one team likely to score – we got behind them and only the lack of a telling final ball prevented us from edging ahead. We found the top of the bar from a set-piece. Old Colfs had to be at their best to keep us out and they were. The last fifteen minutes were a frustration for us – we were pressing for a winner but got caught. Old Colfs found the net twice more – the first with a deflection off the hairstyle I told you about, and the second after we had carelessly misplaced a pass in midfield and a quick incursion in our box was crowned with a well-placed low shot that beat Gary Fentiman's outstretched frame. It was a bitter pill to swallow but we had to, because we had not made the most of the phases when we were dominant, and Old Colfs finished better than we could. Rob Lipscomb had come back for the last ten minutes or so for Ian Lyons but to no avail.

We were disappointed but also glad to have been able to play a game. We did not even mind the fact that only two showers were dispensing hot water, and that Waine Hetherington's ablutions were as protracted and thorough as Andy Faulks' were spare. We might have struggled to get enough players in the Old Colfs box but we had no problem outnumbering them in the bar – despite the absence of vittles. Papa Buffet Nick Waller had chosen the right game to go missing. Roger French joined us to dry his posterior on the radiator after he had slipped over whilst retrieving the ball running the line. It looked like he was having footwear issues à la Brazier though Colin said he would be happy to take a stud if it could get in. Roger seemed genuinely pleased to be in our midst again but would not reveal what New Year resolutions he had made.

Man-of-the-Match – Colin Mant, not bad for a player whose podiatric wellness was questioned, in a spirit of Christmas jest, recently. The two Colfs and one Ian claimed the lion's share of the votes today – somehow fitting against Old Colfeians. Our fe deserved one vote at least but did not get any despite some excellent saves which kept the score respectable.

24 January 2016: Glendale Vets (A, 3-2)

Senior Vets just about avoid sticky end

Three weeks on since our last game and the same leaden skies and sticky conditions awaited us. The pitch was very moist, heavy in fact, but at least we got a game against sporting opponents in Glendale Vets, at the Croydon Postal Sports Ground in Trenham Drive, Warlingham. Although we started the week with a possible sixteen players, we were in fact down to twelve by kick-off time for various reasons, including a bout of man flu, and at 9:17 this morning news that our top goal scorer, Andy Faulks, was unwell (a bit like Jeffrey Bernard used to be unwell, I wondered at the time, perhaps uncharitably). Still, with only twelve players I thought we would avoid the usual gripes about players getting less than a full game, though judging by the performance today some players do not have a full game in them – they know who they are.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Colin Mant, Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Coles, Colin Brazier

Rob Lipscomb, Des Lindsay, Kypros Michael, Simon Thomas

Waine Hetherington, George Kleanthous

Substitute: Patrice Mongelard

Supporter: Hannah Kleanthous

Glendale are a more than competent outfit with a good blend of muscle and craft, and quite a few technical players. Our games against them are usually close affairs, and today was no exception. They scored first after ten minutes with a smart control, turn and low shot in the box. Our play had been tentative and they had started better. Once we had weathered their initial thrust, we could see opportunities, in particular down the left where Kypros Michael had the beating of his full-back. It was from the left that our clinical equaliser came, thankfully within five minutes of Glendale taking the lead. George Kleanthous had slipped his marker and got to the byline before cutting the ball back for Des Lindsay whose first-time shot was crisp and well-directed beyond the keeper. Des might well have injured himself in the process as his movement started to look laboured from then on. Soon after, we edged ahead as Kypros Michael was clean through after a threaded pass from Waine Hetherington and the finish was accurate. There were more fireworks from Kypros as he broke through five minutes later and fired against the cross bar – only to see Rob Lipscomb arrive first to the rebound to steer the ball home. In about twenty minutes we had taken the game by the scruff of the neck, and away from Glendale but they were not out of it. Gary Fentiman had to be vigilant and good clearing headers from Colin Brazier and even Simon Thomas in a rare apparition in our box helped us to preserve our lead.

The decision to substitute Des for myself after thirty-five minutes was made easy by a dodgy back heel from Des in an inappropriate area of the field which nearly cost us (as he knows). Des' ageing groin had stiffened again, and he went to slowly walk the line for the rest of the game. We had a glorious chance to extend our lead shortly before half-time but George Kleanthous was greedy, and shot wide, ignoring calls from better-placed team mates.

When the second half started, we had trouble picking up where we left off. The changes made by Glendale had given them a fresh impetus and we had to work hard to preserve our two-goal cushion. I do not feel that we looked like scoring in the first quarter hour of the second half. Our chances came later after Glendale had narrowed the deficit. Yes, midway through the second half Glendale got their reward though it did not quite take the form you might expect. Gary Fentiman had done superlatively well to parry a close-range shot and the ball had just gone up

vertically above him as he fell to the ground. He kept his eye on it and was fully expecting to catch it as it returned to earth even as he lay on his back on the ground. There was no Glendale player with three yards you see, and Gary called for it, but he had not factored in the Mant effect. Colin Mant took charge of the situation, approaching the ball with great confidence, maximum fluency and elasticity in his legs, perfect eye to limb co-ordination, fully intending to clear the danger, put his team mates' minds at rest and dash Glendale hopes on the rocks of the Farnborough defence. That was the theory – the execution was a different matter as he sliced the ball into our own net off Gary's outstretched arm. Even Nick Waller will have trouble getting a more memorable own goal this season, and probably for as long as he plays.

At that point we seemed to wake up and started creating chances – only to see them neutered by woeful shooting and crossing. Kypros Michael must have wondered where his shooting boots were as he cut in from the left and from three yards blasted the ball wide. There were other mis-directed efforts from Waine Hetherington and George Kleanthous. The question was would we hold on as Glendale were not out of it and kept creating chances and getting corners. Then we had the one controversial moment of the game. The ball had gone out of play we thought in our favour but Glendale took the throw and from the ensuing move got an equaliser. We managed to persuade the referee that the throw should have been ours. The referee (the third Glendale player to play the part) might have been confused by Des Lindsay's antics on the line, but he must have had a doubt in his mind and we were relieved. A less sporting side could have made it more difficult – so all credit to Glendale who were miffed but made little of it.

We continued to miss opportunities at the other end and it needed clearing headers from Colin Brazier and Patrice Mongelard in the final five minutes to give us our first win of 2016. I thought a draw would have been a fair result but not everyone on our team agreed. What is clear though is that we are going to have to go into games with more than twelve players and put more of our chances away. Some players will also have to do a lot more tracking back – they know who they are. Others will have to be more reliable.

I barely had time to enjoy the hospitality of our hosts and nibbled at a couple of egg sandwiches before I had to go and find the driver of the tank that was blocking my swift exit from the ground. I am not sure what was more upsetting, leaving a tray of sandwiches (especially as Buffet Landfill Nick Waller was absent), or thinking that Mrs M might not believe me when I said my return had been delayed by another vehicle. I took the precaution of taking a photo on my phone just in case – not of the sandwiches, but of the cars. I did find, two pitches away, the apologetic but thoughtless culprit among spectators at a kids' game. I left Rob Lipscomb looking for the same outcome with a piece of paper bearing the registration number of the car that had boxed him in. We were both stuck for a while.

Seven players registered **Man-of-the-Match** votes but the Oscar was shared between Colin Mant and Rob Lipscomb.

31 January 2016: Lads of the Village Super Vets (A, 1-1)

Senior Vets snatch a draw from the jaws of defeat and victory

It had been a while since we had played at the Stone Recreation Ground in DA9 9DQ – our opponents were then known as Welsh Tavern if my memory serves me right – and I have played quite a few games for the Farnborough Old Boys Guild Vets – exactly 500 in fact including today's. Now they are known as Lads of the Village Super Vets – the significance of the name will be revealed at the end.

The morning drizzle had dissipated by kick-off and the pitch was probably as good as any we have played on in any January. This was our third game this month and we mustered fifteen players for the occasion. We also tried to put out of our minds the result of the last game we played against today's opponents. It was clear quite quickly that they too were trying to do this, and to this end had a few different players, whilst I fear we were complacent.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman;

Colin Mant, Ian Coles, Colin Brazier, Patrice Mongelard;

Rob Lipscomb, Sinisa Gracanin, Kypros Michael, Simon Thomas;

Waine Hetherington, Andy Faulks.

Substitutes: Mick O'Flynn, Steve Blanchard, Phil Anthony and Obi Ugwumba.

Supporter: Dave O'Flynn.

The pattern of the game was set quite early on, a lot of wasted possession for us, our opponents defending robustly and looking to hit us on the break. We also exhibited a severe lack of scoring opportunities, a pedestrian attack and midfield, too many flicks and mis-placed passes, a fear of entering the opponent's box – a form of pygmachophobia, not enough movement in the final third and defenders asking where the midfield was.

I mean no disrespect to our opponents when I say that Gary Fentiman in our goal had only one shot on goal to deal with (or not, more on that later) in the first half. He had even less in the second and I may be wrong but I do not recall our opponents registering a corner in the whole game (no they had at least two in the first-half- ed.). Andy Faulks had our best chance of the half after only ten minutes when he found the keeper with a close-range volley. It would take Andy another hour before he had another sniff on goal. Simon Thomas feathered a cross-cum-shot that looked easy on the eye. We earned a few free-kicks around the crowded Lads of the Village box but made nothing of them.

Midway through the half we made four changes as Mick O'Flynn, Steve Blanchard, Phil Anthony and Obi Ugwumba came on for Sinisa Gracanin, Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant and Kypros Michael. These changes were necessary given the size of the squad but I do not think anyone would challenge the view that initially the changes helped Lads of the Village more than they did Farnborough. In a particularly dismal passage of play combining a poor touch in midfield, diabolical defending and a goalkeeping conundrum we contrived to concede and Lads of the Village had a lead that would have been as unexpected as it was welcome to them. The Lads of the Village right winger had picked up the stray Farnborough pass, advanced unencumbered by Farnborough defenders, and decided to have a punt from the edge of the box. The lob was tame and you would think a 6ft 3in keeper, unchallenged, not too far off his line, with a clear line of sight would preserve the integrity of his goal – but that was not to be. We were behind and so it remained at half-time.

There was much wind and fury with the oranges. Too many voices confused Simon Thomas. His lines were muddled in his mind, and words like tracking back, picking players up, running past granddad marking him, were all jumbled up. A few others were no longer sure of their best playing positions; however, once the second half got under way we settled and resumed our domination of possession, hoping for a breakthrough. We thought we had it when Mick O'Flynn played Andy Faulks through on goal and Andy (the scorer of five goals when we last played today's opponents) could not place his low shot beyond the keeper who saved very well. Wayne Hetherington got to the rebound with an empty goal but was adjudged by the referee to have handled. There were no complaints from us. The referee had an excellent game and before the game was over was to show his authority and fairness once more.

With about twenty-five minutes of the half left, we brought Patrice Mongelard, Sinisa Gracanin, Kypros Michael and Colin Mant back on, for Simon Thomas, Ian Coles, Colin Brazier and Rob Lipscomb. The last twenty minutes were frantic. We laid siege to the Lads of the Village goal, with Obi Ugwumba imposing himself in the midfield battle and Kypros Michael providing a cutting edge down the left. Wayne Hetherington wriggled free of his marker in the six-yard box, opted to shoot instead of rolling the ball to an unmarked, screaming Andy Faulks for a tap-in.

With fifteen minutes left, we got the goal we deserved as Kypros Michael hustled his way into the box, drifted wide to the left and from a tight angle found the net at the far post. By then Mick O'Flynn had reached his playing time limit with his calf and Simon Thomas was back on. There was only one winner in it at that point but the game got disjointed. First, Sinisa Gracanin picked up an injury, a knock in the ribs left him winded and he had to be replaced by Rob Lipscomb. Not long after Rob tangled with an opponent who sought to rearrange Rob's features with his forehead. The referee brandished the red card quite rightly and the Lads of the Village player went off after threatening to disturb the peace further more than once. We ban players for that sort of behaviour. The unsavoury scenes were too much for Simon and he went off to be replaced by Colin Brazier now playing a new role as a right winger (no, really! - ed.). We then fashioned arguably our best scoring opportunity with five minutes left - Kypros Michael found space in the box, with his back to goal, turned and advanced on goal in a central position – he must have been a yard from the goal line when he put his shot wide. The moment was gone. Lads of the Village had earned a draw which they will remember for a long time.

The neutral might say we deserved more but then again, did we? Opinion was divided as seven of us plus our sole supporter today Dave O'Flynn, provided the après match analysis. As all seven who were present were defenders, that just meant slagging off the midfielders and the forwards who seemingly only wanted to play in One Direction. Our mood was greatly improved by the splendid buffet served by our hosts – piping hot chips, sausage rolls, sausages, chicken nuggets, an array of sandwiches, in the Lads of the Village Public House, a stone's throw from the ground. Even though I used one of the serving trays as a plate we could not finish what was on offer – we needed Buffet Quarry Nick Waller. The pub dog refused Colin Mant's sausage, not enough meat on it I suspect. There was time for me to win the £20 pub raffle and spend most of it in the bar.

Man-of-the-Match: Colin Brazier leads with two votes to come in, but as a team though I do not think we deserved anything today.

7 February 2016: Sanco Super Vets (N, 0-5)

Farnborough Home Guard do not know their onions

We were looking forward to playing on the beaches of Farnborough-on-Sea but made a tactical retreat to Catford Heights to get this game played. The “success” of this flanking manoeuvre earned a stripe for R. French (Co-Manager) making his return, after a lot of time of his hands, following a brush with the laws of the game. It also meant that it was thirteen weeks since our club bar had seen our money. We had been worried that things would go bump in the night again with the heavy rains, but after an anxious wait you could say it was a case of ring dem bells in the Sunday morning sunlight. We had a few absent friends, including our latest recruit but lined up for our big parade with a platoon of fifteen to resist our aggressors from Dulwich. We welcomed back big gun and man of action, George Kleanthous, we hoped, to cure our shooting pains. Alas it was not to be as we were thoroughly thrashed, failed to score, and had many fallen idols in our midst today.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Colin Mant, Ian Coles, Patrice Mongelard, Phil Anthony

Nick Waller, Colin Brazier, Michael Ugwumba, Simon Thomas

Waine Hetherington, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Steve Blanchard, Roger French, Rob Lipscomb, George Kleanthous

Supporter: Michael Ugwumba Jr

Referee ‘Commander’ Mick Gearing who would be a natural in the Dad’s Army film currently showing on the big screen, showed you are never too old and had brought his museum piece of a whistle along. Mick is seventy-eight next weekend and we wish him many happy returns. After today he might even be tempted to resume playing, so woeful was our display.

Things were not looking good early doors. We could not establish a presence in the Sanco half. They took hold of the midfield, looked dangerous up front and were a fortress at the back with quite a few big units sprinkled across the side. This was not the team we had played before – they had reinforcements, schooled in the art of battle, ready for their war dance, not a floral dance like we were. They had the ball in our net after about fifteen minutes but it was ruled out for a brave off-side decision. Five minutes later their menace from the deep paid off and a through ball and smart finish found our net from inside our box despite a desperate dive from Gary Fentiman.

On the half hour the first of the command decisions to make changes was executed as George Kleanthous, Steve Blanchard, Roger French and Rob Lipscomb came on for Colin Mant, Michael Ugwumba, Patrice Mongelard and Colin Brazier. We had a glorious opportunity to equalise when George Kleanthous slipped through the Sanco man hunt like an uninvited guest and found himself five yards out with only the keeper to beat. But his bullet was not for firing and the keeper saved smartly. That was to be our last real scoring opportunity of the game. Five minutes before half-time we were carved up like a turkey dinner at the back and we were 2-0 down.

At half-time the love of oranges took the edge off but it was hard to see how we could get back in the game despite cries of “Wake Up Farnborough”. We now had the slope and the wind against us and to add to our predicament Gary Fentiman had made his soldier’s farewell after forty-five minutes and Waine Hetherington bit the bullet and went in goal. Michael Ugwumba

returned to the heat of battle in the centre of our midfield. Simon Thomas, asleep in the deep to keep young and beautiful, was to see more of the ball in the second half but we struggled to get anything out of the misers in Sanco's defence hoarding their clean sheet.

We went 3-0 down not long into the second half, from, you guessed it, a corner. The ball pinged about a bit in our box but in the end a Sanco foot soldier was in the right place to poke the ball home. Soon after in his first game back Roger French drew blood, his own, after inserting his head in a bush. It could have been worse. Roger's vision was blurred for a bit after some savoury exchanges with a Sanco supporter but the moment, and a test of character, passed.

With half an hour left, there were new orders, and for Nick Waller, Phil Anthony and Ian Coles it was come in your time is up, and you've got to go. Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant and Colin Brazier came back on to see Sanco put the Farnborough lights out with two further goals. I cannot say we came close to getting a consolation goal. The Sanco keeper, one of the new faces, was too good and never looked troubled, least of all by the wild shot from Michael Ugwumba which cleared all available netting behind the pitch and left us a ball short – the loneliness of the long-distance shot, I thought. If I wanted to lower the tone, I would say we had collectively lost both balls in that game long ago.

The mood in the changing room afterwards was not great but Roger's adventure in the bush, and talk of Mick Gearing's birthday present, lightened the gloom. It was just like old times as Roger, like a bank manager, was back in his counting house making sure all monies were safely gathered in. It was not high finance but once again money drained away from the Farnborough coffers, unlike a home pitch that will not drain. The same could happen next Sunday.

Buffet Gorilla Nick Waller will have had a feast today as I was not there. I cannot tell you what would have been available for a spot of comfort eating but I am sure it was not wartime rations.

From time to time in Vets football a game is played where the losers are thoroughly showed up, branded in a way, and left wondering if it is time to give up because they have lost their hunger, desire, fitness, pace, everything in fact. This was D-day for us, under fire from the enemy within the gates, we failed the test. We cannot even pretend that it is a matter of brain over brawn – we have three Co-Managers in the boot room, a case of boots, boots, boots, if you like, but we still cannot get it right. We play without energy, technique, cohesion, movement, we have luxury players – they know who they are, the cap fits. We'll get the bird at every game we have left to play this season unless things change and we'll be heading for room at the bottom. I reckon that if Captain Mainwaring's platoon played a football game against German prisoners, the spectacle would not be too unlike what we served up today.

Man-of-the-Match: not many were mentioned in dispatches but the man of the hour, in this broadcast to the empire, was Steve Blanchard.

Lastly – I have a test, and a bit of fun, for my readers. To celebrate the release of the new Dad's Army film – I have sprinkled through this report references to the titles of Dad's Army episodes. The person who identifies the highest number by close of play next Saturday evening and emails the answers to the Farnborough Old Boys Guild website gets a Spitfire from me.

14 February 2016: Catford Wanderers Vets (A, 2-1)

Farnborough come out smelling of roses

Another home game, time to wander off again to a firmer pitch, as we returned to the Catford Wanderers ground for the second consecutive week, hoping for a different result from last week's, obviously. Injuries and something called Valentine's Day had reduced our numbers to thirteen, and overnight Andy Faulks developed a mystery ailment since the game he played yesterday (with Gary Fentiman). Young Farnborough Vet Peter Harvey, who is actually older than Andy came to our rescue as his game was called off. Our usual referee Mick Gearing who is, I think, older than Simon Thomas + any other Senior Vet, was having a day off for yet another birthday. So, we added to the expense of the day by getting another referee who arrived in the nick of time, a little ahead of Steve Blanchard, who power-walked to the changing rooms as we were about to kick off. We welcomed back Stephane Anelli after an absence of over three months, to add much needed thrust to our midfield. Talking of thrust Mick O'Flynn brought along a photographic illustration of how to enter a bush for Roger French. Today, on the Feast of St Valentine, Roger was wisely keeping well away from bushes.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Colin Mant, Steve Blanchard, Patrice Mongelard, Roger French

Nick Waller, Michael Ugwumba, Simon Thomas, Rob Lipscomb, Waine Hetherington

Peter Harvey

Substitutes: Colin Brazier, Stephane Anelli

Supporter: Michael Ugwumba Jr

Despite the heavy pitch and greasy surface both teams made a good start and an even contest took shape early doors. Both sides had a cutting edge up front, the midfield was congested and both defences were managing to get out of trouble when threatened. Our keeper was marginally busier in the early quarter of an hour (but his handling was assured then and throughout) whilst Waine Hetherington and Peter Harvey were finding their range. The breakthrough, midway through the half, came from a mistake. Colin Mant was adjudged to have handled the ball in our box, harshly perhaps, conceding yet another penalty, and we fell behind. The Catford lead did not last long. Colin Mant atoned with a volleyed through ball to Waine Hetherington after a poor Catford goal-kick; and Waine lofted an exquisite ball over the Catford keeper who was stranded off his line.

Soon after on the half hour, Waine Hetherington and Simon Thomas came off for Stephane Anelli and Colin Brazier. That was a tipping point I felt as we finished the half strongly. We turned the game round with a Michael Ugwumba shot from the edge of the box. The connection was not entirely right and with only a fraction of the power Michael is capable of, but the direction and the ambition were enough to get the ball over the line. At that point we felt we could go on to get a third. Peter Harvey came closest when a lofted through ball from Michael Ugwumba dropped invitingly for Pete who controlled the ball first time on his chest and advanced on goal. Pete's trusty left peg from three yards out did not do the job on this rare occasion but the warning to Catford was clear.

At half-time Roger French swapped sides and Waine Hetherington resumed his attacking midfield role with Colin Brazier dropping back in defence to douse the Catford fire. We dominated possession in the second half and created several shooting chances and good positions crying out for a good final ball but Catford had changed their keeper and the new one, who was in fact

their most dangerous forward in the first half, gave an excellent account of himself. The pattern of the second half saw Catford playing mostly on the break whilst we kept probing for an opening and kept crossing and shooting. We felt we needed the extra daylight of a third goal but it never came. We mixed things up a bit on the hour by taking Rob Lipscomb off and restoring Simon Thomas on our right wing, to continue his smouldering Rudolf Valentino impressions. Peter Harvey and Stephane Anelli looked our most likely source of a third goal. At the other end we could be a danger to ourselves – Patrice Mongelard and Colin Mant got into each other's way chasing a Catford through ball. This prompted Patrice to ask Colin if he was deaf as well as dumb, whilst Colin politely enquired of Patrice's how his Tourette's had gone undiagnosed for so long. As it was Valentine's Day they kissed and made up.

Colin Brazier, on the other hand, was not going to be doing any kissing today in Bodiam, as his match was cut short when he pulled his groin hard, today of all days. Rob Lipscomb came back on as Colin hobbled off, to help us see the game out. Stephane Anelli came close to giving us the cushion we wanted but his shot from six yards hit the base of the post and rolled invitingly across goal. We were not entirely in control though as Catford pressed hard for an equaliser. Our game management nearly came a cropper as Catford fashioned a good one-on-one opportunity only to be frustrated by Gary's reflexes from close range, and in the dying minutes they had a shot which looked very good on the eye until it swerved wide of the postage stamp. There was time for Roger French to thwart Peter Harvey in the Catford box.

We played better than we have been doing in recent weeks but only in patches, helped in no small way by relatively fresh faces Stephane Anelli and Peter Harvey. Catford are a much-improved outfit these days, and a draw might have been the fairer result but we did well to come from behind on Valentine's Day, and dug deep to hold on, just.

This week we made sure that the excellent buffet rustled up by the Catford Wanderers bar staff was fully enjoyed by Farnborough players. Buffet Valentine Nick Waller did not go short – sausage rolls, sausages, garlic bread, quiche, pizza, chips, French bread, ham, cheese, crisps, cherry tomatoes and cucumber were shown a lot of love.

Man-of-the-Match: Senior Vets' Valentine was Stephane Anelli, back after an absence of over three months to show us what we have been missing. He also felt he could get away with taking the kit home – I suppose today is a good day as any to test a loved one with the Farnborough Senior Vets kit after a sweaty mud bath. He is a far braver man than I am.

21 February 2016: Cudham United Super Vets (H, 0-1)

Bitter-sweet return to grass and sand of home for Farnborough Senior Vets

The old place looked the same as I stepped out of the car, and saw familiar faces smiling sweetly. In truth this game had been shrouded in doubt all week and maybe some of that doubt percolated into our psychology. First, our original opponents West Farleigh Vets could not raise a side, but Cudham United were found just down the road. Then, we had the usual hydrophilic tendencies of our pitch to contend with, but in the end found ourselves back where we used to play, fifteen weeks after our last home visit. After today I fear our fans will not mind if we do not return for another fifteen weeks. When we awoke from today's reverie and looked around us, Cudham were walking away with all the points and we realised we only win in our dreams these days. We have now lost as many games as we have won and drawn. We concede 3.136 goals per game and have a negative goal difference of -7. We have scored 62 goals. A test for the arithmetically challenged lads, how many games have we played, and do not cheat by looking at the tables on the website. They make grim viewing anyway.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Patrice Mongelard, Roger French, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard

Michael Ugwumba, Simon Thomas, Rob Lipscomb, Kypros Michael

Andy Faulks, Waine Hetherington

Substitutes: Colin Brazier, Colin Mant, George Kleanthous, Mick O'Flynn

Supporters: Alan Brazier, Isabelle & Thomas French, Sinisa Gracanin & adopted daughter Jodie, Jane Martin, Amanda Sim & Daisy Thomas, Michael Ugwumba Jr

We had forgotten how much there was to do for home games. Away games are much easier in a sense – fewer responsibilities. We got to our top pitch to find the goals chained and the tide had gone out. A not inconsiderable patch had been turned into a beach scene but without the weather, and the Brazilian Women's Beach Volley Ball team were nowhere to be found. I won't dwell on what was there to see, I'd rather forget some of it, and it did not get better once the game started.

I am not going to bore you with a lot of football today because we did not produce much of it. We were world-class for the first two minutes when three or four Cudham players lost their footing but after that it all went downhill. We dominated possession but did nothing with it. Cudham had better positional sense than we did, were more patient, and happy to soak pressure and hit us on the break. Gary Fentiman had less to do than his opposite number who enjoyed a bit of luck after a quarter of an hour when a Waine Hetherington header – applied to a far post cross from Andy Faulks, beat the keeper, came off the base of the post, travelled across the goal to the other post, past a prostrate Waine Hetherington on the ground who could not apply a limb to get the ball over the line. Waine swears that the ball came off one of the wheels of the goal and therefore from behind the line. Goal line technology would have resolved the matter, of course, but we have to sort out the drainage first. In the meantime, better finishing would help. We missed several gilt-edged opportunities – Andy Faulks had a one-on-one which defied explanation until I remembered that one of our players had ventured the suggestion that Andy looked like a George Andrew Romero film extra when he turned up this morning. We made four changes on the half hour – with Kypros Michael, Andy Faulks, Steve Blanchard and Roger French making way for Mick O'Flynn, George Kleanthous, Colin Mant and Colin Brazier. The pattern of play remained the same – now it was George's turn to miss chances. I think the Cudham defence and their keeper deserve credit for the goalless score at half-time. Cudham

had grown into the game. Whilst they had not created a lot, they had forced a few corners and could pose a threat on the break given the tendency of our midfield to go walk about.

Nobody said it, but at half-time we felt it was only a matter of time before we would score. We had three great chances in the first five minutes of the second half which fell to Waine Hetherington and George Kleanthous in the six-yard box. There was still not much to worry about at the other end, we always had covering players, and Cudham were playing only two forwards against four defenders occasionally joined by midfielders though their main job was to frustrate us. In the 55th minute Mick O'Flynn's calf went – it used to go after 55 minutes, now it is just the 55th minute, regardless of how long he has been on the pitch – and Kyros Michael was back on. On the hour, we made our final changes: Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles and Waine Hetherington went off and Andy Faulks, Roger French and Steve Blanchard came back.

The last half hour was more even. Cudham must have sensed that we were there for the taking and we could play a month of Sundays and we would still not score. In the 70th minute disaster struck and the Cudham forward who had been a thorn in our side and never stopped running (an example for our lads I thought) got his reward as he forced the ball home from a defensive mix-up. I am not going to say who was at fault for the goal – the expression “netball defence” was used later in our post-match inquest, sorry, analysis. Some were closer to the action than others but in reality, it was a collective failure. For the last twenty minutes we huffed and puffed, waved our arms about a lot (Simon Thomas' semaphore impressions far out on the right wing were in vain) but never really looking like we could get back in the game. Some last-ditch tackles from Cudham preserved their advantage. Some tempers got shorter – Rob Lipscomb waved his usual handbag, the midfield blamed forwards, the forwards blamed the defence, the defence blamed the midfield – you get the picture and the minutes ticked away. George Kleanthous had a great opportunity towards the bitter end to square the ball to an unmarked Waine Hetherington with a gaping goal at his mercy but George claims not to have heard him. There seems to be a wider hearing problem in the team and Mick O'Flynn is toying with the idea of selling second-hand hearing aids. As I watched from the sidelines, the poverty of our game, the lack of fitness, desire and intelligence in our game, was hard to bear, in my 503rd game for the FOBG Vets. I don't know how much more of this I can take. We got what we deserved. The team with greater belief had come on top. We are now a soft touch, a bit like the match ball thought Colin Brazier but he forgot to moan about that as he had so much else to moan about.

Jane Martin fed the multitude – the slow roast sausages nestling in a hot dog roll were a delight and the prawn crackers were a welcome surprise in the Year of the Monkey. Chunks of cheddar, mini scotch eggs, pork pies and crisps made up the rest of the welcome home party food. She wisely put some aside for me as I tarried sweeping two dressing rooms, and a corridor, without the proper tools for the job. I suppose I was fortunate that Buffet Drainage Channel Nick Waller was absent today.

Next week we play a team called Santos. I wonder if they'll have any fans with hair of gold and lips like cherries.

Man-of-the-Match: I wanted to vote for Sinisa Gracanin, but that was not allowed. The referendum gave today's prize to Ian Coles (the only defender apart from yours truly to have had a clean sheet today).

28 February 2016: Santos Vets (N, 3-1)

Farnborough go marching in

We were back on neutral but familiar ground at the Beckenham Cricket Club in Foxgrove Road for this one – our first visit there since another famous one-time resident of this road, at number 24, passed away in January. The place had been extensively refurbished and was now more wine bar (not Waine bar) than traditional sports clubhouse, with laminate flooring, leather chairs, oak-effect tables and a new menu (more on that later). In an attempt to sprinkle some stardust of our own, we were trying out a new formation after what Roger French called a mass debate with Mick O'Flynn on Friday morning. The question was - were the management just re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, or would they succeed in inserting defensive DNA from Patrice Mongelard and Colin Mant into the midfield. Our offensive DNA was modified late with the withdrawal of Andy Faulks and Peter Harvey came forward after yet another blank fixture for our Young Vets. According to social media, Andy was not in the right frame of mind after missing five one-on-ones yesterday – otherwise he would have won his game 5-4.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Phil Anthony, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Roger French

Simon Thomas, Patrice Mongelard, Stephane Anelli, Colin Mant, Waine Hetherington

Peter Harvey

Substitutes: George Kleanthous, Rob Lipscomb, Kypros Michael, Mark Harrington

Supporters: Isabelle & Thomas French, Hannah Kleanthous.

Referee Mick Gearing got the game going under clear, bright but cold conditions on the more compact of the two BCC pitches, closest to the tennis courts. We quickly had the bulk of possession and a solid defensive platform to build on with Patrice Mongelard patrolling the space in front of (and some say even behind) the back four. We thought we had taken the lead quite early after an incisive move from the left by Stephane Anelli saw him block and divert a Santos defensive clearance into their net from close range. But the goal was ruled out for off-side and we made no fuss. Quite against the run of play, Santos took the lead after about ten minutes – making the most of the opportunity arising from a defensive mix-up involving a penitent Gary Fentiman. It did not take long for Farnborough to strike back. After a neat passing move on the right Phil Anthony found himself in a very advanced position ideally placed to swing a cross over to the far post where it was quiffed in by Simon Thomas. The use of the word quiff as a verb is entirely appropriate on this occasion, I assure you – though Simon did not have the best quiff on show today. His double in the Santos team did – like Simon, tall, bearded, long-limbed, exuberantly quiffed, and with the same Thespian demeanour but less languid. He had a very good game, the Simon double did, and finished up playing the role of a goalkeeper.

After about twenty minutes, Patrice Mongelard decided to produce one of his speciality corners with his right boot. It is still a mystery how the Santos keeper just managed to divert the ball which was arrowing into the top corner at the far post. But he had no chance a few minutes later when Waine Hetherington picked a loose ball in midfield advanced and let fly from thirty yards (if my yardage is correct – I have been unfairly accused of inflating my measurements whilst reducing that of my team mates). We did not pull further ahead as we were hoping at that point. We had some half chances and at times got in each other's way (as Peter Harvey did with Colin Mant) on the edge of the box.

We made four changes on the half hour with George Kleanthous, Rob Lipscomb, Kypros Michael and Mark Harrington coming on for Wayne Hetherington, Stephane Anelli, Peter Harvey and Colin Mant. This was Mark's debut and he had a tidy game particularly in the second half when he made a number of timely interventions in defence. We continued to press the Santos defence and Kypros Michael nearly broke through on the left more than once. At the other end, Gary Fentiman did not really have much to do except to watch over the long goal-kicks that could travel quite a long way on this pitch. Six foot three inches came in handy more than once and there was even a hairy moment when some felt the ball had crept in over his head but he had just tipped it over. 2-1 at half-time was the right scoreline – we had done well to come from behind. Talking of which, Peter Harvey requested that special mention be made that after years of trying he finally had a free-kick awarded in his favour by Mick Gearing after being taken roughly – you've guessed it, from behind.

The second half was to the neutral a little one-directional in that the flow of the game was mainly towards the Santos goal with the occasional dangerous break from Santos. In truth, we missed many chances in that half. These increased in number from the hour when we restored Peter Harvey, Wayne Hetherington, Stephane Anelli and Colin Mant to the play for the departing Roger French, Simon Thomas, Patrice Mongelard and Phil Anthony. Rob Lipscomb found himself at left-back showing his versatility and team spirit. He had his usual tangle, but this time was attacked by the Santos kit bags as he shaped to take a throw-in but we quickly stepped in to separate Rob from the bags. Less funny though were the chances we kept missing and the saves being pulled by the ersatz Santos keeper. Peter Harvey and George Kleanthous failed to hit the target with headers from good positions. Kypros Michael and Wayne Hetherington had shots that they will feel they should have done better with.

We were rewarded though when Peter Harvey bamboozled the Santos defence down their left, got behind them and crossed low and invitingly for Wayne Hetherington whose control and shot were crisp and unerring. At 3-1 we could breathe a bit easier but Santos were not out of it. Gary Fentiman dived bravely at the foot a quick Santos midfielder who had burst into our box. With about ten minutes left we were awarded an undisputed penalty which Wayne Hetherington claimed but did not convert. That was almost the last act of the first Santos keeper who went off injured and was replaced by the Simon Thomas look-alike for the final minutes. The height of the new keeper came in useful as he thwarted Peter Harvey from close-range for a final time.

In the clubhouse (or maybe it should be brasserie) Roger French, who complained about not having enough inches, in last week's match report, surprised us with a new smart phone which came with an activity monitor which he was wearing on his wrist. He told us that the read-out on his phone was showing a minute of activity for the morning, so clearly this was not a device for monitoring brain activity. Phil Anthony stopped playing with his salted nuts for a moment to take a photo of Amanda and four other ladies from the tennis club enjoying a cup of organic fairtrade coffee from a sustainable source on a Nicaraguan commune.

Buffet Apocalypse Nick Waller was absent, just as well as a large tray of hand-cut artisan white and brown sandwiches with a range of succulent fillings nestled around a bed of crisp crudités, did not last long. Gone were the traditional rustic chips, sausages and buttered slices of old – the end of an era but is it progress? Discuss. The new modern menu did, however, deliver a chocolate tray-bake with a hint of ginger and chocolate icing studded with identical bijou fudge cubes. Roger French, despite his fitbit, wolfed a slice down, barely pausing to acknowledge a question from famished-looking son Thomas. Ian Coles followed suit, only to make Roger feel better, before Wayne Hetherington passed the tray over to the delighted Santos team. Their

keeper showed a good pair of hands as he caught hold of it, just like when he saved Waine's penalty, although I thought he could have withheld the information, imparted to Waine, that he was not really a keeper.

Man-of-the-Match: Waine Hetherington who bought a jug as if he had scored a hat-trick, and who was now over the moon to have scored one more goal than George Kleanthous. That is one bet he (Palace fan) has with George (West Ham fan) that is going well for him.

4 March 2016: Eagles Fitter Fans Vets (N, 5-2)

Eagles dare but Farnborough clip their wings

Before I tell you about this game, I have to take you back to last Sunday's match to re-write some Farnborough history. This is a bit unusual and really not something I am keen to encourage as I'd be doing it every week, and my match reports would get longer and never be finished. After all, if any player wants to share their magnificence with the world, they can write their own match report, we could do with more match reports on our website. Simon Thomas had been distressed by my failure to mention that he hit the bar twice in that game. Once is unlucky, twice is careless you might think. Still, it would appear that Simon produced a positively South American piece of technique and skill by wrapping the outside of his right foot, on the run, looking the other way, to caress and curl the ball onto the bar with the keeper transfixed by the terrible beauty of the moment. It was just the sort of flair that English players like Simon are accused of not possessing. As he described it to me vividly, I could not explain how the event had not been seared into my memory. So, I can only apologise for a senior moment, but cannot promise that I will not fail again to do justice to his talent.

And so, to tonight's game, our first weekday game this season, and under floodlights to boot, for a fixture brought forward from Mother's Day because we care. Referee Mick Gearing last visited Darrick Wood in 1915 (joke) and could not believe how much the place had changed. One welcome change was the new Third Generation (3G) artificial pitch. We had 3G, but big G our usual goalkeeper (G), Gary Fentiman, was unavailable, nor was his intended replacement so Eagles super fan Waine Hetherington had to share G duties with small G (George Kleanthous) and Mark Harrington. So, you could say we had 3Gs as well as 3G tonight. We also had an unusual visual geometry to contend with as busy pitch markings in blue, red, yellow and white all competed for attention but that was the same for both teams.

Starting XI:

Waine Hetherington

Chris Bourlet, Steve Blanchard, Patrice Mongelard, Colin Brazier

Simon Thomas, Sinisa Gracanin, Michael Ugwumba, Roger French

Andy Faulks, Rob Lipscomb

Substitutes: George Kleanthous, Mark Harrington

Supporter: Michael Ugwumba Jr.

We went 2-0 up after five minutes. In what was only the second minute, most of us had not touched the ball, Andy Faulks had run at the Eagles defence and released the ball in Sinisa Gracanin's path. Sini cleverly made it look like he had not intended it but he managed to redirect the ball without breaking his stride past the wrong-footed Eagles keeper. Soon after, Andy Faulks was the provider again and this time, he set up the incisive Simon Thomas who had glided into the box from the wing to produce a piece of South American flair with his left foot this time, to tuck the ball into the bottom corner from close range.

In a sense these goals came too early for us. Hubris set into our game. We dominated the next quarter of an hour with crisp short passing, and even celebrated a third goal with a Michael Ugwumba special from a direct free-kick on the edge of the Eagles box, a good cocktail of power and placement. We brought on George Kleanthous and Mark Harrington for Andy Faulks and Sinisa Gracanin after twenty-two minutes and thought we would carry on as before. How wrong we were – the Eagles were not beaten, they rallied, got back in the game, created some decent

chances and scored a deserved goal which owed much to Waine Hetherington's confusion as to the skill of the Eagles forward who had tenaciously followed a long goal-kick into our box as we missed opportunities to clear the danger. As an ardent Eagles fan Waine could not, so it seemed, bring himself to deny the Eagles a goal – his timing and positioning and hand movement all went awry. It is fair to say that the Eagles finished the first-half in a better frame of mind than us. Mark Harrington's aerial ability had come in handy as crosses and corners threatened our goal. We had lost the cohesion we had shown earlier.

Something else was ebbing away a little and that is the good spirit which we have always had in games between us and the Eagles. Niggly remarks, challenges to refereeing decisions over throw-ins, free-kicks, off-side decisions mostly from one Eagles player were intruding on the sporting pleasure of the occasion. Referee Mick Gearing might have sub-optimal vision and hearing these days; his movement is now economical at seventy-eight years of age, and his whistle is on a tantric setting - but his mind is sharp and clear and he is a fiercely honest and fair man. So that was a bit off. It carried on early into the second half, with the Eagles manager adding his frustration into the mix, and even one of their fans waving his crutches until it took only the one Eagles player to take himself off the pitch, and common sense prevailed.

We made more changes at half-time with Simon Thomas and Michael Ugwumba going off and Andy Faulks and Sinisa Gracanin returning. Waine Hetherington was back up front, having been replaced by small G in goal. Despite this, our malaise continued into the second half and the early exchanges were more encouraging for the Eagles than for us. They had tightened up at the back and realised that there were acres of space in our midfield because we had lost our discipline, lengthened our game, and had at least five or six players who like lemmings fancied their chances to score. It was against the run of play, ten minutes into the second period when we went 4-1 up from a corner delivered by Sinisa Gracanin. The ball travelled through a forest of legs to arrive where Chris Bourlet was standing and he thrust himself at it with purposeful connection to bundle the ball over the line. His celebration could be heard at Selhurst Park and he went off the pitch as he was spent and immediately substituted and the mercurial Simon Thomas was back on. However, the Eagles landed the next blow almost immediately with a well-taken goal as a powerful run from midfield was crowned with a shot which found the bottom corner of our net. At that point the neutral observer would not have ruled out a third Eagles goal as our travails in front of the Eagles goal continued. We thought we had edged further ahead when a low shot by Sinisa Gracanin ended up in the Eagles net but was deemed to have got there via a hole in the side netting.

After sixty-seven minutes we made final changes as Colin Brazier was replaced by Michael Ugwumba and Mark Harrington went in goal to allow small G to see if he could creep up the Senior Vets scoring charts from a left midfield position. Mark's height was useful as he had to deal with corners and crosses. The Eagles had not given up but the last quarter of an hour belonged to us. We re-asserted ourselves and resumed short passes and from a neat passing sequence Waine Hetherington unselfishly set up George Kleanthous for a tap-in. There was not much of note to report after that, even from Simon Thomas, but if there was, perhaps you'll read about it in the report of our next game.

Having failed to remember Simon Thomas' sublime piece of skill last Sunday, this time I had forgotten to bring any shower gel but Sinisa Gracanin kindly allowed me to use his Issey Miyake shower gel for men – a toning, cleansing gel that is easy to rinse off and does not dry the skin, for a clean, soft and delicately-scented skin. It was either that elixir of youth, or Roger French's Radox 2-in-1 fennel and sea minerals for men from Sainsbury's. Sini won the shower gel-of-the-

match award whilst Roger French thought Issey Miyake was something one ordered from a sushi bar.

The Eagles might have lost the game but they were 2-0 up in the Woodman public house in Farnborough Village when eight of us turned up at around 10:30. There was no buffet – so Buffet Tectonic Plate, Nick Waller, would have caused tremors but I had taken the precaution of visiting an all-you-can-eat oriental buffet in Orpington some ten hours earlier so I was still full. I had thought I would meet up with two old Italian friends, Peroni and Moretti, but in the end spent a happy hour with two Whitstable Bay Blondes, but don't tell Mrs M about that, and the oriental buffet.

Much of the talk in the bar was about what the elegant Simon Thomas tastefully called tractor porn. Roger French produced a picture from his wallet of the object of his desire: a pert red tractor from Fife, lovely lines, good little runner, guaranteed to purr with the right strokes, does not mind getting dirty. He could see himself mounting it, with instructions from his father, to move earth and sand at Farrow Fields, to restore the condition of our two pitches to cope with next winter's rains. I thought of pointing out that we would not, of course, need a tractor if we made the Darrick Wood 3G pitch our home ground but thought better of it as I could sense some of the other boys fancied a turn on Roger's tractor.

Man-of-the-Match: Sinisa Gracanin back after an absence of a few weeks following a rib injury, to restore much needed midfield craft and spine to our game.

13 March 2016: Reigate Priory Vets (A, 3-2)

Farnborough pull it off in Reigate

This is an away fixture that we do not really look forward to. It is neither the people, nor the setting (far from it) but rather it is because of the results we have had there in the past. Our numbers were down too – and would reduce further on the day for reasons unexplained, but perhaps not unexpected, if postings on social media at three in the morning are a reliable indicator of commitment to the red and yellow shirt. We did not have our usual goalkeeper, eventually played without two of our three strikers on double figures this season (and the third one started in goal), and our “South American” (you know who I mean) was missing too and there is nothing to add about him in this week’s match report. If truth be told, we feared that Reigate would want to avenge their defeat earlier in the season by doing a number on us. We had a secret weapon though in Ian Shoebridge, playing his first game in months after injury. Still, it was a glorious sunny day, crisp, dry and with a fresh breeze doing its best to blow away the morning mists. The wooden clubhouse had a charm of its own and the mature tennis players, the very young, and young Ladies lacrosse team at training, and what looked like a croquet foursome, added to the occasion.

The friendly but firm referee, who had a good game played in excellent spirit to manage, had put his head round our dressing room door to say hello, tip us off about respecting the wicket, and warn Roger about his French, well not just Roger. In the end, the only bit of Anglo-Saxon was uttered by Colin Brazier (after a miss by Rob Lipscomb in the dying moments that Colin’s granny might well have put way).

Starting XI:

Waine Hetherington

Colin Mant, Dave Green, Ian Coles, Colin Brazier

Patrice Mongelard, Sinisa Gracanin, Michael Ugwumba, Roger French, Rob Lipscomb

Ian Shoebridge

Substitutes: Nick Waller, Mark Harrington

Supporter and Linesman: Michael Ugwumba Jr.

We opted to pack the midfield with Ian Shoebridge as our lone forward, and a holding midfielder in Patrice Mongelard providing added protection for the back four. Sinisa Gracanin and Rob Lipscomb were to join Shoey whenever sensible, and Roger French was up there too whenever, whilst Michael Ugwumba provided added muscle in midfield. I think our system worked most of the time, and we grew more confident as the half unfolded. Reigate had a mobile forward that demanded respect but over the rest of the pitch the greater mobility was Farnborough’s. To be honest both goalkeepers were not really that busy in the opening fifteen to twenty minutes until our off-side trap was sprung after the ball was lost in midfield. The Reigate Express had timed his run well and was able to round Waine Hetherington before slotting the ball home. It was not quite against the run of play but we had begun to look like we were more likely to score first, particularly as Ian Shoebridge was getting behind the Reigate defence and playing well too with his back to the Reigate goal, with lay-offs that were finding Sinisa Gracanin and Rob Lipscomb in advanced positions. There was talk briefly of putting a second forward on but with Rob Lipscomb and Roger French needing no invitation to neglect their defensive duties, the moment passed.

Five minutes after Reigate scored, we drew level. Ian Shoebridge had combined well with Sinisa Gracanin in the Reigate box. Sini drew the foul in the box cleverly positioning his body to shield the ball and wrong foot the lunging defender. There was skill in this and that, to me, was the key contribution which led to our equaliser but the anorak who does the match stats decided to deny Sini the assist. Rob Lipscomb, never short of confidence, despite missing his last spot kick, put the ball away with aplomb. The rest of the half belonged to us – we threatened more goals – well some of us did. Patrice Mongelard had two shots from the edge of the box from corner clearances which found the net, on the tennis courts thirty yards away but you have to be there to miss them. You have to be there to score them too, or scruff them (a new verb for you) as Roger French showed us after the Reigate keeper spilled a low shot from Ian Shoebridge. It was a singularly scruffy goal, messier than Messi. The ball did not trouble the net but it changed the score to our advantage and Roger had his goal for the season (a reminder to himself that he really should be playing up front).

Nick Waller and Mark Harrington had come on after half an hour to replace Colin Mant and Dave Green. We reshuffled without the disconnection we sometimes suffer, and finished the half strongly. At half-time Waine Hetherington felt able to swap places with Michael Ugwumba. We were not concerned about this. We knew Michael could do a job between the sticks, and the creative flair which Waine now added to the midfield would not go amiss.

It took us a while to get going in the second half. Reigate had the breeze in their favour and their half-time talk had rallied them. Michael needed his strong wrists to repel a powerful shot and Nick Waller had a senior moment with a header back to our keeper that reminded everyone why Nick is our undisputed own goal specialist, as well as one of our best headers of the ball. The score was still 2-1 in our favour when Patrice Mongelard and Roger French made way for the second coming of Colin Mant and Dave Green. I think we were still adjusting our positions when Reigate equalised with a smart turn and low shot from their most dangerous player. I will be honest with you – at that point we were worried. Reigate looked the more likely to edge ahead and nearly did but for a stupendous save by Michael Ugwumba that would have delighted Michael Jr. Most of us – and all of the Reigate team, will have thought the powerful Reigate shot from distance was dipping into the far corner but for the intervention of a hand from Michael which diverted the ball against the underside of the bar. The rebound was grabbed by a cool as a cucumber Michael, who made it seem like he did this all the time in his back garden and meant it all along. That was a turning point.

The rest of the game – another twenty minutes or so, was ours. The team settled down and the opportunities started coming and going. The next goal was going to be critical. In fact, it was clean, clinical and coruscating. It came courtesy of Ian Shoebridge, twenty yards out on the right, after he controlled a pass from Sinisa Gracanin, on the run, looked up and instinctively lashed the ball high into the opposite top corner in a fluid movement that the Reigate keeper knew little of until he heard the ball stretch the postage stamp netting. At that point the question was not whether we could hold on to the three points but whether we could add more goals to ease our nerves. I do not like naming names especially as this was a great team performance but Mark Harrington, who put in a great all-round display in several positions, Waine Hetherington, Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Shoebridge and most notably Rob Lipscomb missed more than decent chances to score from close range. Rob Lipscomb in particular could not explain how he missed a tap-in at the far post after sterling work from Dave Green who crossed the ball. At least this was better than Rob's explanation for not passing the ball to Michael Ugwumba in the first half, because "Michael blended into the Reigate background" too well.

We held on for a lesser-spotted win at Reigate, with Patrice Mongelard back on for the last five minutes to stiffen the defence after Ian Coles came off as a precaution with a hamstring feeling a bit tight after tracking the Reigate Express all game.

Buffet Revenant Nick Waller made his presence felt as a pile of cheese and ham sandwiches, crisps and cheesy biscuits disappeared like the morning mists. I could not help noticing that the Reigate players were not eating any food and I was worried that Nick was eating their share too, but not enough to put me off my own consumption.

Man-of-the-Match: Ian Shoebridge, back to remind us of what we have been missing, with a goal-of-the-season contender, an assist, and tireless intelligent running all game.

20 March 2016: Glendale Vets (H, 1-4)

Farnborough have a twelve-hour day to forget as Glendale get all the goals

The prospect of a fourth consecutive win, a first for the season, was not sufficient to rouse a hibernating Farnborough on the day of the vernal equinox – the first day of spring, not that you would guess from a chilly overcast day. The spring was in the Glendale step whilst there was more darkness than daylight in our performance. From the beginning, and in the end, our visitors thoroughly deserved their win and they administered just retribution for our 3-2 win at their place eight weeks ago. The bright light of our performance against Reigate last week was totally eclipsed by today's negative display even though we could claim that we drew the second half but that would be clutching at straws.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Mick O'Flynn, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Michael Ugwumba

Sinisa Gracanin, Colin Mant, Ian Shoebridge, George Kleanthous, Rob Lipscomb

Waine Hetherington

Substitutes: Roger French, Kypros Michael, Patrice Mongelard, Simon Thomas

Supporters: Thomas and Isabelle French, Sinisa Gracanin's adopted daughter Jodie, Danny and Ikechukwu Obi, Pam Shoebridge, Vicky Tanner, Michael Ugwumba Jr.

We did not start well. It was a full five minutes before the Glendale keeper got the feel of the ball. We had great trouble establishing ourselves in the Glendale half. Our lone forward Waine Hetherington was isolated, starved of service and support. Rob Lipscomb and Ian Shoebridge made vain occasional forays down the flanks while Sinisa Gracanin and Colin Mant had their work cut out protecting our defence, as did George Kleanthous who could not really venture beyond the halfway line. The writing was on the wall after only forty-two seconds when Glendale drew a sharp save from Gary Fentiman. The early pattern of the game was clear to see. Glendale had better organisation, balance, more movement, possession and penetration to keep us in our half. Our defending got more frantic and a Glendale goal seemed only a matter of time. After twenty minutes – their most skilful forward made room to turn on the edge of the box and his left foot was too good as an accurate shot arrowed into the top corner. Gary got a hand to it but that was too late and too little.

The second Glendale goal was deserved too, by both sides, as a powerful midfield run with ball to feet was allowed to progress unimpeded to the edge of our box and the shot was fired. The ball swerved significantly, some said it was a mis-hit, making Gary look limp-wristed and we had a mountain to climb. That was almost on the half hour and we made four changes immediately as Roger French, Simon Thomas, Patrice Mongelard and Kypros Michael came on for Colin Mant, Steve Blanchard, Ian Shoebridge and Sinisa Gracanin. The plan was to attack more while not conceding. We managed the first, particularly through Kypros Michael on the left, but not the second.

The third Glendale goal, five minutes from half-time was symptomatic of the game – possession was conceded in midfield, Glendale showed more incision down the wing, Gary Fentiman thought that he could come off his line to clear the ball but by the time he realised he would not get there it was too late and the ball had been chipped above his stranded reach into an empty net. I would like to tell you of any scoring opportunities we created in the first-half but I cannot remember any. I recall Rob Lipscomb putting the ball in the net but he was ruled off-side by the

Glendale linesman and that was it. Kypros Michael gave his marker a lot to think about when he came on but there was no end product to his crosses and cut-backs.

Mick O'Flynn did not last his usual fifty-five minutes, and was replaced at half-time by Ian Shoebridge. Our fortunes improved almost immediately as Glendale kindly made a contest of it by scoring one for us (with Waine Hetherington claiming the assist). For a while we dared hope and put the Glendale goal under pressure and began to force corners. In fact, I do not recall a single Glendale corner in the first half, whilst we had between four or five. We created many half chances, drew some good saves from the keeper – Ian Shoebridge and Kypros Michael came closest to narrowing the gap but it was not to be. Not even our South American could smoke out the opposition.

Glendale got a fourth on the break. In the predominantly friendly matches of Vets football the convention is that both teams each provide a linesman. On the whole this seems to work but occasionally there will be one player who will complain, casting loud and repeated aspersions on the neutrality, eyesight, paternity and onanistic proclivities of a linesman. We had quite a bit of that today from a Glendale forward even though he scored two great goals and his team was winning the match comfortably. As a result, we had three different linesmen today, and our young supporters, and Glendale's, were treated to the sight of a celebration, for this fourth Glendale goal, with the artistic inclusion of a double wrist-shuffling action in the direction of the then Farnborough linesman Colin Mant. It was uncalled for, and the referee had to have words. Apart from that there was no ill-feeling at all between the two sides.

We huffed and puffed for the rest of the half – enjoyed the lion's share of the possession without really looking like we could get back in the game. On the hour Steve Blanchard, Sinisa Gracanin and Colin Mant came back on for Ian Coles, Michael Ugwumba and Waine Hetherington. The pattern of the half remained. Glendale sat back, soaked the pressure, looking for the occasional break, watched our crosses go to waste, and will have had the sense of a job well done. We did not even deserve a draw so the best team won on the day.

After "lookwarm" showers, it was a draw in the bar as both teams stayed in good numbers to enjoy the hospitality – and there was enough goodwill to arrange a mid-week game in May. It was noted the opposition got two large jugs from Vicky Tanner even when their numbers had started to thin.

Our mood improved greatly with the scientific impossibility that Roger French's fitbit wrist thingy had sent data to his phone to say he had travelled 8.2 kms. Roger left it hanging in the air that the figure could relate to the distance he travelled on the pitch during the game, in one hour. However, the consensus was that this was the cumulative distance for the previous two games and today's as well, his daily walk to Orpington station for the 7:11 train to Cannon Street, the travel by car to the ground today, and most certainly, wrist action.

Buffet Hunger Games Invincible, Nick Waller, was not present to enjoy the delights served by the double FFC of Farrow Fields Catering and Farnborough Football Club: slow-roast sausages, bread rolls, potato croquettes, cheddar chunks, samosas and crisps. Roger French aspirated the last 8.2 grammes of crisps.

Man-of-the-Match: Ian Shoebridge – more toil than dazzle but a welcome sign of spring after a winter of injury.

27 March 2016: Catford Wanderers Vets (A, 8-2)

Easter egg bonanza for Farnborough

There is no international break for the Farnborough Senior Vets, or come to think of it, an Easter break. Numbers were down on last week but this Easter parade had a special ring to it as it was Roger French's 300th appearance for Farnborough Vets – a tad overdue for reasons we do not need to go into. Moreover, Roger had an Easter message of hope for the team – no not “This is Sparta” but “I am the resurrection” as he was now aiming for Patrice Mongelard's 500-game mark for the Farnborough Vets. He should get there round about Easter 2023, no matter what his fitbit says, barring periods of enforced inactivity.

Our opponents – Catford Wanderers are well-known to us, and better still to Roger, but they surprised us with some new faces, new to most of us except Waine Hetherington who warned us that we would find it hard to score against a reinforced side. We had a new face of our own too – Dave Salako who came with a polished reputation as a keeper, which shone even brighter after the game. Another surprise we sprung was to play Simon Thomas up front, free as a bird from defensive duties, and allowed to express himself at last, and let his quick feet do the talking.

The early morning rain had given way to sunshine by the time we kicked off but returned with a vengeance, and extra wind, in the second half - but could not put a dampener on a cracking ten-goal spectacle.

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Roger French
Colin Mant, Ian Shoebridge, Michael Ugwumba, Rob Lipscomb
Waine Hetherington, Simon Thomas

Substitutes: Mick O'Flynn, Phil Anthony

Supporter: Dave O'Flynn

The first quarter of an hour or so was very even. Both sides competed well all over the pitch with compact formations and defences were generally on top. We enjoyed slightly greater possession and more connective passing but without troubling the Catford keeper. We were playing against the slope and the wind and were probably more wary as a result. We were not wary enough though after about twenty minutes when a moment's inattention and loose marking was punished with what, if intentional, looked like a cracking shot into the top corner after a smart turn inside our box following a throw-in. The feeling that this was somewhat against the run of play spurred us on and thankfully it did not take long for us to draw level. Barely five minutes later, Rob Lipscomb guided a shot from just inside the box beyond the Catford keeper, after Simon Thomas and Waine Hetherington had occupied the Catford defence. Five minutes later we had the lead – as Waine Hetherington was taken roughly from behind in the box – Rob Lipscomb put the penalty away high into the centre of the goal after the Catford keeper went low to his right.

At the other end, when Catford did have shots they usually found Dave Salako's safe pair of hands and we were able to build from the back with his distribution. Patrice Mongelard and Ian Coles made way for Mick O'Flynn and Phil Anthony on the half hour. We went on to edge ahead further after Mick O'Flynn collected a cross field ball from Roger French and laid it on a plate at the far post where Simon Thomas ghosted in to tap the ball home. 3-1 at half-time was a pleasant

surprise and not underserved, but we felt that Catford had the players to get back in the game if we slipped up despite our territorial advantage.

The next goal was, as they say, going to be critical. Colin Mant, commanding the centre circle cleared a ball upfield, which fell nicely for Waine Hetherington who had slipped his marker. It drifted a touch wide to the left but Waine's eye and cultured left foot were in, as the ball was lashed into the top corner from a tightish angle. That was just what we needed and with Patrice Mongelard and Ian Coles coming back on for Waine (who felt he would be taken off as soon as he scored) and Rob Lipscomb, we were looking to make the result safe. It did not feel like that initially as Catford fashioned a number of corners with good left foot delivery and found one of their big units who narrowed the gap from close range.

We could have buckled then but today there was great collective spirit and we weathered the storm (and I do not just mean the rain and wind) and found our cutting edge again. A long kick from Patrice Mongelard found Michael Ugwumba just inside the Catford half, and his cushioned glancing header released jet-heeled Simon Thomas who rounded the Catford keeper and coolly slid the ball home. The goal-fest was not over though – Ian Shoebridge shot low against the base of the post and was impeded as he moved to claim the rebound – unfairly, said the referee. Roger French's fitbit recorded that he covered forty yards in 2.2 seconds to claim the ball. He claimed that he had had one of those teenage dreams where he was going to score twice today, and one of those was a penalty. From a technical point of view his penalty was better than Rob Lipscomb's but as Rob would say - they all count.

With ten minutes left Ian Shoebridge got a tickle in the ribs and Waine Hetherington was back – chasing Andy Faulks for the golden boot – and he was rewarded when a shot from Roger French rebounded off a Catford defender into Waine's path and he steered the ball home with consummate ease. The anorak what does the stats had to deny himself an assist for that one – by popular demand – no point being greedy - 300 games, a penalty and a bit of his dream perhaps still to come – that was quite enough. We were not done – there was time for Simon Thomas to quiff the ball into an empty goal but the connection was too ephemeral and the Catford keeper scrambled back to get his hands to the ball, only to palm it against his defender and into the goal. I know that some of my team will question the use of the word palm here, in this report, as Palm Sunday was a week ago – but surely you will allow me a related religious reference on this day of all days, and besides I have, with my own eyes, seen tackles from a player who has played 300 games for the Vets that were a week late.

I was not present for the après-match vittles as a Sunday dinner of roast lamb and a bottle of 2014 Shiraz Barossa claimed my affections. Nor was Buffet Bunny Nick Waller – so there was plenty for others. So, all I can offer you is a quote from man of the actualité, Roger French: *"Buffet was very good again with sausage rolls, sausages, sliced ham, chips, vine ripened tomatoes, cheese, buttered baguette, slices of pizza and chicken nuggets. I had a large plateful needless to say. Catford players were very sociable and good banter was had in the bar after."*

Man-of-the-Match: Simon Thomas – who seems to have found the role he always wanted to play since he was a boy.

3 April 2016: Met Police Super Vets (A, 3-2)

Farnborough nick the points under Met noses

We assembled in the vast car park at the Warren in West Wickham, home of today's opponents, the Metropolitan Police Super Vets, in what is arguably one of the finest settings we could possibly spend a lovely sunny spring Sunday morning playing football. Malcom Seymour, from Catford Wanderers Vets, who was helping us out after a private arrangement with Roger French, was the first there. Several of us arrived virtually at the same time, including Des Lindsay, back from lapping up the Florida sunshine, and what initially looked like an over-brylcreemed Colin Mant until he informed us, he had merely combed his hair for a trip to a caravan park in Christchurch (Dorset) later in the day. Why a police car followed Sinisa Gracanin and our South American (Simon Thomas) into the car park we'll never know. There were thirteen of us in the end including Richard Paterson who was helping out in goal in an emergency as our goal keeping service had broken down. We would have had fourteen but news filtered through that Andy Faulks had pulled something yesterday, and pulled out overnight. I expect he'll be missing next week too for some reason – well actually it is a good reason – he is getting married. All the Farnborough Senior Vets send their best wishes to Andy and Jo. While Andy is away though, others are chipping away at his goal tally.

Starting XI:

Richard Paterson

Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Colin Mant

Des Lindsay, Michael Ugwumba, Rob Lipscomb, Sinisa Gracanin

Waine Hetherington, Simon Thomas

Substitutes: Malcolm Seymour, Dave Green

Supporters: Michael Ugwumba Jr (also linesman); Mia and Wendy Paterson

We had the prospect of a good game against able opponents who allied experience with some slightly less experienced players with energy. Both teams were looking to play a composed brand of football. We had the best chances early on. The game was barely five minutes old when Rob Lipscomb put Simon Thomas through on goal unchallenged but the finish was not as Simon wished. Simon was to repeat the dose soon after, again in a one-on-one but the Met keeper saved smartly with his legs. For the first twenty minutes he was the busier keeper but the blue line held and coped with all the crosses we sent in from both flanks. Through balls for Waine Hetherington and Simon Thomas always seemed to run a bit too fast on a surface that was a still tad greasy from the early morning rain. Our first goal came after about twenty-five minutes – when Des Lindsay measured a cross to the far post where Waine Hetherington loitered with intent, and applied a calm finish to guide the ball low into the net with the minimum of fuss. Soon after, on the half hour we made two changes with Dave Green and Malcolm Seymour coming on for Steve Blanchard and Des Lindsey. I think Dave and Malcolm will be the first to admit that their introduction unsettled us, initially. The Met went on to have a purple patch of about ten minutes – first they carved us open on the right of the defence with a clever dummy. The cross was cushioned and controlled by their forward who showed surprising lightness of foot for a big unit, and he volleyed the ball home after an off-balance Ian Coles could not make the block. Richard Paterson got fingertips to the ball but the Met had a deserved equaliser. Five minutes later they nearly took the lead as a powerful shot from the edge of the box came through a crowd of players and was moving at great speed in an inexorable arc into our net until a flying Richard Paterson got his hand to it at the last minute to produce a stupendous save. I noted the Met Police player who had the shot sportingly shook Richard's hand.

As the first-half ended, we had regained our ascendancy though still without getting a breakthrough. That was to come very early in the second half, in fact within two minutes of the re-start. As a defender I always have sympathy with those who concede own goals because I know that is not what they intended, and such goals are not easily forgotten. Dave Green swung in a cross from the right which came off a Met Police forehead, going the wrong way for them, and the right way for us. The Met keeper could not retrieve the ball before it crossed the line. We deserved it if you take the first-half into account but we were now in the second half and this was virtually our first serious attempt on the Met Police goal in that half. We then made heavy weather of getting a third goal. We had chances – the best one falling to Simon Thomas two yards out after a clever dummy from Wayne Hetherington but Simon could not force the issue. The Mayan, Aztec and Inca Gods were all displeased with Simon Thomas today. How else could I, or he, explain the chances he missed? On another more propitious day these Gods would have bestowed at least a hat-trick on him.

On the hour we brought Steve Blanchard and Des Lindsay back for Ian Coles and Sinisa Gracanin. We created a series of chances – before it fell to Rob Lipscomb, assisted by a Steve Blanchard cushion header, to give us a two-goal margin with a smart diagonal lobbed finish from inside the box, with just under twenty minutes to go. We went looking for a fourth which never came. Michael Ugwumba delivered a howitzer from twenty yards which curled agonisingly close and drove the ball deep in the undergrowth. Wayne Hetherington was taken roughly from behind again in the box and while the Met Police player involved was happy to concede the penalty the man that mattered, the referee, was unmoved. I should say how well and fairly the referee officiated today. He was dynamic, informative – for example telling us how long was left at regular intervals. That is how I knew the Met scored in the eighty-fifth minute with a great left foot shot that went in off the underside of the bar from twenty yards. It took a shot of that quality to beat Richard in our goal. Earlier he had made an acrobatic save to atone for the error of kicking the ball straight to a Met player with a clear sight of goal. The left foot hammer strike was delivered by a youngster they brought on for the final quarter of an hour. I mean youngster – I will wager that he has yet to shave. By then injuries had taken their toll on the Met – one of their players will be seeing the dentist in the morning after catching an inadvertent hand from Rob Lipscomb in the face. The Met pressed hard for an equaliser but we had the game management to preserve the three points.

The showers at the Warren are spacious, almost as much acreage as where we change, but that is not the most striking feature about them. I reckon they are used for water cannon training. After high velocity refreshing ablutions a few of us wandered through a warren of rooms to find the après-match space. When we did, the large platter of assorted sandwiches and the equally large tray of roast potatoes were a delight. Only a few cress sprouts were left at the end. Our Buffet T-Rex, Nick Waller, and that other big beast of the buffet area, Roger French, were absent. We did not miss them, as it meant more for us. I had the added pleasure of watching the Leicester goal with a pair of ardent Arsenal fans, whilst listening to Ian Coles explaining why he will never be fingered for eating scampi fries. We outstayed the Met Vets to record a 7-0 win in the bar.

I collected match subs in Roger French's absence. He had left strict instructions concerning Des Lindsay, so I am happy to report that Des paid his £5 – now here is a bit of a brainteaser for our readers. Des paid in coins – eight coins in total. If there were two 5p coins out of the eight - what were the other coins? I'll give you a clue - one was a £2 coin. First correct answer gets a beer from Des, perhaps. It was good to have Des back playing, bringing a unique muscular

presence to our midfield, and kamikaze back heels in our box, but providing a generous service to our forwards.

Man-of-the-Match: Richard Paterson an efficient, lithe and agile man who will always be remembered for that worldie in the first-half – he will be telling brother-in-law Waine Hetherington about it for years, and rightly so.

24 April 2016: Wellcome Super Vets (H, 3-2)

An eventful six-hour day at Farrow Fields: where's Waine, where's Des Lindsay's wallet, a birthday celebration in the buffet room, a challenge for the cleaners, rear entry and a hard-fought welcome win against tough opponents

Honesty is the best policy. I had not played in three weeks and it showed as my first touch was very poor, I then fluffed a corner and later on missed a sitter of a header from a corner but I had three splendid samoosas. So now I have got that out in the open, I can tell you about an eventful day. The day was overcast. The match day logistics and practical arrangements were shambolic, but everyone was in a good mood, with the feel-good factor from the Riverside Wanderers après-match events in Eynsford still rippling and putting a smile on faces. The seventeen players we had overnight dwindled to thirteen as Roger French could not work out where Waine Hetherington was, Rob had a bereavement in the family (sadly), Stephane Anelli overdid it in the gym, and Kypros Michael went to offer his services, at Roger French's request, to Metrogas who were short of players for their match against our Young Vets on the adjoining pitch. The keys to the bar could not be found, the dressing room we used could only be accessed from the rear (no jokes please) via our clubhouse lounge, as the key for that too was missing. At first, we could not find the keys to the container to retrieve the nets for the goals but in the end, all was well and referee Mick Gearing got us under way against opponents who outnumbered us with eighteen players, and more supporters (including one blessed with extraordinary eyesight who was ensconced in one of the dugouts).

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Colin Brazier, Colin Mant

Des Lindsay, Michael Ugwumba, Ian Shoebridge, Sinisa Gracanin

George Kleanthous, Simon Thomas

Strategist: Mick O'Flynn

Substitutes: Roger French, Nick Waller

Supporters: Hannah Kleanthous, Michael Ugwumba Jr (also linesman)

It was not easy to separate the two sides in the first quarter of an hour as two evenly-matched teams sussed each other out and probed in various places. There was a hint of greater cohesion and forward menace from our opponents whilst our final ball was not optimal. Wellcome took the lead after about fifteen minutes with a shot that was deflected past a wrong-footed Gary Fentiman. The Wellcome forward had done well to create the space but his low shot could not be fully blocked by Sinisa Gracanin. We felt this was a bit harsh and went looking for an equaliser and we did not have long to wait. Ian Shoebridge had picked up a loose ball in the centre of midfield in David Beckham territory and fired his shot but the ball came off a Wellcome Player and sat nicely in front of him for a half-volley which Shoey duly administered about twenty-five yards out. The Wellcome keeper, not the tallest, had had one or two fumbles but he was not given the opportunity for another, as the ball sailed into the top corner hit the stanchion and came back out across the goal. For a moment, and I am guessing here, Wellcome must have thought they could pretend the ball had not crossed the line. But the referee was decisive, and to give Wellcome credit there were no complaints when he pointed to the centre circle.

There followed a period where both teams pressed for an advantage and corners were won and defended by both sides. Patrice Mongelard could only produce a disappointing glancing header from a Simon Thomas corner that dropped from a great height into a crowd scene at the back

post and the moment was gone. In my defence I would say I was distracted by a row going on between a Wellcome defender and another of their entourage who made the mistake of being honest by not flagging our player for off-side.

On the half-hour, Roger French and Nick Waller came on for Sinisa Gracanin and Michael Ugwumba. We had to work hard to prevent this reshuffle from unsettling our rhythm too greatly and we just about managed it. Des Lindsay saw a shot from the edge of the box come off the post and the threat we carried was rewarded when the Wellcome keeper spilled a cross from Des and George Kleanthous was in the right place to profit as he rounded the keeper and steered the ball into the net. 2-1 at half-time felt right on the balance of play, but Wellcome will have been wondering how they had ended up in that unwelcome position.

It is fair to say that Wellcome had a better second half than we did, at least in the early stages. The changes they made at half-time had given them fresh menace up front, and at times we looked like we were hanging on in there, with last ditch tackles, and Gary Fentiman in our goal had to pull off some great saves. They won corners that put us under pressure with their big units. I recall one passage of pinball play in our box, a yard from our goal line where it was just a matter of putting bodies in the way, including Roger French's whose propinquity was crucial, and Gary Fentiman's huge frame came in handy. We were playing on the break.

With half an hour left master strategist Mick O'Flynn took off a fired-up Colin Brazier, and an even more reluctant Des Lindsay, for the return of Sinisa Gracanin and Michael Ugwumba. As Des has trouble with arithmetic, he stayed on briefly to give us twelve players. Mick's tactical genius was rewarded about a quarter of an hour from the end when Sinisa Gracanin and George Kleanthous combined down the left as Mick had foreseen, and George slipped the ball unselfishly to Simon Thomas unmarked and alone in front of the Wellcome goal. Simon took two touches, steadied himself, waved at the crowd, fluffed his quiff, paid his own thespian's homage to Shakespeare with a couple of lines from Hamlet's soliloquy, and then decided to shoot low and gently into the Wellcome net from three yards out. We now had the cushion of a two-goal lead and that gave us great heart. We needed it as with five minutes to go Wellcome narrowed the deficit with a smart goal. We managed to hold on. A draw would probably have been the fairer result but we had more luck and I was delighted with a win, as everyone in Farnborough and neighbouring Orpington heard as the final whistle went.

In keeping with the general unpreparedness around the place we had a bit of a struggle with the padlocks and the tethering posts for the goals, and the opening of the bar was also delayed, I could see, as several of us paraded with our towels on the way back from the showers.

Nick Waller's 54th birthday wish came true as he was put in charge of the bar. The other 53 wishes were probably the same - see what I did there. To mark the occasion, we used a changing room with a red sign on it that said Buffet, quite fitting we thought as the Buffet Dream Catcher was in fine fettle. He nabbed the last piece of cheddar whilst pondering the location of the tattoo that could pave the way for a free Sky Sports subscription via Eynsford (another birthday wish, perhaps).

The catering firm of Shoebridge and Martin put on a great show as always. There was still a lot to do around the clubhouse. Roger French visited the ladies' toilets to switch the boiler off but seemed to be doing more than that in there, as he was gone for a while with the photo of his little red tractor. We were still discussing the game when two cleaners came to prepare the clubhouse

for the next day's Montessori lessons, put furniture away, Hoover the floors, wipe the tables etc. I shudder to think what the janitory challenge was in the ladies.

The usual banter had added Eynsford spice this week, and there was a bit of a breakthrough when Des Lindsay promised in front of witnesses to settle his annual and match subs arrears next week (just as he had in previous weeks) but this time Roger French made a note as five players affixed their seals to the document recording the oath. I could not help thinking that the Paris Climate Change Agreement ratified only two days ago on Earth Day in New York had been a doddle compared to this. There will be global cooling if we do not resolve the matter.

I think I just got away with it when I got home just under six hours after I left, but I told Mrs M her hair looked nice after a visit to her stylist earlier today (Colin Mant - note and learn!).

Man-of-the-Match: George Kleanthous, for a poacher's goal, an assist, a triathlon athlete of a daughter selected for Kent, a tireless performance and almost sincere best wishes to Crystal Palace for their cup game. Lastly, I should add that Kypros Michael also scored today, for victorious Metrogas, against our Young Vets.

3 May 2016: Eagles Fitter Fans Super Vets (H, 3-0)

Farnborough win the game but lose the joys of football

Our opponents today were a close-knit group of Crystal Palace fans who are going to Wembley on 21 May but today they visited our theatre of dreams, at Farrow Fields, looking in fine fettle after the watery troubles of winter, in the warm sunshine of a glorious spring evening. I think many of us were still dreaming after the first miracle of Chislehurst last Sunday when we registered a great victory against Riverside Wanderers. There was a touch of complacency in our game and an expectation that vital stats would get a boost across the board. Co-Manager Roger French had generated copious figures in a quest to better last season's points, score a hundred goals and two new pretenders were challenging for the golden boot and there were "opta" stats to massage. By chasing points, I feel we lost the point of it all and our opponents taught us the lesson that the serious purpose of football is to provide joy (as Leicester City fans know). I suspect in years to come football philosophers will discuss whether football stats were a case of science killing art, metrics killing joy.

There was not much joy on Des Lindsay's mien when the game started. He had produced the second miracle of Chislehurst last Sunday when he settled his arrears and he noted ruefully that he had gone from being paid to play football to not being in the starting XI after he had paid up. The look of utter incredulity on my face prompted him to add that he had the programmes to prove it. He did though take the opportunity to press his claim for the goal-of-the-season by reminding two thirds of the management of his stupendous header (on the same pitch) against CUACO Vets on 13 September. Mick O'Flynn (possibly) and Patrice Mongelard are great believers in democracy and would not want to influence a free vote. However, our advice was that a player who had played twenty-two games without experiencing the joy of a kit wash might struggle in that ballot, irrespective of the technical merit of his entry.

Starting XI:

Michael Ugwumba

Roger French, Phil Anthony, Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles

Colin Brazier, Paul Scotter, Ian Shoebridge, Rob Lipscomb

George Kleanthous, Wayne Hetherington

Strategist: Mick O'Flynn

Substitutes: Mick O'Flynn, Des Lindsay, Patrice Mongelard, Gary Fentiman, Simon Thomas

Supporters: Peter Harvey, Michael Ugwumba Jr (also linesman)

When referee Mick Gearing got us under way we started with Michael Ugwumba in goal until Gary Fentiman could join us. Gary did so after fifteen minutes during which time Michael had kept a sixth of a clean sheet, and we think without having touched the ball. That does not mean that we were having things all our own way – far from it. In fact, many of us could not recall a poorer display (particularly compared with last Sunday's). The credit for that must go to our opponents who were organised, supported each other, did simple things and took pleasure in what they were doing. They probably do not win many games but they enjoy playing. We were the opposite, frustration grew, tempers frayed, indiscipline spread. Roger French berated most of his own players (with special invective reserved for Des later). I do not think the mood improved even after George Kleanthous had given us the lead on twenty minutes, with an unselfish assist from Rob Lipscomb.

On the half-hour we made three changes with Colin Brazier, Steve Blanchard and Ian Shoebridge making way for Michael Ugwumba, Des Lindsay (finally) and Patrice Mongelard. I do not recall many other scoring opportunities for both sides. The Eagles nearly equalised on the break and their lone forward - who had a thankless task all game, lifted a ball against our crossbar after a neat bit of skill. At the other end Des Lindsay had a shot from close-range smartly saved by the Eagles keeper much to Roger French's fury (copiously vented at Des). This was a joyless moment indeed. 1-0 at half-time was a fair reflection of the game.

More changes were made at half-time with Roger French and Phil Anthony making way for Simon Thomas and Mick O'Flynn. We were calmer and more dominant in the second half and most of the play was in the Eagles half. Patrice Mongelard and Michael Ugwumba had shots that looked good on the eye and were on target. Mick O'Flynn belittled my effort because it looked like I had slipped at the moment of contact and in his view that greatly improved the shot. But I will not let that spoil the joy of the memory. I will also remember some thrilling moves down both flanks with full backs Colin Brazier and Mick O'Flynn shining brightly. It was a welcome sight to see Mick lasting beyond the 55th minute. Simon Thomas laid on a succession of exquisite crosses. Chances were missed. I recall we hit the woodwork two or three times.

Waine Hetherington edged us further ahead with a delicate chip from the edge of the box. Scoring against the Eagles is not a joy for Waine as an ardent Palace fan but he had the comfort of knowing he had just possibly loosened the grasp of Andy Faulks and George Kleanthous on the golden boot trophy. George kept himself in that race when he put away another peach of a cross supplied by Simon Thomas after a silky pass from Des Lindsay. That almost made up for a sitter of a header missed from another Simon Thomas cross and a failure to put the ball away after it had come off the post from an Ian Shoebridge effort. 3-0 was a better reflection of the game but I think a heavier score would have been a tad harsh on opponents who remained sporting and enjoyed the game. I do not recall a bad tackle all game. We waited thirty-two games for a clean sheet this season and now we had two in three days.

We hurried to strip the nets down, locked the goal posts in a kissing position, rushed down to long queues for the showers (another game had taken place on the other pitch with our second team catching up with their winter backlog) and made haste to secure the pizzas. I showered in the referees' room. Roger French is not allowed in there. Eight pizzas and four boxes of curly fries were shared equally between the two teams. There was a 9th pizza which was reserved, not for Buffet Nemesis Nick Waller (absent yesterday), but for the Club Chairman, Steve Viner, and guests. This was an inadequate thank you for the work Steve Viner had done to prepare for this game in particular setting up the goals. The Club President, Ian Couchman, was there too, behind the bar, supporting the two Farnborough teams on show. I heard that Matt Ellis one of our Young Vets had a slice of pizza which normally would have gone to Roger French. They can compare notes when Roger man-marks Matt on Sunday in the traditional Young Vets v Senior Vets end of season fixture. Not that it will be our last game. We play on for a further three games after that, and the stats will keep growing.

There was time for music aficionado Mick O'Flynn to take a selfie with Eagles player Jan Podsiadly from Rocky Sharpe and the Replays (or was it the other way round). This led Mick to reminisce about his encounter with ex-Python Graham Chapman at the legendary Marquee Club in Wardour Street in 1975 when Mick used to be a naughty boy. Roger French mentioned that other naughty boys had been complaining about the management's selection and substitution policy which deprived some of full games. The simple truth is that if any player in our team feel

they are worth a full game every time in an egalitarian world where supply exceeds demand then another team might provide greater joy.

Simon Thomas joyfully nailed the Dot Cotton award for the season by taking home the kit and providing partner Amanda Sim with another opportunity to display superb laundry skills, command of the sun, and maximum reverence for the FOBG shirt (and shorts and socks).

Talking of reverence - the Eagles team stayed in large numbers and for a moment we thought we would not win in the bar. But we saw off the last of them at about 10:30 when Farnborough villager David Smith finally left. But before we could go home the six or seven of us left had to put away 73 chairs and 13 tables to clear the room for the following day's Montessori classes. The things we do for the education of the young. I feared that if I went home and told Mrs M that was the reason for my late return, she might not believe me. Incidentally Club Chairman Ian Couchman waited until we had finished before telling us we had done it the wrong way.

Man-of-the-Match: Steve Blanchard – a joyful man who cruised through the game, and is about to go on another cruise.

8 May 2016: FOBG Young Vets (A, 0-3)

Youth prevails but Vets football wins

This is a game we look forward to, but without expectation, and one which we associate with our end of season awards even though our season is usually not over by then. More often than not the ground is baked hard and the sun is out – as it turned out today. It is a family occasion in a broad and real sense, but as in all families there are some underlying tensions. Our ambitions were limited partly because of absences but we wanted to be able to hold our heads high at the end. Whilst we could not award ourselves the three points, there were some fantastic prizes on offer in our end of season awards.

This was our 35th game of the season – and fittingly thirty-five is conventionally agreed as the cut-off point when Veterans football kicks in. Some of the players on show today were a long way past this watershed, others closer. We lost the game but, in the end, football won, and so did Farnborough Old Boys Guild.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Roger French, Patrice Mongelard, Dave Green, Colin Brazier

Rob Lipscomb, Ian Shoebridge, Sinisa Gracanin, Stephane Anelli

Des Lindsay, Simon Thomas

Substitutes: Wayne Hetherington, George Kleanthous, Michael Ugwumba

Supporters: Paul Bell, Andy and Jo Faulks, Isabelle and Thomas French, Hannah Kleanthous, Pam Shoebridge, Vicky Tanner, Michael Ugwumba Jr (also linesman)

Referee Mick Gearing got us going in glorious sunshine – on a hot day which necessitated several water breaks (suspected by Young Vet Barry Grainger to be a time-wasting tactic on our part) – the old need more hydration I thought, as Barry will find out one day. Mick Gearing told me later that the sun can be a hindrance and affect a referee's vision. This was news to me as I had witnessed ocular issues with many referees, even in very overcast conditions but I could see what he meant.

Not much happened in the first twenty-five minutes. Young Vets had more possession, attacking intent and more incursions in our box but without creating the sort of chances that strikers regret missing and which spectators remember. In the early part of the first-half it is fair to say that only one team looked like scoring but they were made to wait. As the minutes ticked away, we could see that we were not being outclassed. On twenty-five minutes we were forced into a change when Des Lindsay's suspect groin gave way again and after valiantly hobbling in front of his personal fan club (I saw him buying a round for them with my own eyes later) he was replaced slightly ahead of schedule by Wayne Hetherington. We immediately carried more of an attacking threat, which was amplified when George Kleanthous came on along with Michael Ugwumba on the half hour as Stephane Anelli and Simon Thomas went off to cool off.

In a cruel twist of fate, just as we were beginning to make the other Gary in goal today, Gary Rosslee, work, in the Young Vets goal, we were undone by a swift break. We lost the ball in midfield after some fancy footwork which did not come off – the ball was recycled quickly to the wing for Young Vet John Redmond to scooter into our box. He evaded Gary Fentiman and from a tight angle finished well, high into an empty net. I cannot say it was against the run of play but it came at a time when our hopes of scoring ourselves were rising. The last ten minutes of the

half were indisputably ours – Waine Hetherington, George Kleanthous and in particular Rob Lipscomb (twice) came very close. Gary Rosslee in the Young Vets goal had been shaken out of his composure and even Barry Grainger wondered if a betting syndicate had got to that Gary, to throw the game. We had our best spell of the game and the Young Vets had to draw on all their assets to preserve their advantage. They were momentarily disrupted when Matt Wright had to go off after a collision with “a small motorcar” as Matt put it, in the muscular shape of Michael Ugwumba. I hope Fireman Matt can go to work tomorrow – he does an important job.

We were not despondent at half-time – a makeshift back four missing several familiar faces was doing OK, and our forwards could cause problems with a bit of luck. Luck deserted us though when the wind doubled in strength for the second half. We had trouble penetrating the Young Vets box and they attacked swiftly down both wings and began to force corners. No Young Vets v Senior Vets game is complete without a French moment. It came after a shoulder charge by Matt Ellis reminded Roger French that Matt had had a piece of pizza last Tuesday that would have been Roger’s. But things did not get too spicy and I think they made up. Matt had the last laugh though when he hit a stupendous half-volley from forty-five yards which combined all the necessary factors – no Senior Vet nearby to cramp his style, wind assistance, sun in the keeper’s eyes, perfect technical execution, power and direction and we were 2-0 down. By then, we had moved the deckchairs on the Titanic as Stephane Anelli and Simon Thomas were back on for the last half hour replacing Ian Shoebridge and Roger French. Rob Lipscomb dropped to left-back from midfield despite his deeply held feeling that this had greatly emasculated our attacking force.

The Young Vets went on to get a third from top predator Barry Grainger that the neutrals say should have been ruled off-side, much to Gary Fentiman’s annoyance, who crowned the episode with water bottle throwing antics and a bit of a sulk. A fourth Young Vets goal was ruled out for off-side. At the other end, we repeated the pattern of the first period with good half chances created by George Kleanthous, Waine Hetherington and Simon Thomas in particular. But it was not to be. The better team won – even if the score could have been a tad fairer.

The clubhouse was full of Farnborough family members, including many young children, and many spilled out into the sunshine. Pam and Ian Shoebridge had a conveyor belt of sausages and bread rolls on the go. They had samosas too but nobody told me and I just managed to clamp my jaw on the last one – tragedy averted. Good thing that Buffet Apotheosis Nick Waller was absent though we all had a reminder of his Buffetness later. Paul Bell tucked into the sausages with relish and had the nerve to say to me whilst I was munching away that “nothing had changed.” I have no idea what he meant – it’s the Geordie accent.

Even though he was troubled by various things Co-Manager Roger French did his usual star turn presenting an array of end-of-season awards. We would have preferred these awards to be better attended, but as they say it is the thought that counts. At the same time, they reflect a view of the world which is fair, inclusive and unselfish and how the Senior Vets operation is run by the Management Team of French, O’Flynn and Mongelard – and that is unlikely to change. So, players who want to trouble Roger with disputations about our selection and substitutions policy might be wise to use the summer break to showcase their talents to other teams, who will give them ninety minutes every time, because we can’t and we won’t.

Senior Vet and Club Photographer Colin Brazier was on hand to record the intimate event. Watch out for photos in the newsletter including that of a bottle of wine personally recommended by Roger French for half of the Shoebridge & Martin Catering Solutions firm. Roger’s speeches have

lost their Castroesque dimensions but are nevertheless entertaining. So, if you are not happy with our football today you can enjoy the speech as annexed to this report. Daisy Thomas was adamant that mum Amanda changed into a t-shirt with daddy's face on it.

I swear Des Lindsay's eyes were moist as he watched the Dot Cotton Award being picked up. There was added poignancy for him as his injury now meant that his season was over, and to his eternal chagrin, he would not have the opportunity to show his team mates that even though he used to get paid for playing football (like his brother Mark at Crystal Palace who have an appointment at Wembley shortly, to be attended by Eagles fan Vicky Tanner with an £85 ticket, who manned the bar today); he is now not above paying the local launderette for a kit wash.

Man-of-the-Match: Colin Brazier on fire in the midday sun, and going home with a sporty little number in red (no, not a tractor).

ANNEX: FOBG Senior Vets 2015-16 End of Season Awards as narrated (briefly) by Roger French

The Golden Boot

With three more games to go before we finish our long and tortuous season it is too close to call the winner of this season's Golden Boot at this stage as there are three players within two goals of each other and others that are breathing down their necks. Therefore, this year our main trophies will be deferred to the Club EOS presentation in June.

Goal-of-the-season

As with the Golden Boot there are three more games to go and still time for a worldie to be scored so this trophy will also be deferred until the Club EOS presentation.

Managers Player of the Season

This is given to the player that we consider has contributed most to the team both on and off the pitch. As with the main team awards, the winner will be revealed at the Club End of Season presentation, in June.

Referees Award

Our esteemed former manager and long-term referee continues to provide his services free of charge for which we are extremely grateful particularly in light of some of the challenges he has had to face over the course of the 38 games played. This season he has taken charge of 20 plus fixtures with more than a third of those games being played at neutral venues such as Beckenham Cricket Club, Darrick Wood 3G on a Friday evening and Glebe FC in Chislehurst. In recognition and thanks for the excellent service provided we would like to present this fine bottle of Courvoisier VSOP to **Mick Gearing**.

Catering

We are indeed fortunate to be able to provide post match hospitality for all our home games and details are regularly featured in our match reports as written by the Buffet Muppet. This season there have been fewer home games at Farrow Fields until recent weeks but our regular catering team have continued to provide a much-appreciated service and as such we would like to present a bottle of Bailey's Irish Cream and a Green & Black chocolate minibar collection to **Pam Shoebridge**, and some bottles of quality red wine to **Jane Martin**.

Dot Cotton award

This season the Dot Cotton Award has, with one notable (deslinquent) exception, been hotly contested with the majority of the regular players having completed 2 kit washes over the last 9 months. However, one player with commendable support managed 3 washes for the season and in the process not only treated both our home and away kits with the reverence they deserve but also scored highly on Facebook. This season's winners of the Dot Cotton award are **Simon Thomas** and **Amanda Sim** who get this wonderful reminder of a neatly packaged kit, an iconic t-shirt, and a bottle of Bold 2 in 1 Lotus Flower & Lily liquid.

Supporters of the Season award

This season we have once again had a number of regular young supporters travelling far and wide not necessarily watching the action but enjoying the opportunity to get covered in mud. Between them they have covered virtually all of our games this season and so **Isabelle, Thomas, Hannah and Michael Jnr** are awarded Supporters of the Season trophies and footballs for those important kick-about in the back garden or the front room.

In addition, special thanks go to **Michael Jnr** who has run the line for the majority of our games over the course of the season and has had the pleasure of seeing a few thunderbolts from dad Michael bulge the nets and no doubt he gets to hear about it again in the car and at home, every day.

Waldorf's Buffetsaurus award

Post match food is definitely a key component of Vets football particularly when a Buffet Muppet such as Patrice (Waldorf) Mongelard is part of the management team and the main match reporter. One player gets a mention in match reports whether he is there or not and notwithstanding that he eats like a bird (no, not a gannet - that's Pat's job). As these references have become too numerous to list and in recognition of services to catering, we would like **Nick Waller** to have his very own version of Waldorf's Buffetsaurus.

That's almost it for another season apart from the three remaining games we have and the Club EOS Presentation in June so all that remains is to thank the ever-elusive **Lord Lucan AKA Toby Harlow** for arranging the majority of our 38 fixtures for the season and hope that he continues to do so.

10 May 2016: Cudham United Super Vets (H, 0-6)

Farnborough taught a lesson

It is not often that words fail me but today is one such occasion, so this report will be shorter than usual. This was a game too far – 56 hours after our derby match against our Young Vets, and against a vastly superior team (the superb Vets) who did everything right on the final game of their season. We have two more games left, to add to the 104 goals conceded and a negative goal difference of -8 after thirty-six matches. Managers get sacked for less, especially those who arrange tough games like this in such quick succession.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Roger French, Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Phil Anthony

Rob Lipscomb, Colin Brazier, Michael Ugwumba, Paul Scotter

Waine Hetherington, Ian Shoebridge

Strategist: Mick O'Flynn

Substitutes: Colin Mant, Mick O'Flynn, Andy Faulks

Supporters: Ian Couchman, Paul Parsons, Michael Ugwumba Jr (also linesman), Steve Viner

Referee Mick Gearing was on duty again – his second game too, at his venerable age, in a short space of time but in very different conditions. The British weather is invariably variable and the damp overcast conditions were a season away from last Sunday's heliolatry. At least the rain held off and the light held out. The facts of the game are simple and hard to take:

We defended well in the first-half and kept a clean sheet. We were poor in the second half and picked the ball out of our net six times. We had one good half chance in the first-half when Waine Hetherington was in on goal but was forced wide by the defender when he did not take a quick shot and the rare opportunity was gone. We did not even have the comfort of such a moment in the second half. Cudham were better in all departments, assured, sharper, quicker, stronger, marginally younger but not by much. They did not have a weakness, took great care of the ball, passed and moved, and will probably feel they could have scored more. We were vulnerable at set-pieces, could not keep the ball in their half, starved the forwards of service and did not have the legs or discipline to compete in midfield. The game should have been stopped at half-time.

Colin Mant, Mick O'Flynn and Andy Faulks came on after the half hour for Ian Coles, Phil Anthony and Paul Scotter. Andy Faulks, a shadow of his former self did not return for the second half, his golden boot having lost its shine. Roger French and Michel Ugwumba came off midway in the second half for Ian Coles and Paul Scotter. We shipped goals in the 50th, 55th, 60th, 65th, 80th and 85th minutes approximately. Despite this, the game was played in excellent spirit.

We could not finish all the pizzas. Even if Buffet Vortex, Nick Waller, had been present we would have struggled in that department as well today. We even lost the contest in the bar with more Cudham than Farnborough players left at the end.

Man-of-the-Match: Ian Shoebridge, on the occasion of his 500th game for Farnborough, joining an elite group in the club. He deserved better on such a day, but I told him he could have one of (Mum) Pam's chocolates from Sunday.

17 May 2016: Inter the Valley Vets (H, 1-2)

Inter the Valley bury Farnborough at the death

This was our 37th and final game of a long and eventful season, our fourth consecutive Tuesday evening fixture, and against opponents who were an unknown quantity. We started digging a hole for ourselves when our usual goalkeeper, 6ft 3 Gary Fentiman, was caught on the wrong side of Dartford Bridge which had closed because of a serious accident and others had to fill the large space he left. Still, the evening weather was clement, the pitch appeared to be in good nick and our opponents – a team of Charlton fans, looked like they had the same average age as us – 50, albeit with a couple of double wardrobes. When referee Nick Kinnear got us under way at around 6:45 we lined up like this.

Starting XI:

Michael Ugwumba

Roger French, Ian Coles, Phil Anthony, Steve Blanchard

Mick O'Flynn, Sinisa Gracanin, Rob Lipscomb, Ian Shoebridge

Waine Hetherington, George Kleanthous

Strategist: Mick O'Flynn

Substitutes: Colin Brazier, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard, Simon Thomas

Supporters: Ian Couchman, Des Fallon, Andy Faulks, Barry Grainger, Peter Harvey, Hannah Kleanthous, Michael Ugwumba Jr (also linesman), Steve Viner

In fact, Colin Mant was to have a ten-minute quick step for Inter as they had only ten players with two more on the way

To be honest with you, we thought after the opening half hour that we were going to win this game such was our degree of control and inter-passing. Inter defended well and had some nippy forwards and midfielders but we were limiting them to playing on the break. Michael Ugwumba was sitting in his goal until he had to pick the ball from his net for an inter equaliser. Waine Hetherington had crashed a shot against the bar after fifteen minutes, Ian Shoebridge had a long-range effort that was not far from the upright. More importantly, Sinisa Gracanin had given us the lead on twenty minutes with a crisp volley from inside the box as a defensive header fell nicely for him. Our most technically gifted midfielder buried the chance. His absence in the second half – when he went in goal, was keenly felt. Ian Shoebridge had hobbled off after twenty-five minutes undone by a blade of grass viciously attacking his calf (so it seemed) and that was the end of his match. He was replaced by Colin Brazier once we worked out which Colin to put on. By then, Inter had seized on some hesitancy in our defence to draw level a few minutes after we had opened the scoring.

We made three changes on the half hour with Colin Mant, Simon Thomas and Patrice Mongelard coming on eventually after the usual confusion, for Waine Hetherington, Ian Coles and Roger French. We continued to be dominant but without creating any further chances. As the second half started, we made an unexpected substitution as Rob Lipscomb had been invited by referee Nick Kinnear, firm, fair and wise, to cool off (and Waine Hetherington was back on). As the first-half ended Rob had been involved in a contretemps with an Inter Valley player who was still under the impression, wrongly, that he had been elbowed in the face by Rob in the one incident of the first half. Yes, Rob does a lot of thrashing about with his high energy, big-hearted muscular approach and limited finesse, but he plays without malice. There was nothing untoward in the second half I am pleased to say.

The second half was quite remarkable. I think even the Inter players would agree that we should have scored at least five goals. Waine Hetherington admitted that he would be re-living four glaring misses in his mind all night. George Kleanthous could have had a hat-trick – and so could Simon Thomas who had three one-on-ones which came to nothing. At other times he elected to shoot from tight angles when a threaded pass to a better placed team mate would have brought greater joy. I noticed Simon was a bit despondent in the club house afterwards – not even the pizzas could cheer him up though he did perk up once we started to talk dirty tractor.

For their part, Inter were more dangerous in the half too and we had some last-ditch clearances to make. They forced several corners where we missed Gary Fentiman's commanding presence. Sinisa Gracanin pulled off a great one-handed save when he tipped a shot bound for the top corner round the post. The truth though is that Sinisa should have been in the outfield where he does his best work. Mick O'Flynn lasted the regulation fifty-five minutes – thus bringing Rob Lipscomb back in play. Phil Anthony and Steve Blanchard departed on the hour with Ian Coles and Roger French returning. Roger did not last until the end and Steve Blanchard finished the game in his place. As our toothless display unfolded – it was ironic that our fans included Andy Faulks, Barry Grainger and Peter Harvey, arguably the three most prolific goal scorers for Farnborough Vets. They were prowling like wolves with fangs bared as the twilight approached – itching no doubt to bury Inter.

Instead, it was Inter who gave us the last rites. Five minutes from the end a ball over the top had left Sinisa Gracanin facing an Inter attacker on his own and we just about got away with it. But with barely two minutes left we were undone by another ball over the top and the Inter forward twisted and turned and could not be stymied by Patrice Mongelard before scuffing his ball into the Farnborough net. That eternal football lesson was in evidence again – if you do not bury your chances you will get punished.

The Inter Valley manager and goalkeeper admitted that they had got away with it. I went into their changing room to congratulate them on their win, asked them to stay for a beer and some pizza (pity Charlton fan Nick Waller the Buffet Undertaker was not there). I advised them not to rush off as the local constabulary was going to want to talk to them about the robbery of three points that evening at Farnborough. We felt like our pockets had been picked – a bit like the victim of a Cruyff turn. I noticed the Inter Manager had the T-shirt – the latest offering in the Guardian football T-shirt collection. I mention this in case your loved ones are stuck for ideas for your Father's Day present.

The wonders of Facebook had uncovered a dark secret in the Manti household. We had an international in our midst, who had performed at both the Winter Gardens and the Tower Ballroom in Blackpool. Yes, dear reader Colin Mant had represented England at ballroom dancing and the Mant on Anton anecdotes had a ring of authenticity, and there was a photo of Colin in his "gigolo on a cruise ship" days but no Darcy. Colin explained that he had a bit of Italian in him. Too much information I thought but it gave a man called French the opportunity to call Colin a dago-wop (as a term of endearment of course, a kind of double espresso if you like), perhaps revealing his voting intentions for 23 June. However, it was not going to be possible to raise the tone with a discussion about Brexit. Strictly speaking, it was proving very hard, conceptually, for us to associate Colin with a sport, an art even, which called for balance, two good feet, rhythm, and spatial awareness? Where had it all gone? Was this another reminder of the ravages of time?

Time was on my mind too as I got home and Mrs M asked me “Is that it, then?” I think she meant for this season as she added “Until training starts in two weeks”. It reminded me of a fanciful suggestion from Mick O’Flynn that next season I could still write the match reports even if I retired from playing. I’d rather take up ballroom dancing, I think. So, this report could be a collector’s item – although the trouble with collectors’ items is that you do not know at the time if you have one on your hands.

There were about ten of us left in the bar once Inter had departed. There was an end of year feel to the mood music. Our scores were P37, W16, D3, L18, GF 97, GA 106. This was not great but not shabby either – we scraped a pass. The school report will say – there were some promising high marks as well as a lack of application at times, some indiscipline (including one serious breach that required rustication), potential was unfulfilled, and as Toby Manchip’s school report once said - a more serious approach would have paid dividends.

Man-of-the-Match: George Kleanthous – who will probably be unmasked by Facebook as a star of “Fifty Shades of Blue” one day, wrapped in a cyan towel desperately trying to score.

Season 2016-17

28 August 2016	Orpington Vets (N)	3-6	A positive start for Senior Vets if you ignore the score
4 September 2016	Erith Vets (N)	1-3	Senior Vets lose their way after transfer deadline day drama
11 September 2016	CUACO Vets (N)	3-1	Forgiven one shows Senior Vets the true way
18 September 2016	Sanco Super Vets (A)	3-1	Groom scores twice almost as Farnborough come from behind in Dulwich
25 September 2016	West Farleigh Vets (A)	2-3	A tale of goalkeepers as Farnborough pay price
2 October 2016	Belvedere Vets (A)	0-2	Farnborough lose battle of the Deanos as the curse endures
9 October 2016	Inter Vyagra Super Vets (A)	3-1	Farnborough climax early and late in Sunday morning glory
16 October 2016	Inter the Valley Vets (A)	4-2	Farnborough bell tolls four times for Inter the Valley
23 October 2016	CUACO Vets (A)	2-1	Farnborough edge contest as tight as a bugle boy's cheeks
30 October 2016	Lads of the Village Super Vets (N)	4-2	50 th birthday boy Peter Harvey gets Farnborough out of a sticky situation
6 November 2016	Belvedere Vets (H)	2-5	Bonfire of Farnborough vanities
13 November 2016	Met Police Super Vets (H)	6-2	A game to remember
27 November 2016	Old Tamponians Super Vets (A)	6-0	Old Tamponians overwhelmed by Farnborough flow
11 December 2016	Old Tamponians Super Vets (H)	2-1	Farnborough frustrated for long periods but come from behind to claim Sunday morning glory
18 December 2016	Wellcome Super Vets (A)	4-3	Roger's team edges it over the other Roger's team by the odd goal in seven
8 January 2017	Inter Vyagra Super Vets (H)	10-1	Potent Farnborough outscore limp Inter Vyagra
29 January 2017	Lads of the Village Super Vets (A)	2-3	Lads are the only winners in the village
5 February 2017	Sanco Super Vets (H)	3-7	Farnborough youngster makes it a tough day for the Senior Vets
19 February 2017	West Farleigh Vets (H)	1-4	West Farleigh show how far Farnborough have to go
26 February 2017	Eagles Fitter Fans Super Vets (N)	7-0	Farnborough soar after shaky start
5 March 2017	Eagles Fitter Fans Super Vets (N)	6-4	Eagles dare to scare Phil Anthony's defence
12 March 2017	Reigate Priory Vets (A)	4-7	Wry smiles in Reigate as toothless Farnborough score four times
19 March 2017	Glendale Vets (H)	2-4	Glendale pile more pressure on the Farnborough management
26 March 2017	Catford Wanderers Vets (A)	3-1	Farnborough mums happier than Catford mums
9 April 2017	Avery Hill Vets (H)	1-1	All fair and square under the sun

Season 2016-17 (contd)

16 April 2017	Riverside Wanderers Vets (A)	0-1	No Easter eggs for Farnborough in Eynsford
23 April 2017	Wellcome Super Vets (N)	3-1	A superb effort from Farnborough and the football was not bad either
30 April 2017	Riverside Wanderers Vets (H)	0-2	Farnborough all at sea against Riverside
14 May 2017	Inter the Valley Vets (H)	4-1	Inter bury Farnborough (with a little help) in five-goal thriller
18 May 2017	Old Tamponians Super Vets (H)	2-0	Farnborough manage to come through heavy soaking

Extra Report

27 December 2016	FOBG Christmas Club Match Argentina v Royals (H)	5-2	Matthew and Luke lead FOBG Christmas football service
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28 August 2016: Orpington Vets (N, 3-6)

A positive start for Senior Vets if you ignore the score

And so, it begins again – the first match in a mostly unbroken sequence stretching to May 2017. Who knows what lies ahead but whether you have played 300 or 500 games for Farnborough Vets, or aspire to these numbers, or are less than a year away from a bus pass? There is nothing like the thrill of the opening game of a season. It feels like the first time every time and, in a sense, it is. Numbers were good: sixteen players, reflecting two departures and one arrival over the summer break. In the background – at the club there was much to look forward to – new pitch, new dressing rooms, new showers but not quite yet, though not long to wait. We found ourselves in Norman Park within shooting distance of Bromley, for the nearest thing we have to a derby against opponents who have lorded it over us and rung up some big scores in recent times. The weather was not the scorcher that could have been – conditions were overcast, and there was even a passing shower at one point. We saw to the pre-match preparations briskly (involving metal restraints and lots of tape – no it is not what you think – Mick O’Flynn), with young Thomas French doing a great job as litter patrol.

Starting XI:

Gary Rosslee,
Phil Anthony, Ian Coles, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard
Stephane Anelli, Sinisa Gracanin, George Kleanthous, Simon Thomas
Andy Faulks, Wayne Hetherington

Referee: Nick Kinnear

Substitutes: Steve Blanchard, Roger French, Peter Harvey, Des Lindsay, Michael Ugwumba

Supporters: Isabelle and Thomas French, Jodie Gracanin, Michael Ugwumba Jr (also linesman)

The first twenty minutes or so were evenly contested and we were coping with the Orpington attack which included our chief tormentor who was showing no signs of rustiness and looking to run rings round our defence. We even had the first clear opportunity after the effervescent Stephane Anelli had broken through on the right and done what most of us would have done from six yards out – shooting instead of passing and the Orpington keeper saved well. We were undone with two goals in five minutes. Orpington got behind us in a quick break and although the cross was intercepted the ball was not cleared but instead went up and came down on the boot of the one player you did not want near it and that was it. A few minutes later, the same player rolled the ball to the edge of our box for an Orpington midfielder to make the sweetest of connections and Gary Rosslee (a one-match loan from our Young Vets – with a distinctive line in pre-match jokes – sample “I hear Robin Lipscomb has retired but the opposition have appealed”), was picking the ball out of our net. At that point we wondered if we had overdone the attacking players in our midfield. However, you do not get to be the golden boot for nothing and Wayne Hetherington (who collected his trophy for last season’s exploits moments before kick-off) gave everyone a reminder of his eye for goal and cultured left foot when he spotted the Orpington keeper had gone walkabouts, and lofted the ball over his head from thirty yards out.

Soon after, on the half hour as planned, we rung the changes with our quintet of substitutes coming on all at once, for Anelli, Coles, Faulks, Mongelard and Thomas. It took us a while to adjust and in the quarter hour before half-time we fell behind further - first from not marking anyone at a corner, and then from an own goal by Steve Blanchard.

We started the second half well. Michael Ugwumba muscled his way into the six-yard box and then could not decide which foot to use, whether to shoot or pass and the moment was gone. Better and worse followed in one moment when Peter Harvey lashed a twenty-yarder against the bar and the ball came back into play to the only player who had anticipated it – Des Lindsay three yards out but his finish was agricultural. By then, and indeed for most of the second half, we had Orpington looking to play on the break with their lord of the rings at the front – at one point drawing an unorthodox tackle from a horizontal Roger French using his head (oxymoron alert!). A cross from the right travelled a long way to the far post to another unaccompanied darter from the Orpington midfield and the score swelled to 5-1.

I would be lying if I said that our ears were not ringing with the memory of our 9-3 defeat in the corresponding fixture last season – as I, along with the other four substitutes, came back on for Anthony, Hetherington, Gracanin, Mant and Kleanthous. Any yet from this position we managed to draw the second half. Stephane Anelli capped a great penetrating run with a smart finish after a Des Lindsay through ball of surprising subtlety. Peter Harvey was taken roughly from behind in the box and Des Lindsay gobbled up the penalty. In between Orpington had another quick break that exposed the vast steppes between the Farnborough defence and the midfield and brought them their sixth goal of the match.

After a memorable shower scene, we hurried back to our home ground for beer and three trays of sandwiches, eventually. Buffet Ringleader Nick Waller was missing, and so were the Orpington Vets, and yet, eight of us had no trouble clearing the trays. There was not even a bite left for young Daisy Thomas who appeared with mum Amanda – the Daz-zling winner of last season's Dot Cotton Award, who was clearly not going to give up that trophy without a fight, even hinting at bedroom hopes of a matching T-shirt for Simon for marital harmony (not too much information I hope).

Man-of-the-Match: Stephane Anelli and George Kleanthous – our own ringmasters who sizzled in our midfield.

4 September 2016: Erith Vets (N, 1-3)

Senior Vets lose their way after transfer deadline day drama

The number of our dear departed swelled to four this week. After Rob Lipscomb and Gary Fentiman over the summer, two more exited this week in the forms of Waine Hetherington and George Kleanthous – all will be missed to some extent, for different reasons. In fact, George was missing us already and offered his re-appearance, gratefully received, in between the sticks. We have yet to find that last piece of the jigsaw – which in football (unlike in the board game) is the hardest piece to put down. Would we be able to achieve penetration after the defenestration of two potent forwards (31 goals between them out of the 97 we registered in 37 games last season)? First, we had to enter Norman Park by the Hayes Lane entrance, find the right “pavilion”, pitch, and get the nets on etc. There were some other tasks to take in hand. Simon Thomas was appointed “Golden Shovel” to clear the latrine dug by the Hound of the Baskervilles in the centre circle.

The day was overcast and there was quite a breeze which caused the corner flags to droop. For one of them Roger French had needed help from (Bromley Council’s) Meryl to put it in. Referee Mick Gearing arrived just on time, he may even have hurried to put his shorts on, to get us underway.

Starting XI:

George Kleanthous
Ian Coles, Mick O’Flynn, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard
Stephane Anelli, Sinisa Gracanin, Simon Thomas, Michael Ugwumba
Andy Faulks, Des Lindsay

Referee: Mick Gearing

Substitutes: Steve Blanchard, Roger French, Peter Harvey, Ian Lyons

Supporters: Thomas French, Louie Dwight, Michael Ugwumba Jr (also linesman)

I should mention also the presence of spectator Peter Wheeler in the Erith contingent. Peter was a star and fiery striker for Farnborough Vets twenty years or so ago when I first started playing Vets football for Farnborough (and Mick Gearing was running the team then). It was good to see him again.

The first exchanges were very positive for us – early pressure with the wind advantage, lots of passing, a good scoring opportunity after barely five minutes which fell to Andy Faulks drawing a smart save from the Erith keeper. Erith however are no pushovers and have plenty of experienced individuals, some big units, and the most dangerous of the forwards on display (who went on to get a hat-trick I think). Playing on the break they forced three or four successive corners which had us worried for various reasons. George Kleanthous pulled off a series of stupendous saves from close-range and was quick off his line to snuff out any danger.

We scored first after a quarter of an hour. Whilst the goal was with the run of play there was an element of fortune about it as a goal-bound shot from Sinisa Gracanin (played in by Mick O’Flynn) was steered past the Erith keeper by one of his own. We had several chances after that – the best was a header from three yards out from Des Lindsay – getting at the end of a cross from Stephane Anelli. Andy Faulks fashioned a one-on-one which the keeper saved well (when a square pass to an unmarked Simon Thomas might have been a better option). But Andy is

desperately looking for that first goal to restore his mojo. Erith had their chances too, and I recall a free-kick bent round our wall which skidded low against the base of the post.

We made four changes on the half hour as our four substitutes came on for Coles, Faulks, Mongelard and Ugwumba. Both teams would have found it hard to believe that the score remained unchanged to half-time. We lost a bit of momentum and Erith took heart from that, and into the second period, as we could not get the cushion of a second goal.

The trouble with the second half – well there was a lot not right, was that we conceded early and a pattern was set for Erith to get the upper hand. A ball over the top to the forward of the day drew them level despite George's best efforts. Literally moments earlier, we had forced a good save from the Erith keeper. We came back in the game – and were within a whisker of restoring our lead when Stephane Anelli broke through and shot across the face of the goal – with the ball just eluding Simon Thomas' outstretched legs at the far post – if only he had been wearing clown shoes, to go with that yellow tartan suit on his stag do. We were unlucky we felt after Peter Harvey intelligently played Stephane Anelli in on goal, and we had a goal disallowed for off-side. I have seen them given as they say. On the hour O'Flynn, Gracanin, Lindsay and Mant made way for the four players who had gone off half an hour earlier.

I cannot say that it ended well for us. We were undone by two balls over the top which were finished very well. Roger French was taken off to lower the mercury after a mistimed tackle and plenty of verbals. Mick O'Flynn came back for the last ten minutes. Peter Harvey saw a shot come back off the angle of post and bar.

The mood was not great – there was a sense of déjà vu. The showers were cold and not much was said in the changing room. The opposition did not follow us back to our clubhouse. Pity, as they usually do much for the takings, and we have never had trouble with, or from, them. This time there were six of us to eat sandwiches from Shoebridge Catering Solutions meant for twenty-four. Buffet Hound Nick Waller missed out again, but we got some late assistance from a few of our Sunday team. Amanda Sim and Daisy Thomas also helped with the food mountain. The conversation was the usual rich tapestry ranging from stag do antics, craft beers from LIDL, food allergies, Mercedes automobiles, Jehovah's witnesses, testicular jokes and the importance of goalkeepers.

Man-of-the-Match: George Kleanthous, after a very successful but not permanent reincarnation as a Number 1, who more than filled Gary Fentiman's jersey.

11 September 2016: CUACO Vets (N, 3-1)

Forgiven one shows Senior Vets the true way

This week we were down to a baker's dozen after a few withdrawals, some at short notice, and a successful late search for a chosen one to bear the cross of goalkeeping for us. The weather was brilliant, dry, sunny, with a total absence of wind (if you exclude Des Lindsay's schoolboy antics in the changing room). It was a scorcher, and the football was not bad either with the opposition playing their part. Meryl, somewhat incongruously, allocated us the pitch nearest to hot showers today. A bit of semaphore with the linesman's flags from Colin Brazier had brought referee Mick Gearing to the right place to be re-united with his shorts. He was obviously wearing something else to get to the ground.

Colin Brazier, Kypros Michael and occasional saviour Dave Salako were having their first outing this season. Co-Manager Roger French was missing for the first half-hour, having gone to see son Thomas play for the Orpington Rovers, and the neutral observer could be forgiven for thinking we played our best football when Roger was not there.

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier, Ian Coles, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin, Kypros Michael, Simon Thomas, Michael Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, Des Lindsay

Referee: Mick Gearing

Substitutes: Roger French, Mick O'Flynn

Supporters: Thomas French, Louie Dwight, Michael Ugwumba Jr (also linesman)

We took the lead after barely five minutes with a flowing passing move involving five of six players. Simon Thomas and Des Lindsay combined on the right before Des put an exquisite low cross to the far post for Peter Harvey to finish with aplomb. The talking and the passing were good and we caused a lot of problems for the CUACO defence. Occasionally, the excitement would be too much and shots from distance (two from Patrice Mongelard in a short space of time) were met with groans. Kypros Michael was combining well with Peter Harvey as was Des Lindsay. We forced several corners without increasing our advantage. On the quarter hour Des Lindsay made the run into space behind the CUACO defence to receive a through ball from Patrice Mongelard and showed great composure to lift the ball high over the CUACO keeper to double our lead. Kypros Michael had two good opportunities after astute balls from Peter Harvey to further increase our lead but could not find the finish the passes deserved. CUACO had steadied their ship and began to push back – earning a few corners which we defended well. On the half hour, Des Lindsay had been replaced by Mick O'Flynn to shorten our game on the right to good effect, combining well with Simon Thomas. Kypros was looking for the spectacular with half-volleys from deep crosses from Patrice Mongelard and Simon Thomas which caught the eye but did not trouble the CUACO net.

Roger French replaced Colin Brazier at half-time. CUACO started the second half with much spirit and made a mockery of the scoreline. We had lost cohesion and were hanging on for a bit before we could restore dominance. Our midfield quartet was struggling to cover the vast pitch especially when we lost the ball and Sinisa Gracanin was having to put in quite a shift. Simon Thomas had taken a knock – which could have been serious – as he is getting married on Tuesday, and whilst hobbling down the aisle might seem an apt metaphor depending on your

view of marriage – we were relieved, as was the CUACO defender responsible, to see that no permanent harm had been done. I will have more for you on marriage later – in particular polygamy Mormon-style.

Midway through the second half a CUACO player got injured – quite accidentally when he fell awkwardly to the ground after an aerial challenge – and had to go off with what looked like a broken nose. This was sad but it did not sour the atmosphere as no malice had been involved. Both teams got on with it and in reality, there was hardly a bad tackle in the whole game on a hot day.

On the hour, Patrice Mongelard made way for Des Lindsay who had been watching the clock on the touch line. Des was blessed with a second goal not long after when he outmuscled the keeper to make the most of a pass from Peter Harvey. That third goal steadied our nerves and we were more expressive and composed after that. There was however, no composure in evidence as Simon Thomas produced a poor finish from five yards out – perhaps preoccupied by the contents of the best man’s speech on Tuesday (brothers can be cruel - sample: “Simon and I have been through a lot together and it is good to see so many of you here today”). Roger French replaced himself with Colin Brazier for the last quarter of an hour. We had the game management to keep our first clean sheet of the season, especially when Patrice Mongelard returned for the last ten minutes to replace Mick O’Flynn whose calves had lasted the usual fifty-five minutes. Kypros rounded the CUACO keeper twice I think in the closing moments but could not find the right part of the net from tight angles.

It was good this week to see several of the opposition back in our clubhouse to discover the joys of cheddar cheese sandwiches (and Buffet Tickler Nick Waller was not there). I even gave three of them a lift back to Orpington rail station. I felt for them, having to cope with rail travel on the Orpington line on a Sunday, something which could make a 3-0 defeat bearable.

Two other sights in our clubhouse which I would like to share with you were (i) Des Lindsay and Des Fallon greeting each other like long lost friends – a Des double dose if you like; and (ii) Louie Dwight, Thomas French and Daisy Thomas perched on stools at the bar in a most grown-up fashion listening to some imaginary talk from a religious leader about the perils of alcohol.

We also received news of an eventful and prematurely abandoned game played by our Young Vets against an outfit from Bromley which had necessitated hasty exits from the changing room (and to think Roger French was not involved).

Man-of-the-Match: Des Lindsay, the forgiven one, partly because of his star performance today, and also because, miraculously, he paid his match subs and part of his annual subs. Perhaps he would have preferred mink-lined handcuffs, but will have to do with the adoration of his team mates instead. Des revealed that he was a Mormon and he thought he could have four wives. I wonder what the Mormons preach regarding kit washing. Next time referee Mick Gearing books Des he’ll be able to say he booked a Mormon. More seriously someone needs to tell Des it is not a good idea to have several mothers-in-law. I wonder if we’ll get mother-in-law jokes on Tuesday. I hope so. And another thing Des – all that stuff about Joyce McKinney is not true.

18 September 2016: Sanco Super Vets (A, 3-1)

Groom scores twice almost as Farnborough come from behind in Dulwich

Before we get into the serious business of today's match – I must mention an even more important matter, another sort of match. On Tuesday evening several of us, some with plus ones, and in Steve Blanchard's case plus two – had the great pleasure of attending Simon Thomas' wedding reception to celebrate the fabulous occasion with him and wife Amanda, and many others. The whole team could not be there but we had enough for a six-a-side. The funniest bit we heard in his bro's (the best man) speech was "Simon plays football". The saddest point was that the photo show on a big screen for most of the evening did not carry a single FOBG-themed item but every other detail was perfect. The most poignant moment was Simon's own speech. "When will I be famous" he might have asked himself – well, he will be famed for this speech. Beneath the quiff there is a huge heart. Today though we needed his legs and lungs, provided he was not feeling too drained, having interrupted his honeymoon to put on the Farnborough shirt.

Numbers had dwindled to fourteen, overnight. Des Lindsay had a good reason, being stuck at Edinburgh Airport unlike Andy Faulks who was stuck in St Albans with a Blondie tribute band whilst Kypros Michael was stuck in Watford watching a Man Utd Tribute XI (apologies to Kyp, as a Liverpool fan I could not resist this quip). Special thanks were due to Dave Salako who stepped in at the last minute after potential debutant between the sticks Steve Hazell was unavoidably unavailable for family reasons. Roger French too was putting the family first. We had plenty of time to warm up while our opponents waited for one of their players to retrace part of his journey to get the kit which he had forgotten. Still, it was a pleasure to warm up, let alone play, on what is arguably the best surface we play on at the Kings College Sports Ground in SE21 7AL. The football was slick too, from both sides.

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Phil Anthony, Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Patrice Mongelard

Stephane Anelli, Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Shoebridge, Michael Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, Simon Thomas

Referee: SANCO players

Substitutes: Dave Green, Mick O'Flynn, Colin Mant

Supporters: Liam O'Flynn, Emma Weare, Michael Ugwumba Jr (also linesman)

Both sides started well moving the ball about. We provided the greater forward thrust though without creating any clear chances. Both goalkeepers were not exactly over-worked in the first quarter of an hour. The most dangerous SANCO player was their centre forward and he was a bundle of energy, good in the air, and making lots of runs down the channels or behind our defence and on the whole we managed to keep him quiet and Dave's good hands and positioning were always there to help us out. At the other end Peter Harvey and Simon Thomas had the beating of the SANCO defence for pace but our game lacked accuracy in the final third. The midfield was where control of the game would be wrested and we shaded it there with Sinisa Gracanin in particular standing out. Ian Shoebridge was playing his first game in months and was a tad rusty, and in fact had to come off before half-time – to be replaced by Michael Ugwumba. Michael had himself come off on the half hour in the trio of changes we made with Green, O'Flynn and Mant replacing Anthony, Blanchard and Ugwumba. By then we had conceded – a bit against the run of play after Patrice Mongelard lost his footing in the box and

was not able to clear the ball and close down the SANCO right winger who managed to squeeze his shot in from close range. We were level within ten minutes after Simon Thomas – not weighed down by his new wedding ring (some say it gets heavier as time goes by), rounded the last SANCO defender and got his shot away - the SANCO keeper took the sting off the shot but this was Simon's week and the groom had scored. We finished the half strongly with Harvey shooting when he could, and Anelli beginning to have an impact down the right. We were working hard, pressing SANCO high up the pitch and restricting them to long balls towards their dangerous target man (an ex-Farnborough man I understand who seemed determined to prove the law of the ex).

The half-time talk was stirring analytical stuff from Mick O'Flynn with Dave Salako and Peter Harvey giving further encouragement. It worked – within five minutes of the re-start Anelli had broken through the midfield and found Gracanin on the edge of the SANCO box – one touch with perfect control created the space and bang – the right boot propelled the ball into the top corner of the SANCO net. This was a crisp strike well-executed with class and intent. This was no more than we deserved on the balance of play and the usually large SANCO crowd had been silenced. But, of course, we knew from having lost our last game against them 5-0 that they demanded respect, and would come back. We had to defend well and work hard collectively to maintain our advantage. Mick O'Flynn's calf went to join Ian Shoebridge's and Phil Anthony was back on but he would not see the game out as his calf too went to (a bovine three-some in the meadow which in real life would probably be put down for lameness) and Ian Coles was back on to see the game out (having earlier made way for a returning Steve Blanchard on the hour).

We had a scare when a SANCO forward missed a good chance to level the score at the far post and Dave was able to smother the ball. We knew we needed a third goal. We thought we had it when Peter Harvey penetrated the SANCO defence and squared the ball across the box, nay cut it back even, for Simon to score for a second time, so we thought. However, the linesman denied Simon his second moment of Sunday morning glory. We kept knocking on the door – Stephane Anelli had the bit between his teeth (playing his last game for a couple of months) and was giving the SANCO defence a lot to worry about. From his persistence down the right and not giving up on the ball which a SANCO defender wrongly thought would roll over the line, he was able to pick out Peter Harvey who applied the finish the move deserved. At 3-1 we felt SANCO would not get back in the game and so it proved. There were cameos from Peter Harvey beating three players and shooting just over with his right/wrong foot. Patrice Mongelard had a lung-bursting foray deep in the SANCO box, gliding past defenders bar the last one before he could cut the ball back or more likely shoot.

This was a tough game to win and both sides were up for it. There was not a bad tackle in the game, if you set aside the early raised studs which thankfully did no permanent damage to Sinisa Gracanin – and he was to have his revenge later – not far from the spot where he was felled earlier. In the changing room someone thought it would be amusing to text Roger French that we had lost the game 10-0 and we had had four players sent off after a mass brawl. From Roger's response I think he believed us – briefly and with some regret/incredulity he had not been there. Such is the curse of social media. Our hosts were gracious in defeat and very social as a large plate of chips and hotdogs appeared with condiments and compliments – all the more welcome in the absence of Buffet Wolf Nick Waller.

Man-of-the-Match: our midfield maestro – Sinisa Gracanin

25 September 2016: West Farleigh Vets (A, 2-3)

A tale of goalkeepers as Farnborough pay price

If I said to you this was all about goalkeepers you might not believe me and yet I know it was so – and if I did forget my own team mates would remind me, again and again. This was our first trip into the Kentish Weald to West Farleigh to play in what surely is one of the most arcadian settings we play in. Conditions were initially overcast but brightened steadily as the day wore on. 17 players had been due to travel but only fifteen made it there with Andy Faulks and new goalkeeper Steve Hazell missing out on counting sheep. We also had two players making their debuts – Gary Johnson and Rob Faulkner – a couple of blokes Mick O'Flynn and I met down the pub. Nick Waller and Chris Bourlet were also making their debuts this season – Nick likes pubs and Chris does not like it when they close. Patrice Mongelard came through the stampede of players volunteering to go in goal to claim the oversize gloves, shirt and shorts of the goal keeping position.

After walking across two fields and two sets of farm gates this is how the Farnborough prize livestock lined up on what looked an overgrazed pitch – bone dry and the colour of straw.

Starting XI:

Patrice Mongelard

Phil Anthony, Steve Blanchard, Gary Johnson, Colin Mant

Sinisa Gracanin, Kyros Michael, Simon Thomas, Michael Ugwumba

Rob Faulkner, Des Lindsay

Substitutes: Chris Bourlet, Ian Coles, Peter Harvey, Nick Waller

Supporter: Michael Ugwumba Jr (also linesman)

Strategist (with one Man-of-the-Match vote): Mick O'Flynn

The opening moves from both sides were inconclusive. Both sides moved the ball about well. West Farleigh had Deano – the turbo-charged Tintin – who would yet again expose our failings against teams with a Deano. Both defences were generally on top and the midfield was congested. Like West Farleigh, we were looking to mobile forwards to make the incision. We had early changes to accommodate as Gary (5 minutes) and Rob (15 minutes) had to be replaced with Ian Coles and Peter Harvey. This was not unhelpful – Ian Coles had anti-Deano thrusters of his own, and Pete brought a cutting edge to our front line. We scored first after Kyros Michael was played in on goal by Des Lindsay for a smart close-range finish. Our lead did not last long – five minutes later West Farleigh were level with a crisp shot from inside the box by Deano beating the semblance of a block from Patrice Mongelard. The ball on the ground was not proving to be a problem for the ersatz Farnborough No1 but anything in the air was challenging. I could use my feet, and spring off the line to do so, but the hands were another matter. After a while even my goal-kicks were ropery and Sinisa Gracanin had to take on the job of kicking the ball over the half way line. For the avoidance of doubt, I had to issue a high decibel and pithy reminder to Simon Thomas, all my team mates, the opposition and all the sheep in the surrounding fields that I was not a goalkeeper. Simon had had the nerve to ask why I had not rolled the ball out fifty yards to him like you see on the telly on a Saturday night.

Before the half hour was up, we had got our noses in front after an excellent run and deadly finish from Peter Harvey after a pass from Sinisa Gracanin. Despite the introduction of Chris Bourlet and Nick Waller for Colin Mant and Michael Ugwumba we had the clearer chances to egde further

ahead but headers were missed at the far post twice – by Simon Thomas and Kyp Michael. We deserved our lead at half-time though knew we would have the wind and slope against us.

You know from the score at the top of this report that things did not go well for us in the second half. Yet that half started so well for us – in the first twenty-five minutes we created four or five good chances to score. We had failed to register that West Farleigh had changed their goalkeeper at half-time and what a good move that was. He made two or three worldies at point blank range as Kypros Michael (twice), Des Lindsay and Peter Harvey were denied acrobatically at close range. The West Farleigh defenders had the bit between their teeth and were throwing bodies in the way and from their resilience the tide of the game started to turn. The odds of a worldie at the Farnborough end were not as good as say Roger French winning the Nobel Peace Prize or Nick Waller winning the title of Vegetarian Slimmer of the Year. Still, I muddled along and kept West Farleigh at bay until Chris Bourlet (who used to live down there and played for them) decided to hack Deano from behind in the box. The diminutive but sharp-eyed, and fair, local referee had no choice. Patrice Mongelard guessed the right way and got a hand to the ball but it was too fiercely hit.

We had lost some impetus and Simon Thomas limping off with a badly bruised foot (we compared swellings later) did not help. Michael Ugwumba found himself in the unaccustomed position of right winger. Colin Mant was now a right-back having replaced Phil Anthony. Colin was playing in another position but at least spared us his Kama Sutra joke. All the jokes were at my expense as I flapped ineffectively at a ball five minutes from the end – struck you have guessed it, by Deano. The most charitably-minded in our midst suggested that the slope of the pitch had played a part. The less charitably-minded were still mimicking my wave at the ball several hours later in the Farnborough clubhouse. As Peter Harvey remarked astutely, we stopped playing midway through the second half and there was no service to the forwards. Put simply the game hinged on the last twenty minutes and West Farleigh had the edge on us – more composure, more possession and perhaps more luck, and of course, a better goalkeeper.

We made our way to the Good Intent Public House to lick our wounds where I found Buffet Gargantua, Nick Waller, licking his chops. Sausages and chips were being consumed at an alarming rate before my arrival. Here was something else that slipped through my hands today. I was amused as a local dog vied vainly with Nick Waller for the last sausage. There was time to get back to the Farnborough Old Boys Guild Club House in Farrow Fields for the FOBG Open Launch Day Event to mark the refurbishment of our changing rooms and pitches at great cost. I was able to catch two burgers with relish and onions. It was going so well until I bumped into Toby Manchip, erstwhile goalkeeper for the FOBG Senior Vets. My presence always triggers the use of the word Peruvian in him, whilst his presence triggers a different word in my mind but I won't tell you what it is. Anyway, it was good to see him and his family again, and as is his wont he made a generous contribution to the FOBG fund-raising effort and bought a round. Many others had contributed to the funding effort for our new facilities, and not all of it had been recognised. I was asked if Toby had any conditions (for his return in goal perhaps). I thought how long have you got? A poor sense of geography was the least of his concerns I felt.

Man-of-the-Match: our midfield maestro again – Sinisa Gracanin (with a bigger share of the vote than even Jeremy Corbyn managed).

2 October 2016: Belvedere Vets (A, 0-2)

Farnborough lose battle of the Deanos as the curse endures

Footballers (and football fans) are superstitious creatures. We look for signs, portents, omens, miracles; we attach significance to random things; we see causation where there is mere association; we see things that are not there, and miss those that are. For instance, Farnborough Senior Vets believe that they cannot beat teams that have a Deano playing for them. Fact. Well, today we decided to have a Deano of our own, to see if an ancient curse could be lifted. Alas the other team had a Deano of their own. So, from today's result you can infer a universal law of football – namely that we need two Deanos, in other words footballers like to hope too and so often in football, it is the hope that hurts.

Enough gloom and doom. We had a fantastic game of football between two teams who played hard but fair, and with a lot of quality on show. The scoreline might have been a tad harsh to the neutral observer, but it was good to play this game, and in the manner that it was, after past events. Depleted by injuries, we drew on a few others to make up the numbers – Simon Harvey, an old Farnborough hand turned out, as did Dean Murphy from our Young Vets. Most welcome of all, speaking for myself after last week's traumatic experience, was the presence of Paul Parsons our goalkeeper designate for the season, making his first appearance. I speak for the whole team when I say how reassured we were by his assured performance, despite the result.

There was a pure comedy gold before the game when hard-of-hearing Mick O'Flynn misunderstood a call from Roger French. This led to wildly contrasting emotions when Mick thought he had heard that Roger French was coming down when in fact all Roger was doing was to pass on the news another Young Vet John Redman was on his way. Another moment, depending on your point of view, was when Dean Murphy announced how tiring HE had found the recent birth of his son, after a protracted labour. Mrs Murphy's feelings were not reported, but we wish her and the baby all the best.

On a beautiful Sunday morning on a massive pitch where the gradient matters, we lost the toss, and started as follows (kicking downhill).

Starting XI:

Paul Parsons

Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Colin Mant

Sinisa Gracanin, Dean Murphy, Simon Harvey, Michael Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, George Kleanthous

Substitutes: Colin Brazier, Des Lindsay, John Redmond

Supporters: Max Harvey, Michael Ugwumba Jr (also linesman)

Strategist (with one Man-of-the-Match vote to cast (for now): Mick O'Flynn

It was an evenly contested first half. I am truthful when I say that Paul Parsons did not have a save to make although Belvedere forced three or four corners, and we needed to be vigilant all over the pitch. More of the game was played in their half but clear scoring opportunities were few and far between as defences were generally on top. Peter Harvey tested the keeper with a couple of long rangers. Our purple patch came in the last fifteen minutes of the half. By then we had made three changes with Dean Murphy, Peter Harvey and Patrice Mongelard making way for John Redman, Des Lindsay and Colin Brazier. John Redmond in particular had an immediate impact on the game creating arguably the best scoring opportunity of the match with a dash into

the Belvedere box and an exquisite cross for an unmarked George Kleanthous two yards out, who could not apply the right contact and the glancing header flashed wide. Moments later, John made a saving tackle in our own box which prevented a certain goal. He was at it again before the half was over with a sinuous run and powerful shot which the very good Belvedere keeper tipped round the post acrobatically. Before the half was done Sinisa Gracanin (twice) and Michael Ugwumba had powerful shots blocked and just over the bar.

We knew that the second half would bring more pressure from Belvedere because they had the slope. Without stating the obvious, it not only makes it easier for them to come down but it is harder for us to go up. The second half was barely five minutes old when Belvedere had a corner. They threw a few of their big units into the box and the ball made contact with one of them, it was not clean but it was enough to bundle the ball over the line. We had a mountain to climb. Five minutes later things got harder when a knock on the knee forced Simon Harvey to end his involvement and our Deano was back on.

We made further changes on the hour with Peter Harvey and Patrice Mongelard coming on for George Kleanthous and Steve Blanchard. Steve was not off for long as he was to replace Colin Brazier for the last twenty minutes. We pressed hard for an equaliser. Peter Harvey drew a point blank save from the Belvedere keeper and then had a free-kick that flashed inches wide of the post, and of John Redmond's boot simultaneously. That was the last of our scoring opportunities. We were undone in a set-piece situation again in the 90th minute. A headed clearance fell to an unmarked Belvedere player with a lethal left foot on the edge of our box and he was able to take his time and measure a shot that was too good for our keeper as the ball flew into the top corner. This was harsh but this is what happens when one team misses chances and another takes them. Apart from that we have no complaints. There were many good things in today's game from our point of view.

A number of us went into the cosy adjoining bar and our hosts produced sausages, roast potatoes and a tray of sandwiches. We had a bit of help with the food from a young brother and sister associated with the opposition but that was fine as Buffet Magician Nick Waller was not there to make food disappear.

Next week we are playing the fourth of a sequence of six away games, up against Inter Vyagra Super Vets at the Royal Artillery Barracks in Woolwich, one of my favourite games, to play in and report. However, dear Reader you could be disappointed, or maybe not, as a heavy-breathing Peter Harvey has already offered prematurely to write next week's match report. It will be hard for him so I must warn you not to expect the usual subtlety and good taste that I bring to reports of this particular game.

Man-of-the-Match: Steve Blanchard – an old-school defender who gave a master class.

9 October 2016: Inter Vyagra Super Vets (A, 3-1)

Farnborough climax early and late in Sunday morning glory

We are always up for this game against opponents who are no longer a soft touch, on a fantastic pitch in a wondrous historic setting. Injuries having taken their toll early in the season we were carrying a few walking wounded but hoped we had enough big guns to enhance our performance. We were in our away kit, a sort of Viagra blue if you like. On a beautiful Sunday morning in front of James Wyatt's Royal Artillery Barracks off Ha Ha Road in SE18 we arranged our forces like this.

Starting XI:

Paul Parsons

Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Colin Mant, Phil Anthony

Sinisa Gracanin, Michael Ugwumba, Ian Shoebridge, Kypros Michael

Peter Harvey, Des Lindsay

Substitutes: Rob Faulkner, Simon Harvey

Supporters: Max Harvey, Michael Ugwumba Jr (also linesman)

Strategist and cameo appearance: Mick O'Flynn

It looked like Inter Vyagra too had a bit of a recruitment crisis, and they drafted a couple of cadets in but we did not mind. They also supplied an excellent referee who was fair and got no trouble at all from any of the players from both sides. In fact, the game was played in excellent spirit, and there were some very sporting moments when players took a knock, or when corners and free-kicks were conceded.

We took advantage of the breeze to apply the early pressure and there had been hardly any foreplay before we notched our first goal. I think it was after only five minutes and from the first corner we forced. Peter Harvey's left foot corner arrowed in on goal and the young keeper must have misread the flight of the ball as he got a hand to it but could not prevent the ball from entering the net. This was to be the last and only mistake from the Inter Vyagra keeper and he certainly made up for that early error later. This was an unexpected bonus and we braced ourselves for a reaction, in particular from the two nippy Inter Vyagra forwards. However, as all forwards are fond of saying it is all about the service and we had a good measure of control in the midfield in spite of the youngest and flashiest player on show wearing the home colours of orange and black. Inter Vyagra could not penetrate our defence and we looked the team most likely to score again, either from a corner, or an incision into their box from our left-wing wizard Kypros Michael. Twice he was released with clear runs on goal which he carried deep into the Inter Vyagra box before shooting over from three or four yards out. You could say the excitement had got to him, a bit more control and composure, a less premature finish, and we could have been looking at the joy of six today.

I recall only one corner for Inter Vyagra in the first-half (I conceded it) whereas we had several at the other end. From one of those Colin Mant had drifted in to "cause havoc in the box" as he described it later, lathering himself with Lynx Excite in the shower, and he hooked the ball narrowly wide. Michael Ugwumba and Des Lindsay made way for Simon Harvey and Rob Faulkner on the half hour and the flow of the game continued as before. Rob was unlucky when he crashed a close-range header against the underside of the bar soon after arriving on the scene.

The absence of a second goal was a concern raised in our half-time talk (but (counter-intuitively perhaps) we still took Peter Harvey off temporarily as Des Lindsay got back on. Inter Vyagra had the players up front to capitalise on mistakes and we needed that cushion. The half did not start well for me personally as I was carrying an injury and had to come off. Still Mrs M thought my 50 minutes were a triumph of mind over matter. Peter Harvey was back on quickly doing what he does best and we regained our cutting edge up front whilst Simon Harvey dropped back to stiffen our defence. Michael Ugwumba would add muscle to the midfield ten minutes or so later when he replaced Rob Faulkner and was seen making one or two powerful runs in the Inter Vyagra box, with opposition players bouncing off the brick edifice that Michael is.

On the hour, Lynx Mant was to get his reward. From one of the several corners we were to force in that half Des Lindsay headed the ball down and up for a conversion until Colin Mant hooked the ball inside the net this time. Elated and dishevelled Colin fancifully described his move as a bicycle kick, and for a moment the dubious goals committee thought it might have to adjudicate as Kypros thought that the ball had brushed against one of his follicles after leaving Colin's boot. There was much relief all round. We had a number of chances to edge further ahead but the Inter Vyagra keeper came into his own – pulling off several saves, including a point blank one from Des Lindsay who had shown eel-like properties in matters not just pecuniary, to escape the attentions of his marker and create space for a shot.

I am not sure if we got complacent and thought it was only a matter of time before we would score again. Instead, we had a reminder from Inter Vyagra that there was life in the old dog yet as their two nippy forwards combined to pull one back. At that point I will be honest we were a tad anxious – the sun had gone in, the skies had darkened, and we were still looking vainly for that third goal that would surely see the game out. At one point Peter Harvey concluded that the only way we were going to score from the excellent crosses he kept raining into the box was if he could get himself at the end of his own crosses (that observation came after an attempted Colin Mant header at the far post whose geometry defies description). The Kypros Michael-Peter Harvey combination is starting to prove to be our most potent weapon and this time Kypros was able to apply the climax the pass from Pete deserved by wrong-footing the Inter Vyagra keeper. As there were less than five minutes to go there was time for a cameo appearance from Mick O'Flynn before the final whistle to add rigor mortis, sorry rigour, to our midfield.

The mood in the bar was friendly and relaxed, as our hosts produced a vast amount of sausages, mini-sausage rolls, French bread, cheese, branston pickle, mustard and other condiments to feed the troops, in the absence of Buffet Big Bertha Nick Waller. Money was collected from all but one slippery customer, and Man-of-the-Match votes were cast democratically, without the sort of scuffles seen in the corridors of the European Parliament.

Man-of-the-Match: Peter Harvey – who was involved in our best moves, and did more than most to earn a full game next week.

16 October 2016: Inter the Valley Vets (A, 4-2)

Farnborough bell tolls four times for Inter the Valley

It was almost exactly five months ago on 17 May that we first encountered Inter the Valley, a genial team of Charlton fans, who garnered the headline “Inter the Valley bury Farnborough at the death”. The result that day, 2-1 to them, remains an unsolved robbery in the annals of Farnborough football. There was no doubt about today’s result – we administered the last rites, but a more fitting score on the headstone could well have been 8-3 rather than 4-2.

Despite the gloomy overcast leaden skies, we were keen to get this game on as a line of Farnborough-driven cars waited for an elderly gentleman, who ambled up the road weighed down by a huge bunch of keys, to open the gate, or rather lift the barrier into the Catford Wanderers Ground where today’s fixture was taking place. There was then a pause while the same gentleman found the keys to the changing rooms. This gave Kypros Michael time to call Val to order the buffet.

We had started delving into the kit bag for our yellow and red livery but upon checking next door took the view that it was best to avoid a clash of reds and so we changed into our Viagra blue away kit which was fortuitously with us. What was less fortuitous was the news that Rob Faulkner could not play after all – his calf had flared up in the warm up. I cannot help feeling that the Farnborough Senior Vets need a calf strategy, more on that later. We were in effect down to twelve players. Quality not quantity I hear you say – yes, but you also need equality of numbers and we nearly came a cropper today.

Starting XI:

Paul Parsons

Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Colin Mant, Phil Anthony

Michael Ugwumba, Ian Shoebridge, Kypros Michael, Andy Faulks

Peter Harvey, George Kleanthous

Substitute: Chris Bourlet

Supporters: Freya, Kathleen and Thea Anthony and dog Caesar, Michael Ugwumba Jr (also linesman)

Our opponents had the better start. We looked like a team of strangers thrown together for the first time. There was no composure, our touch was poor and we had a lucky escape when the most dangerous and only Inter forward hit the cross bar after making space in the box. He had no choice but to shoot from a tight angle as none of his team mates had had the time come up in support. There was a farcical bit of Sunday morning football involving a prostrate Paul Parsons and alleged former ballroom star Colin Mant who got his legs in quite a tangle, with Paul’s head between them, in our six-yard box as the ball squirmed out but we got away with it. Inter packed the midfield and it took us a while before we could start to play through them, to release Kypros Michael and Peter Harvey down the channels. Inter had some big units at the back and they took turns to take Peter Harvey roughly from behind. Pete must have felt he was playing with a double wardrobe strapped to his back at times.

The referee – the Inter Manager did a good job keeping things calm, fair and ticking over. He was particular about throw-ins and I was caught out twice, as were others, including from Inter.

We got our breakthrough after about twenty minutes when a neat one-two between Kypros Michael and George Kleanthous, our Hellenic Connection, released Kypros to round the keeper and slot the ball home. This improved our game and we began to relieve the pressure on our back four and take the game into the Inter half. Kypros was proving a thorn in Inter's side and he drew good saves from their keeper at close range, even when a pass inside to Peter Harvey was the better option. Forwards are very selfish I understand so I won't go there. We thought we had doubled our lead when Peter Harvey slotted the ball home but the referee had blown for a foul on George Kleanthous micro-seconds before. Andy Faulks was finding his feet and his range and gave us one or two reminders of his eye for goal. On the half hour Chris Bourlet had replaced Phil Anthony. However, Phil barely had time to walk his dog Caesar round the field when he was called back into action. You could say it was a case of Caesar interruptus. Michael Ugwumba had succumbed to the curse of the calf and we had only eleven "fit" players for the last hour. Inter came back at us but without carving a clear chance as we held on to our slim advantage.

Five goals were scored in the second half. We got the first three of them, deservedly with the run of play. The half was about ten minutes old when Andy Faulks placed a shot low into the bottom corner after a lay-off from George Kleanthous. We then had a purple patch of about twenty minutes. Our third goal was the best – one minute we were defending a corner with an Andy Faulks header which found Peter Harvey midway inside our half. Pete advanced to the halfway line before releasing Kyp down the left who then crossed low for George Kleanthous to caress the ball into the net from a tight angle at the far post. It was incisive, one-touch stuff and all seemed to take place in the blink of an eye. Our fourth goal was not as pretty on the eye but they all count. From one of the several corners we forced in that half, Colin Mant was at it again, causing havoc and fear in the box (and there are still a few weeks to go to Halloween) and he arranged for the ball to hit Chris Bourlet and go in.

This was more like it. It could have been more. The profligacy of Kypros Michael in front of goal is legendary, and the talk of many taxi drivers on the island of Cyprus (as Mick O'Flynn found this week where he had gone to, you guessed it, nurse his calf) and today Kyp added copiously to the legend. I cannot explain how one misses three gilt-edged chances from three yards out – though I must credit the keeper with at least one great save in that sequence. Inter were down but not buried. They pulled one back with a cross-cum-shot that took Paul Parsons and another twenty players by surprise. The goal was not the most intended but it was deserved on the balance of play. We could even afford the luxury of a missed penalty by Peter Harvey after Kyp had been upended one too many times in the box after giving his marker the Kyp shuffle. The last ten minutes were a tense affair, unnecessarily perhaps, although we had not forgotten what Inter did to us five months ago and Ian Shoebridge was now hobbling in the centre circle with, you have guessed it, a calf injury. Inter pulled another goal back, a deserved strike from their most dangerous player but he was himself to exit with a twisted knee five minutes from the end.

Val produced a sumptuous buffet – bread, cheese, sausages, chicken nuggets, sausage rolls, pizzas, cucumber, tomato, crisps all in the absence of Buffet Undertaker Mick Waller (and big Charlton fan). I complimented Val on her wonderful spread and she invited me to come again.

Man-of-the-Match: Andy Faulks, rejuvenated in an unaccustomed role which he made his own, in the centre of midfield, no longer a peripheral frustrated figure, using his pace and ability to thread a pass, and to shoot. He deserved his goal today and more will follow – with bonfire night approaching Faulks is about to catch fire.

23 October 2016: CUACO Vets (A, 2-1)

Farnborough edge contest as tight as a bugle boy's cheeks

The mists of autumn are always part of this late October trip to the leafy suburbs of Park Langley at Old Dunstonians RFC, before the clocks change. There was a frisson in the air as we had two birthdays separated by a letter to bear in mind, and the return of RF, as well as of the quiffed one after a metatarsal scare. We mustered thirteen players for this second fixture against CUACO this season, having won the "home" game 3-0 a few weeks ago when it was summer.

It appeared to us that CUACO had reinforced their defence and the other thing that struck us was that CUACO were on average the tallest team we play in our season. This was a problem for us during set-pieces at both ends.

Starting XI:

Paul Parsons

Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Colin Mant, Roger French

Dave Green, Sinisa Gracanin, Simon Thomas, Mick O'Flynn

Peter Harvey, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Steve Blanchard, Barry Grainger

Supporters: Thomas French, Eden Grainger, Teresa Blanchard and granddaughter Georgia, and later on, Amanda Thomas, daughter Daisy and son Louie.

Strategist with special instructions for full backs: Mick O'Flynn

CUACO surprised us by earning three successive corners in the first five minutes. Once we had seen these off, we played the more fluent and cohesive football. In fact, we were 2-0 up by the twentieth minute and could be forgiven for letting a touch of complacency creep into our game. The persistence of Peter Harvey on the edge of the CUACO box had resulted in a block which saw the looping ball teed up nicely for a crisp volley from Andy Faulks which the CUACO keeper could not keep out. This was vintage Faulks which Pele (seventy-six today) would have appreciated. The quarter of an hour after this goal was great for us, lots of movement and passing with good penetration on the right where Patrice Mongelard and Simon Thomas combined well (without the usual flashing blue lights that accompany Simon's lay-offs to his defence). Sinisa Gracanin and Peter Harvey were bringing the best out of the CUACO defence.

It was no surprise when we got our second with Andy Faulks latching on to a loose clearance on the edge of the CUACO box to rifle the ball home, via a slight deflection which took some pace off the bullet. If we thought that this was going to be a stroll in Park Langley – our opponents soon altered this perception. They clawed their way back into the game, tightened things at the back and spent more time in our half. They pulled a goal back from a set-piece after we failed to track their burly yet skilful forward into the six-yard box and he produced a deft header from very close-range to guide the ball into the bottom corner.

On the half hour Mick O'Flynn and Patrice Mongelard made way for Barry Grainger and Steve Blanchard. We lost some of our cohesion, and in fairness CUACO's goal had given them a lift. We were now playing on the break with Barry Grainger in particular providing an outlet on our left, and one exquisite cross field pass to Simon Thomas on the opposite wing caught the eye. We had a couple of dodgy moments from CUACO corners but kept them out.

The second half was hard fought. We created the better and more numerous half chances but remained vulnerable to the set-piece and had to be vigilant at the back. And we had to rely on our goalkeeper to keep our noses in front. The referee let the game flow as they say but even he, had to give us a few free-kicks on the edge of the box. Peter Harvey and Barry Grainger whipped these into the box with intent and the average height of the CUACO defenders served them well. When we did get at the end of these crosses, we lacked the killer instinct. I recall specifically a point-blank quiff-cum-header from Simon Thomas a yard out which cried out for something firmer. You might surmise that a player who did not have quiff issues, or if you prefer one with less or no hair, would have buried the cross.

Barry Grainger scored what we thought was our third goal from a pass from Peter Harvey but the goal was ruled off-side. I have seen them given as they say. But the referee was not to be trifled with and we let it go. It was harder to accept that we did not get a penalty twice after Barry Grainger was interfered with in the box.

Patrice Mongelard replaced Roger French on the hour and soon after Mick O'Flynn came back on for Simon Thomas but Mick's calf could not finish the game and Simon's quiff was beckoned back on for the last ten minutes or so.

In the end we were indebted to Paul Parsons for two stupendous saves in the last five minutes. The first was a low dive to his right to palm the ball away, from, you have guessed it, a CUACO corner. The second was even better – as he got his hands in the way of a pile driver struck from inside the box. The CUACO players must have felt this was the equaliser. Probably many of the Farnborough players thought so too – but the day belonged to us, and Paul (another P).

The game was played in good spirit by both sides, if you exclude the number of times Peter Harvey was taken from behind, a few days short of his 50th birthday. Even Roger French had a mellow autumn air about him today, perhaps due to the pleasure of playing again after several weeks attending to son Thomas' own love of the beautiful game. We were, as Colin Mant put it, gutted that Thomas did not have a game this week (joke!).

The beer in the wooden clubhouse full of history on the walls, with the autumn sunshine bathing the playing fields, was a moment to treasure. This was a good game for Buffet Presence Nick Waller to be absent. I have no food porn to describe for you today. There were a few packets of crisps on show but no scampi fries. As I left the clubhouse to make my way home swiftly to rustle a small (yes – dear reader - small) fried rice with pak choi I saw the toxophilites at it. I reflected on how we had hit the bull's eye twice early on, but could not quite hit the target after that – but got away with it to register a third consecutive victory, our best run so far this season.

I said last week that Andy Faulks was igniting and his two smart goals today blew away the morning mists – and he dedicated his goals to Pele's granny. He seems fond of grannies, our Andy.

Man-of-the-Match: Paul Parsons – you know you have been in a game when your goalkeeper gets the nod over the scorer of your two goals.

30 October 2016: Lads of the Village Super Vets (N, 4-2)

50th birthday boy Peter Harvey gets Farnborough out of a sticky situation

Horological imbecile Andy Faulks arrived at the ground at 10:13 for a 10:15 kick-off – and that is even with the clocks going forward one hour overnight. On another day it would not have mattered but today he had the kit and there was another team waiting to use the changing room. We were steaming. Moreover, we could not be sure if he had washed it. On the way to the ground my thoughts had turned to cleaning as I wondered if the heavy morning mist was a mystic sign that all the Orpington followers of Gwyneth Paltrow's lifestyle website – GOOP – had taken her advice about steam cleaning.

Talking of La Paltrow – not many people will know that former partner Chris Martin's great great grandfather, William Willett, had something to do with the clocks changing. He had introduced the idea of British Summer Time also known as Daylight Saving Time. We have now passed from British Summer Time to Greenwich Mean Time. There is a memorial sundial dedicated to William Willett in Petts Wood.

Starting XI:

Paul Parsons

Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Colin Mant, Phil Anthony

Ian Shoebridge, Sinisa Gracanin, Simon Thomas, Nick Waller

Peter Harvey, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Ian Coles, Ian Lyons, Roger French

Supporters: Thomas French, Isabelle French, Sue Doidge.

Strategist with special instructions for full backs: Mick O'Flynn

Referee: Jim St John – aka Jumbo (which meant no dissent from anyone).

Lads of the Village had much longer than we did to warm up. They had their kit in good time. Some might think this explains why they started so much better. The truth is they surprised us with the quality and energy of their play. We were all over the place in the first quarter of an hour, slow to the second ball and struggling to keep the ball. They took the game by the scruff of the neck and we had a job containing them. I don't know why but it is always a shock when older players perform so well – I think the eye tells the brain to not expect it. It did not help that Steve Blanchard had to go off after only five minutes but Ian Coles replaced him. Steve was out for the rest of the game but he was to get a taste of management later from the touch line.

We had a job containing the Lads midfield star who won most of the headers and had a hammer of a left foot that sprayed passes and crosses to willing runners, and even more concerning for us, would shoot for fun from thirty to forty yards – twice he brought out of Paul Parsons' knees what could best be described as five-a-side saves. Trouble was that we let the thunderbolts come, and the Lads scored their first after a bullet of a left foot was diverted past Paul Parsons who did well to get hands to it. Thankfully we were level within five minutes when Peter Harvey was interfered with in the box as he put his body between the Lads keeper and the ball. Pete generously allowed Andy Faulks to tuck the penalty away.

Deservedly, the Lads pulled ahead again after we failed to clear the ball out of our defence and a low shot from the edge of our box trickled past Paul Parsons to nestle in the bottom corner. Before the half hour we were level again after Colin Mant made the most of an assist from Peter Harvey to swing his left foot at the ball and the goal bound shot was lifted over the keeper via a

defender's limb. Manty, suddenly more prolific than when he used to impersonate a forward, had his second of the season. The dubious goals committee made a half-hearted and vain attempt to deprive him of the strike in the bar later.

We had got back in the game and the introduction of Ian Lyons on the half hour for Phil Anthony added more weight and savoir-faire to our defence. Ian Shoebridge was beginning to make his presence felt whilst Sinisa Gracanin was holding his own in midfield and Andy Faulks and Peter Harvey were giving the Lads defence more to think about. 2-2 at half-time was a fair reflection of the game.

Both teams continued to match each other for most of the second half. It was clear however that we were stretching the Lads defence more with Peter Harvey on the left and Simon Thomas on the right. There was a historical moment midway through the second half when Andy Faulks had a bottle of water poured over his head after a challenge left him dazed. That was probably as much water as he has had on his head since his baptism.

On the hour Patrice Mongelard made way for Roger French (a late arrival after son Thomas's cup game, in which Roger was prepared to score an own goal to avoid extra time). Roger will have been disappointed with his initial touches but afterwards helped us keep the Lads out in his usual robust manner. Another change on the hour was the withdrawal of Buffet Big Boy Nick Waller to make way for Phil's Anthony's return.

In a late comment on social media after the match Andy Faulks claimed that it had been his intention all along to turn up late, allowing the Lads to wear themselves out in the long warm up, and setting us for a late finish. So maybe he is smarter than we think. We might not have started the game well but we certainly finished it on top. With about fifteen minutes left Peter Harvey broke through on the left, advanced deep into the Lads' box and crossed low for Andy Faulks to finish athletically at the far post to give us the lead for the first time in the game. This was Andy's second of the game and his fifth of the season. Lads of the Village have cause to fear Andy – he bagged five goals against them almost exactly a year ago on 1 November.

With ten minutes left Ian Shoebridge beat two players in the corridor of uncertainty only to be brought down by a third. Referee Jim St John gave us the free-kick which Peter Harvey curled expertly round the wall for a low finish inside the post. At 4-2 we were not going to be denied. Patrice Mongelard was brought back on in an inspired move by stand-in manager Steve Blanchard, after Mick O'Flynn had left the stage. Patrice replaced Simon Thomas who had taken a knock and who was probably dizzy from a surfeit of dribbles and step-overs deep in the Lads' box. Thespian Simon was reportedly appearing on stage tonight and mum Sue Doidge spirited him away before the curtain rose on the buffet.

Val produced another splendid buffet. I caught the tail end of it but Val kindly found some extra rolls, cheese, ham and Branston pickle for me, much to the envy of my team mates. As I left the ground there were no signs of the special herbal steam treatment Gwyneth recommended but there was something distinctly herbal in the Catford air. However, I was already quite relaxed after our fourth consecutive win. Credit to our opponents though, they had given us quite a game.

Man-of-the-Match: Peter Harvey – I hope you have him in your Fantasy Football Team – one goal and three assists.

6 November 2016: Belvedere Vets (H, 2-5)

Bonfire of Farnborough vanities

Today's opponents Belvedere Vets would not have been our opponents of choice for our first game on our home pitch this season – eleven matches in. If truth be told, you would not want to play them at any time such is their all-round quality and resilience. They had inflicted our last defeat on 2 October and our four wins since that game had restored morale and pride. Pride was not in short supply today as we got to enjoy our new changing rooms and new pitch, after much work and expenditure over the summer. There is a bit more left to do, give or take the odd shower hook, brush and dust pan, but in many ways we are in a better place now than when we last played Belvedere on our home pitch.

We lost, but competed well for long spells of the game, and if you set aside the usual moaning, whingeing, self-justification and finger-pointing in the bar afterwards from some who should know better, there were positives from the game. Without two regular centre-halves we had to adapt and Mick O'Flynn and Sinisa Gracanin called on their networks to find us two defenders in Lee Henderson and John Norton who both gave a very good account of themselves.

Starting XI:

Paul Parsons

Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant, Lee Henderson, John Norton

Sinisa Gracanin, Simon Thomas, Kyros Michael, Michael Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Chris Bourlet, George Kleanthous, Roger French

Supporters: Thomas French, Jodie Gracanin, Ian and Pam Shoebridge, Michael Ugwumba (Jr) also linesman

Strategist with special instructions for full backs: Mick O'Flynn

Referee: Mick Gearing (Boer War medals to follow next weekend) with new boots, anticipating at least another five years with his tantric method of refereeing.

Despite the final score – this was a tight one. There was not a rizla between the sides after half an hour. If anything, we had come closest to scoring until Belvedere broke the deadlock on thirty-five minutes. The best chance had fallen to Andy Faulks after Peter Harvey had rolled the ball to the far post across goal. Andy controlled the ball instead of trusting his instincts and the window was slammed shut by the robust Belvedere defence and their nimble keeper. Even then there was a second bite – had Andy rolled the ball back to screaming Simon for a shot on goal. Andy was below par today – Faulkses usually are on 6 November, and had nearly pulled out this morning. Kyros Michael had flashed a low drive just wide of the post after breaking through and on the other wing there was always the possibility that Simon would get a good cross in. We were coping well with Belvedere corners, a big part of their armoury from which they hit the bar after Patrice Mongelard had cleared a dipping corner at the far post.

We are not too sure what happened in the last ten minutes or so of the half. George Kleanthous had replaced Michael Ugwumba in the centre of midfield and for a while we lost our shape, though George would grow into the game. In that time, we were undone by quick passing, and nimble midfielders breaking through on the right of our defence and two quick and broadly similar goals were scored as we could not neutralise the attacks with sufficient numbers and pace. Not to put a fine point on it Belvedere had realised we played with a right winger rather than a right midfielder, and it was not that different on the left.

The half-time talk was as usual perceptive, full of insight, hindsight and foresight. We went at them and were rewarded with a penalty about ten minutes into the second period after Peter Harvey was brought down. To his credit the Belvedere linesmen overruled his team mates to confirm the transgression had taken place inside the box and Peter stepped up to the spot to stick the ball away. We had a great spell then and witnessed a sublime lofted pass from George Kleanthous to Andy Faulks unmarked after pulling away from his marker but the instinctive volley was wide. That was the moment to get back in the game and the tipping point passed us by.

We made more changes as Chris Bourlet and Michael Ugwumba replaced Lee Henderson and Kypros Michael, and soon after Roger French replaced John Norton. We were now more vulnerable at the back as Belvedere broke through once more to score two quick goals. We were not out of it though and we were to score arguably the best goal of the match. A corner from Simon Thomas, pinpoint he said, others might say hopeful, found Sinisa Gracanin unmarked six yards out on the right side of the box, and the connection was pure, powerful and the otherwise very good Belvedere keeper was transfixed on his line. An earlier move in the half had seen another coruscating volley from Sinisa that went wide. This time everything was in the right place.

For the second game running Simon Thomas could not see out the closing stages and he exited – giving Kypros Michael another opportunity to trouble the Belvedere defence. But it was all in vain. For a while we thought we would draw the second half – these things matter in defeat but it was not to be. Belvedere put a final gloss on the scoreline with a fifth goal which followed the pattern of several others. We lost to a better team, our run of four wins on the spin had been brought to an end, and we were brought back to earth – taught a lesson in concentration and hard work.

The buffet served up by Pam Shoebridge was fitting for a home coming - hot dogs, sausages, onion bhajis, samosas, spring rolls, cheese. Buffet Wallah Nick Waller would have enjoyed the occasion had he been there. It was good to see Belvedere players in numbers in the club house, but I was not the only Farnborough player relieved that we do not have to play them again this season.

Man-of-the-Match: Colin Mant – who to his credit unilaterally withdrew his unicycle kick against Inter Vyagra on 9 October from the Goal-of-the-season competition, and is increasingly well set for a relatively more expensive trophy.

13 November 2016: Met Police Super Vets (H, 6-2)

A game to remember

The two Farnborough Vets teams, both severely depleted by injuries, managed to field 15 players between them for this traditional mid-November fixture against the Met Police Super Vets. Our opponents had dipped into the fountain of relative youth also, and this made for an engrossing contest with both teams well matched in years. Kick-off was delayed to 11:02 so we could observe the traditional two-minute silence, led in the centre circle by a veteran of the Korean War, or maybe Mick Gearing just looks like one. No players were late though we had a job to get things ready in time. This was partly because there is a serious key management issue at the club. Match day spreadsheets do not cover this scenario, nor do they provide for a lapse of memory on Remembrance Sunday by Sinisa Gracanin who had forgotten to pick up the kit from the launderette, and this had led to some frantic text messages at breakfast from an out-of-the-loop Roger French. I can honestly say that after today's senior moment, Sinisa's chances of lifting the prestigious Dot Cotton trophy at the end of the season are not good. You cannot expect to get your hands on this trophy if you do not wash the hallowed kit in your own home. The Met Police kit too was delayed but they were out on the beat before we could wheel the goal posts into place. When the keys had been found to liberate the goal posts, and the game got under way we were facing the police lines like this:

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant, Jim St John, Phil Anthony

Sinisa Gracanin, Simon Thomas, Michael Ugwumba, Jon Redman

Peter Harvey, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Paul Tanton, Mick O'Flynn, Dean Wyatt, Matt Ellis

Supporters: Freya, Kathleen and Thea Anthony and dog Caesar, Jo Faulks, Roger French, Tony Harvey (who was also there last Sunday but I forgot to mention him), Chloe Mongelard, Ian and Pam Shoebridge, Jacob Ward, Cameron Williams

Strategist with special instructions for full backs: Mick O'Flynn

Referee: Mick Gearing (who always adds gravitas and military bearing to our 2-minute silence on Remembrance Sunday)

Five goals were scored in the first half, with the lead changing hands three times. There were quite a few misses too. The first of these fell to Peter Harvey after barely a minute when he found himself free in the centre of the box, three yards out, and with only the keeper to beat but he screwed his shot wide. Let me get two things out of the way early doors: Pete scored one goal, made another and missed two or three – the fact is that people who miss goals tend to score them too. I'll let you know in a future match report how many hundreds of goals Pete has notched for Farnborough. The other point to register is that I think the Met would be guilty of a miscarriage of justice if they failed to vote their keeper Man-of-the-Match today. The fact that we did not reach double figures today is down to him and he frustrated several of our players today, including of course Peter Harvey. Matt Ellis missed quite a few too later, much to Harvey père & fils' amusement on the touch line.

It came as a surprise when the Met took the lead, against the run of play. One of their players was allowed far too much room and time to loft a shot from twenty-five yards and although Dave got a hand to the ball, it looked almost as if he had a hand in the goal. Thankfully we drew level five minutes later when Jon Redman finished smartly from an assist by Peter Harvey. We kept

creating chances and missing them and paid the price when the Met edged ahead again, courtesy of a hand from Dave. There was a moment's alarm when Simon Thomas took a ball in the unmentionables. Footballers, I find, are unable to sympathise with their stricken mates in such moments, even though they understand their pain. "He won't be needing them again" and "He does not need them for his acting career" were heard.

However, the confidence in the side was good, the passing crisp and we kept the Met kettled in their half. It was a matter of waiting for, and taking, the chances. Peter Harvey's whipped corners allied with Jim St John's aerial menace were causing trouble in the Met's massed ranks. Our fortunes turned even more on the half hour when Matt Ellis, Dean Wyatt, Paul Tanton and Mick O'Flynn came on for John Redman, Phil Anthony, Michael Ugwumba and Andy Faulks. We drew level soon after, when a delightful reverse pass from Matt Ellis opened the way for Peter Harvey to race clear of the thin blue line and this time Pete was deadly. Less deadly was Matt Ellis who made a hash of a penalty earned by Peter Harvey. Dean Wyatt put a close-range header against the post and Paul Tanton put the follow-up in the arable field beyond the footpath behind the goal. At the other end, we just had to be careful because the Met had willing and able runners, and were not out of it by any means.

It was fitting that we took the lead shortly before half-time when Jim St John dominated a corner situation to set up Sinisa Gracanin for an emphatic finish from close range. Even the most ardent Met Police fan would have to agree this was a fair reflection of the game at that point. The second half was not as one-sided as the final score suggests, but the fact is we could have scored twice as many goals.

We made more changes on the hour, taking off Jim St John, Mick O'Flynn, Simon Thomas and Peter Harvey – for the return of Michael Ugwumba, Phil Anthony, John Redmond and Andy Faulks. Paul Tanton increased our lead from close-range almost immediately – incidentally chalking up his 389th goal for Farnborough Old Boys Guild. Matt Ellis made it 5-2 with a smart finish from a Dean Wyatt pass. Matt could have made it 6-2, 7-2 or 8-2 but missed a string of chances until he was able to produce a sweet volley to transform Andy Faulks' pass into our sixth and final goal. Mick O'Flynn, Patrice Mongelard and Simon Thomas swapped places in the last quarter of an hour.

Everyone remembered their duties after the game, and many hands made light of what had to be done. Sinisa Gracanin went off again to find keys for the goal posts and for the container. Colin Mant did a great job sweeping up our changing room, and clearing the overspill from the showers where once again he had over-lathered.

Buffet Veteran Nick "Bernard" Waller missed the copious buffet served up by Shoebridge Catering Solutions. If you are wondering where the "Bernard" comes from you, it is a thought I had on the Paris Metro where earlier this week I saw posters of a major exhibition by artist Bernard Buffet. Anyway, hot dogs, sausages, onion bhajis, samosas, sausage rolls, cheese chunks became a memory in no time at all – much to Roger French's chagrin when he re-appeared towards the end of the après-match with son Thomas.

Man-of-the-Match: Sinisa Gracanin, (Sino, to add to Jumbo (Jim St John) and Rhino (Dean Wyatt and a Deano to boot)), whose day did not start too well, but who now has a fond memory of a day to remember.

27 November 2016: Old Tamponians Super Vets (A, 6-0)

Old Tamponians overwhelmed by Farnborough flow

Clean sheets are rare against Old Tamponians. We shipped nine goals in our two games against them last season scoring six in return. Today we experienced the joy of six again, but in one game, and without reply. This was beyond our expectations as we knew they were a good side with a lot of experience. The pitch was conducive to a passing game, there was no wind or rain as we lined up for the start of the game, after Mick O'Flynn's usual talk about full-backs tucking in. Well, Nick Waller and Patrice Mongelard were to tuck into the buffet later, but that is, surely, not what he meant. I must report though that Nick tucked into the Jaffa cakes as soon as he entered the changing room, and cast a roving eye at the Redman boys' packed lunch.

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant, Sinisa Gracanin, Dean Murphy

Jon Redman, Michael Ugwumba, George Kleanthous, Kypros Michael

Simon Thomas, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Paul Tanton, Peter Harvey, Nick Waller

Supporters: Luke & Joseph Redman, Michael Ugwumba (Jr)

Strategist with one Man-of-the-Match vote: Mick O'Flynn

You might be surprised to learn that the first third of the first period of the game was goalless. We had a slight edge in territorial terms but in practice both defences were coping well and it was noticeable early doors how both teams liked to move the ball about. Old Tamps sat back soaking all our pressure and usually managed to thread the ball out but we would then interrupt their flow and begin again. There were not many chances of note – the final ball was not quite there for both teams even though we looked the team most likely to score. There were one or two interruptions – Michael Ugwumba was felled in the centre circle – a rare experience for such a solid construction, but was able to carry on. We drew blood first when Jon Redman arrived in the box at speed to tuck away a ball driven from the left by Andy Faulks. We are not sure if Luke and Joseph Redman saw daddy score – the woolly hats they wore might have covered their eyes. That settled us but it was Old Tamps who came closest to the next strike but Dave was able to gather the ball from a sitting position after a block caused the ball to loop over straight into his arms. Another loop of another kind was seen at the other end when Simon Thomas put his quiff in the way of a cross and a bit more power might have brought dividends.

It was only 1-0 when we introduced our first tranche of substitutes as Nick Waller, Paul Tanton and Peter Harvey took over from Dean Murphy, Kypros Michael and Jon Redman. The cutting edge which Pete added to our front line was soon in evidence. Ten minutes before half-time Paul and Pete combined down the Old Tamps left before Pete cut the ball back across the box to Andy Faulks. Andy's finish was instinctive, sharp and deadly and we had the sort of scoreline our overall play deserved. To think there are people who doubt Andy's ability – fools – form is temporary but class is permanent.

At 2-0 the half-time the mood was positive. We took that into the second period. An early goal from Peter Harvey was just what we needed. He had been taking some stick from behind but his eye for goal and deadly left foot produced a ball of striking geometry to lob the keeper from twenty-five yards out. Pete reckons I tend to exaggerate my measurements. The prospect of

more goals for us improved as Dean Murphy, Kypros Michael and Jon Redman were back on for the last half hour as Michael Ugwumba, Andy Faulks and Simon Thomas left the scene.

We scored three more goals but in truth could have had double that. George Kleanthous showed great vision to thread the ball to Jon Redman at the far post – some say it was a shot that went astray – but Jon made it look good as he squared the ball for Paul Tanton to notch our fourth with a tap-in. This was Tant's 390th for the club. I reckon if he sticks with us, he'll get to 400 this season. George, Jon and Paul had combined to make sweet music – and to think we had George and Michael in the midfield earlier.

As the game wore on the Paphos taxi drivers betting syndicate were getting restless. Kypros Michael had not yet missed a one-on-one. But he quickly missed two - the second he claimed did not count as he was given off-side. However, as far as I recall the referee had not blown when Kypros lifted that ball wide of the post from a yard out – so I reckon the bookies will have to pay out. But he was to have his moment in the Cyprus sun when he gathered a through ball from Peter Harvey, advanced deep into the Old Tamps box and dinked the ball over the keeper. It was as if Wayne Rooney copied Kyp when he scored against Feyenoord earlier in the week. Kyp's second of the match and our sixth was the best of the lot as he lashed a twenty-yarder into the top corner. He told me to say it was forty yards to impress his Missus, especially as she was going to be doing the kit. We were in full flow – a 15-pass move from the back, through the midfield and to the forwards culminated in a close-range scoring opportunity for Kypros Michael but there was big money on a third miss. In the midst of this purple patch, we had a collector's item – a Nick Waller overlap as he sought to combine down the left with Paul Tanton. Between them these two players have over a thousand appearances for Farnborough.

Old Tamps had not thrown in the towel and for example it took a fantastic clearing header from Colin Mant to deny them an opportunity. The degree of difficulty for Colin was compounded by Patrice Mongelard mounting his back at the time. Modesty prevents me from elaborating on the drag back I produced in our box to bamboozle an Old Tamps attacker. However, it cannot be nice to lose 6-0 when you know there is quality in your team and things boiled over in midfield. But before anyone could see red, wiser heads prevailed, in particular the referee's, who blew the final whistle with a couple of minutes to spare. As the players shook hands, I was glad there was no ill-feeling between two teams that have been playing each other for many seasons and really ought to know better.

The senior citizen who refereed the game today did an excellent job – he was effective, operated without fuss, calmed things down, smoothed over silly flashpoints, spoke to the players who needed a word in their ear, and above all was very fair in his decisions. The club house was stuffed with Vets Teams – and we recognised two other teams who feature in our schedule. The buffet was excellent – a tray of sandwiches followed by a tray of oven hot cocktail sausages and roast potatoes. Buffet Stopper Nick "Blofeld" Waller was man-marking me, counting how many sausages and roast potatoes I had. I will not reveal the score because Mrs M reads the match reports – all I would say is that Nick forgot to count the sandwiches.

Man-of-the-Match: George Kleanthous who strode through the midfield like the Colossus of Rhodes. Luke and Joseph Redman voted for Dave Salako – I think they are both goalkeepers and Crystal Palace fans – though Luke had a Barcelona shirt on. From a distance the colours look the same, but I suspect the similarity goes no further.

11 December 2016: Old Tamponians Super Vets (H, 2-1)

Farnborough frustrated for long periods but come from behind to claim Sunday morning glory

It was only recently that we played Old Tamponians and here they were again, only fourteen days later. In between we suffered a heavy sun-assisted defeat. I say we, some of us were spared that lesson from the Orpington Vets Lord of the Rings. So, we were hoping to get back to winning ways but our opponents had other ideas - that is usually what happens in football. The unusually mild December temperature was enhanced with a bright sun and a total absence of wind, making for a lovely clear day for football. When tantric Mick Gearing blew his whistle, we were disposed thus:

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant, John Norton, Phil Anthony

Mick O'Flynn, Ian Shoebridge, Jim St John, Simon Thomas

Peter Harvey, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Ian Coles, Sinisa Gracanin, Roger French

Supporters: Kathleen, Freya and Thea Anthony and dog Caesar, Tony Harvey

Strategist with one Man-of-the-Match vote, and new midfield domino: Mick O'Flynn

The eagle-eyed among you will have spotted the presence of Ian Shoebridge, back after a long spell injured, and Roger French just back (after what looks like successful psycho therapy). We were also missing flying Cypriot Kypros Michael (the Paphos Taxi Drivers Association betting syndicate darling) but I heard that Roger French could replace Kyp as he had pace and could finish. It seems my hearing is not quite what it was – as I missed the words “maker” and “the buffet” in that conversation.

Old Tamponians made the better start and got their passing game going early doors, and it took us a while to get our fair share of possession. There were, however, no clear scoring opportunities being created. We had lost the toss and so had to play against the sun as well. I gather that was at the root of last week's problems except that in that case the opposition had convinced our tosser for the day – George Kleanthous – that there was not time to toss a coin as the game was running late. I cannot recall many scoring opportunities for either side in the first half-hour. I exclude from that the punt from distance which Dave Salako, blinded by the sun, pushed onto the bar after about twenty minutes. We were getting in good positions but the final shots were wayward – Peter Harvey came closest with a shot that swerved past the post late; Andy Faulks was finding space but his limbs lacked co-ordination, imagine a marionette with a drunk puppet master {but he was to redeem himself with a sublime pass late in the game for the winning goal).

The midfield was congested with Ian Shoebridge and Jim St John having to do the work of three or four players. Jim's physical presence was immense and he certainly laid his body on the line today. On the half hour Ian Coles and Sinisa Gracanin replaced John Norton and Phil Anthony (the latter having picked up a knock). It took us a while to re-adjust our formation. In that time, we fell behind – about five minutes before half-time, a good time to score. Mick O'Flynn had gone travelling from the right-back position and when the ball was lost, we were exposed down the right and Old Tamponians crafted a well-worked move which culminated in a good finish

inside the six-yard box before we could neutralise the danger. They deserved their 1-0 lead at half-time.

Ian Shoebridge departed at half-time to cook sausages, and Roger French joined the fray. Mick O'Flynn was in charge of the clipboard and contrived to start the second half with only ten Farnborough players. Anyway, no harm was done in that time. Instead, we took the game to Old Tamps and began to put sustained pressure on them. This led to one of the talking points of the game – arising from a spell of successive Farnborough corners. A shot from Sinisa Gracanin from edge of the box looked destined for the top corner until a pair of hands intervened. It looked like two Old Tamps players were in the vicinity of the ball – the goalkeeper and defender Roy. Roy managed to create an optical illusion. Several of our players thought he had handled the ball – several of the Old Tamps players thought he had not, but was simply preparing for the possibility that he might. Anyway, the referee was momentarily puzzled, we could tell, and the outcome of the ensuing mass debate was a corner to Farnborough.

We made more changes on the hour with Patrice Mongelard and Mick O'Flynn being replaced by John Norton and Phil Anthony. The last half hour was eventful. Peter Harvey shot speculatively from thirty yards out – the ball kept low and travelled perhaps more quickly than met the eye. The Old Tamps keeper eventually got down to smother the ball but it squirmed beneath his body and we were back in business. We deserved that equaliser, regardless of the way it looked. After that the game could have gone either way. Instead with about ten minutes left, Andy Faulks regained co-ordination in his limbs, and played an exquisite through ball for Peter Harvey who had timed his run to perfection before slotting the ball home to give us the lead for the first time in the game. The last five minutes or so were exciting for the neutral. Old Tamps had two good chances in that period and we also saw superb saving tackles from Colin Mant and Roger French. Simon Thomas nearly made something of a deep cross to the far post to finish things off with an ambitious volley but you have to be there to miss such chances. The referee played what seemed the longest five minutes ever played at Farnborough – tantric Mick had slowed time down.

A draw would have been a fair result – Old Tamps had chances at the end to get something out of the game but we had a striker who made the difference between two evenly matched sides.

The buffet was a bumper edition (a beer for anyone who makes the link with the name of our opponents today but you will need to know your French and not mind showing it in these Brexit times). The horn of plenty that is Shoebridge Catering Solutions disgorged hot dogs, slow roasted sausages (except a rogue one which Peter Harvey found), vegetable samosas, onion bhajis, spring rolls, cheddar cubes, sausage rolls. It was like Christmas come early, especially as Papa Buffet Nick Waller was absent. There was even some left for the Sunday team, also winners today by the slimmest of margins.

Man-of-the-Match: Peter Harvey – who made dad Tony proud with two vintage strikes which took him into double figures for the season.

18 December 2016: Wellcome Super Vets (A, 4-3)

Roger's team edges it over the other Roger's team by the odd goal in seven

If you held a referendum among the Farnborough players it would tell you that the Beckenham Cricket and Tennis Club in Foxgrove Road is one of our favourite away venues, and more so around this time of year when you can expect evidence of the Christmas spirit, and I do not mean just our annual Christmas jumper show (more on that later). Our games against Wellcome are high scoring affairs – the corresponding fixture in three previous seasons had yielded scores of 3-4, 5-4 and 1-6 from the Farnborough lens. The playing surface was, as ever, very good, the mist did its best to approximate a wintry scene but in fact it was mild and still. We shared our playlist in the changing rooms. Mick O'Flynn puts as much thought into the musical side of the operation as he does in team tactics, substitutions and piercings.

Starting XI:

Paul Parsons

Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant, Ian Coles, Phil Anthony

Mick O'Flynn, Sinisa Gracanin, Jim St John, Simon Thomas

Kypros Michael, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Ian Shoebridge, Colin Brazier, Peter Harvey, and later on Roger French

Supporters: Kathleen, Freya and Thea Anthony (who assured me they had got a Christmas present for Grouchy); Ian Lyons

Strategist, DJ, with one Man-of-the-Match vote, and new midfield domino: Mick O'Flynn

Another with one Man-of-the-Match vote, in credit to the tune of £75: Ian Lyons

Wellcome had many faces we recognised but there were absent friends too. We heard that their dreadlocked forward Roger was missing, having had to attend to his ailing elderly parents in Jamaica. It was clear the Wellcome team held their Roger in high regard, and all wished him and his parents well. I wished the circumstances were different but I was glad not to face him.

We still got a shock at the start of the game. We were 1-0 down after two minutes. Patrice Mongelard was turned on the left of our defence and the low cross into our six-yard box was spilled by Paul Parsons. The loose ball was tucked away despite a despairing Farnborough tackle from Colin Mant. Wellcome could have added to their score but hit the bar with the goal seemingly at their mercy. We got what we deserved – we had not started well and we struggled to string three or four passes together.

We drew level with a quick break about ten minutes later. One moment we were defending a corner and the next Simon Thomas was moving to ball to Kypros Michael who dinked the ball past his marker, nipped round him and carried on well into the box before shooting hard and low. I will be the first to put my hands up and say that I thought Kypros had put the ball wide, (he has from you can't blame me for that lack of faith) but in fact – and he asked me to make that clear in the match report (for his missus), his shot was so powerful that it had burst the net. Anyway, to their credit, Wellcome made no fuss as the referee pointed to the centre circle. Five minutes later from another break Andy Faulks crossed the ball into the box to the far post where we had three players waiting, Kypros, the Quiffed one and Jumbo. Guess who got their head to the ball to give us the lead.

Midway through the half (of forty minutes) Simon Thomas, Kypros Michael and Patrice Mongelard made way for Colin Brazier, Ian Shoebridge and Peter Harvey. Pete's introduction

paid dividends in no time as he produced another superb lob from distance to give us a two-goal cushion. Wellcome were certainly not out of it – we would need a fourth goal, we sensed, but it was Welcome who finished the half with hope.

We did not start the second half well. In fact, a shadow was cast. Roger French had appeared about five minutes before half-time, having travelled a long way from his son Thomas's game (which he left at half-time) in a splendid elf outfit and Santa red gilet. Despite this, bonhomie was in short supply indeed as Mick O'Flynn failed to put Roger on straight away at the start of the half. Mick had taken himself off and put Simon Thomas back on and was still computing further changes and wanted to put Roger on at the first break in play. That was not good enough for Roger French who was not going to be messed around. We were left in no doubt that we were not playing for Farnborough Old Boys Guild but for Roger French's team.

Two minutes into the half team player Phil Anthony made way for Roger. The next quarter of an hour was not our finest. Wellcome got back in the game after a player ghosted into the box to produce a crisp finish to meet a low cross. The player was Colin Brazier. 3-2 became 3-3 from a sweet left footed shot from the edge of the box. The game could have swung either way at that point. We made more changes - Kypros Michael and Patrice Mongelard came back on for Andy Faulks and Sinisa Gracanin. We slowly turned things round - and the scoring chances started to return (though not just for us). Peter Harvey will know he should have done better when put clean through by Ian Shoebridge. Wellcome will no doubt rue the shot that crashed against the bar and rebounded kindly for us with two of their forwards loitering with intent.

We restored our lead a quarter of an hour from the end thanks to Kypros Michael who had two bites of the cherry. First, he broke through down the left, rounded the keeper but the angle was too tight as he rolled the ball on a parallel course to the goal line to the other wing where Simon Thomas was lurking. Simon controlled the ball, looked up and lifted it superbly for Kypros unmarked, with time to control the ball, before he could finally finish the job. The final five to ten minutes were keenly contested with half chances falling to both teams but in the end, Santa gave the present of a win to Farnborough.

This was a competitive game played in excellent spirit. Wellcome lived up to their name with an endless supply of food. There was a vast array of sandwiches, samosas, bhajis, pakoras, pizza, mini pork pies and Cornish pasties, even chocolate cake – which we could not finish despite Roger French's best efforts. Wellcome player/host Danny Webber kept plying us with food (his son Sean having played for Farnborough in the past). If only Buffet Grinch Nick Waller had been there – by all accounts he was training hard for his return – twenty-five pints in two days, all that drink on an empty stomach is, of course, not good for you.

There were some crackers among the Christmas jumpers on show. To name but a few, Colin Brazier had his Val Doonican number; Ian Coles had the one with the carrot sticking out (looking less taut than in previous years I felt); Peter Harvey's Tesco Value Xmas Jumper caught Kypros Michael's eye – he is getting one for his mother-in-law. Talking of crackers – a lady from the tennis club spanked Colin Mant twice in the bar, after he jingled her bell, but she left before a queue formed.

Man-of-the-Match: Jim St John (Jumbo) for a towering performance in midfield who can be reassured that the intimate photograph of himself he circulated on the Team WhatsApp earlier this week had no influence whatsoever on the voting.

8 January 2017: Inter Vyagra Super Vets (H, 10-1)

Potent Farnborough outscore limp Inter Vyagra

Games at this time of year can be uncertain because of the weather. For instance, the corresponding game last season was not played because of a waterlogged pitch (those days are well behind us we hope with our new drainage system), and the one after that was frozen off. So, it was a great pleasure to be out on such a mild, still and dry day to resume our season after our "mid-winter" break, and embark on the 17th match of the current campaign. There were many dog walkers about unsurprisingly (more on that later). Embarking on his 100th season (joke) was referee Mick Gearing, very dapper today in the regalia of a London FA referee. Before I could congratulate Mick for finally passing his referee's exams – he explained that the kit was actually loaned to him by the younger referee officiating in our Sunday team's match on the adjacent pitch. Mick had had a senior moment and left his gear (see what I did there) behind.

Starting XI:

Paul Parsons

Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant, Ian Coles, Mick O'Flynn

George Kleanthous, Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Shoebridge, Simon Thomas

Kypros Michael, Peter Harvey

Substitutes: Colin Brazier, Steve Blanchard, Andy Faulks

Supporters: Barry Grainger and son Eden, Neil Connelly

Strategist, DJ, and new co-manager: Mick O'Flynn

We climaxed early in the game. After only five minutes we had scored for the first time. A cross from the left had drawn a deft header from Simon Thomas who lifted the ball behind him to a waiting Peter Harvey. The chest control by Pete was instant, he swerved past a defender to clear the way for a left foot shot and what a shot. Power, accuracy, angle, pace and height all combined in a perfect package which left the Inter Vyagra keeper transfixed as the nets sighed in admiration. A few minutes later Pete came again. This time he picked up a loose ball in space on the edge of the box, and shot past the keeper with the trusty left peg.

Just in case anyone was thinking that Inter Vyagra were not up for it, we saw two quick close-range misses by one of their normally reliable swordsmen. Barely fifteen minutes had elapsed and there could have been four of five goals. Peter Harvey completed his hat-trick soon after when he was in the right place in the centre of the box to score a rare headed goal after good work from Kypros Michael. Before the half hour was up Kypros Michael had himself scored giving a through ball from Peter Harvey the finish it deserved. Kypros wanted me to describe his strike as a scorona (a cross between a scorpion kick and a rabona) to impress the Missus but I think she would smell a Cypriot rat.

On the half hour we brought on Colin Brazier, Steve Blanchard and Andy Faulks for Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant and Ian Shoebridge. Colin and I had the pleasure of watching another great goal from Simon Thomas after the sort of one-touch inter-passing that amateur footballers dream of. Simon started the move cutting in from the wing; Peter Harvey and George Kleanthous were involved before George steered the ball in Simon's path. Simon did not have to break stride, using his momentum and rangy legs he glided past the nearest defender, moved into a position where he had a clear view of the goal, looked up, opened his body as they say, and stroked the ball in an arc round the keeper against the base of the post having computed the angle for the ball to rebound into the net. You normally have to wait a whole season for the goal-

of-the-season (if you will pardon the tautology), but today like buses we had had two of them at either end of our first-half goal fest. In the midst of this we watched a miss of the season from Sinisa Gracanin – two yards out, centre of the box teed up by Kypros Michael, and the ball ended up high in the tress in High Elms (almost). For this, Sinisa had to wear some distinctive head gear in the bar – a sort of clown’s hat for mellow people with long hair, for all the mirth that the recollection of his shot created.

The half-time oranges all went. I would be lying if I said that we were not hoping for more goals but more than anything we wanted the fluid connecting football to continue with players hungry for the ball and passing and moving. Our fluid football was interrupted with the excited presence of a chocolate brown terrier called Willow (still a puppy according to its owner – not fully trained) which held up play for a whole two minutes as it darted here and there, evading the clutches of two goalkeepers and various players, including Simon Thomas who should know better than to work with animals. Willow could do with some caning (see what I did there) or a lead, as Peter Harvey helpfully advised its apologetic owner.

Willow Pete thought he had earned a penalty early in the second half when he was taken roughly from behind but tantric Mick, like the sphinx, was not moved. Five minutes later he was equally enigmatic when he awarded a penalty to Farnborough. This time he used only his right hand (rather than his whistle) when Kypros Michael was brought down after a trademark penetrating run down the left. Like a Greek accepting a gift from another, George Kleanthous stepped up to put the ball away. At last, I had a headline for my match report, but the joy of six did not last long. On the hour Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant and Ian Shoebridge returned for Mick O’Flynn, Ian Coles and Kypros Michael but before he departed Kypros notched our 7th and 8th goals in quick succession, both times aided and abetted by Peter Harvey and we had two hat-tricks in a single match – a rare feat indeed.

Just when we were beginning to think we would start the year with a clean sheet – an inter Vyagra forward nipped in round our back to start what would have been the mother of comebacks. It was not to be – Kypros Michael had returned to the fray for a spent Simon Thomas and he burrowed his way into the Inter Vyagra defence – on the right this time, before setting Peter Harvey up for a tap-in. We reached doubles figures in almost the last phase of play after a shot from Andy Faulks was parried in the path of George Kleanthous who finished the job. If somebody had said to me that we would score ten goals and that Andy would not get any I would have said the odds on this were longer than Leicester winning the Premiership/Brexit/Trump, all combined. Still Andy took it well, I think, as he muttered something about the most important thing was the team winning, helping others score, all about the service etc. You will get even longer odds on an Andy Faulks shower. Talking of which I will spare you the shower scenes where Peter Harvey was a very naughty boy. Appetites were sated with the sumptuous buffet that Pam Shoebridge kept passing through the serving hatch in the kitchen: cheese cubes, sausages, hot dogs, samosas, onion bhajis, vegetable pakoras, spring rolls, prawn toast, sausage rolls - all enjoyed in the absence of Buffet Viagra Nick Waller. Paul Tanton from our Younger Vets returned from his away game as I tucked away my fifth samosa to bring news of another 11-goal thriller – with him now on 394 goals for the club. The Farnborough Vets have started the year with a bang.

Man-of-the-Match: Peter Harvey, the only player ever-present this season, now averaging 0.9417647 goals per game played. His question for the club today – is his 12-minute hat-trick the fastest for the club ever?

29 January 2017: Lads of the Village Super Vets (A, 2-3)

Lads are the only winners in the village

2017 started so well. General winter claimed the last two Sundays but today many of us hurried to the Stone Recreation Ground near Dartford to take on the Lads of the Village Super Vets. It was less cold than of late but the cup of tea we got from the burger van was very welcome. We even resisted the temptation of a bacon sandwich, yes even Nick Waller, but that may have been simply because he was not as early as some of us, or that he knew he would find our biggest shirt quite constricting. Between us we had two post codes for the ground and Peter Harvey used the one where the kids were playing (where parking might have been easier).

We had fourteen players on Friday but by kick-off we could only muster twelve. Understandably, Ian Shoebridge had pulled out to look after mum Pam who sustained a fall on Friday. Thankfully, there was nothing broken and all the Senior Vets send their good wishes to Pam. There are no good wishes, however, for Andy Faulks. His text at 10:10 this morning to say he was not turning up was a disappointment for a management team that has kept faith with Andy. Two of his meagre six goals this season had come in a 4-2 win against today's opponents on 30 October.

Starting XI:

Paul Parsons

Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier

Mick O'Flynn, Michael Ugwumba, Colin Mant, Stephane Anelli

Simon Thomas, Peter Harvey

Substitute: Nick Waller

Supporter and linesman: Michael Ugwumba (Jr)

Strategist, DJ, and midfield domino: Mick O'Flynn

There were several familiar names missing and players like Stephane Anelli and Nick Waller/Colin Brazier who had not featured for quite some time, were playing their fourth and fifth games only this season respectively. We realised that it was going to be a struggle particularly in midfield where without naming anyone it felt like some of our players were playing in diving suits or treacle boots. Just how much of a struggle became clear after only ten minutes when Lads of the Village took the lead with a well-struck shot from the edge of our box after overrunning our midfield and a neat lay-off.

We responded quickly with Peter Harvey latching on to a through ball from Simon Thomas to lob the keeper from the edge of the box. The trajectory of the ball did not appear entirely true but when questioned by the dubious goals committee Pete said he fully intended to lob the keeper but there might have been a bobble as he applied leather to leather. We had a measure of control at the back – we could not recall a single corner for our opponents in the first half. And yet, on the half hour we fell behind again, direct from a free-kick conceded on the edge of the box. It was a good shot but we were disappointed that neither the defensive wall nor Paul Parsons could impede the trajectory of the ball. Nick Waller had come on for Michael Ugwumba after twenty-five minutes but this had not enhanced our mobility in midfield on what is quite a wide pitch.

2-1 at half-time seemed a fair reflection of the game. We had not created too many chances but neither had the Lads of the Village though they had their noses in front.

When the second half started, we had the sun (yes that is correct, the sun) and the slope in our favour. The early pressure was ours and we pressed hard for a second equaliser. We began to win corners and free-kicks from which to threaten the Lads' goal. Peter Harvey's whipped corners were raising our hopes and we cannot explain how Steve Blanchard did not connect with the ball running in at the far post. Patrice Mongelard had a free-kick which caused a Lads defender to head the ball against his cross bar but we could not capitalise on the rebound. On the hour though we back on level terms and what a splendid strike it was. A cross from Patrice Mongelard had found Nick Waller in a good position to have a pop at goal himself but he cleverly disguised his intervention by playing the ball to Peter Harvey who unleashed a thunderbolt into the top corner from fifteen yards out. At 2-2 and with the prevailing direction of travel the neutral might have favoured Farnborough to claim all the points. Yet with about ten minutes left we conceded a soft goal, with due credit to the big Lads of the Village forward who never gave up chasing a ball into our box that he just managed to toe poke past Paul Parsons (who seemed to have checked his run off his line).

This was a bitter blow on the break, against the run of play but that's football. So too, I suppose was the sharp exchange of words between Colin Mant and Michael Ugwumba about the art of midfield play. Michael had replaced Mick O'Flynn midway through the half and did not seem to have fully recovered from the injury sustained before Christmas. We pressed hard for a third equaliser – even bringing out of the locker the lesser-spotted overhead kick in the Lads of the Village box from Ian Coles which was on target. We nearly got caught on the break by the Lads of the Village substitute, Albanian I think, with a still poor grasp of the off-side rule, but Ian Coles was able to clear the ball before it trickled over the line. The final effort on goal was ours, in the dying seconds as the Lads of the Village keeper spilled a shot from Colin Brazier which Stephane Anelli was a whisker away from turning in. That would have a fair shake from the football gods.

At the end both teams shook hands, after a well-contested game, refereed very fairly, and without a cross word or bad tackle in it. After tantric showers eight of us made our way to the Lads of the Village Public House where our hosts produced piping hot chicken nuggets, sausages and sausage rolls as well as ham sandwiches, much to the delight of buffet Boa Nick Waller who paid his tribute. We took part in a raffle which was also won by one of the Lads of the Village lads.

Man-of-the-Match: Peter Harvey who took home three quarters of the twelve votes cast.

5 February 2017: Sanco Super Vets (H, 3-7)

Farnborough youngster makes it a tough day for the Senior Vets

The heavy rains this week had cast a doubt on whether this game would be played. In the end the refurbished pitch held up but the outcome of the game has cast a doubt over the whole of the Senior Vets team, itself now in much need of refurbishment.

SANCO had the bare eleven though I counted twelve players and the word was that if they had not drafted in two under-age players there would not have been a game. One was 24 reportedly the son of one of their players and the other – according to the best Farnborough guesses, was about 29. It was possible in that case to have Farnborough guesses because the player in question was Bobby Moulson, ex-Farnborough first teamer, who went on to have a dazzler of a game. We would have struggled against ten players today.

Starting XI:

Paul Parsons

Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant, Steve Blanchard, Phil Anthony

Michael Ugwumba, Simon Thomas, Paul Tanton, Ian Shoebridge

Andy Faulks, Peter Harvey

Substitutes: Nick Waller, Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Coles, Kypros Michael

Supporters: Kathleen, Freya and Thea Anthony and dog Caesar, Tony Harvey, Jim and Jack St John, and (linesman) Michael Ugwumba (Jr)

Strategist and DJ: Mick O'Flynn

The “keep it tight” bit of the team talk was defenestrated within two minutes of the start when we fell behind to a Moulson goal. We responded fairly quickly with a Michael Ugwumba header which came back off the base of the post from a Paul Tanton free-kick. Within the opening ten to fifteen minutes Michael looked our most likely scorer – a pile driver of a right foot shot went narrowly wide and the SANCO keeper plucked another of Michael's shots from the top corner. I do not really recall other goal threats from us in that half. At the other end, Moulson had added another goal after a fine control and solo run. A third SANCO goal came before the half hour from a cross from the right of our defence and a player who had drifted into the box from the right wing. 3-0 was well deserved – such had been the poverty of our display. We were on Easter Island, a yard behind in thought, disjointed, listless and it felt like we were a player short. SANCO wanted it more.

On the half hour we made four changes as Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant, Michael Ugwumba and Paul Tanton made way for Nick Waller, Sinisa Gracanin, Kypros Michael and Ian Coles. Sinisa Gracanin would have been on from the start but had to make an emergency dash to the club house – by then it was probably safe to use the toilets again (whoever was in there shortly before 10:30 probably needs medical assistance – that is all I would say). Slowly, we began to play more of a part in the game, and we felt that if we could only get one goal back we would sort ourselves out.

Andy Faulks had had enough and removed himself from the game at the interval and Paul Tanton was back on sooner than anticipated. The “keep it tight” bit of the half-time inquest was a joke within five minutes of the re-start. SANCO exploited the vast acres on the left of our defence to register their fourth. Five minutes later the same area yielded their fifth. Tony Harvey arrived

soon after and the look of incredulity on his face was priceless as he was apprised of the score but to his great credit – his first words were “Come on Farnborough”.

By then a tanned Jim St John had removed young Jack from the scene. There are things that young children should not see. Jim was surprised at how wet the ground was. This was a fair observation from a man who had just completed his third holiday of this year, and I am reliably informed, with the prospect of Dubai in four weeks. He’ll qualify for non-dom status at this rate.

On the hour we made more changes as Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant and Michael Ugwumba came back on for Phil Anthony, Steve Blanchard and Ian Shoebridge. We switched to a back three, and pushed our secret weapon Nick Waller into the front line. We scored two quick goals. First Peter Harvey drove determinedly into the box despite the attentions of defenders to make the most of a Kypros Michael assist. Then Peter Harvey again was the architect when his cut-back hit a Sanco defender’s foot and went in.

5-2 seemed respectable and we went looking for more but Moulson got his hat-trick and then created another goal before Kyp Michael finished off a Peter Harvey pass to end the scoring. We had nearly drawn the second half.

It was difficult in a game like this to keep emotions in check and there was the nagging feeling that at least two of the opposition players on the pitch were thirty or more years younger than the oldest Farnborough player. Most players shook hands at the end except for the surly SANCO forward who had a great game and scored two goals. I saw him leave the clubhouse without a word to anyone. You would not want to come across him when he loses a game.

Words were said in our team between Michael and Simon. However, after last week I should explain, to reassure concerned readers of our match reports, that in spite of the way the game unfolded, Colin Mant was an oasis of clam; a deep reservoir of consideration, tact and diplomacy; a haven of courtesy; a paragon of sportsmanship, the epitome of fair play.

Shoebridge Catering Solutions delivered hot dogs, sausage rolls, samosas, onion bhajis, cheddar chunks much to the delight of Buffet Biffa Nick Waller who was involved in a face-off with the Shoebridge dog Pip for the last cheddar chunk. I can still hear that pitiful whelp as the Biffa jaws snuffed Pip’s hopes.

I normally have a clean joke for the Anthony sisters to share with their school mates the next day but today all I could think of was that the whole Farnborough Senior Vets had been a joke.

In the clubhouse we bumped into a Farnborough Legend – Des Fallon (three decades of experience as a Farnborough Team Manager) - who uttered these wise words “Management is the Art of Tough Decisions” – and it seems we have a few of those to make for our next game.

Farnborough **Man-of-the-Match**: Ian Coles.

Star of the game: Bobby Moulson.

19 February 2017: West Farleigh Vets (H, 1-4)

West Farleigh show how far Farnborough have to go

After last week's cancellation – surely the last sting in this winter's tale or tail, we were keen to play today. I think we are still glad we did, though I cannot be sure. The weather was better than it has been for a long time. I cannot say the same for our football. West Farleigh had requested a later kick off to allow them fifteen more minutes to travel from the depths of the Kentish Weald. Andy Faulks was still late for us, having celebrated his birthday this weekend – but as none of the rest of our team appeared to have been there, everyone else was on time, including Steve Blanchard (just) who came back from holiday yesterday. So too was referee Mick Gearing who celebrated his birthday last weekend. We also welcomed back Eric Johnson who travelled all his way from the USA for his annual half in Farnborough colours and this was an opportunity for his genial host, Senior Vets Chief Clown, Toby Manchip, and self-appointed “Overall Club Captain” to come scatter pearls of wisdom about the clubhouse. Eric was glad to get away from the California weather but had to put up with Toby for longer than we did (including a visit to Ghent during the week to watch Spurs).

Starting XI:

Paul Parsons

Steve Blanchard, Mick O'Flynn, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Dave Green, Ian Shoebridge, Simon Thomas, Michael Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, Kypros Michael

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, Andy Faulks, Eric Johnson

Supporters: Tony Harvey, Toby Manchip, Nicholas Michael, Michael Ugwumba (Jr),

Strategist and DJ: Mick O'Flynn

We do not expect easy games against West Farleigh and it was clear early doors that we were not going to get one today. They only had twelve players but they were well-balanced, organised, worked hard, with big units at the back, a compact midfield, and a tall and short combo at the front both with pace that included a Deano. Our concerned readers will know we struggle against sides who have a Deano, and that our search for a Deano of our own goes on.

Initial exchanges were even and if anything, we carried a bit more menace in the first ten minutes or so. Kypros Michael twice broke through, even rounded the keeper but nothing came of it. Even his lad Nicholas thought that dad should have taken an early shot on one of those occasions. I agreed to mention this in the match report but only after Kypros promised not to hurt the boy. West Farleigh were just biding their time, getting our measure and their first serious incursion into our box after fifteen minutes brought them their first goal – a first time volley on the run to convert a cross from the right of our defence with a well-placed shot that crept inside the post. The West Farleigh player had three Farnborough players within a two- yard radius but he had the greater desire, speed of thought, anticipation and momentum. That, in a nutshell, is the story of the whole game.

Their second goal barely five minutes later had a touch of farce about it. A cross from the left of our defence seemed destined for Paul Parsons who had called for the ball and come for it. But in his way was Mick O'Flynn and their bodies coalesced in a heap – like a pair of mating beetles. The ball fell kindly to a West Farleigh player to tuck into an empty net. Mick's brief encounter with Paul meant that he had to go off for a bit and we made the first change of the match with Phil Anthony replacing Mick, a little ahead of schedule. Even at two down, we were still making

a game of it but without really troubling the West Farleigh keeper. On the half hour Patrice Mongelard and Dave Green made way for Andy Faulks and a returning Mick O'Flynn. Before the end of the first-half the Deano had struck with a crisp shot from inside the box which was hit too well for Paul Parsons. It was 3-0 at half-time but could have been worse. For the second consecutive home game Tony Harvey had appeared, to confront a scoreline that he was not expecting. I am not surprised he turned the conversation to cycling in the Ghent Velodrome when Toby Manchip appeared a little later. Toby was amazed to find the only other person he knew who had been to Ghent (apart from Eric Johnson), standing next to him, watching a game at Farnborough on a Sunday morning in February

The talking at half-time amongst ourselves was good, perceptive, intelligent. We are good at analysis. It is execution we find difficult. We also reminded Ian Shoebridge to put the oven on to cook the sausages as he departed the scene with Eric Johnson looking to be the trump in our shuffled pack. But within five minutes of the re-start, we were 4-0 down. Simon Harvey was mugged on the touch line, the ball progressed into our box, was cleared forcefully by Paul Parsons against Colin Mant's ex-ballroom dancer's posterior, whence it was cushioned into the path of Deano who had a simple tap-in. We decided Colin could have the assist for that one.

Colin would have had another assist five minutes later, as he put tantric Mick Gearing in the position of awarding yet another penalty against Farnborough. If Colin had not had his hand round Deano's throat, in an attempt to check his run on the goal – Mick might have kept his whistle in his mouth without blowing (now you know what tantric refereeing is). However, Paul Parsons pulled off a double save – first punching the ball against the underside of the bar, I think, and then punching it clear as Deano moved in for the kill only to find that could not head Paul's fist into the net. On the hour we made changes with Patrice Mongelard and Dave Green back on for Mick O'Flynn and Kypros Michael. It is fair to say we rallied in the game, with Peter Harvey bringing his energy, hunger and pride into midfield. We even managed to reduce the score after about eighty minutes when Michael Ugwumba surprised everyone with an accurate shot from distance which deceived the otherwise very good West Farleigh keeper. You could say we drew the second half.

There were some niggly fouls, many involving Deano, without malice, which broke the game up, and tested Mick Gearing's patience but in the end, we had to acknowledge that the best team won. They came a long way and we came up short. There were grumbles; some accusations of energy conservation, positional indolence and football unintelligence; more moaning than in an adult movie, allegedly. Nobody is calling for a change in the management team yet, after three straight defeats, at least I do not think so. But there did not seem too much universal affection and mutual admiration in the team. In the clubhouse though it was a different matter as the signs of Lee and Senay's engagement party the night before, were everywhere. We wish them well.

Pam and Ian Shoebridge put out more hotdogs, samosas, bhajis, sausages, cheese chunks and sausage rolls than we, and dog Pip, could manage – even after Sunday XI Manager Vince Wray made two visits to the buffet table. Some of the West Farleigh lads left early I think, owing to the travelling distance. We could have done with Buffet Sinkhole Nick Waller today.

I averted a travesty in the Man-of-the-Match voting by refusing to record two votes for Toby Manchip. Farnborough **Man-of-the-Match**: Paul Parsons, for that double punch.

26 February 2017: Eagles Fitter Fans Super Vets (N, 7-0)

Farnborough soar after shaky start

Ten of our original opponents, Santos Vets, were attending a stag do this weekend which meant that there was an opportunity for plucky (I hesitate to say lucky) Eagles Fitter Fans to play us twice this season – this week, and next. We were also on neutral ground at the home of Catford Wanderers as both home pitches in Farnborough were in use. Moreover, we had a later kick off time of 11:00, and Val was doing the food not Pam. Did all these altered circumstances affect our play, in the first fifteen to twenty minutes, I hear you ask? No, we were poor and we were the lucky ones.

The playing surface was immaculate, conditions were a bit overcast but did brighten during the game and there was a fresh breeze which you felt if you stood still. In the week when Claudio Ranieri was sacked, FOBG tactical genius Mick O'Flynn opted for a new formation with five in midfield and with our two most potent forwards on the bench. There was a starting role for Buffet Barrel Nick Waller who set a regional record for the number of pints consumed during two rugby matches yesterday afternoon, before a wind-assisted passage up the hill to Orpington station according to a reliable witness. Well, almost a starting role – as Peter Harvey played the first three minutes at left-back until Nick rolled out of the club house.

Starting XI:

Paul Parsons

Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Phil Anthony, Peter Harvey

Ian Shoebridge, Simon Thomas, Michael Ugwumba, Sinisa Gracanin, Patrice Mongelard

Andy Faulks

Referee: Mick Gearing

Substitutes: Nick Waller, Kypros Michael

Supporters: Freya, Kathleen and Thea Anthony and dog Caesar, Michael Ugwumba (Jr),

Strategist and DJ: Mick O'Flynn

A mixture of Farnborough complacency, conservative play, over-passing and poor finishing gave the Eagles cause for initial optimism. We had a lot of the ball but did not do much with it. Instead in the first quarter of an hour with one lone forward the Eagles hit the post, and had the ball in the net before an off-side call was upheld by tantric Mick Gearing. In the same period of time Ian Shoebridge had missed two gilt-edged chances from close range, and Andy Faulks too had reminded us that things were not as they used to be with him. I say missed but that would do the Eagles defence a disservice, in particular their goalkeeper who was outstanding throughout the match, and the other defenders who managed to get their bodies in the way when their keeper was beaten. It took an injury to tip the balance. Paul Parsons could not continue after pulling something big and Patrice Mongelard had to abandon his much longed- for holding midfielder role in the stampede (joke) to pick up the keeper's gloves. Andy Faulks was not injured, not visibly so, but he came off at the same time and we switched formation to put our pair of raptors, Harvey and Michael, up front.

It did not take long for the complexion of the game to change with the pace we had injected. Within minutes we had edged ahead from a whipped corner from Peter Harvey which hit Simon Thomas's forehead with force at point blank range (as Simon was moving his hair out of the way). The next goal was exquisite – a first time volley from Kypros Michael as he connected with a diagonal ball floated across the box from Simon Thomas. The volley made the pass look

world class. A cross from the left was then sliced into his own net, by an Eagles defender but inexplicably, at least to the Farnborough contingent, the goal was ruled off-side by Mick Gearing. I do not recall us making a fuss about that but even if we had I am not sure Mick would have listened, or heard even. The goals kept coming though. Peter Harvey guided a free-kick low into the bottom corner after he had been interfered with from behind on the edge of the box. Some of our players closer to the action than your match reporter (now stranded on the opposite goal line) thought that Sinisa Gracanin had distracted the keeper with an attempted flick which turned into a neat dummy but Pete was not to be denied his goal. Before the half-time whistle he had doubled his tally, this time after good work by Kypros Michael who had forced his way into the box and unleashed a shot which the Eagles keeper could only parry into Peter Harvey's path. 4-0 at half-time felt harsh but could have been worse if we had made the most of our very early opportunities.

The second half was equally one-sided but yet the Eagles could have had a couple of goals to counter-balance the three we added to the score. We had to wait a bit though before we could increase the gap. The Eagles keeper and a massed defence kept us at bay for quite a while. We still had not broken their resistance by the time Simon Thomas was replaced by Andy Faulks (Simon was back on later in the final stages for Ian Shoebridge). Andy went on to win a controversial penalty for us which was gobbled up by Peter Harvey (no jug avoidance there, no let's be nice to badminton partner Pat and let him take the penalty – after all he had not expected to play three quarters of the game in goal today). We registered more goals in the last quarter of an hour – Kypros Michael added his second by converting a cross from Peter Harvey. Kypros had scored with his right foot – to the delight of the Paphos taxi drivers betting syndicate at odds of a 1000-1 against. Kypros was up to his old tricks again though as he embarked on a mazy run past five Eagles defenders to get the ball on his left foot before lashing it against the post. Ian Coles pointed out that Kypros had only one foot – in the same way I suppose that Ryan Giggs or Maradona had only one foot. Kypros asked me to add the Maradona reference as it would impress his wife. A wife who would have been unimpressed had she been there would have been Mrs Gracacin as husband Sinisa hit the crossbar from a yard out. She might have left the ground as a result in which case she would have missed his atonement as he scored our final goal after a Peter Harvey header from a corner had created confusion in the Eagles box.

At this point of the match report eagle-eyed readers would be right in pointing out that there was not much happening at the other end. They would be wrong. Patrice Mongelard had to be alert to get down to his right to get his hand to a low shot from inside the box. He then had to pull off a reflex save to keep out a header from his own defender Steve Blanchard. He saved the best until last as he parried a fierce twenty-yarder from the big Eagles centre half onto the post before calmly and nonchalantly collecting the rebound as if he had meant it.

The showers were bracing – enough to put Andy 'Compo' Faulks off having one, allegedly. The spread laid on by Val was copious and sumptuous – pizzas, sausages, chips, egg mayonnaise and cheese and onion sandwiches, cucumber slices, cherry tomatoes, cheddar slices and buttered French baguette. I'll have more of the same next week, please Val. Yes, we are back at the same ground but in order to accommodate live TV schedules (and the Eagles) we are kicking off at 14:00. I expect a tougher outing as more players will be available for the Eagles.

Man-of-the-Match: Michael Ugwumba (with one vote missing – his).

5 March 2017: Eagles Fitter Fans Super Vets (N, 6-4)

Eagles dare to scare Phil Anthony's defence

The penultimate prophetic words in my match report last week (against today's opponents) were "*I expect a tougher outing as more players will be available for the Eagles*". I just did not realise just how tough. If I told you we were 3-0 down after fifteen minutes that should give you a sense of the challenge our opponents posed today, having refreshed their side with not a little talent and steel. Football fans are superstitious as I might have mentioned before, and I confess I had misgivings about the unfamiliar kick off time of 14:00 (just like there are many fans who just want their team to kick off at 15:00 on a Saturday afternoon). Still, we were all there in good time, except Nick Waller who had the kit (it is amazing how often the player who has the kit is the last to arrive - another of football's parallel universe alternative facts). The later kick off did not seem such a bad idea after the miserable damp morning had given way to a sun-dappled afternoon, on a hydrophilic pitch in Catford which was a treat to play on.

Starting XI:

George Kleanthous

Steve Blanchard, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard, Mick O'Flynn

Sinisa Gracanin, Kypros Michael, Simon Thomas, Michael Ugwumba,

Andy Faulks, Peter Harvey

Referee: An apprentice

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, Ian Coles, Nick Waller

Supporters: Michael Ugwumba (Jr),

Strategist and DJ: Mick O'Flynn

I was under instruction from Phil Anthony to say more about the defence in this week's match report. Obviously, I had a severe case of writer's block after fifteen minutes. Yet we could have edged ahead in only the second minute. A pass from Patrice Mongelard had released Kypros Michael, with a clear run on the goal. The jinking quick feet and bustling style had done the trick and Kypros was in on goal only a yard out yet the shot flashed past the post – too early to score as the boys in the Paphos taxi rank were still tapping their Bet365 wagers. Moments later the Eagles had their first corner. The ball kept low and reached Mick O'Flynn positioned on the near post. He was unchallenged (except by himself) the swing of the right boot was laboured as he failed to connect as he would have wished. There was a nick from Mick as the ball was deflected against George's unready hands and that was it. In less than five minutes the Eagles had done what they failed to do in ninety last Sunday. But they had not landed yet – a few minutes later a long clearance from the Eagles keeper, wind-assisted, was allowed to bounce and the off-side flag never came and the Eagles forward had swooped to put the ball into the net. We were playing against the wind as our tosser Peter Harvey had not been favoured by the coin. Before the quarter of the hour was up the same Eagles forward (absent last week) had extended their lead after hesitancy on George Kleanthous' part to come off his line, and when he did it left an empty net for the nippy Eagles forward to lift the ball into (again no off-side flag – something which got forgotten in the heat of the second half).

We had a mountain to climb. At that point we were not exactly playing as a team, the forwards and the midfield blamed the defence that Phil Anthony wanted to see mentioned more in the match reports. Mick O'Flynn's muscles had enough and Phil Anthony was on sooner than expected to shore up the defence. At the other end, the Eagles had shored up their defence with a muscular, tall, robust and youngish defender (in Senior Vets terms) who was coping well with

what we had to offer. Yet, the Michael-Harvey axis dragged us back into it. Just before the half hour Kypros set up Peter for a neat finish, and not long after Peter returned the favour for Kypros. We had stopped the rot. On the half hour, Colin Mant and Michael Ugwumba made way for Nick Waller and Ian Coles. Nick's brief was to add weight to our attack. We finished the half strongly with several corners, taken by our tallest player, which yielded little even when we got our heads at the end of them as Steve Blanchard did.

We had the wind behind us for the second half and we took advantage as we clipped the Eagles' wings. The tone was set early in the half when Patrice Mongelard again released Kypros Michael down the left and his forceful run and shot nearly drew us level. We had penetration on the right too with Simon Thomas and it was through Simon that we drew level about ten minutes into the half - I say through him because the final touch was not his but everything else was. His shot after a back heel from Peter Harvey on the edge of the box had squirmed out of the Eagles keeper's grasp and rolled behind him and predator Andy Faulks made sure, as he said later, by driving the ball home. We'll never know if the ball would have rolled over the line, Simon says it would have, Andy says we cannot be sure. They both would say that, wouldn't they? The goal that finally gave us the lead came on about seventy minutes. Sinisa Gracanin and Steve Blanchard had been replaced by the returning Colin Mant and Michael Ugwumba. Michael went on to produce a sublime moment – a 45-yard shot that was intended to sail over the Eagles' keeper head into the top corner. And so, it did, with finesse and power allied in an artefact of terrible beauty.

Our fifth goal of the game had some beauty in it too, as Patrice Mongelard floated yet another ball for Kypros Michael to arrow in on goal and this time he did provide the finish the pass deserved. It is all about the service I reminded the Cypriot Express. My service was done as I had twisted my left ankle and Sinisa Gracanin came back on for me to see the game out. We went on to get a sixth after Kypros Michael wriggled free of his marker in a dangerous area and crossed low for Peter Harvey to tap-in. We nearly got a seventh after Andy Faulks had a shot come off the bar to be met by Nick Waller unchallenged, free in the box, three yards out but his volley was poor. Nick later confided that his 84-year-old mum, an ex-Catford Wanderers Tennis Club member, would have tucked the ball home. The thought did not put him off his Pale Ale and sausages though. Just before the final whistle Eagles produced a shot which whistled past George Kleanthous to cap the scoring in what had been a ten-goal thriller.

This was a competitive game, be in no doubt about it, and the fans got involved too. One Eagles fan was spitting feathers about the off-side rule, and things were said, but nothing came of it because in the end the attitude of both teams was quite sporting and there were no bad tackles in the game. The apprentice referee did a good job and took no nonsense from anyone. He'll go far, and I hope will not have to go on strike one day.

Val delivered a great buffet as always – a wonderful spread as I said to her (and I was not the only one to say so). The hot chips, sausage rolls, chicken nuggets, pizzas and sausages were a welcome counterpoint to the cold showers (not many takers for that). The tomatoes and cucumber were not attracting much interest either – certainly not from Buffet Raptor Nick Waller. As I left the ground for home I wondered if the mayor of Catford would come across the tomatoes and cucumber during his visit to the club later to mark some tennis event. I hoped so as I do not like to see food wasted, as those who know me will attest.

Man-of-the-Match: Simon Thomas for acts of great philanthropy down the right.

12 March 2017: Reigate Priory Vets (A, 4-7)

Wry smiles in Reigate as toothless Farnborough score four times

You do not need to be a genius to work out that if you turn up for an away game on a massive pitch with only eleven players things are going to be difficult. If, on top of that, you do not have your two most potent strikers with you (39 out of our 76 goals scored to date this season and countless assists for many of the rest) then you are truly asking for it. And yet the story of today's game was more nuanced.

As we assembled in the Reigate Priory Cricket Club car park – those of us who could find the place first time, we knew we were in for a tough game. There was even less doubt of that when news came that Andy Faulks would not be joining us after all as he was in Farnborough Hospital A&E sobering up, and having a head injury seen to, after a mysterious contretemps last night. There was no doubt at all when we saw the Reigate players – vast numbers of them looking as if they were taking part in a Grecian 2000 commercial.

Before the game the referee took the trouble to come and talk to us in our cosy dressing room so that there would be no trouble during the game. He explained his personal style and reminded us that there were families and children on the premises (junior football, tennis and ladies lacrosse were in full flow). All the while Dire Straits was blaring out in the opposition dressing room.

The Farnborough brothers in arms were:

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Phil Anthony, Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Patrice Mongelard
Sinisa Gracanin, Colin Mant, Mick O'Flynn, Michael Ugwumba,
Georgie Kleanthous, Simon Thomas

Substitutes: One or two would have been nice

Supporter: Michael Ugwumba (Jr),

Strategist and DJ: Mick O'Flynn

You will not find your match reporter mentioned by name again in this report. A concerned reader who himself was mentioned four times in last week's match report (one more than you know who) objected to the insidious personality cult being imposed on others. Anyway, never mind that, what about the game I hear you say.

As the game got underway, trepidation gave way to surprise and then hope. We found we were holding our own. In fact, we took the lead after about ten minutes. Sinisa Gracanin ambushed a Reigate midfielder, fed the ball to George Kleanthous who then played Simon Thomas in for a cool finish. Our lead did not last long though. We were overrun down the left of our defence, where someone who will remain nameless played today, and Dave Salako was beaten from close range. Five minutes later we had the temerity to regain the lead – this time it was Colin Mant unveiling another moment of rare subtlety with a deft cushioned header in the six-yard box to play Simon Thomas in on goal. Simon teased us all by aiming for the far post from where the ball rebounded into the net.

Once again, our lead did not last long – the nameless one had a coming together with a muscular Reigate forward in the box and the ensuing penalty restored parity between the two teams. Yes, you have guessed it, we took the lead for the third time in the game – with good interplay between George Kleanthous and Simon Thomas, quick feet and a body swerve from Siimon, and once again he used the base of the post on the way into the net. That was as sharp a hat-trick as you are likely to see. It gave us a 3-2 lead at half-time – a fair reward for all the hard work we had done. And we could have been further ahead if George Kleanthous had made the most of his one-on-one at the end of the half. The Reigate defence were playing a high line on a monster of a pitch and there was room behind them if we could find the right pass. There had been one or two tense internal moments as the rest of the team adapted to Michael Ugwumba's zonal midfield style – a Continental analytical insight which was later shared with us by our most technical player, Sinisa Gracanin.

We should have gone home at half-time. We did not. Instead, we let in five goals in what felt like not a lot of time. The Reigate equaliser was a great strike from thirty yards which swerved and dipped. Reigate could make changes at half-time and later in the second half whereas we could not. The neutral observer would have sensed that tiredness was catching up with us, and heads dropped as the Reigate goals mounted, and we could not capitalise on the few chances we created (another one-on-one for George Kleanthous).

Readers of previous reports of matches between the two sides on show today will not be surprised to hear that there was a tipping point in the game with the introduction of the Reigate Express. The goals came quickly once he got involved and Reigate also enjoyed the luxury of a superb long range shot from a very youthful-looking right-back which lobbed our keeper. We steadied the ship a little when we switched to playing the nameless one as a holding midfielder but the damage was done. We had the consolation of the final goal - a fizzer from Michael Ugwumba as we capitalised on one of several free-kicks, we won on the edge of the Reigate box. The nameless one dismissed a shoddy claim from Simon Thomas that the ball had taken a nick off him on the way in.

There was an eventful shower for the nameless one, left in dire straits, fully lathered up, as the water cut out, much to the amusement of his so-called team mates. Eight of us made our way to the bar where sandwiches were being freshly made in front of our eyes – cheese, ham and pickle, with no Buffet Wallah Nick Waller to share them with. A big screen was showing highlights of the Arsenal – Lincoln game. I wanted the Arsenal-Bayern highlights. A swift cold can of Fosters – out of money left behind the bar (by Cruise King Blanchard I think rather than hat-trick hero though I may be wrong), and it was time to find the one-way system out of Reigate on a damp afternoon. It was by no means one way traffic on the pitch but the result was the right one. And yet I think we were not too disheartened. We had played as a team and we had all put in quite a shift against a good team. Some even said they enjoyed the game. That's the spirit.

Man-of-the-Match: Simon Thomas with 10 out of 11 votes cast, and who would have been forgiven for voting for himself today, if he could.

19 March 2017: Glendale Vets (H, 2-4)

Glendale pile more pressure on the Farnborough management

One minute we had 13 players available for this game, another it was fourteen, and later still it was fifteen but, on the day, it was thirteen and a half. Moreover, only half the management was there, though Mick O'Flynn had sent a token of his affection to the lads. If anyone moans that the management do not spend money on the squad, I will be able to show them the invoice for the headgear purchased by Mick O'Flynn, described as a "Trucker Hat dirtyword" item celebrating Onan, but as there was no sun, low-lying or otherwise, the cap was not needed, at least during the game.

Both teams had assembled on our top pitch along with referee Mick Gearing but the keys to unlock the goals (must I think of everything?) had been left behind. Unlocking our defence was a doddle by comparison.

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Phil Anthony, Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier, Colin Mant

Sinisa Gracanin, Peter Harvey, Kypros Michael, Michael Ugwumba

Simon Thomas, Ricky Young

Substitutes: Andy Faulks, Patrice Mongelard, John Norton

Supporters: Ian and Pam Shoebridge, Jodie Gracanin, Tony Harvey, and (also first-halflinesman) Ian Lyons

On an overcast morning with a stiff cross-field breeze, Glendale made the most of their assets while we squandered ours. They packed their big units in their defence, and deployed their quickest players on the wings and in the centre of the midfield. The wind seemed to favour them, and they also appeared to master the bobbly and tufty surface quicker than we did. They were certainly the quicker in the first fifteen minutes when they scored twice with broadly identical goals. One minute we were up in their box, including for a corner, and three incisive passes later they had sliced through a ponderous midfield, stranded and outnumbered defenders, and wrong-footed keeper, to pass the ball into the Farnborough net. Two attacks had yielded two goals for them while we enjoyed more possession to little effect.

Still there were signs that not all was lost. Kypros Michael had the better of his markers (but not the betting if you know what I mean). He got behind the Glendale defence several times but could not find the finish or the pass to set someone else up. Ricky Young was making his debut and there was much to admire – positioning, touch and awareness. As footballers say it was clear he had played to a high level in the past. Peter Harvey, back from piles of fun in Thailand, was committed and energetic as ever but could not quite find room for one of his pile drivers. Simon Thomas could not find the "White Pele" touches of last week.

On the half hour we made our first changes with Andy Faulks, Patrice Mongelard and John Norton replacing Phil Anthony, Colin Mant and Ricky Young. We got a goal back about five minutes before half-time, a good time to score according to the pundits as if there is a bad time to score, with a Kypros special. Kyp had woken up, and bamboozled his markers and this time crossed for Simon Thomas to apply his new haircut to the ball. Sadly, for us, Kypros had a family event in North London, which meant that Glendale were glad to see the back of him at half-time

and Ricky Young was back on having earned the nod from the management (over Colin Mant who was once the Farnborough Vets top goal scorer, a long time ago in a galaxy far away.

At that point we thought we could get back in the game. Ricky Young had a powerful shot that was whiskers away from the postage stamp after making space on the edge of the box. On the hour Andy Faulks slid the ball behind the Glendale defence and this time tricky Ricky made no mistake. We were level. Colin Mant and Phil Anthony were back on for Colin Brazier and Michael Ugwumba. At that point the Paphos taxi drivers betting syndicate would have put money on Farnborough edging head. We had the chances – Ricky Young had a one-on-one that he will have tucked away many times before, but the ball missed the top corner. Simon Thomas will be wondering for days how he misapplied his head to the ball a yard out from the trademark free-kick that Peter Harvey whipped in.

Yes, you have guessed it. We paid the price for these misses. Another quick break from Glendale was rewarded with a low finish that seemed to hit the post and come out but in fact had hit the metal handle for the wheels, behind the line. We did not contest it. In the last ten minutes Michael Ugwumba was back on for an injured Patrice Mongelard. Glendale put a gloss on the scoreline with a sharp turn and crisp finish from fifteen yards out and Simon Thomas missed a one-on-one from a yard out. And that was it.

Glendale had taken the few chances they created whilst we squandered many of the openings we created. They had pace where it mattered most, and bulk too. We did not deserve more from the game. The better team won. As Colin Brazier observed later – we were a bit like Manchester City – all attacking verve and uncertainty at the back.

In the absence of Buffet Torpedo Nick Waller, Shoebridge Catering Solutions fed everyone, and dog Pip, with hot dogs, cooked sausages, cheese chunks, samosas, sausage rolls, onion bhajis and crackers.

Next week – we make our fourth trip to the Catford Wanderers ground this season to see old friends, and return to winning ways perhaps. Another defeat and Mick O'Flynn will be wearing that cap.

Man-of-the-Match: Peter Harvey with a good pile of votes.

26 March 2017: Catford Wanderers Vets (A, 3-1)

Farnborough mums happier than Catford mums

A 10:15 kick-off, on Mother's Day, and on the day the clocks went forward all added to the degree of difficulty today. Of course, it was the same for our opponents. We were missing Kypros Michael and Peter Harvey – piles of goals between them this season. We could not be sure if Andy Faulks had finally learned to tell the time, or if he could remember where he had left his car the night before. We were making additions to the squad late yesterday, and had some subtractions too, as early as this morning. We were also aware that Catford were a much-improved outfit, and had added to their squad. On a bright, blustery and sunny day we were expecting a tight game.

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Mick O'Flynn, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin, George Kleanthous, Colin Mant, Michael Ugwumba

Simon Thomas, Andy Faulks

Substitute: Ian Lyons

Supporter and linesman: Michael Ugwumba Jr

The early chances fell to Catford. In fact, we had reason to be thankful for Dave Salako's interventions as Catford twice found the woodwork in the opening quarter of an hour, including once via Dave's hands. We could see though that there was something to get out of the game. We had the incisive running of Andy Faulks and Simon Thomas, and just needed the service from the midfield and defence. Catford lost a key player, early doors and some of their early momentum faded as we brought their excellent keeper more into the game. He made some telling saves but could do little after about twenty minutes when Patrice Mongelard provided the inspirational through ball (or panicked clearance depending on Andy's optic) for Andy Faulks to run on and round the keeper before squeezing the ball home from a tight angle. On the half hour Ian Lyons came on for Patrice Mongelard. We continued to defend well as we had to, and probed a lot down the right where Mick O'Flynn, Colin Mant and Andy Faulks operated. Our midfield quartet of George Kleanthous, Michael Ugwumba, Colin Mant and George Kleanthous formed a tight ring and were immense today – they seemed to have had some extra motivation.

The referee was excellent today though he came under pressure, mostly from the home team as many decisions were challenged as frustrations mounted. We wondered afterwards how Catford had failed to equalise. There was one glaring miss from three yards which put the ball into the tennis courts. Their long throw-ins were causing us problems and we had to defend in numbers. Catford had one athletic forward, Orrin, who was proving an awkward customer, though well-marshalled by Ian Coles and Steve Blanchard. He was hungry, rangy, all legs and arms, physical but fair, though he had a lot to say and I felt this took something from his game. He wanted as he told everyone, to do the talking, in fact he liked talking, but he could have been so much more fluent if he had let his football do the talking.

At half-time Catford brought on an even more dangerous individual: quick, skilful, much tattooed, with well-groomed facial hair and a lovely sparkling stud earring much admired later by "pensioner" Blanchard (as they exchanged pleasantries after Dave Salako had been barged by said forward "doing his job"). Despite this extra danger, we took greater control of the game. Just before the hour Simon Thomas eased our nerves with a nonchalant flick to steer the ball past

the Catford keeper after Andy Faulks had spotted his run into space. On the hour Mick O'Flynn had reached the limit of his calves, and Ian Lyons was back on to add weight to our defence.

Although both teams were full of effort and commitment, there was not much goal mouth action to report in the last twenty-five minutes or so. Two incidents stand out though. First, the goal that gave us a cushion to sit on, as our top striker Peter Harvey would have appreciated. Our players and fans know that Michael Ugwumba has a mule of a pile driver in him and that when he hits them it is best to not get in the way because the ball stays hit. Picture the scene – thirty yards out, in space, Michael receives the ball from Sinisa Gracanin. He controls the ball, turns, faces the goal and lengthens his stride to advance towards the Catford box. An opponent tries to knock Michael off the ball but is out-muscled by our “Joe Frazier” – the right foot is pulled back and released, the contact is clean, the ball does not rise too high, there is a bit of a bend on the trajectory and the net bulges – with the otherwise competent Catford keeper transfixed on his line. This was a Mother's Day special from Michael, with red roses, chocolate truffles and vintage champagne.

At the other end, with about five minutes left the inked one found himself in splendid isolation in the box, with a strong suspicion of off-side – but there was no debate about the quality of the finish as he whipped the ball past Dave into the roof of the net from a tight angle. That was almost the last action of the game as the players, including Roger French in Catford colours, shook hands. We could hear Orrin was still talking as we got back to our changing room. The showers were slightly warmer than for our last two visits.

Sadly, there was no buffet spread to describe for you, or for Buffet Mother Lode Nick Waller, today. At it was Mother's Day, Val was being treated to a day out by her family, well deserved I am sure. We still spent a fair amount of time in the bar, munching on crisps and digesting the news that Colin Mant was coming on our football tour to Limburg at the end of May. He had decided to treat Mrs Mant today by announcing he was going on tour. Now we just need to find someone willing to room with him. We noticed he was thick as two tittering school boys sitting on a pile of dirty magazines, with Ian Lyons, sharing a keen interest in Terry's chocolate oranges, and artistic gymnastics.

Man-of-the-Match: Sinisa Gracanin whose mum is 80 this year, and who can be very proud of her boy today.

9 April 2017: Avery Hill Vets (H, 1-1)

All fair and square under the sun

As I waited, fourth in a long hot queue of cars to get into the club car park, it felt like such a long time ago since we had played at home. In fact, it was only our fourth game at home in 2017. The other thoughts I had were what a lovely day for football, and less positively perhaps it crossed my mind that in Vic Farrow's days there was none of that waiting in front of locked gates as phone texts and calls crossed the ether to find the nearest set of keys. In this case the shortest straw and distance belonged to a slightly grumpy Paul Tanton despite his three hundred and ninety-eight goals for the club. Paul had been poised to take his lad Rory to the swimming pool when the call to take one for the club, came. He'll be making up for it with Mrs T all week. It was just over four years ago on 6 April that Vic left us to run another football club in the sky. The club survives but we miss the old boy.

Another old boy whom we missed was back today, though not from the other side, in the larger-than-life shape of Des Lindsay, the prodigal son resurrected a week before Easter, with the best pair of shades to be seen today, returning to the fold. The good weather had brought out some distinctive clobber, including a magnificent pair of sandals, last worn by a Roman legionnaire, adorning the feet of Phil Anthony who came without Caesar today.

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Ian Coles, Ian Lyons, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin, Kypros Michael, Mick O'Flynn, Michael Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, Des Lindsay

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, Ian Shoebridge, Nick Waller

Supporters: Andy and Millie Cobham (still showing the old man a few tricks with the ball), Tony Harvey, Jackie Salako, three from the Ugwumba family including two other Michaels and one Emmanuel.

The football was excellent today from both sides. Avery Hill – a team of PE teachers mostly still I think, have been playing the same brand of football for eons – composed, organised, athletic, tall, muscular but fair. I have never known them to field a weak team and so it proved today. There was a lot of effort from both sides but really not a lot to show for it because there were few clear chances to score being created and both teams defended well. Des Lindsay looked like he had not been away at all and settled well in the hole. He hit the side netting after a Patrice Mongelard throw into the box and fashioned a good half chance for Mick O'Flynn.

The pitch was a bit of a leveller though not level – it is the time of year when pitches start to dry and harden and unless rolled frequently with something heavy (no Waller jokes please) make you wish for rain (and then you would not have the sunshine we enjoyed today).

The first goal of the game was controversial – a penalty awarded to Avery Hill in the twenty-fifth minute after a fierce cross hit from two yards away hit the intersection of Patrice Mongelard's midriff and left arm (in a natural position). Mick Gearing assured me it was nothing personal and I assured him that no one could ever accuse him of being a homer, even if the concept of ball to hand had completely failed passed him by.

Despite this set-back we continued to match our opponents. Kypros Michael was up to his old tricks but today it was more a case of a jet-lagged Kypros rather than a jet-heeled one. I understand he had got back very recently from giving it large in California all last week. Peter Harvey, full of effort and heart as always, had played a full game yesterday and we were missing the mercurial Simon Thomas.

On the half hour Patrice Mongelard, Des Lindsay and Mick O'Flynn made way for Ian Shoebridge, Phil Anthony and Nick Waller. Nick's brief was to add weight to our attack and he came closest to dragging us back into the game. He latched on to a loose clearance in the box and seemed favourite to get to the ball first but his attempt to roll the ball into an empty net was thwarted by the agile Avery Hill keeper. It was good to see Ian Shoebridge back to his energetic self, covering a lot of ground and taking care of the ball.

We had the better start to the second half. We equalised about ten minutes in. The Paphos Express was released, with a clear run on the goal. His shot was saved but Peter Harvey – like the top predator that he is, was in the right place at the right time to power the rebound with his head into an empty net from ten yards out. On the hour Patrice Mongelard and Des Lindsay were back on for Michael Ugwumba and Ian Lyons. Michael was to return for the last ten minutes after Phil Anthony went lame.

The last twenty minutes were frantic with both sides looking for a winner. Avery Hill kept Dave Salako very busy and gave him the opportunity to shine. He pulled off several gravity-defying saves, and when he was beaten the post rescued him. In the end neither team could find the breakthrough.

And so, it ended in a draw – we had to wait twenty-six games before we could register our first draw this season. As Mrs M noted astutely, it is either conquest or calamity with the Farnborough Senior Vets. The secret though is to take it all in our stride, and to treat all results in the same way. As we sat in the club house with the sunlight streaming in – taking in cold beverages for dehydration and sustenance from Shoebridge Catering Solutions, and much banter (sample from Peter Harvey to a white-shirted Des Lindsay “Des – Are you off to do a Wham Video?”) – bodies and souls were content. Mick O'Flynn had left early because of trouble in the bedroom department, furniture that is, following a recent house move and he had shopping to do. And, on Palm Sunday, we witnessed a miracle as Des Lindsay paid his match subs. Getting him to take the kit will require special prayers from the Pope himself I feel. There was a belated offer to take the kit from Dave Salako but Ian Shoebridge had beaten him to it. That was the only thing that slipped through Dave's fingers today

Next week we look forward to our last away game of the season - to the Eynsford Bowl to take on Riverside Wanderers. It is always tricky to get players for Easter Sunday and we know we will be missing a few. Kypros Michael is off to Cyprus to do interesting things with olive oil, and pick up his sizeable cut from the Paphos taxi drivers betting syndicate. Michael Ugwumba is off to Nigeria on Med View and Nick Waller has promised to personally handle Michael's baggage at the airport despite the anticipated strain.

Man-of-the-Match: Dave Salako, clearly out to impress Mrs Salako which we all thought he managed handsomely. Note to co-manager Mick O'Flynn – check if Mrs Salako can come to more games.

16 April 2017: Riverside Wanderers Vets (A, 1-1)

No Easter eggs for Farnborough in Eynsford

There is a view of the world that sees Easter as an apology for a religious crime. We have a few apologies to make ourselves today. First, an apology to Jordan Glen who read into my comment in last week's match report about the locked club gates, a failure on my part to acknowledge the efforts of many, including in particular Jordan who do a lot at the club that is unseen. After a late night on duty at the club Jordan had made the 5.5-mile trip to the club to open up (but local boy Paul Tanton had got there first). An apology is due too, from Andy Faulks (but I am not sure we are going to get one) for failing to turn up today. It is all the management's fault seemingly, as Andy had emitted brain waves in the Chislehurst area to tell us he was unavailable. I suppose I ought to apologise for giving away the free-kick which led to the only goal of the game. But you will get no apology for our football today. We gave a good account of ourselves and were unlucky not to get the rub of one or two refereeing decisions.

The morning was gloriously sunny, less so later, but the Eynsford Bowl looked in great shape, lush and smaller than when we last played on it. One of the goals had moved in three yards and the geometric requirements of football had entailed adjustments to the width as well. It was still a beast of a pitch with its unique gradient. We were informed that Riverside were now the only team in the village, though it looked like some of the now defunct Eynsford side did not have to wander very far to get a game.

We were expecting to have only twelve players for this game with Mick O'Flynn having difficulty in the groin area. That we had twelve was thanks to Ian Lyons dragging his mate David Thompson along. We played the last ten minutes of the match with only ten players on the pitch, including a hobbling Des Lindsay, whilst the populous Riverside squad could refresh players at will.

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Colin Brazier, Ian Coles, Ian Lyons, Colin Mant

Sinisa Gracanin, Patrice Mongelard, Ian Shoebridge, Simon Thomas

Peter Harvey, Des Lindsay

Substitute: David Thompson

Supporters: Mick O'Flynn, Daisy Thomas and granny Sue Doidge

Before the game, the referee took the trouble to visit our changing room to explain the latest FA rulings on the application of the off-side rule – which was appreciated. This was a cagey game and it was obvious early doors that there would not be many goals in it. We played against the slope in the first-half and as expected we had to withstand pressure, with our back four resolute, but there was little penetration from either side. Both teams were compact, (in our case with excellent covering runs from Ian Shoebridge and Simon Thomas), got numbers behind the ball and if truth be told there were not many chances created in the first half-hour at both ends. Both keepers, in particular Dave Salako, despite the absence of the motivational Mrs Salako, were vigilant, and an even contest, with controlled football from both teams, ensued in front of a bigish crowd of Eynsford supporters and substitutes on the grassy kop.

We made one change on the half hour when Patrice Mongelard was replaced as the holding midfielder by David Thompson. Five minutes later we thought we had taken the lead from one

of the several corners we forced. Ian Lyons had powered the ball into the net from close-range but the referee disallowed it because, in his better view, five foot nine Colin Mant had invaded the body space of the six-foot-two keeper, and deprived him of oxygen. The biggest threat to our goal as the first-half drew to a close was from Patrice Mongelard as linesman (who was rightly reminded by the referee to keep up with play).

At half-time, we were satisfied with our display and felt that the slope would give us an edge in the second half. I think, in truth, we had reckoned without the benefit of fresh legs and Riverside arguably had more of the play than might have been expected in the opening exchanges. We came closest to scoring though as Peter Harvey hustled his way into the box on the left, was clean through but then accidentally fell well inside the box. He had, from my biased view thirty yards away, been hacked from behind but the referee took the view that Peter had had an accident. For a moment, Peter's prostrate and motionless frame brought to mind the horror of the ankle fracture he suffered at the same ground a few seasons ago. We were all relieved to see Peter back on his feet, even if a little unsteadily from his accident. Riverside forced a number of corners including one that saw levitation at its finest from a Riverside attacker on the back of a Farnborough defender, which the referee with his better view (than the Farnborough linesman) ruled to be OK.

On the hour, Patrice Mongelard replaced Ian Lyons though it was not long before Ian was back on for Colin Brazier and Colin himself was back on when David Thompson limped off with hamstring trouble. He was joined on the sidelines by Simon Thomas, a victim of cramp. Colin Mant had a good attempt on goal, re-directing a pinpoint free-kick from Peter Harvey after Sinisa Gracanin had been interfered with brusquely. From another Riverside corner, Patrice Mongelard blocked a shot in the box, followed the ball out and accidentally hacked down a Riverside player on the edge of our box. The resulting free-kick was hit superbly, beating Dave Salako's dive and nestling into the net off the post. That was with about ten minutes left. We chased the game. Peter Harvey put in on a plate for an arriving Ian Shoebridge in the centre of the six-yard box, with all the trimmings, but Ian's connection with the ball was not true and the opportunity for what would have been a well-deserved equaliser went. That was the last meaningful moment of the game.

In the changing room Dave Salako was persuaded to lose his Dot Cotton cherry by taking the kit home, whilst Des Lindsay paid his subs for the second week running. Whether he will be running next weekend is a doubt. If he does not play, we will miss his sartorial élan even though he left the shades in the Mercedes automobile. He moved well on the superb buffet which our hosts laid on in the Five Bells public house. It was a shame the Buffet Bunny, Nick Waller, was not there. He has fond memories of this establishment where the fuller figure is appreciated by some of the patrons. Roast potatoes, coronation chicken/egg mayonnaise and coleslaw sandwiches, pork pies with Branston pickle, scotch eggs, and – as noted by Peter Harvey, sausages which were not only cooked but had been wrapped in a generous slice of bacon. This was a moveable feast indeed on Easter Sunday and we had not had to move very far for it. How much of it I could move myself was constrained by the prospect of a roast dinner at home and a decent vintage from the Bordeaux region. I could not even stretch to the chocolate corn flake and mini-Easter eggs cup cake, a very nice touch from our hospitable opponents.

Man-of-the-Match: Ian Shoebridge whose mum Pam is seventy-seven on Tuesday 18 April (and deserves a treat – Shoey take note) and to whom all the Senior Vets send their best wishes. Long may she continue to feed us and Shoey.

23 April 2017: Wellcome Super Vets (N, 5-1)

A superb effort from Farnborough and the football was not bad either

This game was a challenge even before it was played. Pie-eyed Colin Mant had, after an afternoon in the Five Bells in Eysford last Sunday, spotted that three Farnborough teams were down to play at home this week, at the same time, on two pitches. He was right. So, I made arrangements to play Wellcome at Norman Park in the London Borough of Bromley with the kind and efficient assistance of Meryl Clarke (the delegated manager for Norman Park). My regular readers will recall that we played our first three matches there this season while we waited for the grass to grow on our top pitch at home. Despite the dry period there was plenty of grass in Norman Park.

We met the challenge of finding the right car park, the changing rooms, locating Meryl and setting things up including hanging, taping and pegging the nets. We were challenged too by having only eleven players when we were expecting fourteen. Michael Ugwumba was detained in Nigeria, Andy Faulks need not detain us, and Darren Chalker, an old Farnborough stalwart with the lowest ratio of distance run to goals scored in Farnborough history, threatening to come out of retirement, was putting out fires last night as a volunteer fireman. At least everyone got a full game but that does not mean that there was no whingeing.

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Patrice Mongelard, Ian Coles, Ian Lyons, Colin Mant

Sinisa Gracanin, Kypros Michael, Ian Shoebridge, Simon Thomas

Peter Harvey, Des Lindsay

Supporter, Co-Manager, DJ, Strategist, Sandwich Carrier and Linesman: Mick O'Flynn

Referee: Mick Gearing

On a mild, still and fairly sunny day we started well against opponents who always give us a good game. They had a cluster of supporters and two or three subs and were playing their last game of the season. In fact, they were looking forward to their club presentations after the game – and were therefore unable to join us in our clubhouse back in Farnborough to make inroads in the four platters of sandwiches I had ordered from Sainsbury's. More on that later.

The early inroads into the opposition box were ours. Chances came and went with good penetration down the flanks and with Peter Harvey and Des Lindsay linking the play between midfield and attack. The experienced Wellcome midfield knew their business though and had willing runners in front of them. However, we edged ahead with Peter Harvey playing the Paphos Express in on goal for a smart finish after a quarter of an hour. Kypros Michael had notched his sixteenth goal of the season in his sixteenth game. Ten minutes later, Kypros returned the compliment when he teed Peter up for our second goal and Peter's twenty-sixth goal in his twenty-sixth game. Chances came and went for both teams. Kypros flashed a low drive against the post. Simon Thomas blazed over from six yards via a slight deflection off Sinisa Gracanin who found himself twice in the way of goal-bound efforts in the six-yard box.

We were certainly not having it our own way and Wellcome will rightly feel that they did not get the rub of the green and the half-time scoreline was harsh on them. Good scoring opportunities were foiled by Dave Salako, they had a good shout for a penalty turned down, and we were having difficulty applying the off-side trap so much so that Colin Mant suggested that the off-side

rule should become compulsory retirement reading in a certain Orpington household (and he did not mean Mick Gearing's). Mick had a difficult game today and there were a few tetchy exchanges dotted here and there throughout the game which we could all have done without, including Mick.

The main topic of the half-time tutorial from Mick O'Flynn was how we needed to defend corners better. Within five minutes of the re-start, we conceded from a Wellcome corner. As they say in football the next goal was going to be crucial. Wellcome rallied – had a superb header that crashed against the bar and inexplicably their most potent forward could not make anything of the rebound from a yard out. Dave Salako played as if Mrs Salako was watching and kept us in it.

Relief came in the shape of Des Lindsay who benefitted from a superb Peter Harvey pass, advancing on goal and coolly lifting the ball over the keeper. We had a bit of breathing space but we also had Wellcome breathing down our neck. The game could still have turned at that point. However, Peter Harvey was not done and he self-assisted the next goal after harrying the Wellcome defence into an error (with a hint of hand-ball which on another day might have been given) as the ball rebounded in his path and the low finish was unerring.

We saved the best till last. Patrice Mongelard volleyed a thirty-yard clearance across the field behind the Wellcome right-back and the Paphos Express put the thrusters on – two touches and the ball flew past the keeper into the top corner. You will not come across many better sights on a football pitch, the goal I mean, not the assist which might have appeared agricultural to the uninitiated. There was not long left to go after that.

Although the margin of victory was emphatic, and the better team won, it is fair to say that there were not four goals between the two teams today. We shook our opponents' hands, wished them well for their presentation and agreed to meet again next season. We did what we do at home with the goal nets and flags and repaired to the dressing room for the usual game of who is taking the kit today – me again. in case you want to know, for the third time this season (and now challenging Phil Anthony for Dot Cotton's favours, and expecting a challenging exchange with Mrs M about it). There are still players who have yet to take the kit and we have only three games left. Still, it gave me an opportunity to explain to Des Lindsay that players who take the kit and pay their subs probably get more Man-of-the-Match votes.

While we made the most of the showers that were working, with the usual Harvey over-lathering, Mick O'Flynn kindly volunteered to collect four platters of sandwiches from Sainsbury's which I had ordered earlier in the week when I was expecting bigger numbers to partake. Mick seemed to take a long time over it – I think the delay was the transfer of my Nectar points to him but, at least when he arrived, we were starving. Dave Salako had not eaten anything that morning. I think he was still digesting a seafood buffet he had in Pembury the weekend before. I can tell you now, that, even in the absence of Buffet Mangetout Nick Waller it is possible for ten people to eat sandwiches meant for three times that number, and that was despite one of the ten having to avoid anything eggy. There were only three sandwiches left last time I glanced at the platters – an egg one which Daisy Thomas turned down because of the green bits in it, and two tuna ones (despite the fish being line-caught in the Maldives). It had been a superb effort which Mr Creosote would have applauded.

Man-of-the-Match: Kypros Michael showing the benefits of olive oil and the Cyprus air, and reaffirming that universal but rarely acknowledged football truth that “it is all about the service”.

30 April 2017: Riverside Wanderers Vets (H, 0-2)

Farnborough all at sea against Riverside

Last week we could not get a pitch at our home ground. This week we had a choice of two. I am not sure we picked the right one, opting for the bigger pitch but I could understand why the prospect of playing our first game this season on our premium surface was appealing. The problem was that our performance was well short of what we know we can deliver. When the opposition keeper comes off the pitch and makes the (correct) observation that he did not have a save to make you have got to take a long hard look at things. This is what we did, and as I told Mrs M there was a lot of analysis to process, which five of us, all defenders, did up to three and a half hours after the game ended, with the lubrication of Farnborough halves.

It all started so well. It was a good day for football - mild, sunny, still. Everyone was there, even Andy Faulks, the various keys to things were found, the changing rooms had been left tidy from the day before, the organisational side of things off the pitch was flawless, leaving aside that one of the corner flags could not be planted in the ground (Mick O'Flynn just could not find the hole).

Starting XI:

Jim St John

Colin Brazier, Ian Coles, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Shoebridge, Simon Thomas, Michael Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, Des Lindsay

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, Steve Blanchard and Andy Faulks

Supporters: Thea, Kathleen and Freya Anthony (and dog Caesar), Jordan Glen, Jodie Gracanin, Tony Harvey, Pam Shoebridge, Vicky Tanner, and Michael Ugwumba Jr who doubled up as linesman.

Co-Manager, DJ, Strategist: Mick O'Flynn

Referee: Mick Gearing

When the football started, there was some Farnborough optimism. We had a degree of initial control which was a surprise. There was passing, composure, great confidence in the athleticism of Jim St John in goal, and probing down both flanks. But there was no end product. Riverside were tactically smart, organised, disciplined, compact, patient, looked after the ball, and they encouraged each other – come to think of how the game unfolded, this was everything we were not. We have a lot to learn from them.

Yet, the two early chances were ours. Des Lindsay thought, as we all did (including some of the Riverside players) that he had earned a penalty when he was taken roughly from behind and shoved to the ground in the box. Referee Mick Gearing thought otherwise, and later explained that this was because he felt Des was a diver (I thought I heard diva – equally applicable some might say) who had a tendency to go down easily. Referee Mick Gearing had earlier revealed to the management that this was his penultimate game officiating for us. He will be eighty years of age next February and it felt right for the tantric one to call time. I have fond memories of my first game for the Farnborough Vets in November 1996, playing in a back four with Mick in it, and being told by 'Commander' Gearing that my arrival would prolong his playing career for another five years (which it did). Here I was, over twenty years and five hundred and forty-three games later, and he was still hanging around. I will sue anyone who says Mick has done us any favours as a referee.

There was a brief interruption when the Anthony dog Caesar ran on the pitch having escaped his minders. Master Phil summoned all his authority to order Caesar to sit but it must have heard sniff judging by what Caesar did next, to another dog. With hindsight, a semiologist could see this as a fitting metaphor for our match today – an illusion of control shattered by a kick up the ass.

The referee did give us a free-kick after twenty minutes after Peter Harvey had another of his accidents on the edge of the Riverside box. Peter curled the sphere towards the far post where Ian Shoebridge running in alone, unmarked, a yard out, got his head to the ball but without the convincing and forceful contact that was required. The last scoring opportunity we would fashion had gone. Five minutes later, Riverside had edged ahead with their first real incursion into our box. Some initial uncertainty, hesitancy and an unpredictable spin conspired against us, and the ball was poked in from two yards out. This was against the run of play but from that point the game changed. We made changes on the half hour with Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant and Michael Ugwumba making way for Phil Anthony, Steve Blanchard and Andy Faulks. I cannot say that our game improved, and Riverside were worth their lead at half-time.

The second half was not good for us. Des Lindsay limped off with a twisted ankle very early after the re-start. Michael Ugwumba was back on. We made more adjustments after sixty minutes with Patrice Mongelard and Colin Mant returning for Colin Brazier and Ian Coles. Things went rapidly downhill. A cross from the right was cleared in the six-yard box by Sinisa Gracanin against the tanned frame of Steve Blanchard and into our net. Pam Shoebridge had observed in the first-half that we looked ragged. I am glad she did not see the last half hour. I cannot remember a more ineffectual period this season. We were second best, slow in deed and thought, outrun, outplayed, lacked imagination or intelligence, wasted possession, blamed each other. We could not penetrate the Riverside defence. We looked like a team which could not wait for the season to end, or bear to play with, or for, each other. Not surprisingly, the Farnborough player who emerged with the most credit today was Jim St John – that we were not engulfed in a sea of despair was down to him.

Shoebridge Catering delivered once again a delightful mix of oriental and traditional fare with the sausages this time having a distinctive woody coal-grilled flavour. We made light of the absence of Buffet Heavyweight Nick Waller – everything went, only a small pack of cherry tomatoes were left standing.

Next week it is our club fixture against the Farnborough Young Vets – a good game to miss you might think, and a few of us will do just that, including Andy Faulks who is having a re-run of his Butlins stag do. If we play like today, we should not be surprised to see Help the Aged and The Samaritans at the club for post-match trauma counselling.

Man-of-the-Match: Jim St John who was immense in goal, and deserved better from the outfield players in front of him.

14 May 2017: Inter the Valley Vets (H, 4-1)

Inter bury Farnborough (with a little help) in five-goal thriller

These are the writings of a conflicted man. I have written hundreds of match reports for the Farnborough Vets, but I do not think I have ever had to do so from the perspective of having played an entire game against Farnborough, and from the winning side. So, you might find me a little constrained compared to my usual style. This was our last Sunday game of a long season, our 31st game, compared to Inter's eighth. This was not our last game because we have an evening match against Old Tamponians next Thursday, but even that will not staunch the flow as we have a "cultural" tour of Belgium' at the end of May. You make what you will of the inverted commas.

Back to today - imagine, if you can, a loved one suffering in front of you and there is nothing you can do about it, in fact you are part of the cause of the suffering. The overwhelming sadness, at the end, is the realisation that we cannot play like our opponents did. We do not have the personnel, the skill or the inclination to do this.

Inter the Valley, a team of Charlton fans, could only muster nine players (eight at the start) and had only ten shirts and fewer shorts between them but what a football lesson they administered. We outnumbered our opponents two to one and so after a show of hands, Patrice Mongelard, Danny Mullins and Dave Green volunteered to play for Inter the Valley. This still left Farnborough with thirteen players. The Ajax style shirts of Inter had names on the back – mine fittingly you might say, was 'Ringer'. They ran rings around us.

Starting XI:

Dave Salako;

Ian Coles, Colin Mant, Steve Blanchard;

Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Shoebridge, Simon Thomas, Obi Ugwumba, Kypros Michael;

Peter Harvey, Wayne Hetherington.

Substitutes: Andy Faulks, Rob Petrozzi.

Supporters: Jordan Glen, Nicholas Michael, Michaela Petrozzi, Pam Shoebridge and Obi Ugwumba Jr (also linesman).

Co-Manager, DJ, Strategist: Mick O'Flynn.

Referee: Nick Kinnear.

We did not start well and it did not really get better later. There were two contrasting styles of play very much in evidence from the off. No prizes for guessing who played what. One side took care of the ball, passed and moved, and was collective, patient, measured, calm, composed and purposeful. Another was wasteful, static, individualistic, rushed, tetchy and clueless.

Farnborough went 1-0 down fairly early before the quarter of an hour was up as the defence was carved open and Danny Mullins was almost able to walk the ball in to the net. I cannot really recall the Inter keeper being called upon to make a save before "we" went 2-0 up, the muscular athleticism of Danny Mullins was too much for "our" defence and he was able to bustle his way into the box and round Dave Salako before finishing from a tight angle shortly after the half-hour. By then Farnborough had brought on Andy Faulks and Rob Petrozzi for Peter Harvey and Obi Ugwumba. Rob did not tarry to make an impression on the game, an injury within five minutes meant an Italian cameo role, and also that Peter Harvey did not have long on the rustic bench to ruminate on the Farnborough Senior Vets substitution policy.

The half-time score of 2-0 did not flatter Inter. I managed to grab some orange quarters before the usual Farnborough mid-game inquest got under way. Whatever was said at half-time did not seem to make much difference. Waine Hetherington had had enough and did not return and that meant Obi Ugwumba was back on to add muscle to our midfield. On the hour it was 3-0 as Dave Green was left free at the far post to finish a cross from one of the two outstanding Inter players today, a forward of a certain vintage who played up front on his own and did the job of four players. The other star of the show was a slight Amharic native speaker who bossed the midfield effortlessly, and with great guile and craft.

In years to come it will be a Farnborough Football Club Quiz Night puzzler to ask how Farnborough could lose a game 4-1, despite its players scoring four goals, and none was an own goal (in the strict sense of the word). I have given the ending away but then again do you really want to read more of the game? I cannot bear to write more about it.

Farnborough put on a rally of sorts in the last quarter of an hour after they got one goal back from a Kypros Michael header at the end of a Peter Harvey cross delivered into a space where three Farnborough players went up against one Inter defender. A truer reflection of Inter's dominance was rightly secured when their star forward bamboozled several defenders before finishing forcefully from close-range with ten minutes to play.

The Farnborough dressing room was not a happy place so I avoided it.

I was not going to avoid the buffet though. Numbers for the feast served up by Shoebridge Catering Solutions were lower than usual. So, we could have as many samosas, pakoras, spring rolls, sausages, sausage rolls, buttered slices of bread and cheese chunks as we could eat. I do not say this very often but there was more than we could put away. Even the presence of Nick Waller, the Buffet Undertaker, would not have made any difference today.

More worrying though was the talk about how we could change things round, for next Thursday, the Belgian tour and of course next season, without letting half the number of players go. I cannot say that there was a flood of ideas. Having bought a new pair of boots only yesterday, in the supportive presence of Mrs M, I am obviously expecting to play for a while longer but after today I cannot help wondering if my particular brand of football is better suited to a different team. I said I was conflicted.

Man-of-the-Match: The thirteen Farnborough votes cast could not separate Ian Coles, Sinisa Gracanin and Simon Thomas. I enforced a strict "no votes for Danny Mullins" rule.

18 May 2017: Old Tamponians Super Vets (H, 2-0)

Farnborough manage to come through heavy soaking

Before I start my report of our only mid-week match this season, I would like to thank the members of the Senior Vets squad who attended Tuesday's fund-raising curry at Village Cuisine in Farnborough which I organised. That is all eight of them – Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier, Ian Coles, Peter Harvey, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard, Mick O'Flynn and Simon Thomas – that is one person for every team in the club. We have four Saturday teams, two Sunday teams and two Vets Teams. Add to this number of players, the team managers, club officials, old boys, other followers and well-wishers and you have, by a conservative estimate, at least 150 individuals. Yet, all we could muster on a Tuesday evening in Farnborough for a local club founded in 1929, was a turnout of fourteen. The other six individuals present were (from the third XI) James Cheshire, Nick Stannard and Ben Tomkins; old boys Glyn Farrell and Des Fallon, and Danny Saines (Young Vets Co-Manager). To cut a long story short the club raised a total of £60 once I paid for 20 covers. You might think it would have been easier if I had just given £60 to the club out of my own pocket but I could not possibly comment.

While I am in rant mode, I ought to mention an observation which was put to me, as I tucked into my sixth papadum before I was deliberately boxed in so I could not reach the buffet trays containing the meat curries and pilau rice, and it was this: Why was it that the reports I write of the Senior Vets games never criticise the management. It seemed a fair point at the time. After my fourth Cobra beer I thought different. My reports do not praise the management enough. So, I'd like to put things right for the record, and pay tribute to the management of all Farnborough teams, past, present and future.

As our late Club Secretary Vic Farrow once said to me - management is a thankless task. Of course, as in most things, there are exceptions but generally individual footballers just want to turn up and play football. They do not want to be bothered with 'administration'. They have no interest in, or idea of, the arrangements that have to be made to ensure games are played, fixtures are scheduled, referees are found, match and annual subs paid, essential statistics collected. And do not get me going on the vexation of substitutions – most players feel their prodigious talent deserves a full 90 minutes, and they can usually also think of at least two of their team mates who do not deserve 90 minutes, or any minutes on the pitch. It is a huge personal favour to the management when a player carries one corner flag back to the clubhouse, and as for finding volunteers to sweep the changing rooms, or take the kit, you get better odds on finding a molar in an Orpington Buff. But we manage.

What about today's game I hear you pant?

Well – first of all we owe a huge thank you to Jordan Glen for opening up and doing the goal nets and putting out the corner flags, and just being there throughout the evening, a great support. Also present was Club President Ian Couchman who was the last to leave. This is all part of the management of the club. The weather was more than a bit of a dampener with leaden skies and a heavy flow of rain seeping through in both periods but the light held and I think both teams enjoyed playing on what turned out to be a rather good surface, lush, moist but firm, true with a bit of zip. We had assembled a fairly strong squad and so had Old Tamps (strengthened with a face or two from Avery Hill).

My Tenerife tan paled in comparison to the burnished presence of Des Lindsay, freshly returned from roasting in the Yucatan peninsula in his designer shades. All this melanin was ridiculously incongruous in the Farnborough monsoon lashing down.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Ian Coles, Colin 'YaYa' Mant, Patrice Mongelard, Sinisa Gracanin

Danny Mullins, Ian Shoebridge, Simon Thomas, Michael Ugwumba

Barry Grainger, Des 'the tan' Lindsay

Substitutes: Andy Faulks, Peter Harvey, George Kleanthous

Supporters: Louie Dwight-Thomas, Guillaume and Pierre Yves Mongelard, Dave O'Flynn, Michael Ugwumba Jr (also linesman)

Co-Manager, DJ, Strategist: Mick O'Flynn

Referee: Nick Kinnear

The early stages were even and Old Tamps could have taken the lead in the first ten minutes but we held firm and a rare occasional appearance from our former keeper, Gary Fentiman, his first in Farnborough colours this season, was proving an inspired stroke by the management. As a defender, I am not too proud to say I missed Gary's abuse. In terms of chances created we took the upper hand as the first-half unfolded. Barry Grainger was flabbergasted when referee Nick Kinnear failed to award us a penalty when his cross could not complete its arc because of an Old Tamps hand. The better chances started to be fashioned by Farnborough. Danny Mullins and Barry Grainger had good close-range headers that on another day would have troubled the net. Danny blasted over from inside the box after chesting the ball down and turning his marker. Simon Thomas kept a steady supply of mostly accurate crosses coming into the box.

Old Tamps defended well, using their big units to good effect and were threatening on the break. On the half hour we brought on Andy Faulks, Peter Harvey and George Kleanthous for Ian Shoebridge, Michael Ugwumba and Des Lindsay. This gave us a greater attacking edge whilst we hoped the midfield would not all rush off in search of a goal. Neither team could find a breakthrough before half-time.

The first goal of the game was as they say going to be important. Aren't they always, at the precise moment of occurrence? You know what I mean though in tight games. Good interplay on the right, ten minutes into the second half, with Simon Thomas and Peter Harvey involved, found Barry Grainger free in the box with a low cross evading the Tamps defence – a quick glance up, a shake of the snake hips which put the nearest defender out of the equation, and the ball was guided silkily into the bottom corner from close range. Our second goal was even better five minutes later as Barry got behind the Tamps defence chasing a ball from George Kleanthous which had been lifted above the last defender. Barry's eye for goal combined with his cultured left foot and predator's instinct to produce a crisp, powerful and deadly half-volley which shook the rain off the goal nets, from inside. Soon after Barry started to limp and Des Lindsay was back on to add weight to our attack. We nearly got a third from a powerful solo run by Danny Mullins but he screwed his excited shot wide. That was Danny's last contribution as the ruthless management brought Michael Ugwumba and Ian Shoebridge back on for Danny and Simon Thomas for the last twenty minutes or so to make the game safe. Peter Harvey, still looking to add to his tally of twenty-seven goals this season, produced a rasping shot which the Tamps keeper saved well. We thought we would get a third when Peter Harvey and Andy Faulks broke through the Tamps defensive line but their football interpretation of the chuckle brothers meant

the moment passed. A third goal would have been harsh given the quality of our opponents. We held on to register a rare clean sheet and that was it for this season though for many of us there is a European adventure next weekend when no doubt there will be much talk of next season. There could be quite a shake-up (by the management).

Fourteen 14" pizzas were despatched with aplomb in the bar, in the absence of Buffet Stuffed Crust Nick Waller, washed down in part by a jug procured by a delighted Peter Harvey who enjoyed a second football game this evening thanks to the North London origins of his parents. My nephew Guillaume visiting from Perth (Australia) appeared to have had a slice from each pizza, (it runs in the family) though it could have been an optical illusion.

As the evening wore on, an appalled Colin Mant noted the management had a list of birthdays of all the squad but had failed to mark the occasion of his recent birthday with a cake. No doubt his roommates will hear more about this on our forthcoming Toure of Belgium (see what I did there). Louie Dwight-Thomas joined in the après-match banter sharing his views on the Van Gaal v Mourinho debate, with ears twitching and separated by beaming smiles as sounds of adult humour reached him.

I had the final slice of pizza. This was a fitting end to a long season of thirty-two games, the whole game I mean, not the pizza. We had worthy opponents who gave us quite an examination. And they matched us in the bar, pizza slice for pizza slice, and pint for pint. There were no injuries bar Barry Grainger's knock but the therapeutic glow of two goals will hasten his recovery.

Man-of-the-Match: Sinisa Gracanin who filled in at centre half with great poise and savoir-faire, another inspired decision by the management.

Extra Report - Farnborough Christmas Club Game

27 December 2016: FOBG Argentina 5 – FOBG Royals 2

Matthew and Luke lead FOBG Christmas football service

One of the Guild's end of year traditions was restored this week with a fixture that attracts much interest across the club as those missing their football, those with guilty stomachs, those who fancy a bit of fresh air - turn up to celebrate a family occasion entre nous, at our place. The improved condition of our pitch and the dry, clear and sunny weather, as well as the guarantee of sportsmanship, added to the quality of the experience for players and spectators.

The two teams were drawn from several of the club's Saturday and Sunday sides – with the larger numbers from the First XI and the Vets – with a few others in between, so to speak. Club President Ian Couchman and Club Chairman Steve Viner welcomed everyone to the club like Santa, as Matt Ellis drew up the team sheets on the back of an envelope. As with most games there had been some late withdrawals and additions. Senior Vet Peter Harvey had pulled out with a back injury sustained in suspicious circumstances (but was on hand to pull pints later), a further Senior Vet Andy Faulks was missing because he is suspicious, and yet another Senior Vet Chris Bourlet was absent (his job is dealing with suspicious characters). Senior Vet Mick O'Flynn had persuaded son Liam to support the aged. The youngsters included players using the names of "Pogba" and "Yaya Toure". There were a few beards on show (none white), and even a pony tail (more on that later).

FOBG Argentina: Marcus Allen, Sam Clarkson, Matt Ellis, Aaron Evans, Lee Gibbs, Kevin Lott, Tony Norcott, George Perfitt, Damien Preston, Jon Redman, Joe Slater, Dekklund Wallace, Alex Wray, Dean Wyatt

FOBG Royals: Alex Barnes, Mark Harrington, Chris Hassan, Luke Johnson, Lamar Myers, Mick O'Flynn, Liam O'Flynn, Patrice Mongelard, Frank Pearce, Mick Pitt, Chris Ralph, Harry Tanner, Simon Thomas

Referee: Roy Seymour

The faithful: Ian Couchman, Peter Harvey, Jim St John and son Leo, Amanda Thomas with daughter Daisy and son Louie, Vince Wray, ramblers, three wise men and a dog or two, Luke Redman

The game was barely two minutes old when the first goal went up on the scoreboard. The Royals overcooked things at the back, Liam O'Flynn was ambushed, and Aaron Evans tucked the Christmas present away. The first twenty minutes or so belonged to the blue and white stripes who could have gone further ahead but for some good goal keeping from surprise package Mark Harrington and some rather good defending from the central pairing of Luke Johnson and Liam O'Flynn who had recovered his poise. Whenever the Royals created scoring opportunities the Argentina keeper was unbeatable pulling off several saves from close range, particularly displaying the goalkeeper's forgotten art of using his feet. Midway through the half, the South Americans took a deserved 2-0 lead through Dekklund Wallace after the Royals failed to clear the ball out of their defence, their keeper was stranded and the ball was squeezed into a narrow passage between Liam O'Flynn's outstretched legs and the post.

The neutrals would have been pleased to see the Royals get a goal back from a corner when Liam O'Flynn pounced on the loose ball to stab the ball home, to dad Mick's delight. Liam's athleticism was clear evidence that only half his genes had come from dad Mick. The half ended with the Royals edging it in territorial terms but with the South Americans dangerous on the break with the marauding Aaron Evans.

The first quarter of an hour of the second half saw a change in the tide of the game as the team most likely to score was the Royals. However, as often happens when one team goes looking for an equaliser it gets punished. Aaron Evans crossed for Lee Gibbs to head the ball acrobatically past Mark Harrington from close range. Gibbo is the possessor of a fine ponytail and I could not help wondering if that feature had imparted any energy to the ball, a bit like the rotating blade of a helicopter. As an aside, I should mention that I had supplied both teams with half-time oranges but the divine ponytail had left the baggie of oranges for his team back in their changing room – there is a beer for the one who works out what I have just done here. Anyway, the ponytail was on fire as he even tried a spectacular overhead kick soon after. It would have looked even better if he had connected with the ball.

After George Perfitt had extended his team's lead to 4-1, the Royals narrowed the gap when a fine solo run from Alex Barnes was crowned with a glorious twenty-yarder into the top corner. The South Americans' keeper was certainly a hard man to beat and it took a shot of great quality to do it. There was an element of surprise to it as well as it looked like Alex had run himself into a cul-de-sac but then a sudden change of direction gave him a clear sight of the back of the onion sack.

The last ten minutes of the game were very open with more goals to be expected. Luke Johnson had wandered away from his defence to try and score from fifty yards whilst the South Americans threatened to overrun the Royals with quick counters. Inevitably they got a fifth with a shot from Aaron Evans that looked innocuous but deceived Mark Harrington – there might have been a bobble (should that be bauble?) in there. That was the final kick of the game.

We all mucked in to put the goals and nets away before making a way to the club house. One of the players picked up a bag with a Yule chocolate log in it, a present perhaps from an appreciative spectator. Later in the bar, I overheard one of the First XI players saying to Lamar that the log was "like one of yours". Before I could ponder the universal appeal of Bake Off, I realised that they might have meant something else – a sort of stress for plumbing.

Anyway, the après-match was very relaxed and agreeable. There was a surprisingly witty remark from Luke Johnson about the referee's surname – should be "see less" instead of "see more". Things took an even better turn with the arrival of four large pizzas – to be shared between eight players (and no Buffet Big Cheese Nick Waller in sight). Yours truly, never knowingly under-fed, was in there quickly though Simon Thomas got to the pizza boxes before me. That was the fastest I had seen him move all day. I was so impressed I gave him a lift home. In fact, I was so pleased with the whole experience I took the kit home, counting on a surfeit of goodwill from Mrs M – with the memory of her many Christmas presents still fresh in her mind.

Man-of-the-Match: all the players, supporters and club officials who were there, with a special mention for Matt Ellis who stepped into the breach to make it all possible, just like Father Christmas.

Season 2017-18

2 September 2017	Central YMCA Vets (A)	1-1	Farnborough contribute to great family occasion with no losers
3 September 2017	Erith Vets (H)	2-3	Farnborough do too little too late
10 September 2017	CUACO Vets (H)	0-1	Farnborough swallow bitter pill
1 October 2017	Belvedere Vets (A)	0-1	Schadenfreude
15 October 2017	Inter the Valley Vets (H)	3-2	Farnborough resurrection continues
22 October 2017	CUACO Vets (A)	1-1	Farnborough snatch draw from jaws of despair
29 October 2017	Ashburnham Wanderers Vets(A)	3-2	Farnborough birthday boy puts a finger of icing on the cake
5 November 2017	Belvedere Vets (H)	1-5	Farnborough revival hits the Belvedere buffers
12 November 2017	Riverside Wanderers Vets (A)	4-5	Finkled Farnborough fade in final stages to lose five – four in game to remember
19 November 2017	Reigate Priory Vets (H)	2-0	Farnborough climax late
26 November 2017	Old Tamponians Super Vets (A)	3-4	Farnborough beaten in the sun
3 December 2017	Orpington Vets (A)	3-4	Statistics do not lie: Lord of the Rings 4 Farnborough 3
7 January 2018	Inter Vyagra Super Vets (N)	2-1	Hardy Farnborough come through stiff test
28 January 2018	Lads of the Village Super Vets (A)	4-1	Kypros Michael crashes Lads of the Village party
18 February 2018	West Farleigh Vets (N)	1-1	Visitors happier than Farnborough with a point
11 March 2018	Riverside Wanderers Vets (H)	3-2	Farnborough collective spirit edges Mother's Day last-minute thriller on home turf
25 March 2018	Catford Wanderers Vets (A)	2-5	Catford enjoy every BST minute of it
1 April 2018	Baltic Vets (N)	3-1	Farnborough win Easter goal hunt in Norman Park
15 April 2018	Inter the Valley Vets (N)	1-1	Farnborough escape burial in Norman Park long grass
22 April 2018	Wellcome Super Vets (N)	2-2	Wasteful Farnborough made to rue missed copper-bottomed chances by Wellcome
29 April 2018	Riverside Wanderers Vets (H)	3-5	Riverside win cold tandoori derby
6 May 2018	FOBG Young Vets (H)	3-3	Farnborough wins as family affair shows plenty of life in the old dogs
13 May 2018	Ashburnham Wanderers Vets (H)	4-2	Farnborough win after giving hope to opponents
17 May 2018	Baltic Vets (H)	3-3	Farnborough teamwork shines through on Vic Farrow Cup Day
20 May 2018	Bird in Hand Vets (A)	2-8	A game too far as Farnborough taught a lesson at University ground

Season 2017-18 (contd)

Extra Report

23 December 2017	FOBG Christmas Club Match (H)	6-7	"Farnborough "Friend - ly" delivers thirteen goals of Christmas"
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2 September 2017: Central YMCA Vets (A, 1-1)

Farnborough contribute to great family occasion with no losers

This match report is a collector's item: a Farnborough Senior Vets game on a Saturday afternoon; a charity and friendly game in the fullest sense; a match report without any inane innuendo (more on that in the report of tomorrow's game); two sexy sexagenarians playing for Farnborough; the first of two games for the Farnborough Senior Vets this week-end, well at least for those of us who can take it.

In glorious late summer sunshine, eight of Farnborough's finest Senior Vets made the trip to the leafy setting of the Pavilion Sports Club in Footscray Road, in the Eltham environs to play Phil Anthony's Saturday Vets side. The Farnborough party consisted of Phil Anthony, Ian Coles, Sinisa Gracanin, Des Lindsay, Patrice Mongelard, Mick O'Flynn, Simon Thomas and Michael Ugwumba.

We were joined by Andy Faulks – who like Phil Anthony and Chris Webb (the CENTRAL YMCA Manager) play/have played for Farnborough Senior Vets. In fact, Phil Anthony played a half for both teams while Andy Faulks – with Farnborough in his heart – showed glimpses of his old magic for us in front of wife Jo. Andy was not the only addition to our numbers today: Paul James, Stuart, Keith James, Raoul, Dave, Vijay, Cliff, another Andy and Dan came over from the YMCA squad. It meant we could rotate at will on a hot day and everyone got a fair shake – which is the Farnborough way. The opposition included Danny Mullins (the Farnborough Man-of-the-Match last Sunday) and arguably the character from our Belgian Tour - Barry Summers, who looked the part with his tan, shades and permanent smile. Our team did not have a recognised goalkeeper unlike the opposition – so Michael Ugwumba went between the sticks (“this will not go well” advised Michael Jr) in the first half, and Patrice Mongelard did the second half. Only one of us could lay claim to a clean sheet – more on that later.

This was a really enjoyable game played in excellent spirit between two sides that were evenly matched for most of the time. Even if I say so myself, Farnborough had the lion's share of possession and the greater attacking thrust. Simon Thomas and Des Lindsay formed a dangerous pairing with plenty of penetration. In midfield (guest) Keith and Sinisa Gracanin caught the eye with their poise and craft. But for the excellence of the YMCA keeper, we would have been out of sight by half-time. He pulled off several great saves, with feet, hands and his distribution and positioning were those of someone who knew his métier. In fact, so good was he that Mick O'Flynn signed him up – a nifty bit of business after the transfer window had closed and I, for one and more than most, cannot wait to see him solve a big problem for us, particularly now that, sadly, we have lost the services of Jim St John to injury.

At the other end, Michael Ugwumba was sound when called upon. I cannot really recall a clear scoring opportunity for YMCA in the first half. Ian Coles took care of the tall YMCA forward who was a handful all game.

Goals came in the second half. We scored first on the hour, with a superb Des Lindsay effort with the outside of the right foot from twenty yards which finally eluded the YMCA keeper. YMCA pressed hard for an equaliser and we had to defend well, with Sinisa Gracanin dropping back often, whilst trying to keep Danny Mullins from doing any damage. Patrice Mongelard played a high line, mopping up through balls and occasionally booting them well away – they are still looking for one clearance which flew in the direction of Eltham High Street. We were hanging on a bit and YMCA were gifted an equaliser with about five minutes left. We had started messing

about at the back and Mick O'Flynn took a throw-in and instead of going down the line, fed a hospital ball to Patrice Mongelard with the tall rangy YMCA forward bearing down on goal. Many of the Farnborough players will tell you that the off-side rule escapes my comprehension. Well, it seems that another piece of football law passed me by in 1932 (?) when the rule allowing keepers to handle the ball from a throw-in by their own side changed. Yes, dear reader, in one careless moment I undid 85 minutes of hard work by handling the ball. The resulting free-kick from five yards out was lashed high into the net.

However, there was still more excitement to come. An acrobatic volley from Andy Faulks will live in the memory along with the keeper's save. Most of all, I will remember that in the last minute of the game Des Lindsay muscled his way past the last YMCA defender, and from the edge of the box, struck a low shot into the bottom corner. That was no more than we deserved but to our charitable consternation the referee adjudged that Des had handled the ball when he shrugged off the YMCA defender. So, the game ended all square at 1-1, and both of Phil Anthony's teams were unbeaten.

There was a good crowd for the game, with families enjoying the weather, bouncy castles, giant velcro football dartboard, and barbecue which were part of the experience. Another Vets game was being played at the same time on the adjoining pitch, and the sound of leather on willow could be heard from another part of the Sports Club.

To my chagrin, other commitments meant I could not tarry and I could not exercise my (rusty) buffet skills at the lavish barbecue Phil had generously laid on for the multitude of friends and family who were there. I also had to get home to do the kit for tomorrow's game as Des Lindsay did not offer to do it. I will not repeat Mrs M's comment when I said this was the last time that I would be taking the kit home in 2017.

We suspended match subs today – with donations instead going to the charity supported by Phil Anthony – the British Heart Foundation.

Man of the moment: Phil Anthony, with a fantastic following, despite, or perhaps because of, his jokes.

3 September 2017: Erith Vets (H, 2-3)

Farnborough do too little too late

I missed last week's 4-0 defeat against Orpington Vets in our season opener against the Lord of the Rings XI. I wagered, rightly, there would be more laughs to be had at the Fringe in Edinburgh than on the fringes at Farrow Fields. Still, it gave a 'development opportunity' to Peter Harvey to turn his hand at match reporting. He did it so well that at least one of our players who will remain nameless, no longer wants 'Pat's inane innuendo' (and this after gorging on the stuff for years like some tittering puerile pubescent pervert). It's the word inane that I find upsetting, more than the ingratitude.

Erith Vets always give us a tough game and today was no exception, particularly as eight of us were playing our second game in two days. On an overcast day, we mustered fourteen players, all chipping in for the pre-match preparations, as requested by co-Manager O'Flynn.

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Colin Brazier, Ian Coles, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin, Danny Mullins, Ian Shoebridge, Simon Thomas

Peter Harvey, Des Lindsay

Substitutes: Waine Hetherington, Mick O'Flynn, Michael Ugwumba

Supporters: Tony Harvey, Jodie Gracanin

Co-Manager, DJ, Strategist: Mick O'Flynn

Referee: Nick Kinnear

Both teams would have been happy with their start to the game. We had more possession whilst Erith were dangerous on the break with their lone forward proving a handful. Erith had a young keeper – probably no more than a third of my age who was standing in for their injured regular keeper. We did not mind and in fairness never really found out how good he was because we did not really test him until very late in the game. Both defences were coping. Erith played a more compact defence with some big units whilst we spread things a bit more, partly because we had the greater attacking intent.

For a game with five goals, I would say that the scoring chances were not much greater in number. Dave Salako pulled off a great save after fifteen minutes to deny the Erith main attacking threat after a long ball over the top had exposed our square defence. We had more corners and crosses into their box which came to nothing. We freshened things up on the half hour with the introduction of Waine Hetherington, Mick O'Flynn and Michael Ugwumba with Patrice Mongelard, Des Lindsay and Sinisa Gracanin making way. About ten minutes before half-time, we fell behind after failing to mark the Erith danger man tightly and allowing him time and space to turn just outside our box and curl a crisp left foot shot past Dave Salako into the far corner of the net. Soon after, I recall Waine Hetherington failing to connect with a ball that was cut-back by Simon Thomas after he had got behind the Erith defence and that was our chance of an equaliser gone before half-time.

Our chances of an equaliser after half-time receded a little with the withdrawal of Danny Mullins who had to leave early for a family commitment. His physical presence at the heart of our midfield had given Erith something to think about. Five minutes into the half, the same Erith striker found space and seemed to hardly connect with the ball which rolled slowly towards the

bottom corner with Dave Salako unable to adjust his position to intercept the ball which trickled over the line. This was a harsh lesson in taking the few chances that come one's way and for the second week running there was a deep sense that the football gods were punishing Farnborough. Inevitably, the moaning and whingeing from our players went up a notch and was to continue into a fair bit of the second half (having started to rear its ugly half in the latter stages of the first half). Our opponents must love it when this happens. It is early enough in the season to say this is unacceptable – it does not help the team and those who do it, they know who they are, should take a long hard look at themselves. And, if at the end of the self-examination they feel they are too good for this team then the solution is obvious and we can be spared the shrill angry voices that disturb the peace of a Sunday morning and the equilibrium of the whole team.

Although 2-0 down, we were far from out of it. Waine Hetherington and Peter Harvey had not given up even if the service to them was not as they would wish. A shot from Waine from inside the box showed how competent the lad in goal from Erith was. We made more changes on the hour with Patrice Mongelard and Des Lindsay back on for Colin Brazier and Ian Shoebridge. Unbelievably, we fell further behind after a defensive infelicity from Mick O'Flynn left Dave Salako exposed. Further mis-hap befell us when Sinisa Gracanin had to come off after turning his ankle in a divot (with Ian Shoebridge coming back on). The existence of said divot and others like it seemed to have been known because top soil had been piled by the pitch for remedial work.

At that point with the Farnborough bickering flaring up again, it was difficult to see where a home goal would come from – and Erith started to use the words “clean sheet” amongst themselves. That is when Michael Ugwumba decided to produce one of his special deliveries. Latching on to a pass from Peter Harvey, Michael found himself about thirty yards out in space and pulled the trigger. Power, flight, accuracy, audacity and the element of surprise combined to propel the ball into the top corner, and the very young Erith keeper was finally beaten. We were not done – we were to score again within a few minutes after a Simon Thomas close-range header had been parried acrobatically by the lad in goal and in the ensuing confusion the ball was bundled into his own net by an Erith defender. The dubious goals committee considered briefly whether Mick O'Flynn was involved in that goal but decided that he had had greater involvement with the third Erith goal. There was no time for us to get an equaliser but there was a palpable sense of a tide turning.

We lost but the final score was a better reflection of the game and a draw would not have flattered us. The game was close and the result fair, and referee Nick Kinnear did not really have any bother to deal with. Erith generously made a contribution to the cost of the pitch as we are not due to play them again this season unless we can arrange a game next May.

It was good to see volunteers come forward to tidy things up after the game and to take the kit. Talking of kit, I was surprised in the après-match in the bar by a declaration of intent from Des Lindsay to take the kit next week. But the much greater surprise was a belated birthday present from my team mates in the form of a framed photograph of a defensive wall facing a free-kick in a Farnborough Senior Vets game against Avery Hill Vets several years ago (it could have been the 2-2 draw on 17 April 2011). The scene would not be out of place in a Monty Python sketch entitled “The Defensive Wall. This was unexpected, and I was very touched by it even if the most ridiculous pose in it was mine. Remarkably four out of the eight Farnborough players in the photo are still playing for the Senior Vets.

Shoebridge Catering Solutions put on a splendid spread as always and there was so much of it that we offered some to the half dozen or so of the Sunday team players who were in the clubhouse. I doubt if some of them had moved faster during their game.

Man-of-the-Match: Sinisa Gracanin. It felt right that the votes were shared between eight players as the collective had performed well.

10 September 2017: CUACO Vets (H, 0-1)

Farnborough swallow bitter pill

To lose 1-0 can sometimes feel worse than losing say 5-0 (like Liverpool did yesterday – there I said it). Also hitting the woodwork four times in a game is unlucky, missing one penalty is unfortunate, missing a second one is unforgivable. Add all these things together and you have a performance that is criminal. So, it is not losing that hurts – it is the manner of it.

Yet it all started so well, the sun was out, everyone was on time, all the pre-match tasks were done efficiently. Referee Kinnear was here. Phil Anthony brought news that his appeal for the British Heart Foundation had raised £800 so far, and that we could look forward to a tour to Lille next May Bank Holiday. George Kleanthous had pulled out overnight but Steve Blanchard filled the hole. Not available was Kypros Michael, formerly known as the Paphos Express but today more like the Paphos Mobility Scooter having returned from his Saga holiday in Cyprus internally bruised and struggling to walk after a close encounter with something hard.

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Mark Hendrick, Steve Blanchard, Colin Mant, Phil Anthony

Sinisa Gracanin, Danny Mullins, Ian Shoebridge, Simon Thomas

Peter Harvey, Waine Hetherington

Substitutes: Des Lindsay, Patrice Mongelard, Mick O'Flynn, Robbie Petrozzi, Michael Ugwumba

Supporters: Ian Coles, Jodie Gracanin, Tony Harvey, Michael Ugwumba Jr

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Referee: Nick Kinnear

We started very well indeed. We could have been 3-0 up after fifteen minutes. We had CUACO penned in. Crosses were raining in mostly from the right. We hit the post twice and had three headers in the six-yard box that were missed or saved and just not converted. Were we complacent? Did CUACO sense early on it was going to be their day? Were we guilty of poor finishing? I suspect it is all these things, and more.

We fell behind after fifteen minutes to the only shot that CUACO had on target in the first half. There might have been one other meaningful attempt on our goal in the second half but that was the sum of the attacking threat we had to face today. Of course, the result tells you we had to face a lot of spirited defending, clearances on the line, and a group of players whose belief grew as steadily as ours waned, and who showed collective endeavour defending in numbers and with a keeper who was not only competent but also a tad lucky.

We made five changes on the half-hour with Mark Hendrick, Waine Hetherington, Sinisa Gracanin, Colin Mant and Ian Shoebridge making way for the five substitutes mentioned above. It is always difficult to gauge for certain whether so many changes help or hinder. Having a mass debate about it will not help. It is our policy to give everyone an hour if we can, even if, as was pointed out later (with some feeling) this can mean that we do not always end the game with our strongest team, whatever that means. Presumably, at some point today we would have had our strongest team out there but it did not make any difference.

We had a real opportunity to draw level after thirty-five minutes. Des Lindsay freshly arrived on the pitch had the legs to slip behind the CUACO defence and round the keeper. His shot was on target and hit the target even after a CUACO defender tried to stop the ball with a deliberate hand. The ball ended up in the net but referee Kinnear had already blown for the penalty (you would not have caught tantric Mick Gearing doing that). The Farnborough Senior Vets management Team of O'Flynn and Mongelard can be accused of many things and one of them I think is that we did not make it crystal clear to the entire squad that our designated penalty taker (when he is on the field) is Peter Harvey. However, Des must have thought that his name was short for designated (more desperate, if you ask me) but he wrestled the ball from Peter and proceeded to roll it gently into the CUACO keeper's arms as he stretched to turn the pages of his Sunday Times on his sun lounger after lighting his pipe and ordering a cocktail.

The mood at half-time was not great but Co-Manager O'Flynn encouraged us to carry on doing what we had been doing – and we did. The flow of the game was unchanged. We had balls cleared on the line, deflected just wide, we hit the cross bar, and missed another penalty. This one was taken by Waine Hetherington after Michael Ugwumba had been bundled to the ground in the box. I turned my back on that one. Just as well, as I do not think I could describe another penalty miss without calling the Samaritans. Des ventured the view in the shower that Waine's penalty had made his look rather good.

I lost count of the number of crosses that were delivered, not all accurately. There were at least three close-range volleys that troubled the netting behind the goal. We had shots blocked off the line, the keeper pulled off some eye-catching saves and when he was beaten there was always a body or a leg or a forehead in the way. We made our final changes on the hour, with Phil Anthony, Peter Harvey, Danny Mullins, Steve Blanchard, and Simon Thomas having reached the end of their allotted hour. The five who went off on the half hour were back on for the last half hour. I am not going to debate whether those changes blunted our attacking threat. As far as I could see, we kept missing scoring opportunities.

At the other end, there were one or two corners which we had to defend, and there was always some encouragement for CUACO from one of Mick O'Flynn's passes in or on the edge of our box (that come with their own ambulances). The sands of time ebbed away: balls went into the nettles or down the footpath behind the goal, we were not always quick to retrieve them; the CUACO keeper could move in slow motion with his kicks, or so it felt).

And that is how CUACO had a rare and famous victory at our home ground. I cannot say we were happy about but, in the end, we had to admire their spirit, collective strength and luck.

There were other surprises in store for us today. Des Lindsay took the kit and he bought a round with a magic £5 note.

This was our fourth match this season and we are still without a win. We managed a draw against CENTRAL YMCA last Saturday but in a sense that game did not count. Mick O'Flynn will propose to the club committee that he be known as Senior Vets Director of Football. He reckons Directors last longer than Managers. Well, at least the team will have new co-Managers next week in the form of Harvey & Mant for their first away fixture this season, in leafy Dulwich.

The food today consisted of luxury premium handmade sandwiches from Patrice Mongelard, as our usual caterers were not available. Four trays of sandwiches all went – I made sure that nothing was left behind. Six loaves of Kingsmill sliced bread (three white/ three wholemeal) came

with a range of succulent fillings: free range egg and Dijon mayonnaise with organic chives (and occasional red chilli); the same with line-caught tuna; Gouda cheese slices and cucumber; Cathedral City cheese slices and Branston pickle; cheese/ham/tomato; corned beef and red onion. One player who will remain nameless told me that the margarine tasted rather good when, in fact, I used President Unsalted Butter (and got into trouble with Mrs M for it).

Man-of-the-Match: Mark Hendrick, with just under half of the fifteen votes that were recorded today, who had a great game in midfield.

1 October 2017: Belvedere Vets (A, 0-1)

Schadenfreude

Six games into our normal season and six defeats – our opponents cannot wait to play us and those who might derive pleasure from our misfortunes are at risk of ecstasy. It is no wonder that Mick O’Flynn now refers to himself as the Farnborough Senior Vets Chairman, and to me as Caretaker Manager. I missed the last two games but there is a clear pattern emerging. We lose matches but morale remains good, as we know there is not much missing from our performances – well, apart from the most important bit in football, which is scoring goals. Recently I read about the Maya Ballgame – a sort of football variant, where the captain of the winning team is decapitated. Obviously, we do not have the same rules, although something is holding us back individually and collectively.

Anyway, we made the journey to Belvedere with only twelve players available on a still overcast but dry morning, a little apprehensively if truth be told, because this has been a difficult fixture for us, traditionally. As we warmed up, I cushioned a ball on my right instep and casually mentioned my newly-acquired South American skills, which Mick O’Flynn took to mean Taco making.

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Phil Anthony, Steve Blanchard, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin, George Kleanthous, Simon Thomas, Michael Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, Waine Hetherington

Substitute: Mick O’Flynn

Supporter: Michael Hills

Director of Football: Mick O’Flynn

I think we surprised ourselves with the degree of control that we exercised as the game flowed more up the slope towards the goal we were attacking. To the neutral, the early exchanges pointed to a Farnborough goal as the more likely outcome. We got behind the Belvedere defence, raided down both flanks with Simon Thomas and Peter Harvey providing penetration, had shots on goal but could not find the final ball or touch to trouble the very assured Belvedere keeper. Both sides played a measured passing game but not many clear chances were being created.

Farnborough provided the comedy moment of the game when we broke quickly midway through the first half, outnumbered the Belvedere defence in a promising move, only to have Simon Thomas run into the back of Waine Hetherington on the edge of the Belvedere box with not a Belvedere defender involved. I know that sometimes players close their eyes when they head the ball but does Simon run with his eyes closed too, I wondered? As he picked himself up off the ground from a tangle of legs with Simon, Waine wanted a free-kick, a claim which the referee smiled away. We had a milder comedy moment in the second half when Colin Mant produced a scything tackle on fresh air, but it will take a monumental effort to top the slapstick served up earlier. Simon can rightly be proud of that performance given his occupation.

On the half hour, Mick O’Flynn replaced Phil Anthony and the first meaningful pass from Mick nearly set up Peter Harvey. We got even closer soon after – as Peter Harvey teed up Waine Hetherington from close range. The Belvedere keeper made an excellent save but Waine got to the rebound first and lifted the ball for what we thought was a formality only to see the ball hit the

bar from two yards out. A minute later we were behind from, arguably, the only meaningful strike that Belvedere had on goal in that half (and some will say for the whole game). The very good Belvedere left winger rounded Mick O'Flynn and was able to fire a low shot just where he wanted, inside the far post. It felt harsh but at that point there was no reason to think we would not get back in the game.

The Belvedere ground is well known for its size and gradient and we thought that a deficit of one goal at half-time could be reversed with the slope which would work in our favour in the second half. It is certainly true that we created a host of chances in the second half. I can remember only one, possibly two Belvedere opportunities, in the whole half against the half dozen or more that we had. It is difficult to know where to begin or to recall all of them. Suffice to say that Peter Harvey, George Kleanthous, Waine Hetherington and Simon Thomas all had half decent chances to score. Poor finishing, selfishness, bad luck, the wrong foot, and the quality of the Belvedere keeper all conspired to frustrate Farnborough. Simon Thomas crashed a volley against the bar with about ten minutes left, and the Belvedere keeper saved the follow-up. Two low fizzers from Peter Harvey stand out in the mind's eye but Belvedere held out as the seconds ticked away. It was all quite symptomatic of our season so far.

As often happens I was criticised for not flagging for a Belvedere off-side when I ran the line in the last half hour, after Phil Anthony had come back on, for me, on the hour. Phil reported that ten players had already signed up for our conquest of Lille on next summer's tour.

As often happens too, people get frustrated in such circumstances and Michael Ugwumba usually gets strongly-worded advice from team mates. Today was no exception – at one point he was berated by Steve Blanchard for standing still, a yard away from Steve Blanchard to defend a corner. Moments later, it was Peter Harvey's turn to criticise a 40-yarder from Michael. None the less Michael must have done some things right because he got one MoM vote. Five players shared the eleven votes recorded – with Sinisa Gracanin standing out from the crowd.

We might complain about the result but the game was played in excellent spirit. Our hosts produced a tray of sandwiches, piping hot sausages and potato slices/wedges. This reminds me that I have so far this season not made any mention of the Buffetsaurus - Nick Waller. He has not been around, and in any case, Peter Harvey pointed out that there was one other person present (today, and indeed at every occasion when Nick Waller was there in the past) who was Buffetsaurus Rex. Guess who? But please do not tell Mrs M.

Next week it is Inter Vyagra - surely that will be the time to stop firing blanks.

Man-of-the-Match: Sinisa Gracanin, a thoroughbred among donkeys, you might think, at times.

15 October 2017: Inter the Valley Vets (H, 3-2)

Farnborough resurrection continues

Dear Readers, I owe you a sincere apology for the near total absence of inane innuendo in the report of last Sunday's 3-2 win against Inter Vyagra which was written by Colin Mant. Obviously, such a happy outcome demands titillation. It was a relief to lose our cherry with our first win of the season. Some of us were beginning to see fifty shades of 2005-06, under Manager Toby Harlow, which yielded figures of P26 W0 D22 GF35 GA101. This probably means there will never be a Toby Harlow stand at our ground. In case you were wondering, and before he reminds you, our Golden Boot that season was Colin Mant with eight goals. He too won't be getting a stand named after him. These dark times are behind us, I hope. Things were looking quite dark for us, and me personally, after ten minutes or so today. Inter had come to bury us and I helped dig our grave but we clawed our way out. There will be more on today's thriller shortly.

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Phil Anthony, Steve Blanchard, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Michael Hills, Obi Ugwumba, Robbie Petrozzi, Jay Hardy

Waine Hetherington, Simon Thomas

Referee: Matty Wright and his watch

Substitutes: Ian Coles, Sinisa Gracanin, Mick O'Flynn, Peter Harvey

Supporters: Leanne Bennett, Tony Harvey, Many Petrozzis, Many Anthonys, Michael Ugwumba

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

The vibrant autumn colours of our woodland setting were resplendent on a sunny morning which had blown away the mists of autumn. There was, however, plenty of mellow fruitfulness on show in both teams. Our Sunday Reserves were playing a cup game on the adjoining pitch but I think we had the bigger crowd.

I should come clean now and say that this report will lack the usual granularity for much of the first-half and part of the second. The reason is that I was off the pitch having sustained an injury in the tenth minute or so which ended my participation on the field. But this was not before I had scored a memorable own goal in the first significant moment of the game. Our defence was breached on the left and a low cross fired into our box. As I moved to cut the ball out, I was bundled to the ground, taken roughly from behind you could say, by a 14-stone forward who caused a part of my body – head or knee – to connect with the ball for a low angled finish into the bottom corner – before his full weight landed on my right shoulder. "I am a first aider" he said "but I cannot help you". That much was painfully obvious. I feared dislocation, a broken collar bone, serious damage as I was helped off the pitch. I cannot say if this felt worse than referee Matty Wright allowing the goal to stand. Mick O'Flynn – 58 tomorrow – sauntered on to replace one of the Farnborough sexagenarians on the pitch.

Before I was helped back to the dressing room by a pair of Harveys I had the comfort of seeing Jay Hardy get our first equaliser within five minutes with a sharp close-range header following a superb cross from Simon Thomas. Peter Harvey and his dad Tony got me back to the clubhouse for a womanly touch and painkillers and to ponder my next move. I cannot say I relished the idea of breaking the news to Mrs M. Until today, I had not had the opportunity to observe how

much Tony Harvey looks like an ageing Franz Beckenbauer. He'd probably beat the real thing in a look-alike competition but I suppose with Brexit, we'll never know.

Colin Mant missed the half-time oranges to drop by a little later after I had managed to shower and dress, to bring news that we were 2-1 down. Thanks Colin. Everyone missed the oranges which were in a plastic bag under their noses. I wonder why I bother sometimes. I could not tell you the score at half-time, neither could some of our players who were there (I'll give you a clue – it's his birthday tomorrow). After pain killers and that great restorative, a strong cup of tea, I ambled back gingerly to watch the rest of the game. I was greeted with the news that we were now 3-2 up after Jay Hardy and Waine Hetherington had scored, both with shots from outside the box after assists from Peter Harvey (not his only assist of the day as I mentioned above).

I watched the last half hour of the match as we hung on. I saw a few substitutions being made (including a dazed Jay Hardy after the ball crashed against his left ear dislodging wax he thought, and affecting his balance). We needed all the substitutes today. There were hairy moments at both ends, including the customary throw-in with flashing blue lights from Mick O'Filth back across the box to our less than fully engaged keeper. Stand-in keeper Matt Angelo had a great first game today, took a knock or two including from his own players, but showed enormous heart and good hands. Inter the Valley are an excellent passing side with some skilful individuals who can cause a lot of problems and they had some big units at the back that could not be moved easily (without casters). The game was played in excellent spirit and I even drew a smile when I advised the forward who sat on my shoulder to lose a stone or two before we next play them. A draw would have been a fairer reflection of Inter's quality but we'll take the three points. Two swallows do not make a summer but I'd like to think we have turned a corner. There is a great spirit among the team and we are beginning to play as a collective. Something else that will make a difference we hope is that we will all now be calling Obi Ugwumba by his real name. Now we know why we never got anywhere for so many games by calling him Michael.

Pam Shoebridge was, sadly, unwell overnight but Ian Shoebridge had got the supplies in and catering duties fell to others. A splendid spread was produced: hot dogs, roast sausages, vegetable samosas, onion bhajis, sausage rolls, chicken nuggets, sandwiches, cherry tomatoes and crisps, cheese and biscuits. I took Colin Mant's advice to feed a bruised shoulder, in the continued absence of Nick Waller – Buffet Undertaker. Young Daisy Thomas did a good job in Nick's absence. We all send Pam our best wishes.

We buried the opposition in the bar but could not, I suspect, see off our Sunday Reserves – 9-0 winners today.

Man-of-the-Match: Jay Hardy with over half of the fifteen votes cast, for digging us out a hole.

22 October 2017: CUACO Vets (A, 1-1)

Farnborough snatch draw from jaws of despair

Who could forget Sunday 10 September 2017 when CUACO Vets won 1-0 at our place, after we hit the woodwork four times and missed not one but two penalties? Today was our chance to put that right. However, any sense we might have had that what happened six weeks ago was a fluke, was quickly knocked out of us, and we had to confront the reality of our decline, juxtaposed alongside the progress made by our opponents.

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier, Ian Coles, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Michael Hills, Obi Ugwumba,

Kypros Michael, Simon Thomas

Substitutes: Peter Harvey, Waine Hetherington, Colin Mant, Mick O'Flynn, Ian Shoebridge

Supporters: Leanne Bennett, Ian Lyons, Michael Ugwumba

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

The first thing that struck us at the Old Dunstonians Sports Club in BR3 3SS today was how long the grass was. I know it has rained a bit recently but to football conspiracy theorists this over-fertilised and hirsute surface had been prepared to stifle our passing game. So thought the fantasists among us because it is the same for both teams and these days you get more passes in a tough Mastermind round than in 90 minutes of our football, or as it was today, 80.

We started well enough, carried the greater initial threat even though the cutting edge was not quite there. The first two or three corners were ours. The CUACO defence was robust, very tactile and occasionally on the referee's blind side. No game against CUACO is complete without us hitting the bar and Michael Hills duly obliged with a twenty-yarder. CUACO were looking to hit us on the break and make the most of set-pieces.

One particular worry we had was that our Paphos Express, Kypros Michael, had morphed into the Paphos Escargot. Some say that the lethargy and poor touch were down to a reaction to Man Utd's defeat yesterday. If true, then I will start praying for Man U draws (and this something, from a Liverpool fan).

After twenty minutes we were punished. A looping cross was pumped into the box after we had headed a corner clear. The ball was fed into what would normally be defined as the corridor of uncertainty between keeper and defence but today we extended the space into a sea of uncertainty as Dave Salako stayed rooted to his line and called for a defender who had moved away five minutes ago, it seemed. The ball was bundled in from a yard out despite Michael Hills' attempt to clear the danger. This felt very much like the game on 10 September. There was a pattern forming. We would have more possession but do little with it whilst CUACO soaked the pressure and frustrated us. Frustration would boil over into some unseemly behaviour later which tested the referee.

We made five substitutions to reinvigorate our game as Obi Ugwumba, Ian Coles, Patrice Mongelard, Michael Hills and Simon Thomas made way for, and onto, our bench. It nearly paid off when Jay Hardy ploughed into the box, with Peter Harvey drawing defenders away, to find

room for a shot from the edge of the box which the CUACO keeper parried with his legs. Jay had paused to admire his shot and by the time he got to the rebound the scene had got crowded and the opportunity was gone.

The second half continued the pattern. Accentuated perhaps because we pressed harder and Dave Salako had even less to do. Jay Hardy caused some alarm when he had to come off early in the second half with a sore head to be replaced by Simon Thomas but thankfully Jay felt better later. As time ticked away our frustration grew. There was a tangle at one point when Peter Harvey and the rugged CUACO centre half, tumbled to the ground and CUACO arms wrapped themselves round Peter's throat. Calmer heads were quickly on the scene, including Mick O'Flynn who pointed out that kids were watching the game and that supposed adults should behave better. There were kids on the pitch too I thought. This was a gritty aspect of the game which I do not recall from past encounters but the good thing was that this did not lead to any afters.

CUACO could smell the three points and defended in numbers hoping to run the reduced clock down. This is when the chasing teams feel keenly any delays in retrieving the ball from brambles, re-starting the play with goal-kicks, trundling to get the ball behind the goals etc. It is called managing the game and I suppose we have all done it. We made more substitutions and went looking for an equaliser. It took a long time to come – about five minutes only were left when Michael Hills blocked a CUACO clearance on the edge of their box to tee up Ian Shoebridge to curl a delightful instinctive left foot low shot into the corner of the CUACO net. It was fully deserved but it was certainly stressful getting there.

There is no buffet porn for you this week dear readers, unless you want to read about fifteen blokes and a few packets of nuts (and crisps). Next season we'll take our own sandwiches when we visit the same ground. Talking of food – I read in last week's BBC football gossip column that former jockey A P McCoy said Arsenal midfielder Mesut Ozil was "not worth feeding, never mind paying a contract". I hope nobody ever says that about me. I could murder a curry I thought as I left the ground.

Man-of-the-Match: Eight players garnered votes but the winner by a clear grey head was Mick O'Flynn for a performance of great exuberance and verve that belied his 78 years, sorry, 58 years.

29 October 2017: Ashburnham Wanderers Vets (A, 3-2)

Farnborough birthday boy puts a finger of icing on the cake

There was no danger of anyone arriving late for this game given that the clocks had gone back last night (we all had tasteful reminders on the team WhatsApp) though Jay Hardy almost did. Perhaps he had not set his alarm. It is worth arriving early at the home of today's opponents to take in the view of architect James Wyatt's sumptuous creation. Yes, we were making a second visit this month to the Royal Artillery Barracks at Woolwich in the Royal Borough of Greenwich. Today's opponents were an unknown quantity but came highly recommended as their manager (Baz) had been educated at the same establishment as Mick O'Flynn (and it had not done Baz any harm). The question was whether our big guns would carry the day – particularly as Peter Harvey was looking to score today on his 51st birthday. Who would have the last laugh in Ha Ha Road?

The Farnborough regiment lined up as follows, on an initially overcast and breezy day:

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Steve Blanchard, Colin Mant, Mick O'Flynn, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Obi Ugwumba, Wayne Hetherington

Kypros Michael, Simon Thomas

Substitutes: Peter Harvey, Michael Hills

Supporters: Leanne Bennett, Steve Hills and partner Sarah (all supporting Michael Hills and no doubt proving a great comfort at the end of the day)

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

We started very well, fashioning a string of scoring opportunities which were all spurned, or saved well by the Ashburnham keeper. Simon Thomas and in particular Kypros Michael will have rued their misses, many at close-range. At least we were creating the chances. We had a measure of control which meant the flow of the game was largely towards the Ashburnham goal (aided a little perhaps with the breeze (which died later on)). Our opponents would mount occasional raids into our box and we were not always convincing in how we dealt with these incursions but our line held though we had to be wary of set-pieces.

Midway through the half, Peter Harvey and Michael Hills came on for Jay Hardy and Simon Thomas to add more forward momentum to our attack. Soon after, following a Kypros Michael nod to the Paphos Taxi Drivers Betting Syndicate, it transpired that Kypros had suffered a dislocated finger as he fell after missing a header from three yards out. He "popped it back in" but he feared the injury would interfere with one of his more pleasurable pursuits. Kypros eventually scored after coming round the back and getting at the end of a free-kick from Colin Mant to flick the ball beyond the Ashburnham keeper who until then had been equal to everything we threw at him.

Quite how we did not extend our lead before the half-time whistle is bit of a mystery. It became clear that as the game wore on there was more to Ashburnham than met the eye, if I could put it that way and you could sense their confidence growing as we did not get the cushion of more goals.

Obi Ugwumba and Waine Hetherington made way for Jay Hardy and Simon Thomas as the second half resumed. What a half that was, packed with incident and four goals. There was another goal which came early in the proceedings after Simon Thomas swept the ball into the bottom corner after Peter Harvey had threaded a low ball through the heart of the Ashburnham defence. This smart finish was ruled out for off-side (with only Simon protesting). It is fair to say that our goal came under more pressure in that half. It was not quite a turning tide but we no longer had things our way. It was a more equal contest with our opponents suddenly matching us physically. Yet, we edged further ahead after an in-swinging corner from Peter Harvey was turned in for an own goal. Michael Hills and Colin Mant were in the vicinity of the ball, but none of them laid a finger on it, so to speak. By then it was also apparent that the Ashburnham keeper was hampered by a knee injury.

We then had what I would call our hara-kiri moment – ten minutes of ineptitude which allowed Ashburnham to score twice and hit the bar. Their equaliser was disputed heatedly and wrongly by us as the ball had gone in straight from a gem of a corner. Sinisa Gracanin – by then running the line had the grace to concede the ball had crossed the line. We had made what we thought were our final substitutions by then with Sinisa and Kypros going off for Obi and Waine.

For a moment at 2-2 it was anybody's game. We continued to have the clearer cut chances but we were also liable to throw it away from a quick break by Ashburnham. Jay Hardy and Obi Ugwumba had to dig deep in midfield where the Ashburnham muscle was concentrated. We then had our second finger trouble of the day as Michael Hills suffered a fracture and dislocation of a finger and had to come off. Michael rushed off to hospital after the game, from where he sent us pictures of his finger – and sparking a debate about internal examinations in the NHS, but before he left, he had, reportedly, cast his Man-of-the-Match vote for Colin Mant.

Our other player with a dodgy finger Kypros Michael was back on for the final minutes and he was to play a key part in the outcome of the match. You could say it was a two-finger affair. With minutes left, Kypros was upended in the box and fell theatrically to the ground. Usually that is Obi's job. To the neutral it looked like Kypros had over-egged it (a bit like Ashley Young from the team he supports) but the penalty was earned and given. Kypros offered the scientific but fanciful explanation that his dislocated finger had affected his balance. His finger will affect a lot of his behaviour but balance is not one of them, I suspect. The barracks have no doubt seen worse injuries. Anyway, Peter Harvey stepped up and buried the spot kick with aplomb. There was barely time to re-start the game. 3-2 felt like a fair reflection of the overall game but our opponents would have had their hopes of a draw raised. They certainly earned our respect. The return fixture at Farnborough on 13 May should be interesting, and I am sure will be played in the same spirit.

The cold beers in the scenic wooden clubhouse were excellent – the first pint especially, as it was paid for by our opponents (I told you their manager Baz had had a good education) to make up for the absence of solid food. The sunlit grounds in front of the barracks were a delight for the eye. The Crimean War monument in the distance brought Farnborough legend Mick Gearing to mind. He'll be showing his war medals off in a couple of weeks.

Finally – a word to thank the referee today for an excellent performance. He is an ex-Inter Vyagra player and that team shares the ground with Ashburnham Wanderers and I think that meant he was under extra local pressure but he was scrupulously fair and did not miss much.

Man-of-the-Match: The finger of fate selected Steve Blanchard today.

5 November 2017: Belvedere Vets (H, 1-5)

Farnborough revival hits the Belvedere buffers

You could say the finger of fate was pointing that way. Injuries – two broken fingers sustained in the same match last Sunday, including a life-style threatening injury for Kypros Michael, deprived us of Kypros and Michael Hills. And then we lost Sinisa Gracanin and Simon Thomas both to ankle injuries. Simon even sent round pictures of his swelling on the team WhatsApp. Cabinet Ministers could lose jobs over inappropriate images. We have a zero tolerance of this sort of thing too. Simon is still with this club because he sent a picture of his ankle, injured in a Tuesday night 5-a-side.

Belvedere are a good enough side to not need favours from their opponents. But we were generous today. After the gloom of yesterday's rain-laden day it was pleasant to have a dry, sun-lit and still morning to play football. Both teams had a big entourage. For a brief moment, there was a danger that we might have to let the Sunday team have our goal posts for their league fixture on the adjoining pitch. Their posts were tethered and the keys could not be found. It is usual practice for the Vets team to make way in certain circumstances, as we might find out next Sunday. But the danger passed. After ten minutes, some of us might well have been wishing those keys had not been found.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Steve Blanchard, Colin Mant, Ian Lyons, Patrice Mongelard

Jay Hardy, Obi Ugwumba, Waine Hetherington, Ian Shoebridge

Peter Harvey, George Kleanthous

Referee: Paul Parsons

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, Mick O'Flynn, Robbie Petrozzii

Supporters: Many Anthonys, Tony Harvey, Michael Hills, Sinisa Gracanin, Many Petrozziis, Michael Ugwumba

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

We did not have a good start, to put it mildly. After five minutes the first corner, conceded by Waine Hetherington, had yielded a simple goal for one of the big Belvedere units who had ambled up for the occasion. Gary Fentiman bellowed for the ball, came off his line and never got near it, leaving an empty space for the ball to be propelled into our net. Five minutes later, it was the turn of Ian Lyons to be generous to our opposition as he could not get a clearing header away, was inconvenienced by a short, stocky Belvedere forward with a low centre of gravity and an eye for goal who swivelled to lash the ball home from three yards out. It could have been two or four yards as some of the metrical pedants in the team might argue, but there was no doubt about the damage.

To our credit, we did not capitulate. We were having as much of the game as our opponents who at one point noted that most of the game was being played in their half. Steve Blanchard produced a balletic moment as he slid in to tackle a Belvedere forward, and then got up in one fluid movement to whisk the ball away, like a matador, thought Ian Lyons. I was thinking more petrol tanker turning like a jet ski but you get the picture. Obi Ugwumba had a long-range shot that looked good on the eye which was well saved by the giant Belvedere keeper, a surprisingly agile and dextrous individual with long arms (that would reach outside the box later in the game, twice). Soon after, Obi used the force to win a fortuitous penalty. Belvedere were not exactly

ecstatic at the decision, but they were certainly delighted with the outcome as Peter Harvey put his kick against the inside of the post and back out and across the goal. We could set a record for penalties missed this season.

Robbie Petrozzi, Mick O'Flynn and Phil Anthony came on for Jay Hardy, Ian Shoebridge and Ian Lyons on the half hour. That seemed to check our momentum, initially. Belvedere capitalised on the changing dynamic. We went on to concede two more goals before half-time, both similar in design and execution as the Farnborough off-side trap was sprung and nippy Belvedere runners did the rest. 4-0 at half-time seemed harsh. It allowed Belvedere to bring on a large number of substitutes. To say we drew the second half might seem like clutching at straws but we felt we matched Belvedere. Their keeper was certainly busier and was called to make some good saves, one from a marauding Peter Harvey was memorable. Obi Ukwumba, George Kleanthous and Patrice Mongelard made way on the hour for the return of Ian Shoebridge, Ian Lyons and hard-running and tackling Jay Hardy. This time, the changes did not unsettle us as much. We could see clearly that we were creating chances even if we were not converting them. Mick O'Flynn will have nightmares about the sliced shot from three yards out, unmarked and with time to control the ball, wave at the crowd and pick his spot. He will probably not get closer to scoring all season. Sustained pressure from Farnborough drew the Belvedere keeper off his line and twice, how shall I put it? his momentum carried him beyond the boundary of his box but with his instinct to handle the ball undimmed. Those of us on the sidelines could not understand why Wayne Hetherington took the free-kick resulting from one such incident. The direction of the ball will remain a mystery, there did not seem to be much power behind it – yet the ball hit the smallest Belvedere player on the pitch who guided it beyond his own keeper. Obi and George were back on before the close of play to replace Mick O'Flynn and Robbie Petrozzi both unable to see the game out with thigh strains. Just when we thought we were going to win the second half Belvedere contrived to “equalise” with a smart shot in the postage stamp that beat Gary Fentiman’s giant reach.

And that was it today for on the pitch business, all conducted in a sporting spirit. We were well-beaten but yet had competed well for long periods of the game. I hope I have captured everything. It is hard enough to remember things when one was there. Today, I was rebuked mildly for not remembering things when I was not there. It seems I had not given the write-up he deserved to Jay Hardy on 15 October, when he scored two goals and was Man-of-the-Match in our 3-2 win against Inter the Valley. That day I missed some of the game with a serious shoulder injury and it appears I missed a golden fifteen minutes from Jay full of nutmegs, Cruyff turns, lung-busting box-to-box running and bone-crunching tackles, deft touches, and so on. To Jay and any others, I have wronged in this way, and will wrong in the future, I can only apologise.

Four platters of Sainsbury’s assorted sandwiches (fish/meat/vegetarian/classic) (96 quarters) and eight portions of spicy chicken wings (64 items) disappeared quickly, leaving those who had tarried in the changing rooms with something else to be grumpy about. Crisps and nuts from the bar supplemented the diet of athletes. We saw the opposition off in the bar (Jay, Colin, Ian, Steve and Patrice playing a blinder). There was much analysis to be done after the game, though Mrs M could not quite fathom why I had needed an absence of six hours to encapsulate a 90-minute game. It did not seem the right time to play the “responsibilities of management card” as the lager-assisted hole was deep enough.

Man-of-the-Match: with half the votes cast, Colin Mant, and I sincerely hope he does not complain about his write-up.

12 November 2017: Riverside Wanderers Vets (A, 4-5)

Finkled Farnborough fade in final stages to lose five – four in game to remember

The cunning linguists among you will note the word finkled in the headline. I admit I made this word up. No, it does not describe the latest sexual peccadillo in the Westminster Village. It is more innocent, though there are meanings of finkle out there which are less innocent. A sudden attack of good taste prevents me from elaborating. For the purposes of this match report - to be finkled is to lose several players due to injury specifically to fingers and ankles for the same match. Our finkled four were Sinisa Gracanin, Michael Hills, Kypros Michael and Simon Thomas – depriving us of much forward thrusting action. Moreover, the master thruster Peter Harvey (27 goals last season) was also missing on Remembrance Day duty – and before you ask, no, he was not in the Korean War.

We had been due to play the Met Police Super Vets at our place in Farnborough but uncertainty about the availability of their players meant that alternative arrangements had to be considered. Fortuitously, Riverside too had to look beyond their original injury-struck opponents (Ashburnham Wanderers). We were, if truth be told, not unhappy to be going to Riverside. In fact, we had two Ashburnham players in our midst, the father and son duo of David and Josh Settle, who responded to our SOS (as had Jon Marks). Some of our players have very pleasant memories of the après-match in Eynsford. Readers of the match report for our Young Vets away match against Riverside last Sunday will have gone all moist at the remembrance of Mark Harrington's description of the buffet served up at the Five Bells. Indeed, the prospect of the pleasant company and a luxury buffet flushed out the Farnborough Buffetsaurus himself, Nick Waller, (like a salmon returning to its spawning ground).

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Colin Brazier, Ian Coles, Colin Mant, Jon Marks, Patrice Mongelard

Jay Hardy, Obi Ugwumba, Wayne Hetherington, Ian Shoebridge

George Kleanthous

Referee: Jim St John (who kindly and generously waived his match fee)

Substitutes: David and Josh Settle, Rob Faulkner

Supporters: Steve Blanchard, Leanne Bennett, Michael Hills, Michael Ugwumba, Nick Waller

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

We kicked downhill in the first half. The direction of play matters on the Riverside pitch where you would be forgiven for including crampons with your usual choice of moulded or studs. This felt like a good idea barely a minute into the game when a sprightly George Kleanthous made the most of an Ian Shoebridge intervention to steer the ball home from just inside the box. Our delight did not last long though as a Riverside player nicknamed "Fish" wriggled free at the far post to put the ball in our net barely a minute later as we were still getting to grip with organising our five-man defence.

Five minutes later, Riverside had edged ahead with a powerful left foot shot from outside the box from one of their dangerous midfielders eager to join the attack. We then went on to play our best football. George Kleanthous equalised after his own shot was spilled by the keeper and he was quickest to the rebound. Not long after Colin Brazier's cultured left foot had restored our lead with a crisp shot from outside the box as he moved in from the left-back position to latch on to a Riverside clearance. The technique was perfect, the intention clear and the reward was

satisfying for a player who does not score mundane goals but plays fewer games than we would wish.

We had a two-minute break at 11:00 for Remembrance Sunday which was impeccably observed.

The heavy pitch started to take its toll. Jay Hardy made way for David Settle (and could not return later on). Colin Brazier and Jon Marks were replaced by Phil Anthony and Rob Faulkner. Waine Hetherington dropped to left-back while Rob Faulkner gave us glimpses of his football brain and movement. We had a scare when an Ian Coles clearing header hit the underside of our bar but Matt Angelo was able to claw the ball out despite the muscular attentions of a Riverside forward. We were certainly well worth our lead at half-time. The question was would a one-goal lead be sufficient against the slope (aka the Riverside twelfth man).

Within five minutes of the re-start a moment of pure brilliance and tenacity from Waine Hetherington from the left-back position had created the opportunity for George Kleanthous to register his third and our fourth with a crisp shot from a central position inside the Riverside box. Waine's hunger for the ball was probably the equal of Waller's for the buffet at that point. I was not the only one who thought that at 4-2 up we would finally get one over Riverside at their place. But in the end, the heavy pitch, the slope, more injuries, the resilience of our opponents gave them the decisive edge. Ian Shoebridge left the fray with a pulled hamstring as Jay Hardy had earlier. Rob Faulkner also came off, more as a precaution on the heavy surface. Patrice Mongelard too sat out the last twenty minutes or so. The final quarter of the game was not great viewing from a Farnborough point of view despite the tonic of Nick Waller's appearance. We had to spend some of the time looking for Mick O'Flynn's phone so I missed some of the action.

Put simply, we had trouble establishing a presence in the Riverside half and we could not always clear the ball as well, or as far, as we wanted, or move the line of play further up the pitch. There were more and more incursions into our box. Waine Hetherington pushed up front to support George Kleanthous and Josh Settle brought some deft touches to our game but in truth we had lost the momentum despite the huge amount of work being done by David Settle and Obi Ugwumba in the heart of midfield. 4-2 became 4-3. Then with ten minutes left a Riverside corner, expertly swung in by probably (I say probably, Waine and Colin B to note please as I do not want any more complaining emails in the week even if they are not always sent to the correct address) the best left foot in the game, bamboozled both Phil Anthony and Matt Angelo at the near post and the ball came off both of them without a Riverside player within earshot and we were back where we started. How Phil will have wished he had a couple more inches to play with at that point. O.G had struck again but this time against us.

The final goal of the game, Riverside's fifth and the winning goal, was like a car crash in slow motion. We must have had three or four opportunities to clear the ball, made several tackles as evidenced by the Farnborough bodies on the ground, and yet still the ball clung to a Riverside boot and it was toe-poked against the base of the post and into the net and that was it, in a most memorable game on Remembrance Sunday 2017.

Man-of-the-Match: George Kleanthous who was a shade more immense than Waine Hetherington today, with a sharp hat-trick of great quality. The 84-year-old Riverside resident, proudly wearing his poppy, who watched part of the game, and who took the ideal position for the buffet also deserves a mention. He remembered breaking his tibia on the same pitch seventy years ago (almost as long as Phil Anthony has been alive) but his love of life, football and

sandwiches was undimmed. He got the better of Waller in the buffet and not many people can say that.

19 November 2017: Reigate Priory Vets (H, 2-0)

Farnborough climax late

A rare alignment of planets resulted in both Farnborough Vets teams playing at home today – a sort of back to the future experience for our Younger Vets. The bright sunshine on a dry, clear, relatively mild, still and sunny morning brought our supporters out in large numbers. Last week I introduced a new word to you – “finkled”. There is a variant of it, with two ks as in “finkkled”. This adds the knee to the parts affected by injury and that covers me. Today I write the match report purely as an observer (my best game for weeks according to Wit Hetherington). This means I am not dazzled by my own brilliance and I should see things more clearly. Who knows, we might even have a whine-free week. Injuries and other impediments meant several new faces today as the extended Farnborough family rallied round. This included debutant Martin Zapico – the last piece in our alphabet puzzle for surnames that have played for the Farnborough Vets. Zs are rare – compared to Ws.

Starting XI:

Rob Faulkner

Ian Lyons, Colin Mant, Martin Zapico.

Simon Harvey, Wayne Hetherington, Jason Miller, Dean Murphy, Obi Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, George Kleanthous

Referee: Paul Parsons

Substitutes: Danny Mullins, Tom Naughton, Mick O’Flynn.

Supporters: Leanne Bennett, Steve Blanchard, Grant Gable, Sinisa and Jodie Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Max Harvey, Tony Harvey, Mark Hawkins, Michael Hills, Des Lindsay, Patrice Mongelard, Michael Ugwumba.

Director of Football: Mick O’Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

This was not an easy game. In fact, Peter Harvey opined that “if we had played our normal team, we would have lost this game”. Reigate always give us a tough game and today was no exception. They had sprinkled experience with innocence and had several individual performers who stood out, to add to their collective quality. It took us a long time to score, when it came the relief was palpable.

It is fair to say that we had the greater possession in both halves and created more chances but also that there were not many clear chances at either end and that the longer the game went on the greater the likelihood of a draw. Dean Murphy drew the first meaningful save out of the pony-tailed Reigate keeper early in the game with a trademark burst into the box. The Reigate keeper was partial to an acrobatic save even though there were no cameras there. Both sets of defences were playing well and most of the game was taking place in the middle third of the pitch (which was excellent by the way after yesterday’s heavy rains). Reigate had players that asked questions including the tallest forward we have had to face. Rob Faulkner pulled off a great one-handed save on the one occasion when our defence was breached and revealed afterwards that he had injured his calf again. In his own words he was the “Darren Anderton of the Farnborough Senior Vets” but the fact is he can claim to have had all the answers when quizzed by the opposition and he kept our first and only clean sheet of the season. A number of players stood out for various reasons in the first half-hour: the defensive solidity of Martin Zapico and the energy and pace of Jason Miller caught the eye. Of course, there were some things that did not always come off, credit must be given to our opponents for this, and we had players still trying to

learn each other's names. Mick O'Flynn, Tom Naughton and Danny Mullins came on after half an hour for Jason Miller, Obi Ugwumba and Simon Harvey. This did not change the pattern of play. The physical presence of Danny Mullins was a useful addition to our game and his tireless running and long stride was a useful outlet and for a while probably represented our best chance of a breakthrough.

Reigate made some changes at half-time, the most significant one being to swap their keeper. The pony-tailed one was replaced by a slightly shorter player (5ft 4 by my reckoning but very springy according to Colin Mant for reasons that will become obvious later). The pony-tail, equally if not more useful in the outfield, was to sustain an accidental bloody nose from Peter Harvey's trailing arm and we wish him well and hope no serious damage was done.

We applied the pressure in much the same way as in the first period and we still could not breach the Reigate goal line. We also had to be wary of being caught on the break because they had good players (at least two with better than average left feet) that could create something out of not very much if we let them. For both teams it looked like corners might yield their best chance of scoring. We made final changes on the hour with Dean Murphy, Martin Zapico and Ian Lyons making way for Jason Miller, Obi Ugwumba and Simon Harvey. For a moment we had twelve players on the pitch as Waine Hetherington was struck by a hearing impairment which meant he did not hear his name called out to come off. Ian Lyons took one for the team and came off instead.

With five minutes left, I was beginning to think of a headline for a draw. We earned a free-kick thirty-five yards out in a central position and a committee comprising Jason Miller, Peter Harvey and Michael Ugwumba held an emergency session to decide who would take it. In the end age won and Peter was trusted with the job. What followed was an exquisite floated cross on to the forehead of Colin Mant who had crept up stealthily to cause havoc in the box. Colin craned his neck and whipped his head across to produce a meaty contact that sent the ball looping over the vertically-challenged Reigate keeper with the DNA of a salmon, in an arc of deadly inevitability and intent into the bottom corner at the far post. The deadlock was broken. Colin's fey celebration would have delighted daughter Isabelle as a "Mr Tumnus moment". One could see the class and craft of a former Farnborough Vets Golden Boot Winner crystallised in that cameo. That goal broke Reigate and two minutes later George Kleanthous (a tad leggy perhaps after playing yesterday) slipped the ball to Peter Harvey for a crisp low finish from just inside the box (much to the delight of dad Tony, brother Simon and nephew Max) to give us a scoreline that the neutral would not begrudge Farnborough.

As our usual caterers were having a day off, I procured sandwiches from Sainsbury's – three platters per team. It would appear this indulgence was positively extravagant and decadent. I was informed the entire first team, no less, manage with one single platter. This raised interesting issues. Do hungry teams perform better? Could sandwiches be a key element of an eat-as-you-play rewards policy? One Senior Vet who will have to remain anonymous said *"This is a red line for me. One platter per team – I walk"*. I should have walked (with the platters) when Des Lindsay appeared, in a tweed cap straight from the cast of Peaky Blinders. I cannot be sure when his last meal was but he would be certainly cast out of the first team for his intake.

Lastly, a political observation in these interesting times: events in Zimbabwe this week have led me to reflect on the nature of dictatorship. By analogy, you might think that it is not healthy to have the same individual writing reports of our matches for nearly a decade. I agree. If any of our players wish to produce reports of any of our games, at any time, from their perspective,

perhaps to do justice to their massive talent, they are most welcome to do so. I am sure that our webmaster Colin Brazier would appreciate the additional content for our club website www.fobqfc.org

Man-of-the-Match: Martin Zapico, for a solid, no nonsense performance, of no little finesse, who forfeited a night out in London to make his debut for the Farnborough OBG Senior Vets.

26 November 2017: Old Tamponians Super Vets (A, 3-4)

Farnborough beaten in the sun

My own players are such avid readers of my match reports that I am going to have to introduce a 'Corrections & Clarifications' section at the start of each report. It would appear that I failed, dismally, to do justice to the full technical splendour of Peter Harvey's goal last Sunday. I had utterly failed to appreciate the quality of Peter's first touch to control the ball and take it in his stride, his sublime second touch to beat the last defender passed me by totally, and the quality of the low fizzing shot to beat the keeper low into the corner was clearly beyond my woeful powers of description. Back to today's events in sunny Kidbrooke Village at the John Roan Playing Fields where we took on Old Tamponians Super Vets, on a dry, crisp morning with a bright low winter sun which allowed them to put us in the shade, more on that later.

We were still indisposed by injuries but had declined to call on our Younger Vets – without a fixture today, partly out of respect for our opponents, and partly because our Younger Vets have superior buffet requirements. So, we called on two new debutants in Tadesse "Tadu" Desta and Richard Patience. Steve Blanchard got changed for the third week running without playing because of injury whilst Obina Ugwumba informed the dictatorial management yesterday that he was taking a break in sunny Malta, from Malta. Obi is fifty years of age on the 29th and that might have something to do with it - (Birthday Happy wish you we, Obi). Sinisa Gracanin "ran" the line while we wait for his ankle to get better. He had one other job to do today and that was to take the half-time oranges out, but the Issey Miyake in him would not let him carry a Zara paper bag, so I had to do it.

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Ian Coles, Colin Mant, Martin Zapico

Phil Anthony, Tadesse 'Tadu' Desta, Wayne Hetherington, Mick O'Flynn, Richard Patience

Peter Harvey, George Kleanthous

Substitute: Patrice Mongelard

Supporters: Leanne Bennett, Steve Blanchard, Sinisa Gracanin, Michael Hills

Decorator of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Once the game got under way it was clear we were in for a memorable one. Both sides were passing the ball well on a good surface with our opponents carrying a bit more threat while we adjusted to a new formation and new faces. Old Tamponians were the first to draw blood. Five minutes had barely elapsed when a quality cross from the right in the corridor of uncertainty eluded any and every Farnborough shirt and was tucked away with a close-range header. Our riposte did not take long – ten minutes later Wayne Hetherington's PhD of a left foot released Peter Harvey who advanced before squaring the ball for George Kleanthous. For a moment it looked like the ball had travelled too far but George retrieved it, beat the covering defender and sent the keeper the wrong way before lashing it high into the net. I should say that George was back to his effervescent self today, with fizz, bite and a sharp finish, just like his favourite continental cocktail, the Tongeren Sunrise.

Sadly, Tadu did not last beyond twenty-five minutes and Patrice Mongelard replaced him. We never got to see the quality that Tadu has – as we know from having faced him in matches

against Inter the Valley. We hope there will be other opportunities and we wish him a swift recovery.

We were not able to hold back the Old Tamponians flow as they edged ahead with a smartly executed goal from the second of their powerful forwards. He was allowed to run with the ball for some distance, fending off defenders before producing a low angled finish into the bottom corner. The 2-1 score in our opponents' favour at half-time felt right. Although we were matching them all over the pitch, we had not really established a presence in the final third.

The second period was to be a different matter. We started it with verve and intent. Five minutes in - Richard Patience's rangy stride and left foot found space on the edge of the Tamps box and a low shot eluded the diving keeper to draw us level. Our optimism did not last long as soon after we fell behind again. Colin Mant was blinded by the sun and lost the flight of the ball as a high cross dropped nicely for a Tamps forward to poke home nonchalantly from two yards out. The Tamps player could have been wearing shades for all I know. Still, we battled on. There was more desire and urgency in our second half performance. George Kleanthous drew us level again – our third equaliser of the game and his second, with a shot of great complexity – certainly from a descriptive point of view. First, he appeared to have gone too wide and there was hardly any angle for him as he looked like he was in line with the goal line, the ball was alive, off the ground, and yet he had the vision and the audacity to shoot. Martin Zapico was closing in fast at the far post but the ball got there first in my view and went in off the post as Martin followed it in. I heard it before I saw it. There was a fleeting moment of doubt in the bar afterwards about the paternity of the goal but it was clear that George was the daddy.

In an ideal world we would have pushed on and the absorbent Old Tamps defence would have crumbled but their resilience and my own ineptitude conspired against us. Yes, I put my hand up for the fourth Old Tamps goal, the winning strike as it turned out. Another cross from the right of our defence came out of the sun. I moved in to make the interception, lost the flight and sight of the ball only for that Old Tamps stalwart Roy to ghost in behind me and make the sweetest of connections to put the ball inside our post. We huffed and puffed mightily for the last ten minutes, with Peter Harvey and Waine Hetherington bossing the midfield, rained crosses and shots on the Old Tamps goal but could not find the final equaliser we craved. Perhaps we should have pushed more players up top as they say (with hindsight). We had lost but felt we had given a good account of ourselves despite the bout of heliophobia in our defence.

Cocktail sausages, crisp roast potatoes and a selection of sandwiches helped ease the disappointment of defeat in the cosy clubhouse where several Vets teams had gathered. I paused on my way out to congratulate a group of Old Tamps players and asked Roy for a few words to describe his goal. His team mates spoke for him to say he had not meant it. I think he had, but perhaps had not expected it would come off. But you know the saying – you have got to be there to miss, and occasionally score, them. Roy now has a memory that will sustain him through the winter, and I am sure he will not tire of telling his team about it.

Finally, a word of thanks to the old boy who refereed the game today, with a minimum of fuss, economy of movement, and a maximum of authority and fairness. There was not an iota of trouble or malice from both teams. We play each other again in half of twenty-eight days.

Man-of-the-Match: Richard Patience following in Martin Zapico's footsteps, with an educated left foot that is almost as good as Waine Hetherington's, or Peter Harvey's.

3 December 2017: Orpington Vets (A, 3-4)

Statistics do not lie: Lord of the Rings 4 Farnborough 3

To lose one game 4-3 is unfortunate, to lose two consecutive games by the same score is careless. To lose in the last few minutes after a fantastic comeback might be seen as criminal. But we were up against our Orpington nemesis, Kevin, the ring-tailed tattooed one, who does not score ordinary goals, at least not against us. I should have paid more attention when he said in the clubhouse before the game that he really fancied playing today. And yet we had brought a Deano of our own, and we had two Zs playing for us in Zanelli and Zapico. I am not sure if Zinedine Zidane himself could have won the game for us today.

The weather was not too bad at the start of the game, dry initially, with hardly any wind and the playing surface was a tribute to the drainage at the Beckenham Cricket Club. Despite many injuries we still mustered fourteen players with three new faces in Dean Hawkins, Antonio Plado and Paul Zanelli. We would have had fifteen if Obi Ugwumba had not stretched time. Before the game Phil Anthony, a local, who was the last to arrive, presented the management team of O'Flynn and Mongelard with what he must have thought was an apt present, in the form of a suggestive vegetable, almost as subtle as one of his jokes. I can only describe it as a failed attempt to cross a potato with a coco de mer. Still, it looked a fine pair. I got my own back on Phil later by suggesting this was not a very sensitive offering to an Irishman who had lost half his family to the potato famine. I made it up, of course.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Phil Anthony, Ian Lyons, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Dean Hawkins, Antonio Plado, Paul Zanelli, Martin Zapico

Peter Harvey, George Kleanthous

Substitutes: Ian Coles, Waine Hetherington, Mick O'Flynn

Supporters: None

Decorator of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

What shall we do about Kevin? was a key part of the pre-match briefing. Within three minutes that was all out of the window as the Farnborough off-side trap was sprung, the keeper rounded and the ball stroked into the net by Kevin. It took us a little while to get our passing right and to learn each other's names but even at an early stage we felt that we were not out of it. Of course, Kevin threatened. He drew a great save from Gary Fentiman who dived at his feet in a one-on-one and was able to palm the ball away as Kevin was about to pull the trigger. We gave away a sloppy second goal after twenty minutes as we failed to shepherd a ball out deep in our area and the cut-back found the last person we wanted and the finish was emphatic. Tony Plado's flexibility got us out of trouble with a goal line clearance on the half hour. Around that time, we made three changes with Waine Hetherington, Mick O'Flynn and Ian Coles coming on for Dean Hawkins, Phil Anthony and Ian Lyons respectively. These were all positive changes. Consequently, we finished the half strongly. We were unlucky with the clearest scoring opportunity we fashioned with ten minutes left. George Kleanthous slipped Peter Harvey in and Peter's shot (from fifteen yards out) was angled, powerful, low and had the keeper beaten only to hit the base of the post. Still there was much encouragement to be taken from that even though we trailed by two goals at the turn.

The second half was a cracker, five goals including two fantastic strikes. Ten minutes in Peter Harvey latched on to a lofted ball from Paul Zanelli – controlled it on the run with his head, glided past the defender and lashed the ball home from ten yards out. The runs behind the Orpington defence from Peter Harvey, George Kleanthous and Martin Zapico were promising more joy with intelligent balls from Paul Zanelli, Waine Hetherington and Tony Plado.

Just when we felt we were getting back in the game we conceded a beauty. The ball was crossed into our box from a position adjacent to the corner flag. It looked like the ball had been played behind Kevin but he was able to control it with a deft touch, run away from his marker with his back to our goal before swivelling and lashing the ball into the postage stamp. It was a thing of brutal beauty.

We made further changes on the hour with Dean Hawkins, Phil Anthony and Ian Lyons replacing Tony Plado, Patrice Mongelard and Colin Mant. Colin barely had time to put his top on before responding to Peter Harvey's call for him to run the line, such was our desire to get back in the game. Our belief grew when Peter Harvey played George Kleanthous in for him to bring us within a goal of Orpington with a smart finish inside the post. At that point Orpington started to ask the referee how long was left – always a sign of fingertips on the ledge. We piled the pressure on – there were bodies all over the place in the Orpington box. I recall in particular there was a corner which nearly yielded that collector's item – an Ian Coles goal – but the low shot flashed past the post.

With barely five minutes left we got the reward we deserved as George Kleanthous' constant harrying of the Orpington defence and Peter Harvey's vision and quick thinking crafted a beauty. We spent some time in the bar afterwards getting the measurements right as Peter can be very sensitive about these things. We all agreed that Peter was only fifty yards out as he guided the ball into an empty net after the Orpington keeper had stranded himself and made a poor attempt at clearing the ball under pressure from George Kleanthous.

We had about three minutes of the game to manage to get a fantastic draw in the drizzle that had now descended upon us. We conceded a free-kick on the edge of our box. Ian Lyons and Mick O'Flynn seemed to think they were both responsible (not something to fess up to if you ask me). Kevin stepped up and bent the ball round the wall beyond Gary's 6ft3 frame. That was it. We scored three goals in the second half and still lost, because one other exceptional player got four goals.

I should record a word of praise for the referee today. He had presence, authority and was scrupulously fair and in return got no trouble from either team.

The showers were good and any fears we might have had about the hot water running out were unfounded. A large tray of sandwiches, sausage rolls and cocktail sausages cheered us up but not as much as the Orpington player who joined us to offer his view that Mick O'Flynn had had a great game. I think he meant for us.

Man-of-the-Match: Peter Harvey, with two goals including one that Wayne Rooney copied last week, an assist, and fitbit stats, from his wrist I think, that showed he covered a distance of 7.3 kms, took 11,176 steps and used 1,356 calories in 96 minutes.

7 January 2018: Inter Vyagra Super Vets (N, 2-1)

Hardy Farnborough come through stiff test

The first game of the year is always hard. Today was made harder for a number of reasons: our opponents obviously, the passage of time since our last game over a month ago, forced relocation to Norman Park, to name a few. Norman Park in the environs of Bromley is conceptually best seen as the place where you can experience grassroots football. It is not for the pampered. "Groundslady" Meryl Clarke does a great job and was there to hand me a bag of goal nets, pack of pegs and stepladder. She had given us the best pitch (no Hound of the Baskervilles night soil on it) but if we wanted hot showers, we would have to walk 80 yards to adjoining changing rooms. Early arrivals Wayne Hetherington, Patrice Mongelard, Ian Shoebridge and Michael Ugwumba put the nets up in both goals and corner-flagged the pitch by the time others dribbled in on a bright, but cold and blustery day. I think Wayne was the first to arrive – I saw him in his car as I struggled past with my stuff, first aid bag, balls and full water bottles. It must have been an important phone call that held him back from helping me.

A squad of sixteen players dwindled to thirteen, overnight. Thankfully we had managed to find a keeper in Adam Roome (and what a find he proved to be). For our first game since 3 December, and seeking to protect our 2018 unbeaten record, we lined up as follows:

Starting XI:

Adam Roome

Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier, Ian Coles, Patrice Mongelard

Jay Hardy, Wayne Hetherington, Ian Shoebridge, Obi Ugwumba

Kypros Michael, Wisey

Substitutes: Peter Harvey, Paul Zanelli

Supporters (inside the windbreak): Met Balaji, Michael Hills, David (Obi Ugwumba's nephew)

Referee: Paul Parsons

Decorator of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

The return of Steve Blanchard and Kypros Michael from injury was a tonic for the team. Kypros is our 2017 European Golden Boot Winner but had been out of action since 29 October with a dislocated and broken finger. Kypros showed flashes of his genius today but at times was more European Galoche than Golden Boot and I think, though I may be wrong, the mended fingers have been at the baklava in recent weeks. His sharpness, and hunger (for goals that is) will return.

We played with the wind in the first half. We did not know at the time what a difference this would make. It is a universal trick of footballers' minds to think that the wind is stronger when they play against it than when they play with it – even though anemometers might say otherwise. Anyway, the flow of the game in the first-half was distinctly towards the Inter Vyagra goal. A combination of good defending, goalkeeping quality and Farnborough rustiness conspired to frustrate us. The early half and quarter chances fell to us – many to Kypros, but we could not capitalise. Inter Vyagra defended in numbers and were looking to break quickly, particularly down our left where Colin Brazier was kept busy. In fact, we all had to keep busy, partly to keep warm but to match our opponents. We had the greater possession but as we passed the half way point in the first period it was not clear if either team would get a breakthrough. When it came, it fell to us – from pressure we exerted at a corner there was a bit of pinball wizardry in the Inter Vyagra box and

hands were involved. Referee Paul Parsons had no hesitation in pointing to the spot. With Peter Harvey off the pitch, it fell to Kypros Michael to step up. I could not help thinking about the Christmas card Kypros received from the Paphos taxi Drivers Betting Syndicate at that point but Kypros went in low and hard in the bottom corner. The Inter Vyagra keeper was finally beaten but it had taken time and effort.

Paul Zanelli and Peter Harvey joined the fray on the half hour with Obi Ugwumba and Wisey taking a break. This did not alter the pattern of play but the comfort of a second goal did not come until near the end of the half. This time Kypros was provider as he looped a cross to the far post where Jay Hardy slipped in to guide the ball home with a sliding connection. The question was would two goals be enough when Inter Vyagra had the wind in their sails. I will not hide from you that we had trouble at times coming out of our box, let alone our half. An unchanged and balanced back four kept us in it (even if I say so myself) aided in no small way by Adam Roome's goal keeping. This report would be a travesty if I did not mention one acrobatic save to tip the ball over the bar when Inter Vyagra were pushing hard for an equaliser. I am not sure any of the many other keepers we have had in goal this season would have pulled this save. The Inter Vyagra right-back (I am not sure where he was in the first half) with an oak furniture build, had a mule of a kick which he was happy to try from thirty or forty yards given a glimpse of our goal. Adam's excellent hands were kept busy.

Midway through the second half, Inter Vyagra had pulled a deserved goal back after we failed to clear the ball. It was not all one-way traffic though. We did fashion some scoring opportunities – Wisey and Peter Harvey had the best of them but the Inter Vyagra keeper was no mug either. He too was pulling off eye-catching saves. The comfort of a third Farnborough goal never came. Peter Harvey was taken so roughly from behind in the box that the thrust caused him to part company with one of his boots. Moments before he had floated an exquisite ball to the far post for a waiting Wisey but said big unit in the Inter Vyagra defence plucked the ball out of the air like a ballet dancer. In the end we held on – everyone had to put a shift in though, and we made the most we could of our substitutions in the second half to preserve our advantage as Ian Shoebridge, Obi Ugwumba, Kypros Michael and Wisey alternated places. We did not tarry to bring the nets in or to exit the changing rooms.

A word of praise and thanks for our opponents. They gave us a tough examination today, played with the right sporting attitude, competed well and contributed in equal measure to an entertaining game. I regret we were not able to extend our usual hospitality to them (they treat us well at their place) as a return to Farnborough was not on their route home. In fact, not many Farnborough players came back to the club today – there were only five of us (with Paul Zanelli dropping by fleetingly later). I am told that some of our Younger Vets had returned to Farnborough from their 'home' game in Stone but were taking refreshments thirty yards away as the crow flies in the Woodman. Of course, you cannot expect five players to consume three trays of sandwiches so the Sunday teams benefited – Manager Vince Wray enjoyed the vegetarian ones in particular even if he was not quite sure what he was eating. Five players did the analysis (and drink) for the entire squad, and my return home, a quarter of an hour shy of five o'clock, drew the comment from Mrs M that she was beginning to wonder whether to cook me any dinner. This is serious stuff I thought and there has to be behavioural change. But before speaking to her about her behaviour I thought it wise to check my Horoscope in the Sunday Times Style magazine – and there in black on white – and I am not making this up, were the words "For now, silence is best". Mrs M said I was silent as I fell asleep on the sofa!

Man-of-the-Match: Jay Hardy who guided us home with vigour and verve.

28 January 2018: Lads of the Village Super Vets (A, 4-1)

Kypros Michael crashes Lads of the Village party

After two waterlogged weekends, we were very keen to get a game. All sixteen players turned up and we had what the Farnborough Gazette would call a strong bench. We knew from experience that the Stone Recreation Ground near Dartford could cope with rain. In the end we had a dry, mild morning on a surface that was true and conducive to a passing game.

Kypros Michael and Michael Hills were playing their first game since sustaining a broken finger each in the same game on 29 October. It was good to have them back. In fact, Kypros was lucky to not have broken anything else more recently after his car was written off in an accident yesterday which was no fault of his, involving an unmarked police car, chasing someone else according to Kyp. Thankfully, all the family came out unharmed, but all were shaken. Sinisa Gracanin was also back after weeks of absence with an ankle injury. We had a debutant in Junior Kadi who turned out to be a very good advertisement for the Football Academy he runs. My team mates did a very good job of hiding their concerns (and their willingness to go in goal) when I put on the keeper's shirt but the relatively late arrival of Rob Faulkner would have been a great relief to them (though not as great as to me). They certainly cheered Rob when I announced the line-up, and did a shorter than usual team talk in the absence of ill Co-Manager Mick O'Flynn to whom we send our best wishes for a swift recovery (I think).

Starting XI:

Rob Faulkner

Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Patrice Mongelard, Martin Zapico

Jay Hardy, Junior Kadi, Ian Shoebridge, Obi Ugwumba

Michael Hills, George Kleanthous

Substitutes: Colin Brazier, Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael

Supporter: David Orji (Obi Ugwumba's nephew)

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

We elected to play with the slope in the first-half and it is fair to say we enjoyed more possession than our opponents and the flow of the game was more towards their goal but I do not think we created anything in the first quarter of an hour. The Lads centre half with the long legs was putting them to great use in keeping us at bay. Indeed, the first decent chance of the game fell to the Lads but thankfully Rob was alert and saved with his feet from eight yards. We were fortunate that the connection was not the best. I honestly cannot recall another scare for us in that half. George Kleanthous and Michael Hills were getting behind the Lads defence but our numbers in the Lads box or the final ball were not ideal. Jay Hardy was a tiger in midfield and Junior Kadi was showing some silky touches and a good football brain. Martin Zapico was a good outlet for goal-kicks as we built from the back.

On the half hour we made five changes with the five substitutes coming on simultaneously for Junior, Obi, Martin, Michael and Colesy. The bench was still strong but now we had a cutting edge in the devilry of Kyp's left foot. It was not long before Kyp crossed the ball for George to stoop at the far post to give us the lead with a smart header. Kyp just knew that George was waiting for that one. We remained dominant but could not get the cushion of a second goal.

I also wondered if we should worry about the sniper on the QEII bridge in the distance who shot Colin Brazier as he attempted a pass with his right foot. I jest of course, and one should not

make fun of one's team mate. Colin had in fact produced a turn of speed to snuff out potential danger with a covering run.

We knew at half-time that we needed more goals and felt that there would be more of the game in our half in the second period. About ten minutes in, the Greek connection delivered – this time with George providing the assist for Kypros to produce a low finish from close range. I thought to myself this was as smooth as a bead of extra virgin olive oil on the surface of a Kalamata olive. It was 2-0 to us on the hour when the five players who went off on the half hour came back on with Steve Blanchard, Jay Hardy, George Kleanthous, Patrice Mongelard and Ian Shoebridge making way. From the touchline we witnessed a goal for Lads of the Village from a well-taken corner and a close-range header from an unmarked Lads player in the six-yard box. There was perhaps too much of Colin Brazier in the defining moment but we agreed that he had made a genuine attempt to clear the ball and the fact that it came off his head on the line on its way to the roof of the net was accidental and incidental, and that nobody would mention the words own goal (except me of course).

I will not hide from you that we badly needed a third goal. Michael Hills obliged with a low cross for Kypros Michael who finished emphatically into the top corner. Soon after Kypros rounded the keeper but could not squeeze the ball home – jug avoidance was mentioned. Avoidance is one of the recognised symptoms of PTSD but Kyp was to get his hat-trick after an exquisite through ball from Waine Hetherington.

We could have extended our lead even further had Michael Hills found one of three unmarked team mates waiting for him to cut the ball back after he got through on the right and advanced into the box. I had to remind Michael at that point that he had broken a finger, not a leg. He had one simple job to do – thread the ball away from the keeper. It was not as if there was a defender looking to interfere with him. In the end, it did not matter and you could say the third goal had finished the Lads off. One of their players was nearly finished off when he caught the full force of a Sinisa Gracanin pile driver in a place that you could describe as high on the inner thigh.

This was a very good game played in excellent spirit watched by probably the biggest crowd we have had this season, and they knew their football and their compliments for Farnborough at the end were genuine. I should also mention the referee who did an excellent job.

Eight of us made it to the Lads of The Village Public House to enjoy the hospitality of our hosts, and lose the usual £1/ticket raffle. Ham and egg mayonnaise sandwiches, chips, sausages and chicken nuggets were swiftly despatched. I will not name the five Farnborough players who were still there when I left at 14:00 but I can tell you they were determined to win in the bar as well.

Man-of-the-Match: Kypros Michael with an amazing hat-trick to heal the pain, and who in a careless whisper agreed to take the kit. I asked him to make sure Mrs M washed my No14 shirt by hand. I do not get that at home.

18 February 2018: West Farleigh Vets (N, 1-1)

Visitors happier than Farnborough with a point

The week started with us not knowing if we would have a pitch for this game, then we did not have a referee, and on the day itself we did not have a goalkeeper and we had no food (more on the latter later). In the end, we had an entertaining game in morning sunshine, in dry mild weather, on a pitch that was as good as we had played on in weeks, and we had a qualified referee from our midst in the shape of Waine Hetherington who did an excellent job. This was only our third game in 2018. We remain unbeaten this year but today it was more a case of two points dropped than a point gained.

Although our home pitch in Farnborough Village was miraculously playable today, we had decided (prematurely or wisely – answers on a post card) earlier in the week to switch the game to Norman Park, in the care of Meryl Clarke. Sadly, it meant we could not reciprocate the hospitality we have enjoyed from our visitors from West Farleigh but both teams were glad to get a game today, played in excellent spirit.

The early shift of Michael Hills, Patrice Mongelard, Ian Shoebridge and Michael Ugwumba put up the nets before others arrived.

Starting XI:

Obi "Clean sheet" Ugwumba
Phil Anthony, Steve Blanchard, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard,
Jay Hardy, Michael Hills, Ian Shoebridge, Simon Thomas
Peter Harvey, Kypros Michael

Substitutes: Ian Coles, Franco Petrozzi

Referee: Waine Hetherington

Linesman: Michael Ugwumba Jr

Supporters: Tony Harvey, Mick O'Flynn, Michael Ugwumba Jr

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

We dominated the game from the off, with most of the play in the West Farleigh half. Our West Farleigh nemesis, Deano, was not on the pitch from the start and by the time he came on fifteen minutes or so in the game I was not the only one to rue the chances we had already missed. Kypros Michael and Peter Harvey were looking dangerous and it seemed only a matter of time before they would craft a breakthrough. Kypros, not showing any ill effects from that second helping of Valentine's Day Moussaka, had created the first clear opportunity by having his powerful shot parried by the West Farleigh keeper (who might have hurt his hand in the process) into the path of Simon Thomas three yards out with an empty net, only for Simon, playing his first game in months, to find the crossbar. Simon will, I know, have been disappointed with his effort but his sharpness will return, eventually.

At the other end, a diving save from Obi Ugwumba low to his left caught the eye before we took the lead after twenty minutes or so. Patrice Mongelard had found Peter Harvey on the edge of the West Farleigh box and Peter's cross-cum-shot deceived the West Farleigh keeper who let the ball trickle through his hands into the net. I think the keeper came off soon after and the West Farleigh centre forward went in goal – I think you could say without fear of contradiction that this was a turning point in the game.

Despite our dominance we never got a second goal. We had several corners that yielded nothing. I do not recall a single West Farleigh corner in the first half. The introduction of Franco Petrozzi and Ian Coles on the half hour had stiffened our defence and enhanced our dominance but it was up front that things did not quite click. Michael Hills had several long-range efforts that were more aesthetic than effective. We could not find the decisive final pass and when we created danger the replacement West Farleigh keeper was more than equal to it. Jay Hardy was a constant threat from midfield – aided and abetted by Michael Hills and the tireless Ian Shoebridge but West Farleigh were resilient, with some big units at the back and a faux keeper who was proving to be the real deal. The mood at half-time was positive – we had nullified Deano, we were creating scoring opportunities, and even the prospect of Patrice Mongelard in goal for the second period did not appear to disturb anyone.

The second half was not too different from the first. We weathered some initial West Farleigh pressure before re-establishing the pattern of the first half. I lost count of the number of times when we could have scored, had it not been for the dazzling display by the West Farleigh keeper. Time and again he came off his line to parry shots, narrow angles and save with his legs and so on and that was when other West Farleigh bodies were not in the way. West Farleigh were reduced to playing on the break looking for Deano but he was usually well marshalled by the fleet Ian Coles and the muscular presence of Steve Blanchard and Franco Petrozzi. Set-pieces were the best chance they had to score we thought and so it proved to be.

I was feeling rather good about myself midway through the half after pulling off a double point blank save. However, fifteen minutes from the end we were undone by a West Farleigh corner. Our shortest player went up against their tallest and then Phil Anthony on the post helped the ball over the line as it came off the underside of the bar on his head. Things got frantic as we pressed for a winner. We even re-introduced Kypros Michael for the last ten minutes (after he had made way on the hour) but it was not to be our day. Jay Hardy, Ian Shoebridge, Kypros and Peter Harvey all had decent chances which came and went. The longer it went on the more belief West Farleigh accrued and they held out for a draw which was not quite daylight robbery, more a gentle mugging in the environs of Bromley.

Six of us made our way back to our club in Farnborough Village. Mick O'Flynn had one job to do and that was to order three pizzas. Had they turned up we would have shared Vegetarian, Hawaiian and Pepperoni pizzas. I wish I could have described them in a bit more sensory detail. I have Mick's credit card code (which he wrote down) for future use but would have preferred the pizzas. When I got home the other side of half past four, and explained the nutritional ordeal I had just experienced, Mrs M remarked that the Famished Farnborough Six could have gone to Pizza Hut for a meal in the inordinate amount of time we had taken for "analysis".

Man-of-the-Match – our dynamic midfield duo of Jay Hardy and Ian Shoebridge could not be separated, receiving the accolades of their team mates in equal measure.

11 March 2018: Riverside Wanderers Vets (H, 3-2)

Farnborough collective spirit edges Mother's Day last-minute thriller on home turf

The team played on 25 February, registering a 9-1 victory, without me, as some noted, rather uncharitably. Apparently, a certain player had enjoyed having "a proper right-back" behind him on 25 February. My absence meant that the iridescent beauty and supreme artistry of nine goals did not adorn the report of that match. You cannot have everything. On 4 March we lost to the Beast from the East. On 11 March though we were back home for first time since 19 November, and for only the seventh time this season. By contrast we have played 75% of our games this year at Norman Park but there have been no demonstrations from our fans, no pitch invasions, demanding that we be re-named Norman Park Senior Vets, yet. Thankfully our pitch was fit for play and we managed to get thirteen players, as well as new opponents in Riverside Vets. We lined up for our Mother's Day parade like this:

Starting XI:

Rob Faulkner

Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Patrice Mongelard, Franco Petrozzi

Jay Hardy, Michael Hills, Simon Thomas, Obi Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, George Kleanthous

Substitutes: Colin Mant, Mick O'Flynn

Referee: Nick Kinnear (who donated his match fee to club funds)

Supporter: Ian Shoebridge

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

As far as we could see early doors, Mother's Day absences had not weakened Riverside one jot. They looked as strong and balanced a side as always, with willing runners in midfield, a crafty and burly target man and some big units at the back (including a double wardrobe of the Rhino brand) and a keeper that looked agile, strong-wristed and youthful even though he claimed to be wearing boots (not gloves!) of the wrong size.

It was therefore a cagey, measured start by both sides. We had marginally more territory and attempts at goal in the early phases. Both defences were on top. It did not feel like a game where there would be a lot of goals and any goals that were scored today would have to be hard-earned. We were quietly surprised and pleased with our collective spirit. The presence of Rob Faulkner in goal was certainly re-assuring and his handling and kicking were just the platform we needed. Our midfield quarter knew they were in a game. Michael Hills and Simon Thomas were tucking in and helping out as best they could and Obi Ugwumba and Jay Hardy had to use all their muscle on a heavy pitch. Our first clear scoring opportunity came from Jay Hardy who hustled his way into the Riverside box before unloading and we were able to see what the Riverside keeper was made of. A mis-hit cross from Patrice Mongelard hit the top of the angle of post and bar from twenty-five yards out. We forced a number of corners which came to no avail. The muscular attentions of the Riverside defence were being felt by Peter Harvey and George Kleanthous, but they just got on with it giving as good as they got. Obi Ugwumba tried one of his howitzers which seemed to trouble one of his own players more than the opposition. Riverside came closest to scoring from a corner but Patrice Mongelard was well-positioned on the far post to clear the ball.

Midway through the half, Mick O'Flynn and Colin Mant came on for Ian Coles and Franco Petrozzi. By accident, or possibly design, just after the half hour Mick became associated with the one moment in that half that broke the deadlock. He lumped the ball forward into the Riverside box, or if you prefer, measured a lofted pass into space that was swiftly occupied by George Kleanthous. George had timed his run to such perfection that the Riverside linesman had to keep his flag down. As the Riverside keeper came out to counter the imminent danger, George produced an exquisite, deft, nerve agent of a half-volleyed lob which left the Riverside keeper paralysed with the ball sailing into the net. We were not able to increase our lead by half-time. There were distractions and even though we were leading there was not much serenity in our midst, for reasons best left unexposed. My own serenity was disturbed further when I realised, I had left the half-time oranges behind in the dressing room. I had been too busy thinking about the referee, the valuables, the pizzas (more on that later), and the corner flags.

Ian Coles and Franco Petrozzi were back on for the second half with Steve Blanchard and Simon Thomas making way. We were on the front foot as the game resumed. Peter Harvey was released into space by George Kleanthous and went on to force a great save from the Riverside keeper diving to left to palm away a pile driver. Surely it would be a matter of time we thought. Ten minutes later that same combination worked again and this time Peter rounded the keeper, turned inside and seemed intent on taking his time to walk the ball into the net but the presence of a covering defender close by caused Peter to use his right foot to bundle the ball over the line. Even at 2-0 up we could not feel the job was done. Riverside kept pressing for a goal but the defence and Rob Faulkner held firm. Midway through the second period Patrice Mongelard and George Kleanthous went off for Steve Blanchard and Simon Thomas. From the touchline, I was able to witness Peter Harvey drive a penalty low and hard past the Riverside keeper. One too many agricultural tackles on Peter had earned the penalty and Peter was empowered, through the liberating absence of advice from his team mates to do as he pleased with the spot kick. At 3-0 up with barely a quarter of an hour left we dared to hope. Michael Hills was 'rhinoed' on the wing and wailed like a new born baby on Mother's Day. We thought he had broken something. Of greater consequence were the injuries to Jay Hardy and Steve Blanchard which weakened our spine with about ten minutes left. George Kleanthous and Patrice Mongelard were back on in time to see Riverside pull two goals back in the last five minutes. But what would have been the mother of comebacks never materialised and we held on but Riverside had underlined their enduring quality with that scare. Rob Faulkner was disappointed that his clean sheet had gone but there was no reason for him to beat himself up like this, such is the confidence that we all derive from his presence.

Back in the changing rooms we had that customary awkward moment when we wait for a volunteer to take the kit. Today it was especially muddy and heavy and George Kleanthous, who drives an F-type convertible Jaguar, offered the weak defence that he did not have the right car to take the kit home and that he should have brought his children's Mother's car. Then he remembered the beauty of his goal and relented. For good measure I reminded him that not even Des Lindsay had tried the 'wrong type of car for the kit' defence.

Pizzas ordered by Leanne were there when we emerged into the clubhouse. Mother's Day roast lunches had thinned the number of partakers, in particular from Riverside, and we were on hand to mop up whatever they left. There was a lingering sense, I felt, none the less that we should have doubled the food order, as the post-match analysis went on and on until nearly 5 o'clock. Michael Hills' 'injury' had not interfered with his appetite nor did his damaged finger affect his pizza slice grip. I should add, I almost forgot, that Leanne also did the scoring at the FOBG Quiz

on 3 March, and what a grand job she did then too. The Senior Vets collective of Coles, Mongelard and O'Flynn won the Mother of battles by one point.

We remain unbeaten in 2018. Glendale Vets next week will undoubtedly test this state of affairs. But first the British weather will test us all. The Farnborough pitch is in danger of being washed away as I write this report (a day later than usual because of Mother's Day).

Man-of-the-Match – mummy's boy today by a long chalk, our midfield enforcer, Jay Hardy.

25 March 2018: Catford Wanderers (A, 2-5)

Catford enjoy every BST minute of it

How did we lose this game? The meerkat would say “Simple – you did not deserve to win”. Nobody would quarrel with this. Catford wanted it more. We were complacent, unprepared, ran out of ideas and players. This was a shock to the system – our first defeat of 2018, and a shock to the cistern so voluminous was the manure we produced. The football we played was inept, woeful, devoid of solidarity, hunger, desire, energy, confidence, imagination. There was no cohesion, pattern of play or strategy at work. We were missing players but so too probably did our opponents. Those of us who turned went missing. Catford – with a fired-up Roger French, defended like the Norman Hunter Appreciation Society, without Norman’s finesse at times. Moreover, we could not cope with their quick breaks from midfield, or the ball over the top. And they had one female fan who gave us an equally tough time.

A squad of over twenty players had whittled down to sixteen by close on Friday. Ian Shoebridge dropped out on Saturday, and Simon Thomas followed on Sunday morning. Jay Hardy overslept.

Starting XI:

Rob Faulkner

Phil Anthony, Steve Blanchard, Ian Lyons, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracacin, Waine Hetherington, Michael Hills, Obi Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, George Kleanthous

Substitutes: Colin Mant, Mick O’Flynn and, when he eventually turned up, tardy Jay Hardy)

Supporter: None (we did not deserve any)

Director of Football: Mick O’Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

We had the temerity to score first after about ten minutes. Michael Hills had sprung from the right midfield position to cut in and gather a diagonal ball from George Kleanthous and rounded the keeper to finish with aplomb. At that point although we had made a shaky start, I am sure I was not the only one who thought this goal would be the first of many. I was right but not in the way I hoped. There were warning signs from Catford early doors – the injury that cut Steve Blanchard’s game short after three minutes did not help but we had an able replacement in Colin Mant (the 2008 FOBG Vets Golden Boot – more on that later). There were warning signs from Farnborough too as we showed signs of hesitancy and sluggishness in defence and midfield.

Catford rattled in three goals in a golden twenty-minute period aided and abetted by us (including now linesman Steve Blanchard). It always feels worse to concede goals that follow the same pattern because it reveals an inability to learn from mistakes, and a despairing truth of the human condition. Yet, we had a glimmer of hope after George Kleanthous had finished smartly with a crisp half-volley to convert a pass from Waine Hetherington who has escaped the clutches of his markers on the left wing, after picking himself off the floor. At 3-2 the situation was not beyond repair. The introduction of Jay Hardy after thirty-five minutes hour had stiffened our midfield but on the other hand Peter Harvey had his legs bitten and an injury to his back was setting in as the half ended. Mick O’Flynn also joined the fray before half-time with Phil Anthony making way.

We started the second half better than Catford and had them penned in but we could not capitalise on our territorial advantage. The moment that best captures this reality came from a free-kick that George Kleanthous earned after another tangle with Roger French. After things

calmed down George whipped the free-kick in – the keeper spilled the ball into the path of Colin Mant. Some say Colin was an inch from goal line, others say a foot, some even say a yard. The keeper was out of the equation, Roger French was not around, it was just Colin, the empty goal – and, just in the corner of Colin’s eye, a middle-aged woman in a bright yellow dress and a vivid green hat about to enter the nearby Homebase to purchase some shrubs for her suburban garden. You guessed it – a momentarily distracted Colin cushioned the ball on his instep and lifted it onto the top of the bar.

Not long after, Catford extended their lead with a goal that was identical to their third – a free-kick from outside the box which eluded Rob Faulkner’s outstretched frame low into the bottom corner. To compound matters Peter Harvey was hacked from behind by the President of the Catford Wanderers branch of the Tommy Smith Appreciation Society and could not continue. There then followed a tactical masterstroke as Colin Mant was drafted into the forward line. The clocks had gone forward an hour overnight – and now we had gone back ten years by restoring our 2008 Vets Golden Boot to our front line. The passage of time has not been kind to Manty’s finishing skills. Phil Anthony came back on for Peter Harvey and Obi Ugwumba replaced Sinisa Gracanin for the last twenty-five minutes. Any hopes we might have had of reducing the deficit vanished at that point. In truth they vanished much sooner.

We huffed and puffed to no end. Catford added a fifth in the dying minutes and the lesson ended.

The après-match was not exactly a sparkling affair. Autopsies are not joyous occasions. Even the copious buffet failed to cheer us up. Mick O’Flynn had slipped away to go to a Picasso exhibition. The dislocated tableau we had presented in Catford was a sort of homage to “Guernica” I thought; until a better analogy for the game came to mind on the drive home – Edvard Munch’s “The Scream”. Colin Mant would surely agree that Art really does imitate life as he reflects on his Ronnie Rosenthal or Kypros Michael moment.

The one moment of comfort I had today was to see my brother’s Nicolas name on the Catford Wanderers Tennis Honours Board – Singles Champion in 1998 and 1999 and Doubles Champion in 1998.

Man-of-the-Match – arguably the one exception to our general malaise today, George Kleanthous with the lion’s share of the thirteen votes recorded today. Steve “it was 0-0 when I came off” Blanchard was so appalled by our performance that he tore up his ballot paper.

1 April 2018: Baltic Vets (N, 3-1)

Farnborough win Easter goal hunt in Norman Park

What a difference a week makes. It is not just that we won today, but the manner in which we went about our business was so much better. It was good to play to get last Sunday out of our system. We played with more confidence and better team work, passed the ball more and the defence, midfield and forward line had more connective tissue. We were generally calmer, and smarter with and without the ball, than last Sunday. Credit is due in equal measure to our opponents who also aimed for a passing game.

At the start of the week our original opponents pulled out and it was not until Wednesday that Baltic Vets (restored to our schedule this season but whom could not play on 14 January because of a waterlogged pitch) took up our invitation. Easter is a tricky time to get players, and we also had a lot of rain this week and we could not be certain that the Norman Park pitch would be playable despite Meryl Clarke's efforts. Our numbers dwindled to twelve, after Rob Faulkner injured his back bundling a creature with blonde hair in his car yesterday. We were grateful that Dave Salako agreed to play in goal at very short notice. Otherwise, I might well have made a fool of myself again in goal.

Meryl Clarke allocated us a pitch that had not been played on yesterday. Having eight pitches to rotate helps during the monsoon season. Wayne Hetherington, Colin Mant and Patrice Mongelard set up the goal nets while Baltic Vets waited for their kit to arrive. Before kick off the Baltic Manager tipped me off that they would at some point put a youngster in goal. What he omitted to tell me was that the lad was a Crystal Palace and Chelsea Youth keeper. I am glad he played because he was very good and made the game interesting.

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Ian Coles, Ian Lyons, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Jay Hardy, Michael Hills, Simon Thomas, Obi Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, Wayne Hetherington

Substitute: Franco Petrozzi

Supporters: Tony Harvey, Mick O'Flynn, Michael Ugwumba (Jr), Obi Ugwumba's nephew Orji.

Linesman: Michael Ugwumba (Jr)

Referee: Nick Kinnear

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Both teams made a measured start, moving the ball about. Our front pairing of Harvey and Hetherington combined well together, whilst Michael Hills and Simon Thomas provided thrust down the sides. Michael Ugwumba was beginning to enjoy the midfield tussle until he had to come off injured after only ten minutes. Franco Petrozzi replaced him with gusto and guile. The early chances fell to Farnborough. Michael Hills punished a poor clearance from the Baltic keeper, who stranded himself in the process, to loft the ball into an empty net from thirty yards out. Peter Harvey spurned a couple of good chances to increase our lead – these were not in the class of Kypros Michael or Colin Mant moments, but Peter will have been disappointed with his efforts. Still, he took the opportunity on the half hour, to put things right with a smartly taken penalty earned by Jay Hardy who had been interfered with from behind in the box. Just when some of us had fatefully begun to think of a clean sheet Baltic capitalised on Farnborough

hesitancy on the edge of our box to pull a goal back after Dave Salako had parried the initial effort.

We were surprised by the vigour of Baltic's start to the second half. They put a nippy winger on and moved a big unit to the front (having replaced him with the young maestro in goal) and suddenly they posed more of a threat and started winning corners. Patrice Mongelard cleared off the line from one such corner and we had to work hard to re-establish the flow of the game towards the Baltic goal. When we did get at the Baltic goal their young keeper was equal to it, saving a header from Franco Petrozzi who connected with a corner at the far post, coming off his line to mop up through balls and generally frustrating our efforts, most coming from Peter Harvey and Waine Hetherington. However, the best save of the game belonged to our keeper. Baltic had arrowed a free-kick into the top corner of our net. I was not the only one who thought that was the Baltic equaliser until Dave Salako somehow contorted his body and flung a left hand at the ball.

We needed the cushion of a third goal, fast. Peter Harvey, more mobile, and hungry this week thought he had scored with a lofted raking shot destined for the top corner until the slender young man in the big yellow shirt tipped the ball onto the bar. It was going to take something special to beat him, and that is exactly what Simon Thomas provided. Baltic did not quite clear the ball from yet another of our corners. The ball rose high on the edge of the Baltic box and as it fell Simon Thomas was sharpest to react. He was, in fact, facing away from the goal, eyes on the ball as it descended to knee height for the sweetest of connections with his left foot, and a trajectory that defied interception into the bottom corner. It was crisp, deadly and just what we needed.

The second half seemed to go on for ever. Perhaps Nick Kinnear was having difficulty reading Mick O'Flynn's timepiece. There was time for us to craft a goal that was ruled off-side. Michael Hills caused more havoc on the left, aided and abetted by a marauding Ian Lyons who slid in to guide the ball just inside the post. However, Lionel was denied by the lino.

I think both teams enjoyed the game in relatively pleasant conditions for the time of year. It was dry, there was no wind, the pitch needed rolling but played better than could have been expected after all the rain we had. The match was contested in excellent spirit and any arguments or raised voices that could be heard were amongst players from the same team, on both sides.

There is not much to report by way of an après-match as we did not have the use of a bar sur place and most people were keen to get home for Sunday roast. It was Easter after all and family comes first (albeit after football). I had been warned that lunch would start without me if I was home any later than 13:30, and Mrs M was not fooling.

Finally, I leave you with a selection of quotes from today: Meryl Clarke "The showers are hot"; Peter Harvey "Pat – you had a brilliant game"; George Kleanthous "My vote goes to Peter Harvey"; Kypros Michael "I've been asked to manage my little boy's team"; Mick O'Flynn "It's a Cartier watch". See if you can work out which one is not a *poisson d'Avril*.

Man-of-the-Match – a revelation in midfield, Franco Petrozzi with whom you would be a fool to tangle.

15 April 2018: Inter the Valley Vets (N, 1-1)

Farnborough escape burial in Norman Park long grass

Grass grows fast at this time of year but the Norman Park surface was lusher than expected because the tractors had not been able to get on to cut the grass during the week. Still, Meryl Clarke has promised a trim wicket for next week. The Farnborough Senior Vets team had been shorn, however, and absentees included magic Mike O'Flynn who was seeking relief, from the pressures of management, studying frescoes of nude Greco-Roman wrestling in Crete (and he had sent us a picture from the beach). Michael Hills could not help notice the uncanny resemblance of the sandy expanse with Broadstairs.

In Mick's absence it fell to Peter Harvey (promoted to officer class for the day) to provide the strategic input for team disposition, substitutions etc. for the thirteen players that we mustered on an overcast, still and dry morning. Three of the thirteen, Waine Hetherington, Patrice Mongelard and Ian Shoebridge put the nets up before some of their team mates arrived.

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Phil Anthony, Ian Coles, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Jay Hardy, Peter Harvey, Michael Hills, Simon Thomas

Waine Hetherington, George Kleanthous

Substitutes: Ian Lyons, Ian Shoebridge

Supporters: Sam Kleanthous, Danny and Ethan Mullins

Referee: Paul Parsons

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Games against Inter the Valley are usually tight affairs and so it proved today. Enormous units at the back, bags of skill in the midfield and bustling pace up front is their trademark and today was no different. They started better than we did and the early chances were theirs and twice in the opening ten minutes Matt Angelo came off his line to thwart Inter forwards intent on burying us. They appeared to have adapted to the surface more quickly than we did and looked more likely to score first. We were more tentative and could not find the cutting edge despite the pace we had down the wings in Michael Hills and Simon Thomas. But, of course, pace is not enough and the greater degree of control, care of the ball, purposeful movement and the menace of a marauding forward who put himself about a fair bit belonged to our opponents. We contrived to lose the ball on the edge of our area, were outnumbered and Inter's 'Jonjo Shelvey' impersonator finished the move with a low drive that beat Matt Angelo.

I cannot say we were creating many chances. In fact, arguably, we did not truly settle and develop a pattern of play until the half hour when Ian Lyons and Ian Shoebridge came on for Michael Hills and Waine Hetherington. Don't get me wrong I am not saying that the players who went off were doing a poor job (in fact they both came back on to great effect later). No, it was more a case of us improving the positional deployment of our assets. Peter Harvey took his fire and energy up front, Ian Shoebridge stabilised the midfield with much-needed support for Jay Hardy, and Ian Lyons gave us a left midfield player with a left foot and a more defensive mindset.

Earlier in the week George Kleanthous had promised to mark his fiftieth birthday by scoring for Farnborough. He must have consulted the Delphi Oracle. Around the fortieth minute he chased a ball from Peter Harvey into the box, harrying the last Inter defender in the way he does, going

all the way to put pressure on the Inter keeper. The latter was confused and partly impeded by his own defender before fluffing his intervention. George was left with a tap-in. It might have looked a simple matter from distance but it was vintage George, all hunger and desire and tireless running. The icing on his birthday cake was that his brother was there to see it happen. We were back on level terms.

The second half was even tougher. Matt Angelo puled off a couple of amazing saves, airborne, last-minute, finger-tip interventions that defied gravity. We had to defend many corners. Several players went down with knocks, at one point we had two players down at the same time. Still, we held on. I am not sure that we came very close to scoring ourselves in the second half. We had good possession moved the ball well but it was peripheral. We never really penetrated and when we did the Inter keeper (not bigger than our own) was there. A volley from Ian Lyons caught the eye.

On the hour, Patrice Mongelard and Phil Anthony made way for the return of Michael Hills and Waine Hetherington. Michael, in particular, was called upon at left-back to use his pace to thwart Inter more than once. Jay Hardy and Ian Shoebridge held firm in midfield and whenever the balance looked like it was tipping Inter's way our third lan – Ian Coles, in the wars today, was there.

In the end a draw was a fair result. It was a tough game, marshalled very well by Paul Parsons, from which both teams emerged with credit.

The repaired showers did their job. It was in there that I caught a glimpse of Simon Thomas' boot brush – an artefact which Jay Hardy applied elsewhere (don't ask – here is a clue, it begins with the same two letters).

Five of us made it back to the Farnborough Old Boys Guild club house looking great after renovation (the club house that is) for extensive analysis, and the care of barmaid Leanne (our new caterer). Colin Mant declared himself to be "tour-ready". He also defended his minimalist match reports on the grounds that "Pat watches the game, I don't". I was too hurt and (more to the point) hungry to argue.

Some of our Young Vets were there – including legend Paul Tanton (Farnborough's all-time top goal scorer with over four hundred goals for the club) who reported a 5-4 win (after being 4-0 down with thirty-five minutes left). Paul kindly offered to see if we could have their home pitch next week.

Man-of-the-Match – our guardian angel today, Matt Angelo, who got home at 7:30 this morning. At this rate we'll be sponsoring his nights out.

22 April 2018: Wellcome Super Vets (N, 2-2)

Wasteful Farnborough made to rue missed copper-bottomed chances by Wellcome

The sun was shining, the grass was very green despite having been cut only on Tuesday; both teams were on time, as was the referee. We have five more games before our European adventure at the end of May. The good news is that four of these games are at our home ground in Farnborough Village. As far as I could tell only Jay Hardy had used the wrong entrance to Norman Park today, the back entrance if you like. We were using Norman Park for the sixth and last time this season. I will resist the jest about re-naming ourselves Meryl's Boys or the Norman Park Vets. We were more like the Norman Wisdom Vets today – more on that later. Patrice Mongelard and Sinisa Gracanin put one goal net up, supervised by a coffee-drinking Mick O'Flynn, whilst Waine Hetherington and Ian Shoebridge did the other net.

Chris Jablonski was a late addition to the squad thanks to Phil Anthony, to play in goal, our 8th keeper, and 48th player, to be used this season. I think all would agree that Chris had a fine game and made some particular eye-catching double saves. Our opponents seemed to have a makeshift keeper but in the end because of the ineptitude of our finishing he went home with a smile.

Our opponents today had been reinforced by a transfusion of players from another team, in particular by a Catford Wanderers striker who reminded me that he scored four goals against us four weeks ago on 25 March. That of course was a dark day for many reasons but at least the sun did not shine on said striker today. For our part, we were welcoming back Kypros Michael, playing his first game since 18 February. Since then, he has become a manager himself, and although he will not say so I fear he is a changed man, the experience has put weight on him, on his shoulders.

Starting XI:

Chris Jablonski
Phil Anthony, Ian Coles, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard
Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Michael Hills, Simon Thomas
Waine Hetherington, Kypros Michael

Substitutes: Peter Harvey, Mick O'Flynn, Ian Shoebridge

Supporter: Tony Harvey

Referee: Jim St John (who donated his fee to the club for the second time this season)

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

We had the better of the early exchanges. The game was barely ten minutes old when Waine Hetherington found himself unmarked at the far post at the end of a teasing cross from Michael Hills but Waine's aim would have been a disappointment to him. Five minutes later Kypros Michael hit the angle of crossbar and post with a twenty-yard free kick.

At the other end as the half progressed Wellcome started to make more of a fist of it. In fact, Chris Jablonski was like Jan Tomaszewski for a couple of moments pulling off a double save. We were put under pressure from a succession of corners where we had to be wary of a tall rangy handful of a striker that Wellcome introduced into the game midway through the half. Not long after, we took the lead from a free-kick by Michael Hills. We debated long and hard about this one and the conclusion was that without the intervention of the Wellcome keeper the ball

would not have ended in the net. Colin Mant made the fanciful suggestion that his presence in the box had somehow distracted the keeper and that therefore he had a valid, though tenuous, association with the goal. Perhaps the Wellcome keeper had been distracted by a middle-aged woman in a bright yellow dress and a vivid green hat admiring the Norman Park shrubbery in the distance. We'll never know.

On the half hour Patrice Mongelard, Simon Thomas and Kypros Michael came off for Mick O'Flynn, Ian Shoebridge and Peter Harvey. The score was unchanged to half-time.

The second half was packed with goalmouth incidents – three goals, and at least ten guilt-edged misses (most of them ours). I counted several one-on-ones involving Kypros Michael and Peter Harvey. Kypros had returned for the last half hour along with Patrice Mongelard and Simon Thomas, to replace Phil Anthony, Michael Hills and Waine Hetherington. Kypros certainly adds to the menace we pose upfront, albeit unfulfilled. Our 2017 European Golden Boot will have to sharpen up for Lille at the end of May.

We just could not finish. When we did, the goal we scored was ruled off-side. The Wellcome linesman with a particular form of semaphore Tourette's saw the forward pass from Peter Harvey but not that Kypros had come from behind his marker to climax the move. We had other moments of regret. Kypros Michael failed to square the ball for Peter in an unmarked position with a clear sight of goal from six yards out. I am almost sure that if roles were reversed Peter would have done exactly the same. Jay Hardy lashed the ball over the bar from thirty yards out with the Wellcome keeper behind him and a gaping goal in front. Peter Harvey was clattered from behind by the last defender as he advanced on goal.

With ten minutes left, we edged ahead again. A corner swung in by Peter Harvey was headed powerfully past his own keeper by a Wellcome player. Peter entertained the idea, Harry Kane-like, that his corner was swinging in and the parallel course to the goal line was an optical illusion but eventually he had to accept the verdict of the dubious goal committee. Arguably, Michael Hills had more of a claim but I do not recall him making a fuss. Perhaps Michael is less intense about these things but still two OGs in the same game for us tell their own story. Even after that, we had chances to put the result of the game well beyond doubt. Yes, you have guessed it, Kypros again, twice. In a cruel twist of fate, the football Gods decided that we did not deserve to win this game. In the dying minute, we failed to hold on to the ball in midfield – it was recycled quickly to the edge of our box where a Wellcome player advanced, twisted and turned to make room for a shot. With Farnborough bodies strewn over the place the self-styled 'toe punt king' earned a point, snatching a draw from the jaws of defeat, with virtually the last kick of the game.

This was a physical though not dirty game. There seemed to be a lot of injuries, or maybe it was just players taking a breather in the heat. We had a water break in the first-half and ran out of water early in the second half.

OG now has 6 goals for us – this is as many as Kypros Michael has scored in 8 games, though it would be understandable if, after today's showing, you were to ask, with great vehemence, how on earth Kypros has managed to score six goals for us this season. They say class is permanent, form temporary.

Six of us made it back to the Farnborough clubhouse where Coles Catering Solutions produced some sustenance for the famished, which not even Jay Hardy's mincing in 'Village People' micro-

shorts could put us off. Jay declared a life's ambition to "get a tan like Pat's" though, of course, I have the advantage of having been born with one, a tan that is.

Simon Thomas made a great suggestion for a Mick Gearing Trophy for the Senior Vets. Watch this space.

Man-of-the-Match – Ian Coles, who had a particularly difficult opponent to mark today, just like every week really.

29 April 2018: Riverside Wanderers Vets (H, 3-5)

Riverside win cold tandoori derby

This game was a battle between two teams sponsored by curry houses. The Palace of India in Farningham was up against the Village Cuisine in Farnborough. On a day fully devoid of heat this irony was not lost on curry lovers. A week is a long time anywhere but in Farnborough today it felt like there was a whole one and a half season's difference between two Sundays. Last week it was 27 degrees C today it was 7 degrees. The cold overcast day was not the greatest difficulty we had to face today - our opponents were. There was also some mild disappointment that the dance group using the club house this morning was not Hot Gossip. Not even Phil Anthony could wring another joke out of using the back entrance into the club house. I hope he is not saving them for the Tour. Even greater disappointment was to follow on the pitch.

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Phil Anthony, Ian Coles, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Michael Hills, Simon Thomas

Waine Hetherington, George Kleanthous

Substitutes: Peter Harvey, Mick O'Flynn, Ian Shoebridge, Obi Ugwumba

Supporters: Tony Harvey, two of Obi's fans including nephew Orji.

Referee: Paul Parsons

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

We started well enough. Both teams moved the ball competently without creating any scoring opportunities. It was a bit of a shock when Riverside scored two quick goals after ten and fifteen minutes approximately. Their first was a well-struck shot that kept low and went in off the base of the post after a clearance by Colin Mant was sliced to an unmarked Riverside midfielder loitering with intent outside our box. The second saw Matt Angelo chipped from twenty yards out.

We weathered the storm and just before the half hour George Kleanthous pulled a goal back with a smart finish after latching on to a through ball from Sinisa Gracanin which drew the Riverside keeper off his line. We maintained momentum even with the changes we made on the half hour with the introduction of Mick O'Flynn, Peter Harvey, Ian Shoebridge and Obi Ugwumba – in lieu of Phil Anthony, Waine Hetherington, Simon Thomas and Sinisa Gracanin. Despite the tonic of our goal, we fell further behind minutes before half-time after we failed to clear convincingly from a Riverside corner. We streamed out of our box like headless chickens neglecting to go out to a Riverside player wide on the right who lifted the ball to the far post where two Riverside players lurked. One of them – a new bearded face, and scorer of a very good hat-trick today (with left foot, head and right foot) looped a header from an impossible angle over Matt Angelo who for once seemed to have lost his angel wings.

The feeling at half-time was that we were back in the game with a new three-at-the-back formation which gave us more of a presence in midfield. It was our turn to surprise Riverside with two goals in the early stages of the second half. First Peter Harvey put Jay Hardy through after a move involving five or six successive passes and Jay lashed a half-volley into the top corner. Five minutes later, a vicious in-swinging low corner from Peter Harvey arrowed into the centre of the six-yard box before being diverted into the net off a Riverside player. It was a crowd

scene. Colin Mant claimed to have been actively involved in some capacity but I am finding hard to give credence to his delusion. Nobody has a better claim to this assist than Peter Harvey. All the players on the pitch will have felt that the game had reached a tipping point and as they say the next goal was going to be all important. Before then though we made final changes with four players – Patrice Mongelard, Jay Hardy, George Kleanthous and Michael Hills making way for the return of Phil Anthony, Sinisa Gracanin, Simon Thomas and Wayne Hetherington. There is no point debating whether that added or subtracted to the team, out of respect to all our players. We pressed forward looking for a winning goal – had some half chances but in the end paid the price for defensive lapses. With ten minutes left Riverside restored their lead when the bearded wonder picked his way through lame tackles on the edge of, and inside, our box before planting the ball inside the far post.

Worse followed – with five minutes left Mick O’Flynn was entrusted with the responsibility of chasing a ball out of our box in a pseudo right-back position. The medication he must be taking induced the euphoric but delusional feeling that he was on Copacabana beach, surrounded by several ladies’ beach volley-ball teams and that this was the time and place to attempt some Samba soccer stepover, with a Ronaldinho impression. Instead, we had sombre football as Mick was robbed and, in a flash, Matt Angelo was lobbed for a third time. And that was it, for the second week running, Mick finished the game with a very rueful shake of the head after giving late comfort to the opposition following an infelicitous moment in a dangerous area.

There was a lot of analysis to go through in the bar, and not a few grumbles about formations, substitutions etc, the usual stuff from the usual suspects. The fact is we were beaten by a better team that worked harder and had more tactical nous. Next week’s game, against our Young Vets, will not be a barrel of laughs either. The management have already had suggestions – Jay Hardy wants to play in the hole next week. Colin Mant has a dead leg but I am not sure that has been a problem in the past.

There was even more food to go through – our new caterer, barmaid Leanne, spoilt us, and we could not finish it all despite solid support from a group of Riverside players, and the presence of new buffet Black Hole Michael Hills. Cheese and pickle, chicken and lettuce, tuna and cucumber sandwiches; pizzas, garlic bread, cocktail sausages, sausage rolls, hot dogs, chicken wings, chicken nuggets, potato wedges kept tumbling out of the kitchen. I am not sure I have remembered it all – I must be getting old.

Man-of-the-Match – the voting threw up some unexpected results today, so much so that one player refused to take part in a farce. Nine players somehow got votes with Sinisa Gracanin and Michael Hills leading the pack in equal measure with three votes each.

6 May 2018: FOBG Young Vets (H, 3-3)

Farnborough wins as family affair shows plenty of life in the old dogs

This annual match is a great family occasion for the vibrant Vets scene at Farnborough to showcase its breadth, depth and quality. Occasionally, the weather puts on a show too as it did today as the mercury hovered around the 25-degree C mark under cloudless skies. I like to think of this game as one where we give our younger siblings a glimpse of their future, and they give us one of our past. Both teams were missing players for various reasons – defenders for us, forwards for the youngsters but between us we mustered twenty-seven players.

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Colin Brazier, Mark Friend, Franco Petrozzi, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Ian Shoebridge, Simon Thomas

George Kleanthous, Kypros Michael

Substitutes: Peter Harvey, Waine Hetherington, Mick O'Flynn, Danny Mullins

Supporters: Steve Blanchard, Mark Harrington, Tony Harvey, Dean Murphy, Danny Saines, Jim St John and many others – a big crowd.

Referee: Paul Parsons who kindly waived his fee for this club game

Director of Football: Mick(alinho) O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

It would be fair to say we made the better start. Kypros Michael and George Kleanthous, our Hellenic pairing, caught the eye early doors. Ten minutes in Simon Thomas arrowed a cross field ball behind the Vets defence for Kypros Michael to move on to – despite the muscular attentions of Frank Pearce. Kyp won the 50:50 against the keeper before volleying the ball into the net from a tight angle. I have seen Kyp miss many of those before but today there was a hunger and sharpness about him despite his double teapot stance, that bodes well for the tour (I look forward to him ordering the quiche in Lille). Ten minutes later the same combination produced a delight – Kypros bamboozled his marker and from almost the corner flag spot lifted a peach of a cross to the far post where Simon Thomas steaming in volleyed the ball into the top corner from a yard out. It was crisp, refreshing, zesty like a glass of chilled Colombard Chardonnay on a hot summer's day. The Youngsters linesman's flag stayed down throughout both episodes. It was, of course, too soon to be popping corks.

Our youngsters are a resilient lot and sooner or later their big units would we knew come into it, despite the strong showing from our new central defenders – Franco Petrozzi and Mark Friend, and the diligence of our midfield enforcers Jay Hardy and Sinisa Gracanin. So, it proved just before the half hour when Dean Wyatt (Rhino to his friends and enemies) intercepted a pass and broke through showing good feet for a big man to tuck the ball away. The half hour bell had tolled for Patrice Mongelard, Kypros Michael, Mark Friend and Ian Shoebridge as Mick O'Flynn, Peter Harvey, Danny Mullins and Waine Hetherington joined the fray. It would also be fair to say that we had a bit of a wobble then and by the time the half-time whistle went we were trailing 3-2 as Dean Wyatt and Simon Davies had scored to edge the youngsters ahead. I would not say they were scrappy goals – they were timely physical moments of power.

We had managed to scrape together some spare water bottles (and some balls) as our usual supplier was absent. We could not match the iced peach water from LIDL that the youngsters enjoyed during the break – a classy caring touch from manager Mark Harrington, which you are

not going to get from the O'Flynn/Mongelard dictatorship. You try telling young people that this sort of thing is luxury and they won't believe you.

Luckily for us, the youngsters did not quite pick up from where they left. Matt Ellis thought he had extended their lead early in the second period but that was after Dave Salako had been bundled to the ground. Referee Paul Parsons, excellent today, rightly ruled this out and there was no protest from our opponents. In the main the game was played in excellent spirit, notwithstanding Frank Pearce's occasional over-exuberance and lack of finesse. As the second half unfolded, there was a great tussle between our Danny Mullins and the youngsters' Jon Gasson – two giants, giving no quarter. Mullins had played 90 minutes yesterday, and been up half the night with baby Ethan but it barely showed.

Franco Petrozzi must have wished he had a couple more inches to play with as he nearly got to the ball ahead of the goalkeeper from a Peter Harvey corner. The tide, we felt, was on the turn. With half an hour to go Colin Brazier, George Kleanthous, Franco Petrozzi and Simon Thomas made way for the return of Patrice Mongelard, Kypros Michael, Mark Friend and Ian Shoebridge. The third period of the game was good for us – several corners, Kypros up to his old tricks, Peter Harvey more than a handful under his appreciative dad Tony's eye. Tony's eye will have moistened as his boy picked up a loose ball just inside the Youngsters' box before blasting it through a crowd scene high into the net. The excellent Gary Rosslee was beaten. Composure, class and not a little feeling went into this exultant moment from Peter, our saviour today.

Could we have gone on to win the game? I'd like to think so but I am not exactly neutral. The facts though are that we had a worldie of a save from Gary Rosslee to tip a top corner-bound shot round the post. Jon Gasson made two goal-saving clearances on the line, one from a vicious snarling free-kick by Peter Harvey. At the other end Tom Naughton could have punished us and one very good "on the money" corner from Paul Tanton was wasted. In the end both teams could not be separated. A fair result. I nearly forgot – in the final five minutes there was another Mick O'Flynn moment, this time positive, as he hit a shot from twenty-five yards (I think it was a shot) that drew gasps as it swerved not far from the post. Had that gone in we would have had a hundred years of having to hear about it. Mick says it was forty-five yards – always exaggerates his measurements.

The mood in the bar was very good – aided by copious supplies of food from Leanne. Peter Harvey – our Goodwill Ambassador for our forthcoming tour of Lille, would not allow himself to be unsettled by banter from his former team mates (who of course have forgotten all the goals he used to score for them). We watched Jay Hardy's desperate efforts to get a tan as good as Pat's – but all he did was work up a thirst. My tan, incidentally, was on full view courtesy of a moment of perversion from Mick O'Flynn who used his phone in the showers. The photos went on the Group WhatsApp and my phone has not stopped pinging since. Mrs M has taken a very dim view of such puerile behaviour.

I am writing this report having had the benefit of reading about the game first – confused? By this I mean that I saw Mark Harrington's report. He is the only person I know that is able to write match reports quicker than I can. I hope he continues to write them even though I see a valedictory note in his report. It was not only the Youngsters' last game of the season today but Mark is stepping down as Manager. No such luck for the Seniors – not only do we have three more games, two Sundays and a Wednesday (I must stress the latter it seems) before our three games-in-three-days Tour of Lille, but the O'Flynn/Mongelard dictatorship have won a secret ballot by 100% to carry on next season.

Man-of-the-Match – Sinisa Gracanin who played in two positions seamlessly, and edged the voting over six others in a fine all round team performance.

13 May 2018: Ashburnham Wanderers Vets (H, 4-2)

Farnborough win after giving hope to opponents

The weather was not as glorious as last week but it stayed dry for our last Sunday home game this season. Our opponents today, Ashburnham Wanderers, had given us a tough game at their place on 29 October which had left two of our players with broken digits in a narrow 3-2 away win, quite by accident (the hurty digits that is not the result). Hopes had been raised overnight that Mick O'Flynn might not be well enough to play. Any disappointment was swept aside by the sight of former player Paul Scotter who had come to watch the game. Paul promised not to cause any crowd trouble, under the watchful eye of Mrs S.

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Phil Anthony, Ian Coles, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Ian Shoebridge, Simon Thomas

Waine Hetherington, George Kleanthous

Substitutes: Mark Friend, Peter Harvey, Michael Hills, Mick O'Flynn, Danny Mullins

Supporters: Anne and Paul Scotter

Referee: Paul "Play On" Parsons

Director of Football: Mick(alinho) O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

After the longer than usual warm-up, as we waited for the Ashburnham keeper to arrive, referee Paul Parsons got us under way after he put on a lime green bib to accommodate the black strip of our opponents. Paul's interactive retro refereeing, delivered with Brian Blessed's voice, has been much appreciated – this was his thirteenth assignment with us this season, and there is one more to come in mid-week, on Thursday.

We wanted to start with the same intensity and purpose as last Sunday but I am not sure we quite managed it. It was with the run of play that we took the lead about ten minutes into the game. George Kleanthous had turned his marker and created space for a cross which was diverted past the Ashburnham keeper by one of his own players who shinned an attempted clearance. Harry Kane might have claimed a similar goal but George was too honest to do so and OG became our third highest goal scorer this season. There was an element of good fortune to it but it did not feel undeserved.

Ashburnham reacted well to going behind and nearly got back in the game after Matt Angelo spilled a shot behind him only to be rescued by Ian Coles with a goal-line clearance facing the back of the net. This was not the first frisson caused by Matt today, more on that later. We got more luck when Ashburnham pulled their most dangerous player – a bearded wonder on the wing, back into the heart of their defence. That stopped them scoring but it stopped us too.

The half-hour changes were made – with Patrice Mongelard, Sinisa Gracanin, George Kleanthous, Colin Mant and Simon Thomas making way for Mark Friend, Peter Harvey, Michael Hills, Mick O'Flynn and Danny Mullins. Ashburnham will have cast envious eyes at such riches – it is fair to say that their squad was a little threadbare. Ten minutes later we doubled our lead after Peter Harvey had left his marker for dead on the left wing and lifted an exquisite cross to the far post where our smallest player Jay Hardy leapt like the proverbial salmon to power the

ball home from a yard out. The 2-0 score felt right at half-time, even if there was a nagging feeling that we had not quite shaken off our opponents.

That feeling grew early in the second half when Mick O'Flynn played one of his legendary back passes (with blue flashing lights) to Matt Angelo as an Ashburnham forward bore down on Matt. Matt's attempted clearance was 75% fresh air and 25% back spin as he managed to loft the ball behind him but was able to scramble back to paw the ball out. To say there is never a dull moment with Matt would be an understatement. And I am not telling you what goes on off the pitch. You do not have to be mad to play in goal for the Farnborough Senior Vets but it undoubtedly helps.

Anyway – cometh the hour and we make the final five changes with Phil Anthony, Ian Coles, Jay Hardy, Waine Hetherington and Ian Shoebridge making way for the five who went off on the half hour. Soon after we had a wobble – the Ashburnham bearded wonder was back in their attack and he cut in from the left and unleashed an unstoppable thirty yarder into the top corner. I was impelled to shake his hand. Ten minutes later, Ashburnham punished us again this time from a sweet left-footed free-kick that sailed over Matt Angelo into the other corner. By our own standards this was a remarkable turn-around.

With a quarter of an hour left it was not entirely clear who would claim maximum points. We were creating chances but not taking them. We then had a moment which commentators describe as being “straight off the training ground”. We won a free-kick just outside the Ashburnham box. Peter Harvey stood over the ball, wrote a telegram saying he would slip the ball to his left to George Kleanthous in splendid isolation, and from there George lifted the ball to the far post where Simon Thomas applied his quiff to it and we were back in the lead. And some people still contend that Simon's acting contract has a clause which forbids him from heading the ball. There is always radio work I suppose. That was not the end of the excitement. The last five minutes or so were tetchy. Peter Harvey had latched on to a ball over the top, drawn the keeper off his line before lifting the ball into an empty net. The goal was given but that did not prevent a protracted debate between Peter and the Ashburnham left-back and others, about the off-side rule, and who was where when the ball was kicked, and when it bounced, and when it came off an Ashburnham head before reaching Peter. I do not think things were about to get out of hand even when an Ashburnham player said to Peter “You are worse than my wife” – presumably meaning that Peter would not shut up in an argument. A bit tough on the wife I thought.

And that is how it ended at 4-2 to us, and I am pleased to say there was ill-feeling at the end. After all the Ashburnham manager and Mick O'Flynn are former school mates even if he refused our offer to take Mick off our hands next season. Indeed, it was good to see many Ashburnham players and supporters in the bar enjoying our hospitality. It looked they were giving out some of their team awards. I could not see the player who had mentioned his wife to Peter Harvey. Presumably he was under orders to rush back.

The new catering arrangements continue to be a success with crusty rolls and mini meat pasties making a welcome appearance. However, we were ushered out of the club at 14:30 but thankfully the “Woodman” public house next door was open to give refuge to six Farnborough wanderers (where I had the pleasure of watching two Liverpool goals go in). Incidentally, this deprived at least one of my team mates of a source of fun. There is a beer for the first person, who was not there obviously, who correctly identifies the other five of the Woodman Six (excluding me).

I should mention that some of the match subs collected today will be going towards a charity event for the benefit of a former Avery Hill Vets player, Sylvester, who has lost part of his limbs following a blood disorder.

Man-of-the-Match – Simon Thomas, owner of the finest quiff in Kent, in Farnborough at least, who tipped the balance when it mattered most.

17 May 2018: Baltic Vets (H, 3-3)

Farnborough teamwork shines through on Vic Farrow Cup Day

We were not playing for the Vic Farrow Cup today. We were playing Baltic Vets in our first and last evening game of a season which saw too many games lost to the weather. There were two games at the club – our game on the top pitch, at 6:30, using the smaller changing rooms (one of which had to be cleared for use) and the Vic Farrow Cup Final between Meridian Sports (2) and Crayford Arrows Red (1), on the big pitch, at 7:00, using the two biggest changing rooms. It was an honour to host this final, and to be associated with this Cup which was established a couple of years ago by the Bromley and South London Football League to honour the late Vic Farrow. I am not sure how many of the big crowd today of around seventy-five would have known who Vic Farrow was. But the Farnborough family certainly do. Farnborough is Vic's spiritual home. He rests a few football pitches away in St Giles the Abbot churchyard in Farnborough. He left us on April 6th 2013, after an association of five decades with our club as a player and including as club secretary for thirty-four years.

There were some logistics to sort out and I am glad to say that the players responded very well. Wayne Hetherington, Jay Hardy and Colin Mant were putting the nets up before most of the squad turned up. But the shift of the day belonged to club Chairman Steve Viner, more on that later. It was not until 6:00 that we could access the fourth changing room to remove all the clubhouse chairs and tables but many hands made light of the task. The opposition had turned up in good time and were waiting for us on the top pitch in very good light for the time of year. The Baltic Manager had tipped me off that he had had to draft a couple of young players to make the numbers up. As usually happens, such extras tend to be rather good players and one sinuous midfielder and a robust centre half certainly caught the eye.

Starting XI:

Rob Faulkner

Colin Brazier, Ian Coles, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Jay Hardy, Michael Hills, Danny Mullins, Simon Thomas

Wayne Hetherington, George Kleanthous

Substitutes: Steve Blanchard, Peter Harvey, Ian Shoebridge

Supporters: Louie (I am only here for the pizzas) Dwight-Thomas, Mick O'Flynn, Richard Mitchell, Steve Viner and many others who kept an eye on both games

Referee: Paul "Play On" Parsons who waived his match fee again, this time on the grounds that the game was on the way home

Director of Football: Mick(alinho) O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Both teams started well with plenty of passing. The first clear scoring opportunity fell our way after Danny Mullins played Simon Thomas in on goal for a one-on-one with the Baltic keeper. However, the ball was on Simon's left foot, the contact was sub-optimal and the opportunity was missed. Ten minutes in, though we got our reward from a corner. Colin Mant had gone up to cause chaos and confusion in the Baltic box and found himself with an opportunity to shoot on goal after the ball found its way to him six yards out. The Baltic keeper saved the initial shot but the ball fell to Jay Hardy who guided it into an empty net. Colin Brazier later offered the view that had Jay Hardy not been there he, Colin, would have scored as he was the next player nearest to the ball. We had a good spell then though without necessarily threatening to score again. Rob Faulkner in our goal was comfortable and alert and his long kicks were proving quite an

asset. There was though a lot of quality in the Baltic ranks – a pass out of our defence was intercepted a little against the run of play, an intelligent through pass bisected our defence and a good low finish brought Baltic level.

On the half hour George Kleanthous, Michael Hills and Colin Brazier made way for Peter Harvey, Ian Shoebridge and Steve Blanchard. Steve was playing his first game in weeks after hamstringing trouble and was not sure if he would last the pace. He did and played with his usual muscularity and at one point nearly took out some studs on my moulded boots. Talking of studs, Jay Hardy took a ball in the unmentionables in the centre circle and it took him a while to regain his composure and re-arrange himself. There was nothing to separate the teams at half-time.

Mick O'Flynn's half-time master class about concentrating, not conceding early, being compact, tucking in etc. went out of the window within five minutes of the re-start. We failed to react to a quick throw-in (pleading in vain for a foul throw), misjudged the flight of the incoming cross, were outnumbered and out of position at the back and an unmarked Baltic player finished emphatically from close range. We could have buckled then but we did not. Just before the hour we were on level terms after a splendid piece of individual flair and perseverance from Peter Harvey. He chased down a defender, robbed him in a dangerous area and despite a tight angle managed to squeeze the ball home high into the net.

Waine Hetherington, Patrice Mongelard and Steve Blanchard made way on the hour for the return of Michael Hills, Colin Brazier and George Kleanthous. The pairing of George and Peter up front gave us an edge and a menace that brought us sustained dominance. Peter Harvey hit the same post twice in ten minutes, we forced several corners and at that point Farnborough looked the most likely team to score. There was one sublime moment when the indefatigable George Kleanthous slipped through on the left before lifting a cross to the far post. Simon Thomas entered the stage, and for Louie Dwight-Thomas' benefit, attacked the ball in a very butch manner, to produce an exquisite first-time volley that flew twelve inches over the bar. If we had an award for the goal that would have been goal-of-the-season if it had gone in, that would have been it.

My former Defra colleague Richard Mitchell was watching the game with me by that time, and he agreed with my assessment that Farnborough had the upper hand. However, Richard is a Crystal Palace fan and as Baltic play in Palace colours he had added that a Farnborough mistake could let Baltic in. And so, it came to pass as with barely ten minutes left, we lost possession of the ball on the wing. An incisive pass was delivered and another smart finish much like the Baltic first goal delivered, in fact the same player could have been involved, and Baltic could almost grasp victory. There was one final twist as experience got the better of youth. Peter Harvey chased a ball into the box, indeed he was moving away from the goal, with the 18-year old Baltic centre-half hot on his heels, too hot in fact as he deployed his tackle prematurely from behind. The award of a penalty was uncontested and Peter Harvey did the rest. That was almost the last kick of the game. 3-3 was a fair result in the end for a most enjoyable game played in very good spirit.

The pizzas from Ollie's in Farnborough High St arrived on time at 8:30, an assortment of ten 15-inch pizzas, and five smaller boxes of garlic bread. Louie Dwight-Thomas acted as look-out and helped bring them in. I think they went down well with both teams. The clubhouse was busy and got even more so when the Vic Farrow Cup Final ended. There was a sudden rush to the bar where barmaid Leanne was busy pulling jugs and Jay Hardy, Steve Blanchard and Jordan Glen were quickly on hand to help. The place seemed to empty equally quickly. In the end

officials from the Bromley and South London Football League and the usual suspects from the Senior Vets were left. We put the furniture away before we left and club Chairman Steve Viner was still at it, after some five hours at the club. You will not find many club Chairmen stacking chairs and hoovering at half past ten at night. Vic Farrow could be rightly proud of the way things were done. Four of us adjourned to the Woodman next door. The place was packed and got even more congested when Meridien Sports players and entourage arrived. A fifth Senior Vet, Steve Blanchard arrived too, but too late and as Ian Coles reported the landlady would not let him in because she had already called last orders. I do not think Ian meant any innuendo. I don't myself, as I have promised Mrs M that I will ease up on innuendo and eat less pizza. Progress is slow though.

Man-of-the-Match – Peter Harvey, by a long chalk, who gave an 18-year-old centre half something to think about, and put some clear blue water between himself and George Kleanthous in the sizzling race for the golden boot.

20 May 2018: Bird in Hand Vets (A, 2-8)

A game too far as Farnborough taught a lesson at University ground

This will not take long. Sometimes less is more. The venue was one of the loveliest we have experienced in many a season – the Queen Mary University Ground, Perry Street, Chislehurst BR7 6HA. The immaculate pitches, mown to perfection looked resplendent in the morning sunshine. Our opponents were an unknown quantity although we knew three or four of their players who have turned out for us this season, including their manager Paul Zanelli (who is coming on tour with us next weekend). In a way, we were sounding out potential opponents for next season. I look forward to our Young Vets playing them.

In retrospect it might have been sensible not to play on Thursday 16th. Today was our 31st game of a long season marred by nine cancellations, and a bit of rest ahead of our three-matches-in-three days tour to Lille next weekend might have been wise. But we are where we are and we were certainly put in our place today.

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Phil Anthony, Ian Lyons, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Jay Hardy, Michael Hills, Sinisa Gracanin, Simon Thomas

Waine Hetherington, George Kleanthous

Substitutes: Steve Blanchard, Peter Harvey, Franco Petrozzi, Ian Shoebridge

Supporters: Mick O'Flynn, Steve Hills, Sarah Hills, James and little Max

Director of Football: Mick(alinho) O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

We were 3-0 down after 15 minutes, undone by a combination of pace, good passing and a bit of bad luck. Our back five had a combined age of 278 and it showed. The pitch seemed enormous and we struggled to cover the ground, we were outnumbered in midfield and it was difficult to counter the incursions at pace into our box. After the initial shock of playing against intelligent footballers with young legs and good organisation we stemmed the bleeding so to speak. The four substitutes on the half hour gave us a more solid and competitive edge. We fashioned a few half chances but never really made the most of them. 3-0 did not feel harsh at half-time.

A big unit with pace and hunger appeared for Bird in the Hand at half-time and he quickly made his mark scoring two or three goals in no time as he muscled and hustled his way into our box. It turned out he was two years shy of his fortieth birthday. And as if they needed help scoring goals, we duly obliged. Michael Hills was unfortunate in driving a goal line clearance against Dave Salako's back into our net. Things looked bleak at 8-0, and the scoreline felt harsh. Yet somehow you could say we won the last quarter of an hour as we scored the last two goals. By then we had had the misfortune of losing Jay Hardy to what looked like a broken hand. Steve Blanchard's hamstring had tightened up and we barely had enough players to finish the game. Players who had gone off were pressed back into service. David Salako pulled off a couple of great saves to keep the score to single figures.

Our opponents had eased up a bit and brought on some of their older players but the damage had been done in two devastating pulses of three goals and they could bask in the sun, and in the glory of a job well done, against a team which whilst not quite a gerontocracy might have

wished the game was played two decades earlier (for us at least). To their credit they did not rub our noses in it and the game was played in very good spirit.

Peter Harvey and George Kleanthous kept going. George earned an undisputed penalty which he was allowed to convert, and five minutes later he notched his second after an unselfish assist from Peter. The scoring completed an exciting race for the golden boot, won by the slimmest of margins by Peter Harvey's seventeen goals to George's sixteen. George now faces the prospect of icing and resting his groin for five days before our tour. At the time of writing, I have no information on Jay Hardy's injury and how serious it is. We wish him well and a speedy recovery. He needs his hands.

The quality of the facilities extended to the showers and to the upstairs bar with a panoramic view of the grounds bathed in sunshine. Several Vets teams were present. Sausages, hot dog rolls and caramelised onions appeared. Taking one for the team, I had the last sausage. Colin Mant could not believe how long it took me to claim the item. The mental struggle was immense, given my promise to Mrs M to moderate my intake. There was a further test (which I passed) when another Vets team (Charlton Park Rangers) invited us to finish their jug.

This was not the best way to end a season, ahead of our forthcoming tour. Our figures read P31, W11, D7, L13, GF 73, GA 89. We used 48 players in total. There is considerable room for improvement.

Man-of-the-Match – Sinisa Gracanin, just edging out George Kleanthous on a very tough day in the office.

Extra Report

23 December 2017: Farnborough Old Boys Guild Christmas Club Game

Farnborough "Friend - ly" delivers thirteen goals of Christmas

There could have been more players, there could have been more spectators but I do not think anyone could complain about the number of goals, or the game, as a spectacle. There were some Christmas crackers in the Farnborough stocking. The two teams were billed as Red/Yellow versus Blue/Green, with respective managers in Mick O'Flynn and Nick Pitt. I could not help noticing that the Blue/Green shirts were short-sleeved but as the weather was not exactly Pearl Harbour it did not matter. The two teams were:

Red/Yellow (6)

Alex Barnes	1 st XI
Lee Gibbs	Sunday Reserves
Gary Harrigan	3 rd XI
Peter Harvey	Senior Vets
Waine Hetherington	Senior Vets
George Jones	Guest
Stefan Jones	3 rd XI
Luke Johnson	Sunday Reserves
Joe O'Flynn	Guest
Liam O'Flynn	Guest
Mick O'Flynn	Senior Vets

Blue/Green (7)

Zeph Clarke	3 rd XI
Eddie Figg	4 th XI
Lee Friend	Sunday Reserves
Jordan Glen	Club Fixer
Jay Hardy	Senior Vets
Patrice Mongelard	Senior Vets
Charlie Pitt	Saturday Reserves
Nick Pitt	Saturday Reserves
Jamie Spiteri	1 st XI
Phil Wallis	Saturday Reserves
Paul Zanelli	Senior Vets

Referee: Ian Couchman (also Club President, Barman, Oven Operative)

Supporters: Four men and an Old English sheepdog. Of the four I can identify three – Barnes Sr. (Alex's dad and Dulux dog owner), Roger Figg (Eddie's dad), Gary Willison (club benefactor).

Team tactics were simple as there were no substitutes available. In fact, Eddie Figg had to wait in the dugout until George Jones turned up midway through the second half so that we could even the sides up. This being Farnborough Old Boys Guild it took two attempts to get the right dressing room key to George. In fact, for the Blue/Green team the tactics were even simpler – get the ball to Lee Friend.

I am not familiar with many of the players so I cannot go into the same detail as usual with this report. We took a 2-0 goal lead with goals from Lee Friend and Jamie Spiteri – the first a crisp shot that swerved and dipped after Lee had made room twenty yards out, the second was snaffled by Jamie after Peter Harvey could not hold on to a Lee Friend zinger. Amazingly, like Arsenal yesterday, the Reds/Yellow came back to lead with quick goals from Joe O'Flynn, Gary Harrigan and Luke Johnson. As there were no linesman, we cannot debate whether any of these goals were off-side, or any of the other goals scored today. Suffice it to say that referee Ian Couchman let the game flow with a tantric style (I think there is an oxymoron here) that tantric grand master Micky Gearing would have been proud of. Talking of oxymoron at one point towards the end of the half Luke Johnson was heard to say "I am not a genius, but, I think this three-at-the-back system is not working" I detected a pause after genius, but I cannot be sure – my hearing is not what it used to be so Mrs M tells me, I think. By then, the Blue/Green had restored their lead including with a rasping shot from Charlie Pitt that hit the underside of the bar on its way in. The scores would have been bigger without the saves from the two keepers – Peter

Harvey and Jordan Glen. Towards the end of the first-half Dulux dog had had enough even though it was not exactly like watching paint dry. It re-appeared towards the end though.

The half-time oranges I had provided for both teams were barely touched – unlike the food which came from Shoebridge Catering Solutions (more on that later). It took a while before the goals came in the second half. Stefan Jones produced a crisp finish into the bottom corner after Gary Harrigan had (surprisingly I am told) squared the ball across the box to bring the scores level. I do not think that the players would have minded parity. However, Lee Friend had other ideas. His spring, speed, balance, ability to create space and eye for goal were the difference between the teams today. The Blue/Green restored and extended their lead with two trademark finishes from a rampant Lee Friend. Later he set up Nick Pitt for his goal. Jay Hardy too thought he had scored after a crowd scene from one of the few corners that Charlie Pitt got right but Peter Harvey had been interfered with.

Both teams changed their keepers soon after the hour – Peter Harvey was replaced by Waine Hetherington in goal for the Yellow/Red team whilst Jordan Glen went up front with Charlie Pitt going between the sticks for the Blue/Green team. We were not far from an acrobatic finish from Jordan Glen (now that would have been something to describe for your match reporter). Instead, I must mention, as I was specifically reminded, the assist from Mick O'Flynn for the last goal scored by the Red/Yellow team. Mick had found himself in our box, don't ask me how, charmed a ball down (that is a combination of chest and arm) and would have missed the ensuing scoring opportunity (I suspect) but Stefan Jones was on hand (see what I did there) to snaffle the opportunity. This ended what Luke Johnson declared to be the longest half of football he had played (this is what usually happens with a tantric referee). I'll be honest with you I cannot remember all the goals but it was a good game to be involved in - from a personal point of view it was Mongelard 7 - O'Flynn 6.

Club records will show that the scorers today were:

Blue/Green – Lee Friend (4), Charlie Pitt, Nick Pitt, Jamie Spiteri

Yellow/Red – Joe O'Flynn, Gary Harrigan, Luke Johnson, Stefan Jones (2) (I know it does not add up)

Gary Harrigan will want the goal to count as another notch in his quest to knock Paul Tanton off his 400+ goal all time club top scorer perch. Gary has time on his side, well more time than Paul anyway.

This being a family affair the game was played in excellent spirit – if you averted your eyes when Patrice Mongelard introduced himself properly to Stefan Jones in the first half, and then when Alex Barnes walked into Patrice's studs in the second. Jay Hardy too will be stiff in the morning but he certainly enjoyed his tussle with Luke Johnson, in particular.

Ian Couchman put the oven on for 40 mini sausage rolls, 16 vegetable samosas, 18 vegetable spring rolls and 24 sweet potato and red onion bhajis. It all went. There was no need to order pizzas. Mick O'Flynn had been worried about that.

Man-of-the-Match: Everyone who was there.

Season 2018-19

19 August 2018	STC Sports Vets (H)	1-2	Farnborough run out of gas after promising start
26 August 2018	Orpington Vets (H)	8-2	Farnborough delight fans with thumping derby win
2 September 2018	Erith Vets (H)	1-0	Farnborough find key to success
9 September 2018	CUACO Vets (H)	4-2	Carry On Farnborough, as Senior Vets come from behind
23 September 2018	West Farleigh Vets (A)	1-0	Senior Vets lift Deano curse in biblical deluge
30 September 2018	Belvedere Vets (A)	2-3	You boys do not have much luck down here, do you?
7 October 2018	Inter Vyagra Super Vets (A)	13-3	Potent Farnborough go beyond joy of six more than twice
14 October 2018	Inter the Valley Vets (H)	7-0	Farnborough bury Inter the Valley
21 October 2018	CUACO Vets (A)	3-1	Farnborough make heavy weather of it in glorious autumn sunshine
28 October 2018	Ashburnham Wanderers Vets (A)	5-2	Manty winds the clock back thirteen years to maintain Farnborough run
4 November 2018	Belvedere Vets (H)	6-0	Belvedere finally run out of luck against Farnborough
18 November 2018	Reigate Priory Vets (H)	8-1	Farnborough make it a very long journey home for Reigate
25 November 2018	Old Tamponians Super Vets (A)	4-3	Farnborough overwhelm Old Tamponians with monster second period
2 December 2018	Orpington Vets (A)	2-2	Derby day honours even for Senior Vets
9 December 2018	Old Tamponians Super Vets (H)	2-1	Sensory overload
16 December 2018	Wellcome Super Vets (A)	6-4	Farnborough come from behind to win 10-goal thriller, with a bit of panto at the end
23 December 2018	STC Sports Vets (A)	2-1	Farnborough edge a tough encounter
6 January 2019	Inter Vyagra Super Vets (H)	6-1	Farnborough peak early against Inter Vyagra
13 January 2019	Baltic Vets (A)	3-1	Farnborough come through a tough one
20 January 2019	Glendale Vets (A)	2-3	Disgruntlement abounds as Farnborough brought back to earth by Glendale
27 January 2019	Lads of the Village Super Vets (A)	7-1	Farnborough back to winning ways, and with style
17 February 2019	West Farleigh Vets (H)	4-2	Farnborough win first game in February in front of biggest crowd of the season
24 February 2019	Santos Vets (H)	5-0	Farnborough go marching in
3 March 2019	Lads of the Village Super Vets (H)	6-0	Football wins
10 March 2019	Reigate Priory Vets (A)	5-5	Honours even in wind-assisted ten-goal thriller at Reigate Priory
17 March 2019	Glendale Vets (N)	1-3	Farnborough taught a lesson by Glendale but will we ever learn?
24 March 2019	Catford Wanderers Vets (A)	2-2	Hearts race as Farnborough snatch draw from jaws of victory

Season 2018-19 (contd)

31 March 2019	Baltic Vets (H)	2-4	Farnborough too generous on Mother's Day
7 April 2019	Avery Hill Vets (A)	2-2	Both teams emerge with credit from a very good game
14 April 2019	Riverside Wanderers Vets (A)	3-3	Balti derby ends in honourable draw
21 April 2019	Sanatogen Vets (A)	9-3	Kypros delivers tonic against Sanatogen
28 April 2019	Riverside Wanderers Vets (H)	3-2	Farnborough cling on for narrow win
5 May 2019	Bird in Hand Vets (A)	0-3	Tough examination for Farnborough at the University Ground in Chislehurst
19 May 2019	FOBG Young Vets (H)	3-5	Farnborough Vets treat big home crowd to eight-goal thriller

Extra Report

11 November 2018	Remembrance Day Memorial Match (H)	3-3	Tull's Wanderers v Chavasse's Casuals
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Farnborough Old Boys Guild FC Senior Vets, Season 2018-19



Back row, left to right:

Mick O'Flynn, Steve Blanchard, Mark Friend, Michael Hills, Danny Mullins, Matt Angelo, Simon Thomas, Jay Hardy, Peter Harvey, George Kleanthous

Front row, left to right:

Hamed Lafia, Chisa Mkala, Sinisa Gracanin, Kypros Michael, Gordon Thompson, Patrice Mongelard

19 August 2018: STC Sports Vets (H, 1-2)

Farnborough run out of gas after promising start

Our regular readers will have spotted an earlier than usual start for us. Mrs M did. We decided to start a week early to get one more game in. Today we shared top billing in Farnborough Village with the Biggin Hill Air show on an overcast day. At times we were noisier, but our aim was not always true when we had our opponents' goals in our sights. More on that later. From a distance, our pitch appeared to me to be showing the delineation of Stone Age archaeological remains that the dry summer has caused to be evident in fields and open spaces. On closer examination re-conditioned drainage channels provided the explanation. We can all but hope they do their job this winter. Today's opponents, STC Vets from Eltham, were an unknown quantity.

Back in the dressing room, Mick O'Flynn spoke of the importance of everyone doing their bit, taking the kit, sweeping up after games, helping with the nets, and in particular taking keys for the goal posts on the way out. That last bit fell on deaf ears, he might as well have been talking to himself.

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Phil Anthony, Colin Brazier, Michael Hills, Patrice Mongelard

Jay Hardy, Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Simon Thomas

Peter Harvey, George Kleanthous

Substitutes: Mick O'Flynn, Ian Lyons, Gordon Thompson, Obi Ugwumba

Supporters: Ian Coles, Alan Fines, Danny and Ethan Mullins, Michael Ugwumba Jr

Referee: Paul "Play On" Parsons

Director of Football: Mick(alinho) O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

First games of any season are never simple. We were missing a few players, including three centre-halves and our European Golden Boot. Summer training has not been a success. Some players were a bit off the pace, others were just a year older and a stone heavier. I expect it was partly the same for the other team.

We made the better start. After ten minutes we had our first, and only, goal of the game. Jay Hardy won the ball in midfield before sliding a perfectly weighted pass in the path of Peter Harvey who advanced into the box and proceeded to guide a firm low shot into the bottom corner. That was a move straight out of the training ground you might say as Peter and Jay have been at training this summer more often than the rest of the squad put together. Or at least it feels that way. Our opponents were holding their own though and we had to be vigilant. They had revealed their secret weapon – a thirty-yard throw-in which we had reason to fear as the ensemble of our squad is vertically-challenged you might think.

Should we have extended our lead? Yes, but could we? No. We could get behind the STC defence but final passes or finishes could have done with lubrication. On the half hour, we made the first changes as four players - Phil Anthony, Jay Hardy, Patrice Mongelard and Simon Thomas made way for the four substitutes. The rest of the half did not go so well for us. The STC long throws were causing us increasing difficulty – one rebounding off the post. With ten minutes of the first period left the inevitable happened. Matt Angelo came off his line to claim a

high ball but could not get the desired contact, we were slow to react in our box and an STC midfielder running in, unfettered, swept the ball in from close range. There then followed two or three missed opportunities for us. They say there is no better time to score than just before half-time. Michael Ugwumba produced a deft touch for a big man to put Peter Harvey clean through on goal but Peter's finish flashed wide of the post. Another miss to rue came from our Luka Modric impersonator, fellow countryman Sinisa Gracanin, usually technically precise, who guided a cushioned half-volley inches wide after we had overrun the STC defence. Sini agreed with me that Luka would have done better.

As usual we had a lot to say at half-time. I was shoved out of the way with my bag of oranges so that I would not obstruct the sound waves of Peter Harvey's analysis. Simon Thomas was back on for a pausing Waine Hetherington. We did not start the second half with the same aplomb as the first. Ten minutes in, we fell behind. Our midfield looked pedestrian as STC carved their way through it. The ball was stopped on the edge of our box and a tall sinuous midfielder wrapped his left peg round the ball with power and precision to steer the sphere wide of Matt Angelo's dive.

The last half-hour was eventful. After we had wrung more changes, we went to a back three of Phil Anthony, Ian Lyons and Patrice Mongelard – 170 years between them. That we did not concede owed much to the flying saves that Matt Angelo produced out of his locker to stifle premature cries of celebration by STC players. Should we have celebrated at the other end – yes, but we could not. The best opportunity, a one-on-one, fell to George Kleanthous – usually deadly from close-range but the STC keeper made himself big as they say, and even though George was on to the rebound in a flash he could not find the net. Peter Harvey had several shots to help keep the nettles down. Gordon Thompson instigated some promising moves. Waine Hetherington was back on for the last quarter of an hour (for the twice-substituted Simon Thomas) but to no avail. STC had the points – it was not quite daylight robbery, more a gentle mugging which we asked for.

So, any positives from the game you might ask? A few – debutant Gordon Thompson's football intelligence, Michael Hills' prowess at centre half and Jay Hardy's capacity for physical pain come to mind. The mood in the camp could be worse. Absentees today will be back over the coming weeks. Peter Harvey and George Kleanthous will bang them in.

The new buffet formula from Leanne Macdonald Catering Solutions was a great success – so much so that we have increased the order of crusty rolls by 33% for next Sunday. Thirty cheese and pickle, ham, tuna and sweet corn rolls and four packs of mini-pasties, sausage rolls and cocktail sausages disappeared from view faster than a Red Arrows Flypast.

I made the mistake of taking my eye off my new moleskin A4 Notebook which will be serving as the logbook for the season when I went to get a round of drinks. A most juvenile prankster in our midst quickly sketched a crude piece of naturalistic art in it, a sort of symbol of potency that we, or perhaps the Stone Age artist himself, lacked in front of goal.

We were joined in the bar by Blanchard *père & fils*. They had discovered there was no fuel in the club mowers – a fitting metaphor for our performance today I felt. Ian Coles was there too, providing moral support, of course. He used the word Spitfire but was not referring to the Air Show. Some wit said Ian had his best game for a while today. There is no denying the quality of the banter – now we need to improve the quality of the football. We have thirty-eight games left to do so this season.

Man-of-the-Match – Matt Angelo – forgiven for the goals we conceded because of two or three stupendous saves he made although some players felt he should have caught the balls in question. Michael Hills and Gordon Thompson were also on the podium.

26 August 2018: Orpington Vets (H, 8-2)

Farnborough delight fans with thumping derby win

This is a match report I thought I would never get to write, such have been our travails against Orpington Vets, and our nemesis Kevin “Lord of the Rings” who was quite gracious and sporting at the end, like his team mates. We chose a wet, blustery and not warm day to produce a sizzling performance that warmed the heart. The team’s WhatsApp feed is buzzing as I write this report. It is nice to see that, for a change, it is not about the true, real, genuine fans berating so-called plastic fans for their inferior support – more on that later.

Fifteen players on paper became thirteen on the pitch as Jay Hardy did not recover from last Sunday’s knocks, and Jim Grimley went missing. But we had a plan – Operation Kevin. I am not going to reveal our plan, in case the information is of value to future opponents. Careless talk costs points.

Starting XI:

Mark Harrington

Michael Hills, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Danny Mullins, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson, Peter Harvey, George Kleanthous

Substitutes: Obi Ugwumba, Chisa Mkala

Supporters: Jay Hardy, Tony Harvey, Mick O’Flynn, Michael Ugwumba Jr

Referee: Paul “Play On” Parsons

Director of Football: Mick(alinho) O’Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

We started well and kept going well right until the end. We were 2-0 up within seven minutes. Peter Harvey had produced two crisp flashing drives within minutes of each other which had found the net and settled the whole team. The first was curled in from the edge of the box while the second followed a ball over the top from Simon Thomas which Peter drove into the box before producing a ferocious close-range shot. Peter completed his hat-trick by the quarter hour after a lay-off from Danny Mullins inside the box invited another quality finish with a cultured left foot. At the other end, Mark Harrington’s performance between the sticks was hugely reassuring for us. Our three-man defence ably marshalled by Michael Hills, with additional protection from midfield anchor Waine Hetherington and hard-running wide players Gordon Thompson and Simon Thomas was coping more than well. Orpington marksman Kevin pulled one back after some pinball in our box from a corner with his instant control, turn and shot which evaded several Farnborough bodies in a crowd scene. Any nascent feelings of doubt in our midst were quietened by Croatian maestro Sinisa Gracanin who played Danny Mullins in on goal to restore our three-goal advantage. Danny was immense today – after being kept up until half past four in the morning by son Ethan. He had some huge players to contend with – imagine two large refrigerators with French doors, to which was added a triple wardrobe later in the game. Our own big unit, Obi Ugwumba, came on after half an hour with Chisa Mkala, no pushover himself and a man of impeccable football judgement, to replace Gordon Thompson and Sinisa Gracanin.

A feeling of mild euphoria came upon us as Simon Thomas arrived at the far post to quiff the ball into the net after a sublime cross from Peter Harvey. Even without the benefit of VAR, Referee Paul Parsons made the right decision to let the goal stand such had been the trajectory of the

cross. At the other end, Orpington produced a cross of similar quality for Kevin to nod the ball into our net to remind us at half-time that even at 5-2 this game was not over by a long chalk.

We braced ourselves for a second half Orpington revival but in truth it never came. Sinisa Gracanin was back on for a resting Waine Hetherington to take up the midfield anchor role. We continued to defend with composure and solidarity. Our line was holding and Orpington incursions into our box were rare. On the hour Patrice Mongelard and Simon Thomas made way for the return of Waine Hetherington and Gordon Thompson. And the scoring opportunities started to come again. A cross from Chisa Mkala produced that rare item – a headed goal from Peter Harvey, which dad Tony was able to see in its full technicolour glory. More Farnborough goals followed from Chisa Mkala and Simon Thomas after excellent approach work by Danny Mullins and Gordon Thompson respectively, as we overwhelmed the Orpington back line. In the last quarter hour, Peter Harvey made way for Simon Thomas but Peter was back on for the final five minutes or so after George suffered a knee injury which meant he had to be carried back to the changing room. We all hope George's injury is not too serious. He was due to miss some games with an ankle operation in any case and we hope he can return as quickly as possible. He is an important piece of our jigsaw.

George's injury notwithstanding, the mood in the bar was good after arguably our best team performance for quite some time. Everyone pulled together today. The system worked. The players that came in today added greatly to the team.

Referee Paul Parsons did not have a difficult game to deal with such was the spirit in which it was played. Catering arrangements went well, although we are thinking of increasing the number of bread rolls in coming weeks.

Jay Hardy helped with the pre and post-match arrangements, retrieved two balls from the undergrowth behind our goal to add to the feeling of a day that had gone well. He also helped George back to the clubhouse, and offered to drive George home.

My own mood was now lighter. I had started the day ruminating morosely on the tribal nature of football and the aspersions that had been cast in my, and others', direction by so-called real or true or genuine fans at the lesser species of so-called plastic fans. The latter often have no discernible link with the club they support, were not born with shouting distance of a particular ground, lacked any cultural or emotional connection with a club, did not know any of the songs sung by fans etc. – you get the picture. Somehow plastic fans are deemed to lack the heightened emotions, superior sensitivity, deeper joys and darker despair of organic fans. It raises issues about the nature of reality and identity despite the connective tissue of moving images and the written word. It juxtaposes the insular and the global at the same time, a bit like Brexit, but is more complicated. In the end the shared love of football, respect for our opponents and admiration for team mates trumped all of that. The big win helped.

Man-of-the-Match – Peter Harvey with a huge haul of votes, back to his deadly best, who still found time to chide his old man Tony for turning up late and missing his hat-trick. I am sure there will be other hat-tricks. Peter would not be Peter if he had not asked me to mention that the players who put the nets up were the same ones who took them down. So, there is some room for improvement after all.

2 September 2018: Erith Vets (H, 1-0)

Farnborough find key to success

The hot summer made a reappearance today at Farrow Fields, home of the mighty Farnborough Old Boys Guild Senior Vets. What a lovely day for football – for anything really. After last week's triumph I was not the only one wondering if we could deliver the same level of performance. As the true football fan knows the performance matters more than the result. Talking of result there was no need to remind the team that we lost the corresponding match 3-2 last season. We had to respect our opponents but we also wanted to play without fear.

Starting XI:

Rob Faulkner

Michael Hills, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Chisa Mkala, Danny Mullins, Simon Thomas

Peter Harvey, George Kleanthous

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, Ian Lyons, Ian Shoebridge, Obi Ugwumba

Supporters: Terry Bear, Neil Connelly, Jay Hardy, Tony Harvey, Mick O'Flynn, Leanne Macdonald, David Orji, Michael Ugwumba Jr,

Referee: Paul "Play On" Parsons

Director of Football: Mick(alinho) O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

We started with the same formation as last week and with many of the same players. We settled quickly and saw more of the ball. Erith did not push too many players forward but defended robustly and in numbers – a pattern of play that was largely unchanged for the whole game. The opening quarter of an hour did not really bring any clear scoring opportunities for either side. Then our midfield craftsman Sinisa Gracanin created time and space on the edge of the Erith box to unleash a right foot drive that smacked against the post. Soon after Peter Harvey found himself at the end of a cross from the left, unmarked in the six-yard box and his header, more cushioned than forceful, drifted just wide. These were encouraging signs, and once again our system worked well. Rob Faulkner in our goal was not really quizzed by the opposition and all he had to do was to distribute the ball well from goal-kicks. We forced several corners but nothing came of them. The Erith keeper was not huge but he was agile, with good hands and had a seasoned defence in front of him.

On the half hour we made four changes with Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant, Danny Mullins and Chisa Mkala making way for the four substitutes. If we had any concerns about unsettling the side these were unfounded as the new performers slotted in seamlessly. This said, it looked for five minutes or so that Erith were turning the tide. Ian Lyons (who feels he never gets a mention in the match report – you could say he wants more inches) expertly guided a clearance just wide of our post to create a frisson in the Farnborough crowd, and give Erith their only corner of the game five minutes from half-time. There had been no breakthrough for either team when the half-time whistle went. There had been time for Peter Harvey to rue another missed close-range header from a peach of a cross from Sinisa Gracanin. Peter's dad Tony appeared shortly before half-time but on this occasion had not missed anything. Peter had.

As the second half got under way Colin Mant who had performed the duties of water carrier found himself standing next to Patrice Mongelard when a high clearance was propelled in their direction. Patrice was able to bring the ball under instant control with one deft movement of his

right foot in a crowd of people. I pointed out to Manty that this was what football analysts call the Velcro touch, not something that the football gods had included in his allocation of talents.

Simon Thomas exited the stage at half-time with Chisa Mkala taking on the role of chief tormentor on the right. Chisa had several moments in the game but the one that sticks in the mind most vividly is what I would call his Ronnie Rosenthal moment – something which Liverpool fan Chisa will treasure. As a Liverpool fan myself it is hard to relive that memory but being plastic makes it less real somehow. Imagine the scene – Chisa has broken through in the Erith box, shrugged off the encumbrance of defenders, disposed of the keeper, the goal is empty with Peter Harvey parallel to him a yard away. Chisa could have lashed the ball in, walked it in, rolled it in, squared the ball to Peter but these are not the way of the artist. Instead, he went for a nonchalant flick-cum-hook with the outside of his foot to lift the ball over the bar. Someone said later that at least Ronnie hit the bar. In fairness, there were other players who missed good scoring opportunities in the second half. George Kleanthous took an extra touch a yard from a gaping goal which allowed the Erith keeper to smother the shot. Peter Harvey flashed a low drive against the base of the post. To the neutral there was only one team likely to score although we did get a timely reminder of the quality in Erith's ranks when their darting forward forced a good save from Rob Faulkner's foot.

Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant and Danny Mullins were back in the fray on the hour, with Waine Hetherington, Sinisa Gracanin and Michael Hills having done their work with great diligence and savoir-faire for the day. Our goal when it came on seventy-five minutes was a thing of beauty – with six players involved in the move. Picture this - Ian Shoebridge back to Patrice Mongelard, the ball is moved to Colin Mant who rolls in into space to Ian Shoebridge; there follows an exchange of quickfire passes between Peter Harvey and Ian before Ian drives carries the ball deep into the Erith box. Ian's first shot is parried by the Erith keeper but Ian takes ownership of the rebound before coolly rolling the ball across to George Kleanthous who this time makes no mistake to register his first success in the race for golden boot. Could we have had more goals? Should we? Even Erith would not have begrudged us another. A thirty yarder from Michael Hills (back on for a tiring but honest Phil Anthony) destined for the top corner brought a finger tip save from the Erith keeper that was made for the cameras. In the dying moments Peter Harvey drove a fierce shot against the angle of post and bar. Even Danny Mullins, with good feet for a big man, threatened to disturb the onion bag with a neat control and pirouette on a sixpence in the six-yard box.

Referee Paul Parsons inserted two water breaks during the game which were very welcome. The rest of the time he let the game flow. Once again, the game was played in excellent spirit.

Fifty bread rolls and assorted sundries were blown away like an autumn mist in the afternoon sunshine.

Jay Hardy tried to help with the pre-match arrangements but found it a challenge to locate the keys to the top goals – a condition which seemed to afflict the whole club. Jay expects to be back playing next Sunday, if selected.

On his way out, Mick O'Flynn dropped an unopened pack of batteries for his hearing aid – perhaps inadvertently revealing the key to an enduring mystery. The lads kindly continued my education in the life of a real football fan. The sacred artefact I was given today was a real match ticket for the Burton Albion v AFC Wimbledon match played less than 24 hours ago (3-0 to Burton

Albion – attendance 2,814 – cost of ticket £22). I can think of one way of saving £22, or spending it on the Mrs.

Man-of-the-Match – George Kleanthous, back from premature demise last Sunday with a performance full of heart, effort and endeavour. If only the team he supports could have some of George's spirit. I will not name them but all I would say is that a point would be nice.

9 September 2018: CUACO Vets (H, 4-2)

Carry On Farnborough, as Senior Vets come from behind

Sadly - I must start with a slightly discordant note, despite our victory. There has been a complaint from our Director of Football, Mick O'Flynn, absent today but not really missed, about my recent match reports. He feels these reports have gone downhill because I have let "the puerile aspect slide a little". So, breaking the habit of a lifetime, I am going to have to lower the tone from now on. To borrow an analogy from the world of film I have been feeding my audience some avant-garde world cinema when, in fact, all they wanted was some Carry On films. On another sunny morning we had the added bonus of being the only team at home today and so got to use the big pitch. Whether this is now the better of our two pitches is a matter for mass debate. What is not for debate is the sweat that Jay Hardy broke in liberating and wheeling into place the goal posts – apparently all on his own. He reported the wheels had come off one of the goals – but would the wheels come off our bus today after two back-to-back wins?

Starting XI:

Rob Faulkner

Phil Anthony, Mark Friend, Michael Hills

Jay Hardy, Colin Mant, Ian Shoebridge, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson

George Kleanthous, Kypros Michael

Substitutes: Peter Harvey, Patrice Mongelard, Obi Ugwumba

Supporters: Steve Blanchard, Tony Harvey, David Orji, Michael Ugwumba Jr

Referee: Paul "Play On" Parsons

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

We did not start well. CUACO had more of the play and kept the ball in our half. They forced a string of early corners, and even had a shout for an early goal in the belief that the ball had crossed our line from a scramble following their second corner. There was a doubt in the referee's mind as Michael Hills had thrust a sensitive part of his anatomy forward to interrupt the path of the ball. To their credit the CUACO players made no fuss and carried on with the game.

Clear scoring opportunities were as rare as hen's teeth. George Kleanthous had a left foot drive from the edge of the box that threatened to dip into the net at the far post until the CUACO keeper somehow managed to get his left hand to the ball after an agile contortion. We lacked fluency, the passing was approximate and hurried and we did not always take the best options – which in most cases meant giving the ball to Gordon Thompson or George Kleanthous. Our European Golden Boot Kypros Michael was playing his first game after an extended holiday and lavish birthday celebrations in Cyprus, and it showed. You would be forgiven for thinking he had overdone the kleftiko, souvlaki, moussaka, baklava and Turkish delight on the luxury holiday courtesy of the Paphos Taxi Drivers Betting Syndicate. He would have had a job winning the Golden Pantoufles today. But he will get better and work harder, and to be fair there were fleeting glimpses of the quality that lies beneath. The CUACO defender who got in the way of a Kypros volley will be sore in the morning.

On the half-hour, Patrice Mongelard, Peter Harvey and Obi Ugwumba replaced Mark Friend, Ian Shoebridge and George Kleanthous. Peter had been chomping at the bit on the touchline and wasted no time in giving us more up top as they say. However, just as we thought we had contrived to weather the CUACO pressure we conspired to fall behind about seven minutes before half-time. Colin "Kante" Mant aimed an unwise pass across the pitch in front of the

defence wide to where Simon Thomas had called for the ball, initially moving back towards his goal, instead of going forward, and then doing little to claim the ball. The pass was undercooked, intercepted and the CUACO player involved drove into the box to place a shot above Rob Faulkner's head and in against the underside of the bar.

Kypros Michael and Phil Anthony departed at half-time with George Kleanthous and Mark Friend resuming their positions. There was not much to say at half-time – we knew we had goals in our locker and just needed more composure, patience and faith in our abilities. Whatever zephyrs were about were now behind us as we set about clawing our way back in the game with our passing now quicker, crisper and making better use of space. It did not take long. Gordon Thompson teed up Peter Harvey on the edge of the CUACO box for a shot that surprised us because it came from Peter's right foot, and surprised the CUACO keeper even more as what looked like a tame effort deceived him to slip through his hands and between his legs to roll into the net. It looked a tad fortuitous but it was not against the run of play. We began to earn free-kicks in dangerous positions on the edges of the CUACO box. Five minutes later, Peter Harvey stood over one such free-kick made for a left-footer and the resulting shot dipped and bounced over the diving keeper into the bottom corner. Once again, the keeper will be tempted to blame himself for the goal but some credit needs to go to Peter for the intent and execution of the shot.

Now that we had edged ahead, we played our most assured football. A third goal duly followed after excellent approach play by Gordon Thompson which led to a shot on goal that the CUACO keeper spilled. Peter Harvey was on the scene quickly, asserted his rights over the ball, glided wide of the keeper and from the tightest of angles claimed his second hat-trick of the season, this one though was witnessed in full and in real time by dad Tony on the touchline. By then CUACO who were playing their first game of the season were breathing heavily and we seemed able to penetrate at will. Simon Thomas engineered a fourth goal for us after one of our corners was not cleared properly. Mark Friend had gone up for the corner was still lurking in the box, and was in the right place to belt Simon's pull back into the net from a yard out. Mark enjoyed that as he could not remember when he had last scored for Farnborough Vets. Even at 4-1 we did not relent. Ian Shoebridge was back on for Gordon Thompson and was at the heart of several promising moves. We could have gone ahead even further. We knew that this was going to be George Kleanthous' last game before the ankle operation that will keep him out for the rest of the season and several players tried to get him the goal that his effervescent performance deserved. He flashed a low drive against the post after a through ball from Simon Thomas. Later on, he was put clear on goal but was undecided with only the keeper to beat. Michael Hills found himself unmarked at the far post to receive a cross from Simon Thomas. Michael could have headed the ball in but he had already opted for an acrobatic "Chinese" scissor kick that looked good on the eye, even when it failed.

At the other end, there was not much for Rob Faulkner to do. I do not recall a single CUACO corner in the second half. Yet, on a rare incursion they earned a generous penalty with about eight minutes left. Rob Faulkner guessed right, got down low to his right and parried the shot. However, it looped up and as it came down Rob was like a kitten playing with a ball of string and he palmed the ball into our net. OG had struck for the first time this season. We held on to claim a victory that was the right result. On the way back to the club house after helping Jay Hardy take down the nets – a task that he felt, rightly, that others should have been doing – I was given another opportunity to inhale the thin air of the real football fan's experience when Peter Harvey showed me his ticket for the Spurs v Liverpool game at Wembley on 15 September.

Leanne MacDonald Catering Services did a sterling job with fifty bread rolls and supporting nibbles, and the job she did cleaning the place up after last night's birthday party was top notch too.

Man-of-the-Match – Peter Harvey, a proud father's delight, with a hat-trick that turned the game on its head, and a real football fan.

23 September 2018: West Farleigh Vets (A, 1-0)

Senior Vets lift Deano curse in biblical deluge

The West Farleigh Vets ground in Charlton Lane (ME15 0PB) is the most picturesque we encounter on our travels. It is usually sunny when we go down there but today heavy rain deluged the Kentish Weald. To me the pitch retained its scenic charm in its rural, albeit wet splendour. I did wonder briefly though if we would get eleven players to get out of bed to make their way there. It helped that three of our number – Brazier, Parsons and Salako were 'locals'. A squad of twelve had dwindled to ten when the referee blew his whistle but West Farleigh sportingly let us have one of their players – a rather muscular man called Martin who played in our midfield briefly but that was not his best position as we found out later. He came out of the tight Farnborough shirt when Jay Hardy joined us on the quarter hour. Chisa Mkala was still on his way, safely I hoped, after Peter Harvey's aquaplaning episode on the way down which had left him momentarily pensive on the hard shoulder, but thankfully unharmed. The reduced numbers meant that all the players (except a willing and team-minded Paul Parsons) got full games, including Waine Hetherington.

Starting XI:

Dave Salako

Michael Hills, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Colin Brazier, Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Paul Parsons, Ian Shoebridge, Martin

Peter Harvey

Late arrivals: Jay Hardy, Chisa Mkala

Substitute: Paul Parsons (also linesman for 60 minutes)

Supporters: A few sheep

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

The surface was a delight to play on, it had zip but was true and suited both teams' passing game. I do not think we minded the rain and the wind. There was something mildly heroic about playing football in such adverse weather conditions. Both defences were tight and scoring opportunities were not exactly abundant. Shots on goal were rare even in conditions that would favour the early shot from distance. The singular moments of the first-half consisted of some bone-crunching but perfectly fair tackles from Paul Parsons. We forced two corners I think whilst there were none against us in the first half. The insertion of Jay Hardy gave us more threat in the final third. The pairing of Jay Hardy and Peter Harvey up front was music to Colin Mant's ears because he was now further away from their moaning, particularly as we had the wind in our favour in the first period.

The arrival of Chisa Mkala on the half hour (in lieu of Paul Parsons) gave us more legs to play the pressing style that Jurgen Klopp favours. A promising free-kick in what we must now call Peter Harvey territory did not yield the usual goal. At the other end, we were able to contain West Farleigh's Deano, our nemesis in many past games but today well-shackled by the Farnborough back three, including at one point with the use of a rustic tackle from Patrice Mongelard that Deano thought had removed one of his kidneys (figuratively speaking, of course). Seriously, the entire game was played in excellent spirit and the referee had no trouble at all from anyone. As the half drew to a close, the momentum was starting to shift in our favour but we were wary of playing against the wind in the second half.

As often happens now, the second half was rather positive for us. Even West Farleigh would agree that we created the greater number of chances. Colin Brazier, enjoying the freedom of the wing-back position (not bad this back three system after all, especially if one is not part of the three) found himself close enough to goal to have two or three shots that made it worth his while getting out of bed. On the other flank, Ian Shoebridge was putting in quite a shift, linking well with Peter Harvey down the right. The West Farleigh player who had started the game in a Farnborough shirt was now firmly ensconced in their goal and he pulled off a string of eye-catching saves. A dive low to his left to keep out a crafty Peter Harvey low shot was more than good. But his best was the point blank save with his feet that he produced to keep out a Wayne Hetherington shot from two yards out after Peter had carved his way through the West Farleigh defence to set him up. Jay Hardy and Chisa Mkala also threatened with intent. It was only a matter of time I thought but time was running out.

Dave Salako in our goal was marginally busier in the second half than the first but it was mostly routine stuff until he had to dive sharply to keep out a twenty-five yarder that fizzed off the wet turf. He goes down well for a big man, and more importantly he did not spill anything. Nor did the farmer whom we saw gathering sheep behind our goal. We do not think it was a spot of sheep rustling, or any form of other activity with sheep, nor was it a prelude to boarding the Ark despite the rain.

With about five minutes left we got our breakthrough – Liverpool-like gegenpressing from Chisa Mkala had won the ball before he released Ian Shoebridge on the right – Peter Harvey made his decoy run – Shoey kept advancing before lifting a cross into the middle of the West Farleigh defence for the smallest Farnborough player Jay Hardy. Jay leapt, contorted his body, craned his neck, whipped his head to impart further power to the ball with a meaty yet deft contact that sent the ball in the direction that the West Farleigh keeper had come from as he followed the flight of Shoey's cross. It was too late for the keeper to re-adjust his momentum, shuffle his feet and claw the ball out. He got hands to it but was defeated by the arc of the ball, the geometry of the goal structure and Jay's acrobatics. We held out for a memorable win.

And so, we had our first clean sheet against West Farleigh since we started playing them on 2 October 2011. Those Farnborough players who were not there today should weep in the morning – including the two who preferred to go to the Greek Islands this weekend (not together I hasten to add). More importantly perhaps scholars of FOBG Vets folklore will note that this was probably the first time we had won an away game against a team with a Deano in their line-up.

Nine of us made our way back to the public house – The Good Intent, to enjoy our opponents' hospitality. In Mick O'Flynn's absence I was lured to a vacant seat underneath a sign that said "Bullshit Corner", amidst much tittering. I noticed too late, after a photo was taken. Hot chips and sausages helped warm our soaked through frames.

Man-of-the-Match – the overwhelming feeling that today was more about the team than about individuals was reflected in the voting. Seven players came through the ballot and of these five could not be separated with two votes each: Jay Hardy, Michael Hills, Wayne Hetherington, Ian Shoebridge and Chisa Mkala.

Manty had the most sausages.

30 September 2018: Belvedere Vets (A, 2-3)

You boys do not have much luck down here, do you?

The headline you have just read was spoken by a Belvedere player on his way to the bar, as he passed some of us who were still in the showers. Obviously, he was referring to the outcome of the game. Oddly, we look forward to this away game on one of the biggest pitches we play on, and one where it really matters whether one is kicking downhill or uphill. Today another significant variable was the referee, a Belvedere associate who was helping his mates out.

Starting XI:

Chris Jablonski

Michael Hills, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Waine Hetherington, Franco Petrozzi, Ian Shoebridge, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson

Peter Harvey, Kypros Michael

Substitutes: Mick O'Flynn, George Kleanthous, Obi Ugwumba

Supporters: Sinisa Gracanin, David Orji, Michael Ugwumba Jr

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Croatian Technical Director: Sinisa Gracanin

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Both teams moved the ball well from the off. The early penetration was ours though. The first clear chance fell to Peter Harvey who got his head to a Gordon Thompson cross in the six-yard box to steer the ball low into the corner only to find the Belvedere keeper equal to it. He got down well for an ample man and was to surprise us again in the game later (and, once, his team mates). We fashioned a second good scoring opportunity, another header, this time for Kypros Michael, launching himself off the ground to direct the ball over from two yards out after a cross had arrowed in from the right. Kypros told me later that he should have gone for a volley. I was not entirely convinced the result would have been different, but I opted to nod sagely. As a Man U supporter his mood is fragile at the moment. Simon Thomas on our right wing was achieving what Boris Johnson would call salience, whilst Gordon Thompson sparkled on the left. Waine Hetherington was mopping things up in front of the back three, Franco Petrozzi was having his usual muscular game and Ian Shoebridge was full of running. We had reason to be optimistic.

But then we were undone with two goals that felt, to us at least, to be against the run of play. The first and only corner that Belvedere got was turned to profit as we failed to clear the ball properly, there was a bit of a crowd scene, and a Belvedere shot went in via two Farnborough deflections. Five minutes later, a well-struck shot from twenty-five yards by the best Belvedere player on show had enough power and dip to elude Jabba in our goal and we were 2-0 down. On the half hour, Kypros Michael, Patrice Mongelard and Franco Petrozzi made way for our three substitutes. We were thrown a lifeline when a long ball from Gordon Thompson was followed into the Belvedere box by Simon Thomas. The Belvedere keeper had stirred himself, come off his line and shaped to hoof the ball away. He was always favourite to get to it first but perhaps he was distracted by Simon's Tarzan impression, and he kicked fresh air. Simon just glided round him and stroked the ball into an empty net. At 2-1, with the slope in the second half in our favour, we had reason again to be optimistic. But then Mick O'Flynn had one of his Copacabana moments, when he imagines that he is performing in front of bethonged Brazilian beauties. He attempted something fancy that did not come off in a dangerous area and the youthful Belvedere forward (he must advertise moisturiser for a living) did the rest with quick feet and Chris Jablonski was beaten again with a sharp low drive. Talking of attempting something

fancy, Michael Hills did a bit of unnecessary juggling with the ball in our box, fell over, looked at the pitch in a very accusatory and fierce manner, but thankfully only his pride was hurt.

We knew from experience that playing with the slope in the second half was worth an extra man. Initially though Belvedere kept us away from their box. But after the initial ten minutes of this second period and in particular after a goal from an angry Obi Ugwumba who bulldozed his way into the Belvedere box past two defenders before lashing a left foot drive past the Belvedere keeper – we felt we would get back in the game. On the hour, Kypros Michael, Patrice Mongelard and Franco Petrozzi were back on for Peter Harvey, Mick O’Flynn and Ian Shoebridge. We then applied sustained pressure on the Belvedere goal, forcing a string of corners but there was always a Belvedere body or their keeper in the way. Obi Ugwumba departed with an injury and that brought Peter Harvey back on. Peter then lashed a free-kick against the bar after the first controversial moment of the game. We could have done with VAR. George Kleanthous had entered the Belvedere box and managed to lift the ball over the shoulder of the Belvedere player who was slightly ahead of him, in other words nearer to their goal and therefore even deeper in their box, but the referee ruled the hand-ball was on the chalk that marked the boundary of the box. There followed two further instances where we had a decent shout for a penalty. First Simon Thomas was upended deep in the box – and was in fact unable to continue (after hitting the post moments earlier). Thespian Simon left for his matinée performance soon after. Manty thought it was a performance with a manatee. Ian Shoebridge, back on the pitch as Simon’s understudy, then had his standing leg whipped away from under him by a zealous Belvedere tackle in the box but once again the referee’s eyes glazed over. By then, I thought he was a splendid walking advert for the importance of a visit to the local Specsavers.

We finished the game strongly, with Belvedere hanging on. The last meaningful Farnborough shot fell to Kypros Michael, teed up by Gordon Thompson in the last minute, two yards out on Kyp’s favourite left foot. However, once again, the huge presence in the Belvedere goal saved their bacon. He certainly made up for his first-half aberration. We lost, only just, but spirits were high. The feeling in the changing room was that we had given a good account of ourselves and maintained the quality of play and level of performance shown in recent weeks. There was a moment of light relief when Manty won the Peter Harvey bingo contest by predicting correctly that Peter would compliment Sinisa Gracanin for having had his best game in weeks. The other bit of relief came from Michael Hills’ inability to recognise circumcision but I will spare you the detail on grounds of taste.

There were only four of us left in the bar when an enormous platter of assorted freshly-made sandwiches, a plate of hot pork sausages and a tray of roast potatoes arrived from our hosts. The four included Mick O’Flynn, a vegetarian who is allergic to eggs – so really you could say there were only three of us. Patrice Mongelard (it would be him wouldn’t it), Colin Mant and Michael Hills put in a great shift, taking more than one for the team. If only our forwards could finish like that, noted Manty, we’d be in the Champions League. Mick O’Flynn admitted that he was considering changing his Man-of-the-Match vote in my favour following my intake.

Despite this setback we just have to keep it up. Next week it is Inter Vyagra.

Man-of-the-Match: by a long chalk, Gordon Thompson.

7 October 2018: Inter Vyagra Super Vets (A, 13-3)

Potent Farnborough go beyond joy of six more than twice

The Royal Artillery Barracks in Woolwich is arguably the grandest of historical venues for our Sunday morning displays. It is not the place to fire blanks and today we did not disappoint against Inter Vyagra Super Vets. The rains of yesterday had softened the ground and the absence of wind and abundant sunshine made for a very pleasant experience, albeit on a pitch that seemed smaller than the ones we have played on there. Two of our players had broken a finger each on our last visit at this ground last October. Today we were in danger of breaking scoring records only.

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Phil Anthony, Michael Hills, Colin Mant

Jay Hardy, Wayne Hetherington, Ian Shoebridge, Gordon Thompson, Obi Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, George Kleanthous

Substitutes: Ian Lyons, Mick O'Flynn, Patrice Mongelard

Supporters: Steve and Sarah Hills

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

It is going to be beyond my powers of recall to describe all the goals we scored today, and their assists, but some have imposed themselves on my consciousness. To say we started well would be an understatement. We were two goals to the good within five minutes. George Kleanthous had given us the lead with a crisp close-range finish. Soon after Peter Harvey doubled our lead. The Inter Vyagra keeper underestimated Peter's sharpness and tried to play the ball out in a dangerous area only to see Peter close down the space and nick the ball off him for an easy finish. It was 3-0 on the quarter hour after Gordon Thompson had sashayed his way into the box and exchanged quick passes to set himself up for a low drive in the bottom corner.

Matt Angelo at the other end had little to do and perhaps this is what led him to take a chance with a risky pass inside his six-yard area. The concentration, accuracy and pace were missing, things did not turn out as Matt intended and an Inter Vyagra forward walked the ball into the net. The sight and sound of Matt beating himself up did not last long as more Farnborough goals followed. First though Matt had to deal with a rather limp back pass from Phil Anthony which nearly led to another Inter Vyagra goal.

Peter Harvey completed his hat-trick before the half hour changes were made. His third goal – our fifth looked scruffy with both Peter and the Inter Vyagra keeper horizontal on the ground in close proximity to each other with the ball between them. It appeared that the ball had been bundled over the line by the keeper's flailing arm. The dubious goals committee debated long and hard about this one. In the end the weight of evidence pointed to more than an association with the event – there was agency. Like the head of a snake that had been cut off Peter was still trying to cause damage and his trailing foot pushed the ball against the keeper's prone shape.

On the half hour, Mick O'Flynn, Patrice Mongelard and Ian Lyons joined the fun replacing Ian Shoebridge, Michael Hills and Colin Mant. Three more goals followed until the half-time whistle, including a sublime gem of a goal from Wayne Hetherington from just outside the box left of centre. Wayne had plucked out of the air a ball that Ian Lyons would like readers to consider to

be an assist, turned, re-positioned his body to face the goal, and in a fluid natural movement applied the left foot to the ball before it could touch the ground, to guide it beyond the keeper's grasp into the corner of the goal. A merciless Peter Harvey completed his scoring with two more strikes – one of which, a twenty-yard lob into the bottom corner, would grace any game but today had been upstaged by Waine's wonder goal.

Michael Hills was back on at half-time to replace a departing Phil Anthony. That was another early exit for Phil the mamil – perhaps he is taking extra classes to work on his jokes (latest one about a crime in the elevator that was wrong on so many levels, failed to impress).

The second half was a more even affair to some extent. We scored early with a trademark quick-footed finish from George Kleanthous. But then Inter Vyagra stunned us with two goals – both of which will have upset Matt because he got hands to the ball in both cases. But before Matt could beat himself up too badly, he produced a flying fingertip save to push a long range shot onto the bar, stifling the premature shout of celebration from the rangy Inter Vyagra forward who spent the rest of the game praising the save. He was still talking about it in the Red Lion later.

Jay Hardy got his name on the score sheet by arriving at the right time to meet a corner. In fact, the last four Farnborough goals all came from corners. Gordon Thompson and Obi Ugwumba had made way on the hour for Ian Shoebridge and Colin Mant. Mick O'Flynn lasted another fifteen minutes before beckoning Gordon back on for the quarter of an hour. Gordon's re-introduction gave us fresh impetus. He made a speculative back heel from Ian Lyons look good by picking the ball up and penetrating deep into the Inter Vyagra box.

Ian Shoebridge scored direct from a corner with some assistance from the Inter Vyagra keeper (but the same agency rule applies as above). There was time for another eye-catching volley from Waine Hetherington. An inter Vyagra head had – so they thought, cleared the ball from a Peter Harvey corner, but the ball dropped no further than the edge of the box where Waine lurked with intent. This time the connection was equally pure but the ball kept low and traversed through a forest of legs into the net. A final Farnborough corner was volleyed home by George Kleanthous to complete the scoring. The two strikes from George book-ended another eleven Farnborough goals. His hat-trick today was well-deserved and I hope will constitute a happy memory as he recovers from the season-ending ankle surgery he is having in the coming week.

There was time for some revealing photos of Manty to be taken in the changing rooms (if you like that sort of thing – an acquired taste) whilst Mick O'Flynn made vigorous applications of Man's Best Friend. No, it is not what you might think – Mick is a Joba's Witness, and was merely applying moisturiser before a family lunch engagement.

The behaviour and attitude of our hosts were top notch. Despite losing heavily they never lost their composure, or good humour. They directed us to, and joined us outside, the Red Lion on Shooters Hill to exchange pleasantries and share the grub which flowed from the pub kitchen – potato and sweet potato chips with dips, condiments aplenty and piping hot sausages and sausage rolls. The Inter Vyagra keeper's handling of the hot sausage rolls was excellent.

Man-of-the-Match: Waine Hetherington for two sumptuous volleys, and more besides.

14 October 2018: Inter the Valley Vets (H, 7-0)

Farnborough bury Inter the Valley

Football fans know more than most that life is often not fair, and scorelines can be harsh. Today we felt sympathy for our opponents, partly as we had two of our players in their colours. The leaden skies and intermittent rain did not lift the spirits exactly, but the game was played in excellent spirit, both teams favoured measured football, it was not cold or windy and the lush surface was conducive to a passing game. It felt good to be back on home turf after a run of four away games.

Our numbers reduced overnight, but we still mustered twelve players, even after loaning Phil Anthony and Gordon Thompson to Inter the Valley. Gordon was a sort of revenant as he used to play for them. Phil went on to have what bingo master Peter Harvey later described as one of his best games. We had a new face in the shape of Crystal Palace fan (yes, another one as if we do not have enough of them already) Lee Loizou, who went on to become the second player of Greek origin to get on our score sheet this season, and possibly the last.

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Michael Hills, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Waine Hetherington, Lee Loizou, Ian Shoebridge, Simon Thomas, Obi Ugwumba

Jay Hardy, Peter Harvey

Referee: Paul 'Play On' Parsons

Substitute: Mick O'Flynn

Supporters: Tony Harvey, David Orji and Michael Ugwumba Jr

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

For a game that eventually yielded seven goals there was a relatively slow start in terms of chances created. The direction of play was indisputably towards the Inter goal but our opponents would have sorties ably led by Gordon Thompson that would bring the play into our box or its outskirts. So, we had to be watchful. Early chances fell to Simon Thomas who will have been the harshest critic of his performance. A flash of the Thomas quiff two yards out at the far post sticks in the mind. We won a steady stream of corners (in fact I do not recall a single Inter corner all game). Midway through the half we got our breakthrough – an Inter clearance was sliced in an unintended direction and Jay Hardy was on to it in a flash, advancing deep into the Inter box before guiding the ball home.

Debutant Lee Loizou made way for Mick O'Flynn on the half hour. We continued to create chances – in fact, a barely warm Mick O'Flynn found himself running in on goal, clean through but the ball was to his left and he can barely stand on his left foot. The semblance of a left foot shot drifted across the face of the goal and as it could not really masquerade as a pass it eluded a lunging Simon Thomas at the far post. Instead of Brazilian composure we had a 'jigsaw' moment from Mick as he fell apart in the box. We nearly paid the price for it at the other end. Quite how Inter did not bury the opportunity that came their way with Farnborough bodies including Matt Angelo's strewn on the ground, had much to do with presence of Michael Hills on the line, a delicate blend of finesse, physical prowess and positioning. A 1-0 lead for us at half-time was deserved. More goals for us at that point would have been harsh, possibly. Ian

Shoebridge made way for Lee Loizou at half-time but was to return later in the game as Obi Ugwumba and Simon Thomas assisted the management of substitutions.

We nearly had a shock at the start of the second half. Barely a minute in, a long ball was floated over from the Inter double wardrobe in the heart of their defence, dropping delicately over a surprised Michael Hills into the path of their dreadlocked forward. He was caught in two minds – or rather which foot to use and the window was shut. Starved of service throughout the game he will have rued that rare missed opportunity. Inter nearly paid for it as we forced a corner in the next phase of play and Michael Hills lashed a powerful volley against the underside of the bar and the ball bounced away from the goal. If that goal had gone in, we would have heard about it for months, like some annoying anodyne vapid musical tune from Russian pop. However, we did not have to wait long for the cushion of a second goal. For all our aspirations to play a passing brand of football this was Route One. Matt Angelo hoofed the ball upfield, Peter Harvey won the tussle with the big unit, cushioned the ball in an alert Jay Hardy's path and an almost instant volley followed from twenty-five yards out. I lost sight of the ball but I heard the unmistakable swishing sound it made as it arced into the postage stamp. I could clearly see Jay's thoughts at that precise joyous moment – they screamed out "anything Wayne can do, I can do better" – a passing homage to Wayne Hetherington's two sweet volleys last week.

After that, the goals flowed freely and abundantly. Jay was to notch his first hat-trick of this season with a rapier thrust to convert a knock back from Peter Harvey five minutes later inside the box. A free-kick won by Peter Harvey was then powered into the net by Obi Ugwumba, from a position ideal for a right footer with a mule of a kick. Obi indicated he had used only half of the power available as he did not want to hurt Gordon who was on the edge of the Inter wall. Colin Mant guided a header from one of our corners into a dangerous space. The keeper was beaten but Phil Anthony was in the right place to clear off the line, and he also thwarted the follow-up from Simon Thomas. There was though no stopping our flow. Debutant Lee Loizou converted a smart assist from Jay Hardy. A fluid move from the back of our defence all the way deep into the Inter box, saw a silky finish from Simon Thomas, to make the most of another assist from Jay Hardy. Jay recorded his third consecutive assist of the game five minutes or so from the end to help Peter Harvey get on the score sheet with a crisp close-range finish. This final nail in the Inter coffin was witnessed by a delighted Tony Harvey (Peter's dad).

Before the game ended there was time for linesman Michael Ugwumba Jr, and cousin David Orji, to be highly amused by the sight of Matt Angelo going up for the last Farnborough corner. Matt can be unconventional to say the least.

There was a lot of water about as the game ended and we put the goals and nets away. The water was less abundant in the showers. Abundance was restored with the buffet laid out by Leanne Macdonald Catering Solutions (one of our home comforts). We even had to get the Sunday team to help mop up the remaining crusty rolls and pasties. Gary Harrigan was on hand to provide an expert finish.

The name of the visiting team brought out a dad joke I read about in the Times recently – why do cemeteries have walls? Answer: because people are dying to get in there. There was another joke about an 85-year-old Mick O'Flynn failing to produce a sample for his doctor but it is not for a family audience.

To celebrate our victory Mrs M produced a wonderful apple traybake to a Mary Berry recipe. I think I will get fourteen slices out of it, one for every member of our team today, and one each

for the two players we loaned to Inter. I shall eat it all, in my own modest tribute to my team. Two slices a day should do it over the coming week.

Man-of-the-Match: Jay Hardy with a double hat-trick of goals and assists, a pair of jugs and all the MoM votes cast (minus his own which went elsewhere).

21 October 2018: CUACO Vets (A, 3-1)

Farnborough make heavy weather of it in glorious autumn sunshine

There is something really uplifting and life-enhancing about a sports field bathed in sunshine with the morning dew waiting to moisten one's boots, in the still air enriched with autumn colours. The Old Dunstonians Sports Club in Beckenham (BR3 3SS) probably sees more rugby than football played going by the evidence of pitch markings and goal posts. Sometimes there is toxophilia too, but not today. Our squad of sixteen withered to twelve overnight but club stalwarts Luke Johnson and Matt Ellis responded to the call.

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Michael Hills, Luke Johnson, Patrice Mongelard

Jay Hardy, Wayne Hetherington, Mick O'Flynn, Ian Shoebridge, Obi Ugwumba

Matt Ellis, Kypros Michael

Substitutes: Peter Harvey, Lee Loizou, Simon Thomas

Supporters: David Orji and Michael Ugwumba Jr

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Before the game started both teams had, separately, a talk from the avuncular referee which was a useful ice-breaker and scene-setter. He noted the angle of the sun, the multi-coloured pitch markings and the difficult jobs that linesmen do. He said he would probably make mistakes but would aim to be fair to both teams. Specifically, he cautioned against bad language given the large number of young children playing rugby on adjacent pitches. He promised to give a tug to anyone who talked dirty. I wondered if he had overheard Michael Hills in the changing room, talking about using Vaseline for every time he went down.

It took a while for both teams to get going. We carried more menace but CUACO defended deep and in numbers, and our passing lacked the crispness that we are becoming used to. Kypros Michael looked like he was determined to shake off that monkey on his back by finally getting on the score sheet. He put a shot against the bar and was looking hungry (not for kebabs or Turkish delight). Our two-time European Golden Boot latched on to a perceptive through ball from Jay Hardy to break through the middle of the CUACO defence but then was taken roughly from behind. Kypros despatched the penalty with aplomb. This settled us down but we could not carve out decent opportunities, despite some stunning long-range Hollywood cross-field balls from Luke Johnson to Matt Ellis. However, Matt earned a free-kick on the edge of the box and ignored calls to let Obi Ugwumba take it. It was the right decision as Matt curled an exquisitely crisp right footer into the top corner. The CUACO keeper, who proved to be quite an obstinate obstacle, was powerless on this occasion. Another set-piece had come good for us.

We made changes on the half hour with Peter Harvey, Lee Loizou and Simon Thomas replacing Matt Ellis, Obi Ugwumba and Ian Shoebridge. Matt, Obi and Ian would all come back in the second half. Simon was not the spent force his late coming might have presaged, but immediately settled into his tough man role on the right to bamboozle the CUACO defence with his quick feet and direct runs. A moment of finesse from Peter Harvey brought Kypros Michael his second goal of the morning as a delicately weighted through ball got, for once and at last, the finish it deserved. I looked forward to brushing macaque fur off Kyp's shoulders at half-time. There was no finesse though when Peter Harvey was taken out by the CUACO goalkeeper just

outside the box on the right wing. I confess I worry when Peter goes down (will he be OK to play badminton tomorrow?) and it took him a while to get back on his feet. Nothing came of the free-kick – a square ball to Wayne Hetherington sent by telegraph, yesterday.

At 3-0 up and seemingly cruising – it became a mystery how we did not go on to consolidate and extend our dominance. We were a tad fortunate that a CUACO goal from a corner was disallowed for interfering with the keeper before half-time. The neutral would have expected Farnborough to grow the score but we were out of sorts. I do not think that the absence of oranges had anything to do with it but I will put my hand up to having forgotten to get them. It is not an item Mrs M reminds me to get in Sainsbury's on a Saturday morning.

I am not sure what the cause of the malaise was that came over us in the second half. Wayne Hetherington took a breather while Ian Shoebridge was back on. Early in the half, thanks to the latter, Kypros had a great opportunity, one-on-one, to bag a hat-trick but the CUACO keeper was not to be beaten again. In fact, he grew into the game. He dived low to stop another Matt Ellis free-kick. He made himself big to claw at a ball that Peter Harvey tried to lift over his head after Peter had broken free into the box. He punched several corners away. More than once we got behind the CUACO defence but could not capitalise. An extra touch by Simon Thomas looked extravagant when a square ball to Peter Harvey could have yielded a better dividend. When the ball was used intelligently and unselfishly the finish was not there. The normally precise and crisp Matt Ellis will not want to be reminded, but I will anyway, of his atrocious miss two yards out after Peter Harvey had set him up. The presence of the rugby goals immediately behind the football goals could have confused him but he was not around later in the bar to explain why he went for a drop goal (as Peter Harvey noted). Obi Ugwumba lifted a delicate ball over the CUACO defence for Ian Shoebridge to wallop into the goal but the ball would not come down fast enough for Shoey, and the moment passed. At the other end, Matt Angelo was doing his best to keep up his high eccentricity score. Dodgy clearances, mad dashes off his line, undercooked passes – the full repertoire. We had to defend against a resurgent CUACO, for which they should be given credit. With a quarter of an hour left, they scored after an indecently quick free-kick whilst we were beginning to consider whether it would be a good idea to have a wall. Ian Shoebridge picked up his usual autumn calf strain and could not see the game out. We even had to bring Jay Hardy back on for Lee Loizou to weather the CUACO resurgence, and Mick O'Flynn replaced an injured Ian Shoebridge for the last ten minutes. In the end our first-half display was enough even if we could not embellish it in the second half, as our defence held firm, in no small way thanks to the double athletic presence of Michael Hills and Luke Johnson.

Unfortunately, there are no buffet delights to regale you with on this occasion. We saw other people eat on the premises, but we had to make do with crisps and pork scratchings. A CUACO player, a teacher by occupation, came over to our table in a very loud and ample shirt, to admire the length of our fixture list. He apologised for his keeper taking Peter Harvey out in the first-half though he said he found it hilarious that none of the Farnborough players rushed over to see if Peter was OK. We found it hilarious when Mick O'Flynn asked him if he was a PE teacher. Luke Johnson also found some of Patrice Mongelard's jokes hilarious. The one about Jehovah's witnesses and testicles caused Matt Angelo to splutter, shake and spill his drink badly, more spillage from what should be a safe pair of hands.

Man-of-the-Match: Luke Johnson who told his missus he was playing nine holes of golf and ended up with nine votes.

28 October 2018: Ashburnham Wanderers Vets (A, 5-2)

Manty winds the clock back thirteen years to maintain Farnborough run

The mild confusion during the week about the location of today's away ground, which an excitable member of the squad called near hysteria, re-surfaced briefly as one or two players made phone calls less than a hundred yards away from the venue with the clock ticking. It was helpful that the clocks had gone back, not forward. When we got there, it was clear that the facilities would be a prime candidate for the sort of financial support which the FA is reportedly considering injecting into grassroots football. It had seen far better days – something you could say about most of the players in Vets football, but the sun was peering behind the passing rain clouds and the pitch looked to be in very good nick. The games between Farnborough and Ashburnham have been close and keenly but fairly fought. The pre-match team talk was curtailed when Mick O'Flynn realised that Ian Shoebridge was not playing and he had to re-work the spreadsheet.

When eventually assembled our squad of fourteen looked like this:

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Michael Hills, Mark Friend, Patrice Mongelard

Jay Hardy, Wayne Hetherington, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson, Obi Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, Kypros 'Romelu' Michael

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, Colin Mant, Mick O'Flynn

Supporters: David Orji and Michael Ugwumba Jr

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

I confess news had reached us of the 11-0 demolition job Ashburnham had done on West Farleigh Vets a few weeks ago, with one forward scoring eight times. We think that player was playing today but there was no need to let him know we were there, early doors. We enjoyed a good measure of control in the opening stages which gave us heart. When Kypros Michael gave us the lead about ten minutes into the game with a sizzling left foot shot which the Ashburnham keeper could not hold it was with the run of play. So too was the second goal we got a quarter of an hour later when Gordon Thompson and Peter Harvey carved open the Ashburnham defence and Gordon finished the assist from Peter from close range. In between the two goals we had carried a threat winning numerous corners and drawing last ditch tackles from the robust Ashburnham defence. Our own tackling could be on the brusque side and one Ashburnham player did mutter something to me about going to work in the morning. To break the ice, I mentioned I was retired. Kypros Michael had to retire prematurely with a recurrence of the knee trouble that has dogged him this season and Colin Mant was on shortly to sniff the air up front, before the other two half hour changes were made with Patrice Mongelard and Simon Thomas making way for Mick O'Flynn and Phil Anthony. This took a bit of flair and pace out of our game. Ashburnham began to exert more pressure on our box, their star player was making his presence felt despite the ministrations of Mark Friend and Michael Hills. With Matt Angelo in goal anything was possible but we thought we would hold on to half-time.

The weather was initially a bit Pearl Harbour but that does not explain the kamikaze defending from Phil Anthony which gifted Ashburnham a way back into the game to make it 2-1. Of course, Phil did not mean to under-hit the pass back to Matt Angelo which set up the Ashburnham forward, hitherto starved of service, very nicely to slot the ball past Matt. It was only two weeks

ago that Phil played for an opposing team. The clocks went back an hour not two weeks. Time travel today though, belonged to Colin Mant, thirteen years in fact, more on that later. I should say that Phil went on to put that moment behind him and give a more assured performance for the rest of the game.

As is often said in football the next goal was going to be crucial. It did not take long as the second half got underway. We caused dismay in the Ashburnham box from a corner and in the crowd scene that followed the ball fell to Colin Mant in the six-yard box. Colin cleverly disguised the quality of the contact – from the touchline three of us agreed unanimously that he had shinned it, but it appears he was aiming for the underside of the bar beyond the reach of the Ashburnham keeper who had morphed into a different player. On the hour, Gordon Thompson and Mark Friend made way for the return of Patrice Mongelard and Simon Thomas (with Phil Anthony and Mick O'Flynn now gracing the left side of our defence with a solid display).

We all had to work hard as Ashburnham pressed to get back in the game. Their star man produced a shot of great quality to reduce the deficit. He nearly equalised with a pile driver that Matt Angelo miraculously tipped round the post with an acrobatic gravity-defying save. Things were getting serious and just when we needed it, Peter Harvey provided the relief we craved, to restore our two-goal cushion. I am not sure what was classier, the visionary through ball from Wayne Hetherington or the predatory finish from Peter low into the bottom corner which appeared to punch a hole through the net.

Still Ashburnham pressed and Michael Hills and Patrice Mongelard produced a succession of tackles and clearing headers. Patrice Mongelard lifted a peach of a ball over the Ashburnham defence for Colin Mant, the 2005-06 Farnborough Old Boys Guild Vets Golden Boot, to “run” on to, clear through on goal but the finish was not there as he got caught in treacle. It did not matter as five minutes later Colin followed a ball into the Ashburnham box – a defender was ahead of him and the keeper was also coming out to get involved. What followed was, from our point of view, a good thing. The keeper lashed the ball against the back of his defender, the flight of the rebound was kind to Manty, now in a race with the keeper to claim the ball. It looked like Manty was operating in slow motion but that did not matter because the keeper was slower and a tired and elated Manty bundled the ball over the line, for a most improbable but welcome brace.

5-2 was a fair reflection of the match but it was not an easy game, far from it. You only have to ask Peter Harvey, taken roughly from behind repeatedly.

I avoided the showers as the hot water tap could not be activated. I had been thinking of another shower scene, oddly, involving a female player we once played against on our last visit to this ground. I understand food was laid on the Old Tamponians ground just around the corner but I had an appointment with some left over Cantonese fried rice at home, and wall papering with Mrs M.

Man-of-the-Match: Michael Hills and Colin Mant could not be separated, a Halloween double act you could say. You decide who is trick and who is treat.

4 November 2018: Belvedere Vets (H, 6-0)

Belvedere finally run out of luck against Farnborough

Farnborough Old Boys Guild Senior Vets historians will know that we do not tend to do well against today's opponents. Indeed, five weeks ago we lost by the odd goal in a five-goal thriller at Belvedere and they commented that we did not usually have much luck at their place. Well today they had no luck at ours. It might have started with the players they had available but we made our luck. The scoreline does not lie. It could have been more if Lady Luck had been truly on our side.

The highlight of the pre-match humour was Peter Harvey's observation that he was aggressive, negative and cynical. This contrasted with the poster left on the inside of the changing room yesterday which exhorted the away team to be aggressive, positive and clinical. On a dry, mild and overcast day we could not help wonder if our run of form would continue but today's opponents demanded respect. It had been a few seasons since we had got the better of them. We mustered fourteen players for the latest attempt.

Starting XI:

Rob Faulkner

Michael Hills, Mark Friend, Patrice Mongelard

Jay Hardy, Waine Hetherington, Mick O'Flynn, Simon Thomas, Obi Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, Colin Mant

Referee: Paul "Play-on" Parsons

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Lyons

Supporters: Kathleen and Thea Anthony, Steve Blanchard, Tony Harvey, David Orji, Ian Shoebridge

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

We started well and had reason to be optimistic. Belvedere incursions into our box were rare and the bulk of the play was in their half. Jay Hardy broke the deadlock about ten minutes in with a bustling run that took him past three Belvedere players and into the box before he fired low into the bottom corner with a clean strike of the ball. Simon Thomas will still be shaking his head at the free header he missed at the far post two yards from goal soon after. Peter Harvey doubled our lead from the penalty spot by drilling the ball low and hard after he had been taken down from behind. The penalty might have seemed harsh but sportingly Belvedere made nothing of it. Their main threat came from set-pieces but we managed to survive a few corners and free-kicks.

On the half hour we made three changes with Phil Anthony, Ian Lyons and Sinisa Gracanin coming on for Patrice Mongelard, Mark Friend and Waine Hetherington. Sinisa's return from a long lay-off from injury was marked with a smart finish when he scored our third with the sort of technical aplomb that Croatians are capable of. He made the most of an assist from Peter Harvey in a crowded box to steer the ball along the ground into the corner of the net – there was more finesse than power (a bit like Luka Modric) and Colin Mant was wondering if he should get the curling broom out as the ball made its way in a stately fashion into the net. Belvedere were showing signs of resurgence as the first-half tailed off but Rob Faulkner in our goal produced his normally assured performance to reassure the team.

We carried on in the same vein after half-time. Jay Hardy, a bundle of energy, hard tackling and purposeful running produced a gem about ten minutes after the restart to increase our lead. Another assist from Peter Harvey (a fantasy football favourite) was transformed into a golden moment as Jay placed a twenty-five yarder into the corner well beyond the reach of the Belvedere keeper. With half an hour left Colin Mant, Michael Hills and Obi Ugwumba made way for the return of Mark Friend, Waine Hetherington and Patrice Mongelard. We continued the same brand of passing football but the next goal was pure route one as Rob Faulkner launched another trademark goal-kick downfield for Jay Hardy to anticipate and run on to before lifting the ball exquisitely over the Belvedere keeper who had been drawn off his line.

Rob Faulkner then injured himself as he stretched unnecessarily to reach a high ball that was going wide (as helpfully pointed out by some of our players). His calf had gone. I have often wondered where they go. Waine Hetherington took the opportunity to remind everyone of his goal-keeping talent by taking the gloves and going on to produce the best save of the game to preserve our clean sheet. Michael Hills came back on, and was to come as near to scoring as he has been this season.

Mick O'Flynn could not quite last the full ninety minutes and was replaced by Colin Mant to see the game out. The eighty minutes or so he played had been purposeful and dynamic. Some of the lads want the pills Mick has been having. He came close to scoring with a flying header in the second half – if he only had a couple more inches to play with, he would have been in. He would be a terrifying prospect with half a yard of pace. Our sixth and last goal came from a corner with about ten minutes left. Peter Harvey swung it in with his customary vicious intent and Ian Lyons did the rest with a well-placed header at the far post. Lionel had gone up with the prophetic words that “one day the ball is going to land on my head”. He grimaced through the celebration because the act of scoring had involved Mark Friend landing on Lionel's foot as both players vied for position.

To their credit Belvedere, who do not lose often, played the game in the right spirit and they were complimentary about our performance. They did ask the referee at one point if we had more than eleven players on the pitch and Simon Thomas was chided for not launching himself into the bushes to retrieve a ball quickly enough. There was time in the final moments for both Peter Harvey and Michael Hills to hit the woodwork (well it is metal work really but you know what I mean). You could say Belvedere had a bit of luck after all. It was lucky for them too that a theatrical Simon Thomas did not connect with the ball while executing an acrobatic scissor kick at the far post.

There is not much shower action to report this week. Our showers malfunctioned and could only produce a thin drizzle, marginally better than the showers we did not experience last Sunday. Mick O'Flynn visited one of the other changing rooms to see what a big one looked like, and to have his small one laughed at, a sound system that is. I fear we have not seen the last of a huge speaker on wheels with flashing lights. People will still complain about the play list I expect, never mind the size of the organ.

Fifty crusty bread rolls and three packs each of sausage rolls and mini-pasties did not last long. The lads thought it would be hilarious to give the last few sausage rolls and mini-meat pasties that I had my eye on, and in fact had started consuming, to the people on an adjoining table. Still, they had excellent manners and thanked me, including when I was in the act of reimbursing Leanne for the food. We must get news to our guests that we are not playing at home next Sunday.

There was a lot of analysis to be done after the game and several jugs appeared, including from hat-trick boy Jay Hardy, and a nostalgic Steve Blanchard. We discussed the availability of a masseuse for the forthcoming tour of Prague next May, gave Simon Thomas firm marital advice not least because he took the kit home, and agreed with Leanne that the clubhouse Hoover sucked.

Man-of-the-Match: On a day of surprises Jay Hardy and Mick O'Flynn could not be separated initially, but a casting vote from Paul Parsons was registered in Mick's favour. Paul might have been charitable to the elderly but he is playing with fire if you ask me.

18 November 2018: Reigate Priory Vets (H, 8-1)

Farnborough make it a very long journey home for Reigate

The trip we make to Reigate is probably the longest we make during the season. I suspect Reigate's trip to Farnborough is their longest. Today it would have seemed even longer to them, particularly on the way back.

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Colin Mant, Michael Hills, Ian Lyons

Waine Hetherington, Danny Mullins, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson, Obi Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, Jay Hardy

Referee: Paul "Play-on" Parsons

Substitutes: Patrice Mongelard, Mick O'Flynn (unused), Ian Shoebridge

Supporters: Steve Blanchard, David Orji, Michael Ugwumba Jr

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

On a crisp, dry, sunny morning we looked forward to a tight game – as borne out by past results against today's opponents. Indeed, a neutral watching the game would have found it hard to predict a winner after the first ten minutes. Reigate matched our passing, defending, and care of the ball and their keeper looked like he knew his business. In fact, it would be fair to say that Reigate came closest to opening the score in that initial period. But after what could be seen as a shaky start, we got our bearings and our more influential players began to find their range and their feet.

It took three quick and slick goals from Farnborough to break Reigate's spirit by the half hour. Waine Hetherington, usually the anchor in our midfield, had ventured into the Reigate half and exchanged passes with Danny Mullins to find himself unencumbered by defenders with the keeper to beat. Waine took the shot on the run, two short strides into the eighteen-yard box, with the outside of his seemingly weaker right foot to thread the ball wide of the Reigate keeper at full stretch. Five minutes later we doubled our lead with another clinical finish. This time the blow was struck by Jay Hardy virtually on the penalty spot, who timed his entry in the box just right to meet a low cross with a first-time shot. The cross was curated by Simon Thomas who had got behind the Reigate defence. As we readied ourselves for two substitutions scheduled after one third of the match, we were able to admire a through ball which was eased into Peter Harvey's path by Obi Ugwumba who can make a difficult pass look deceptively easy. Peter stroked the ball against the base of the post and into the net.

Patrice Mongelard and Ian Shoebridge came on for Ian Lyons and Waine Hetherington soon after. Five minutes later Patrice lofted a pass over the Reigate defence which fell just right for Jay Hardy to steer beyond the keeper. Of course, the finesse came from Jay who made what Peter Harvey called a hopeful punt forward look good. We had other chances, notably Gordon "moves like Messi" Thompson came closest but we could not grow the score.

The talk at half-time was that this game had not been won yet and that an early goal from Reigate would make a difference. However, the early decisive strike was ours – barely two minutes after the restart. Gordon Thompson made an interception in a central midfield position, advanced on goal, slipped the ball past the last defender, nipped round to collect it and guide a low shot into

the bottom corner. Gordon was prominent ten minutes later to set up Jay Hardy for his third hat-trick of the season. On the hour, Waine Hetherington and Ian Lyons were back on for Colin Mant and Obi Ugwumba. We went on to register a seventh goal when Simon Thomas used his slide rule to invite Peter Harvey to apply a finish with the outside of his left foot.

Just when our minds were turning to a fifth clean sheet of the season Matt Angelo intervened. With about fifteen minutes left a hopeful cross was lofted into our box. With no other player within three yards of him Matt Angelo called for the ball, went up to gather but, perhaps blinded by the sun or hubris, fumbled and Reigate had a tap-in. Matt did not have long to beat himself up about it before we scored again. This time it was a fumble by the Reigate keeper which was seized by a marauding Jay Hardy from a tight angle. We could have scored more – Ian Shoebridge had time to control the ball after a cut-back from an unselfish Peter Harvey but lashed the ball over from a couple of yards out. Waine Hetherington hit the bar and Ian Lyons had a header from a Peter Harvey corner which he must have thought was in as soon as he made the contact. Michael Hills, excellent again, was taken off as Mick O'Flynn took his foot off the pedal for the last ten minutes and Colin Mant was back on to close the game out, so to speak.

To their credit Reigate did not lose their composure and they congratulated us warmly at the end despite what must have been a difficult morning for them with an unaccustomed experience. I am sure they cannot wait for the 10th of March when we go to their place.

There was a rumour that the showers had been fixed but I found no evidence of that. The bread rolls supplied by Leanne Macdonald were a delight and we did not need too much help from the Sunday team to finish the mini-sausage rolls. Peter Harvey also liked Leanne's furry bits.

The après-match discussion included an exchange on democracy. No, we were not discussing Brexit. We were discussing something more complicated – the Man-of-the-Match voting. Simon Thomas and Jay Hardy seemed to have difficulty accepting the idea that other players might have a different perspective from theirs, and therefore cast their votes in a different direction. Some might say that the problem with democracy is that you cannot control the way people vote. Anyway, I was not able to enrich the discussion because Mick O'Flynn felt that since I came from an African country, I was unable to grasp the concept of democracy in full. I let that Imperial spasm pass and focussed instead on my fourth cheese and pickle roll (I blame the African famines – although Mrs M would disagree).

Man-of-the-Match: Jay Hardy, feeling on top of the world after his four-goal haul who tried to ginger up your match reporter, for having deprived him of eight inches in the last match report. Jay feels he is five foot ten not the five foot two attributed to him. Well, I am happy to acknowledge that today Jay was immense.

25 November 2018: Old Tamponians Super Vets (A, 4-3)

Farnborough overwhelm Old Tamponians with monster second period

I am sure I was not the only one watching the precipitation all week with a tinge of trepidation. Thankfully, the John Roan Playing Fields in Kidbrooke Park Road, home of today's opponents, Old Tamponians Super Vets, coped with the flow. Memories of last season's late 4-3 defeat in the corresponding fixture were fresh in our minds as we sought to assemble a squad for the game.

Our numbers dwindled to twelve on the day. We think this week's Orpington Bus Depot fire was too much for Mark Friend, and we might never know what did for Obi Ugwumba. More importantly, we had been unable to find a goal-keeper. Sadly, a bereavement in the family deprived us of Matt Angelo. We approached a whole team of goalkeepers: Gary 'Fingers' Fentiman, Chris Jablonski, Dave Salako, Toby Manchip, Adam Roome, Steve Palmer, Paul Parsons, Matt Wright, Jim St John, Chisa's mate number 1 and Chisa's mate number 2 – all to no avail. So, in the end Patrice Mongelard did the job (without proper gloves, and without protection – more on that later).

Starting XI:

Patrice Mongelard

Colin Mant, Michael Hills, Phil Anthony

Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Chisa Mkala, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson

Peter Harvey, Jay Hardy

Substitute: Mick O'Flynn

Supporters: Steve and Sarah Hills

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Both periods of the game were quite memorable. I never touched the ball in the first fifteen minutes as Farnborough lay siege to the Old Tamps goal. We attacked and they defended and very well too – in numbers, in compact formation, with intelligence and not a little muscle. I think we forced three corners in the first five minutes and a number of half chances went begging, headers mostly. The other ersatz keeper on the pitch, Roy, in the Old Tamps goal, scorer of their winner in their 4-3 victory last year, caught the eye with a flying save to deny Peter Harvey.

Then against the run of play, on the quarter hour, with virtually their first incursion in our box Old Tamps drew first blood after some sloppy Farnborough defending. The agricultural Farnborough defending continued for the Old Tamps second and third goals. I had gardening gloves – apt I thought for the way things were turning out. Michael Hills felt he was at fault for, and assisted, two of the goals and his usual poise and finesse turned into a simmering frustration. The whole of the team was similarly affected. Harsh words were said, fingers pointed, eyes rolled, tutting and bad language heard – all music to our opponents who must have believed it was Christmas come early – to have less of the play, having to defend for long periods, and be three goals to the good from three chances. In the midst of this turmoil Mick O'Flynn came on for Phil Anthony on the half hour. I accused my players of giving me no protection (which at least one player, pervert, took as a reference to his sexual preference).

When we thought we pulled one back after a smart free-kick move the Old Tamps linesman did his job and the deficit remained three goals. Old Tamps were happy to soak the pressure,

concede free-kicks and corners and rely on their ability to cut out the telling pass, read the game, and narrow angles of penetration. They were putting up quite a fight in the midfield too where our more expressive and creative players were massed to supply Peter Harvey and Jay Hardy who were not finding it easy.

There was not much love to be felt at half-time.

The pattern of the first-half resumed, now with greater urgency having to be tempered with diminishing patience. Chances came and went again. An acrobatic bicycle kick with his back to goal from our strawberry blonde dynamo, Jay Hardy, was easy on the eye but had lost the bearings of the goal posts. We almost gave away a fourth goal but that was ruled out for hand ball after a bit more confusion in our box. That apart (if you are willing to gloss over a poor pass from the Farnborough goalkeeper out of his defence which was intercepted but thankfully without consequence) the traffic was one-way but time was ebbing away.

It was still 3-0 to Old Tamps when Phil Anthony came back on and Colin Mant went to run the line on the hour. From there Manty had a prime seat as Michael Hills saw red after some perceived rough treatment and went to shake the Old Tamps player involved, warmly by the throat. Thankfully older and wiser heads, including peace-maker Manty (who knows many of the Old Tamps players (and even works with some of them)) were on the scene quickly to restore order and the goodwill that there has always been between the two teams over many years of playing each other. A stray elbow in the Adam's apple for Waine Hetherington from the same Old Tamps player, not long after, was unhelpful but deemed accidental.

The last fifteen to twenty minutes of the game were packed with incident and for us with serendipity too. On seventy-five minutes Jay Hardy cushioned a pass in Chisa "Mo" Mkala's path just inside the box in a central position and Chisa's powerful shot was finally too much for the Old Tamps keeper. Five minutes later we had our first penalty as Old Tamps threw bodies and limbs in the way, on the line and in front of their goal. Peter Harvey slotted his twentieth goal-of-the-season beyond the keeper. Peter repeated the dose five minutes later with his second successful penalty. With five minutes to go, the Farnborough pressure was building. Waine Hetherington and Gordon Thompson had one-on-one moments at close-range that they would normally put away with their eyes closed but still we could not break through. With the referee looking at his watch we made a final assault through the heart of the Old Tamps defence with Waine Hetherington threading a killer ball for Jay Hardy to power home off the keeper. There was barely time to restart the game.

This week we experienced proper showers.

The atmosphere in the bar was friendly as we munched on sandwiches, chips and sausages and swapped banter with Old Tamps. Michael Hills was voted Old Tamps Man-of-the-Match (joke), assisted them with condiments, and stroked a pussy.

I can only hope that the return game at Farnborough in two weeks is just as memorable, and that we have a proper keeper for it.

Man-of-the-Match – Gordon Thompson – edging ahead of five other players, including three other midfielders, who also garnered votes.

2 December 2018: Orpington Vets (A, 2-2)

Derby day honours even for Senior Vets

On a day of several derby matches in football land, the big one in the Farnborough and Orpington Senior Vets universe was Farnborough Old Boys Guild v Orpington. It did not disappoint.

The goalkeeping net cast upon the Orpington and Farnborough waters during the week had hauled in Toby Manchip, erstwhile self-appointed overall club captain. Once again, a keeper for us was proving as rare as an Orpington buff's teeth but the lads seemed pleased to be spared a second week of Patrice Mongelard in goal, despite a proper set of gloves having been procured midweek. The pitch at the Beckenham Cricket Club in Foxgrove Road had coped with the deluges of recent days and was in splendid condition, on a dry and mild, albeit overcast morning.

We had only twelve players when the game kicked off at 10:30. Jay Hardy was still asleep in Grove Park, having knocked himself out watching the boxing. Mick O'Flynn did well to hide his fury when he woke Jay up with his call.

Starting XI:

Toby Manchip

Colin Mant, Michael Hills, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin, Wayne Hetherington, Mick O'Flynn, Simon Thomas, Obi Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, Gordon Thompson

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, and a tardy Jay Hardy

Supporters on the pitch: Danny and baby Ethan Mullins (with mum's looks)

Supporter in the bar: Steve Blanchard

Linesman: Ian Coles

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

It was clear from the warm-up that Orpington had assembled a squad to do a job on us today, to avenge their 8-2 defeat in August. New faces, old faces, and a lot of muscle were on display. Their star player Kevin declared himself fit after five hours of sleep (Jay Hardy - take note) to run rings round our defence. Both teams started well, moving the ball about with both defences kept busy. The first scare was ours though as Toby Manchip was called upon to fingertip the ball over the bar. The post came to our rescue on the quarter hour but before the half hour we had let in two goals. The first came when Toby parried but did not gather a shot and the ball fell kindly for the tall Orpington forward who used his body to bundle the ball over the line. The same player turned in a cross ten minutes later and confusion ensued. The referee initially ruled the goal out for off-side, and play had in fact moved on. But there was a clamour and he was persuaded to speak to linesman Ian Coles who was unable to confirm the off-side situation. Ian had one job to do today, one job, and all we can say is that he did it with utter honesty.

In between those two Orpington goals we had what we thought was a clear penalty when Peter Harvey rounded the Orpington keeper and was brought down. The referee was not persuaded by the skid marks inside the box and a likely penalty became a free-kick that yielded nothing. On the half hour, Patrice Mongelard and Simon Thomas made way for Phil Anthony and Jay Hardy who had finally arrived and after some trouble with the zip of his top eventually came on. I think that Jay himself would agree that his usual zip was not there today. At only three days away from his 44th birthday he found that two and a half hours of sleep are not ideal preparation

for a derby game. This was confirmed soon after he came on when Jay was put clean through on goal and lifted the ball over the bar as the giant Orpington keeper came at him like a heavy weight boxer.

For the second consecutive game we found ourselves facing a test of character as the second half got under way. Simon Thomas resumed his role on the right as Obi Ugwumba (fifty-one earlier in the week) sat on a wooden bench which was there in honour of a great sportsman called Mick. I could not make out the rest of the inscription. We began to put the Orpington goal under more pressure. Gordon Thompson raised our spirits with a mazy run, beating two defenders before firing narrowly wide. Soon after Simon Thomas almost climaxed a sweeping passing move but his shot was wide from two yards out after he had ghosted in like a phantom behind the Orpington defence.

At the other end, Orpington were not creating as many chances. Their forward Kevin was having to drop deep and do a lot of running but there was always a ring of Farnborough players around him. We lost a bit of momentum when Peter Harvey dropped deep and the options up front narrowed but we made the adjustment with changes on the hour with Patrice Mongelard and Obi Ugwumba back on for Colin Mant and Waine Hetherington. With Jay Hardy, Gordon Thompson and Simon Thomas now probing more and deeper we got our reward. Peter Harvey set up Gordon Thompson for a low finish from a narrow angle and it was game on. Five minutes later Sinisa Gracanin was on hand for a left foot finish that drew us level. Sini had two bites at it – his first shot was parried, the ball came back to him, it looked like he played a one-two with an Orpington defender and was perfectly positioned to gather the rebound and produce a composed finish. The emotion of it all was too much for a spent Mick O'Flynn and he ushered Waine Hetherington back on to restore the game management craft that we needed at that point whilst still pushing for a winner.

The last quarter of an hour was packed with incident. We had good chances to win it. Jay Hardy (with a bicycle kick a yard out no less) and Simon Thomas came closest whilst at the other end Orpington were relying on dangerous set-pieces – long throws and corners to regain the lead. Toby Manchip produced a couple of cracking saves to deny Orpington. Patrice Mongelard cleared overhead on the line. Waine Hetherington put his head where it hurt between two Orpington players. We finished the game with a great sense of belief.

In the end a draw was the right result – our second draw this season, also 2-2 and away. We probably felt we had done a bit more to claim a moral victory but there was quality and intent in the Orpington side that deserved respect.

The showers were the best we have experienced this season. Sandwiches and sausages were excellent. I was persuaded to eat the last sausage, after I had finished off the sandwiches. Steve Blanchard appeared in the bar to keep Ian Coles company, just like the old days. Ian Coles took delivery of his Managers' Player of the Year from last season (with correct use of the apostrophe engraved). The club archives recorded this for Ian – “arguably our, most consistent player, always pitted against the big fast units up front, never has a bad game – good in the changing room, and a huge presence in the bar”. We wish Ian a full recovery from injury. There was time for Mick to make eyes at Orpington Kevin, should he ever be looking for another team. Ian Coles said he'd give Kevin a sausage every morning if he played for us.

Man-of-the-Match - Sinisa Gracanin with a beacon of a performance, just edging out a black-booted Michael Hills, and five other players who attracted votes including Toby Manchip.

9 December 2018: Old Tamponians Super Vets (H, 2-1)

Sensory overload

It is not often that I am stumped for a headline to sum the game up. Today I am. There is almost too much to fit in. Moreover, I have to start the report from the day before. Here are some of the key ingredients – fifty-five crusty bread rolls, kit that went walkabout, another triumph at the Farnborough Old Boys Guild Quiz for the Senior Vets Boot Room; a revenant, water everywhere but not quite in the showers, a penalty virgin, an anger management video, a tight squeeze on the pitch, a worldie of a goal. What more could you want for Christmas?

All week it rained and it was not possible to predict if our pitch would be playable. I was ready with Operation Meryl to switch the game to Norman Park if needed at short notice. In the end we got the all clear on Saturday. None the less the heavy Sunday morning downpour shortly after 9 o'clock was unwelcome even if the heavy rain clouds moved on and we eventually had a bit of clear daylight for most of the game although some of our play today was not too bright. Before I knew if we would play the game the unseen pressures of management meant that I had to buy fifty-five crusty white rolls the day before. They were more like soft rolls a day later.

Sinisa Gracanin had one job, one relatively simple job, to do during the week and that was to get the kit washed from last Sunday. Imagine his surprise, and ours, when he turns up in the launderette on the afternoon before the game only to be told that a mystery man had collected the kit already. We have been playing without Kyp for weeks and now kit had gone walkabout. I cannot begin to explain how we got to that point but fortunately the man in question had links with Farnborough Old Boys Guild and after a phone call from Brighton to Mick O'Flynn from another man, I was summoned from afternoon tea in Fortnum and Mason, for Mrs M's birthday, to collect the kit from Maureen from an Orpington address on a cold wet and dark evening.

By contrast it seemed more straightforward for the Harvey, Mongelard, O'Flynn and Paris ensemble, to win the Quiz at the club. It was in the balance until the final round but in the end, it felt more comfortable that the numerous previous occasions we had won it. I duly took the opportunity the next day to wear the Tee shirt that tells people to forget about using GOOGLE because my wife knows everything.

Anyway, back to the football. We had sixteen players for the warm-up but fifteen for the game after Gordon Thompson had pulled something. (No, I don't know her name – joke). We had a bigger crowd than usual, including the welcome sight of Roger French, back on familiar turf after his triple coronary by-pass. Our opponents Old Tamponians Super Vets had given us a tough game fourteen days ago, and we expected no less again this time from their bare eleven. Their back four looked like the keynote speakers at a Convention for large furniture.

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Colin Mant, Michael Hills, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Ian Shoebridge, Simon Thomas, Obi Ugwumba

Chisa Mkala, Jay Hardy

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, Peter Harvey, Ian Lyons, Mick O'Flynn

Supporters: Rob Faulkner and a not so hungry dog, Roger French, Tony Harvey, Danny Mullins and a hungry dog, Jim St John, Gordon Thompson.

Referee: Nick Kinnear (who waived his fee, in effect donating it to the club shower appeal)

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Compared to how we have been playing recently I have to be honest and say we could have made a better start. Of course, our opponents would not let us. Sometimes we did not let ourselves. Simon Thomas was clean through on goal after ten minutes and the Old Tamps giant keeper mustered all his experience to thwart Simon. There was not much he could do though five minutes later when an incisive run from Chisa Mkala into the heart of the Old Tamps defence, lubricated with an exquisite through ball from Waine Hetherington enabled Chisa to produce a composed finish to give us the lead. We were not able to build on this. Jay Hardy, dapper today in a raffish light brown scarf which complemented his ginger coiffure rather well, was in fact sleep-deprived having watched long hours, so I understand as I do not know about such things, of female mud wrestling. He was jaded, not his usual effervescent self.

How Old Tamponians did not draw level before the half hour was down to a stupendous save from Matt "Rainman" Angelo combined with an acrobatic last-ditch block from Michael "Mindfulness" Hills after a cross from the right had caused disarray in our box. Roy, the Old Tamps forward, was still shaking his head at the end of the game about that moment. The half hour changes with Colin Mant, Chisa Mkala, Patrice Mongelard and Michael Ugwumba being replaced by Phil Anthony, Peter Harvey, Ian Lyons, Mick O'Flynn did not quite have the revitalising effect we were seeking. Peter Harvey did put a low shot against the base of the post but Old Tamps were making a contest of it, even though they were down to ten players as the half ended. Obi Ugwumba sportingly went across at half-time to squeeze into an Old Tamps shirt and went on to do his Farnborough team mates no favours.

Old Tamps started the second half better than we did – with more purpose, pace and in particular solidarity. Matt Angelo came to our rescue more than once but then again that is why he is on the pitch. There were far too many occasions today when our players were more exercised about their own team mates than the opposition. Michael Hills began hearing voices in his head as he berated Simon Thomas for his Moai impression in defending a corner. Picture the sight of Basil Fawltly thrashing a broken-down car with a small bush and you will begin to get the sense of Michael's outburst. Simon must have felt like an extra in a video on anger management. The same player was to have a contretemps with Peter Harvey later. I suppose as a thespian Simon takes criticism to heart but he is bright enough to know how team spirit works.

This was all music to Old Tamps who went on to force a penalty as Ian Lyons brought down from behind a forward who had got round the back of our defence. I have seen more grace from lions bringing down wildebeest in the Serengeti and yet Lionel would have me believe that this was his first time ever. One of the big units from the Tamps defence struck the penalty very well, beyond Matt's reach. The early re-introduction of Chisa Mkala replacing Mick O'Flynn restored some of our attacking impetus.

Just before the hour the game was blessed with a moment of exquisite skill. Peter Harvey and Waine Hetherington dovetailed in the middle of the park and Waine found himself in space thirty or so yards out with the ball on his wand of a left foot. The shot was clean, powerful and directed unerringly towards the top corner beyond the despairing reach of the assured Old Tamps keeper. Waine's celebration was full of feeling. Imagine a Stuart Pearce moment after he struck a successful penalty for England, but with added raised middle digits.

Patrice Mongelard and Colin Mant were back on for the last half hour to see the game out with Ian Shoebridge and Michael Hills making way. The neutral would say that we ought to have increased our lead with the front quartet of Jay Hardy, Peter Harvey, Chisa Mkala and Simon Thomas producing moments of inter-connected play that we know they are capable of but Old Tamps held out. Peter Harvey had a good shout for a penalty waved away by referee Nick Kinnear. In the end the scoreline was a fair reflection of the game.

The state of our showers remains a puzzle, wrapped in an enigma inside a conundrum. A question about what it would take for the showers at Farnborough to work would have been a tough one at last night's quiz. I suspect a lot of money is the answer.

The fifty-five bread rolls were joined by some sandwiches from the quiz night (which the Sunday Reserve XI, 10-1 winners today, polished off). The Old Tamps contingent produced a splendid effort in the bar as a mountain of tuna, cheese and pickle and ham sandwiches was tackled along with mini-pasties and mini-sausage rolls. I made my own modest contribution of course.

Man-of-the-Match - with just over half of the fifteen votes cast, Wayne Hetherington, with the wonder goal he wanted for Christmas and a celebration to remember. I understand that the element of irony was introduced for one vote which went to another player but I failed to pick up on that nuance. Voting is a serious matter that should not be trifled with, as our political leaders are finding out.

16 December: Wellcome Super Vets (A, 6-4)

Farnborough come from behind to win 10-goal thriller, with a bit of panto at the end

Despite the heavy rain yesterday there was really no doubt that this game would go ahead at the Beckenham Cricket Club. By happy coincidence, both Farnborough Vets teams were playing at the same venue which meant we had to play on the smaller pitch. The two sets of identical Farnborough colours on adjacent pitches were a rare sight.

Toby Manchip's account of his previous night at the Ally Pally darts had to be heard to be disbelieved. It was not far short of a miracle that he was almost ready for his pick-up at 9:15. Talking of pick-ups his tale got more fantastical as the journey to the ground progressed. I promised not to reveal more, mostly on grounds of taste and decorum.

Starting XI:

Toby Manchip;

Colin Mant, Michael Hills, Patrice Mongelard;

Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Chisa Mkala, Danny Mullins, Simon Thomas;

Peter Harvey, Jay Hardy.

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, Ian Lyons, Ian Shoebridge.

Supporters: Mick O'Flynn.

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

The weather was dry, sunny and relatively mild compared to other parts of the country. Before kick-off Wellcome informed us that they had drafted a couple of youngsters to make up the numbers. I gather that the Farnborough Young Vets team had even younger players. The pitch had been played on the day before but it was hard to tell. The surface was slick.

Not so slick though was our start. It was hard to put a finger on the reason. The consensus later was that the size of the pitch was inhibiting, depriving our offensive players like Peter Harvey of the usual room. The first clear chance was ours none the less as Chisa Mkala put a close-range shot against the base of the post after he was quickest to a rebound in the six-yard box. We thought we had scored after Jay Hardy rounded the keeper and squared the ball for two Farnborough players on the line but the Wellcome linesman had flagged for off-side, "a couple of moves earlier". There was no doubt though when the first Wellcome attack of any note yielded a goal for them. Manchip was chipped from twenty yards out by the touchline, against the run of play.

We were still trailing when we made our first raft of changes. Waine Hetherington, Colin Mant and Patrice Mongelard made way for Phil Anthony, Ian Lyons and Ian Shoebridge. In a golden five minutes we scored two quick goals – first Peter Harvey was set up by Chisa Mkala for a rasping close-range drive. Peter Harvey returned the service for a belter from Chisa Mkala, after the tackle of the match from our smallest player, Jay Hardy, on the biggest Wellcome player – a midfield heavy that was not slow to put himself about. A good night's sleep makes a lot of difference, Jay agreed.

Ian Lyons' involvement was cut short with a calf strain after ten minutes during which time he had the impression that he had been involved in creating our two goals. Patrice Mongelard was back on, in time to see Jay Hardy return to scoring form with a smart finish after one of the many

headers won by Danny Mullins in the Wellcome box (some of which inexplicably not finding the back of the net).

3-1 at half-time felt deserved. Chisa Mkala stretched our lead early in the second half with a self-made goal that looked bizarre against the new, and arguably better, keeper that Wellcome brought on towards the end of the first half. Our own keeper Toby Manchip at the other end must have had a flashback of the darts as he juggled with the ball and appeared to throw it at our post but he was able to cover it before too late.

At 4-1, probably believing the game was won, Mick O'Flynn made further changes. Patrice Mongelard came back on to replace Phil Anthony. Patrice set up Jay Hardy for our fifth with a heavily disguised pass. More changes were made as Michael Hills and Simon Thomas made way for the return of Waine Hetherington and Phil Anthony. Phil will not look upon his second stint with fondness. An unwise pass out of our defence was not executed as well as Phil hoped. The ball went straight to an unmarked Wellcome forward who produced an exquisite twenty yarder for the top corner. There was still no need to panic as our chances kept coming. Danny Mullins put a header against the crossbar. Peter Harvey had a low drive well saved by the Wellcome keeper. Peter did not have to wait long to notch another goal as Chisa Mkala delivered a cross to the far post on a plate for our sixth goal.

Things then got a bit spicy – like mulled wine, after Peter Harvey and Waine Hetherington were both taken roughly from behind. Words were exchanged, there was a bit of shoving and pulling but nothing more serious than that although the Wellcome midfield heavy took himself off – I suppose to avoid doing anything serious. In the midst of this display of handbags I had not noticed that Toby Manchip had darted off the pitch with a calf strain and Michael Hills was now in goal. Phil Anthony might well have found that confusing and that could explain what happened next. A long ball out of the Wellcome defence was on its way to the edge of the box when Michael called for it and came off his line. He was behind Phil but Phil thought oh no he isn't. I don't think Phil is hard-of-hearing yet but somehow decided to apply his head to the ball, producing a change of direction for the ball which wrong-footed Michael and rolled into the bottom corner of our net. I have seen worse finishes win goal-of-the-season. This was not to be the last goal. Wellcome contrived another finish in the top corner that had Michael flummoxed.

The Christmas spirit almost ran dry after some heavy tackling from Wellcome. The mild-mannered referee just about kept a lid on it. One of the Wellcome players, the midfield heavy, got a bit worked up on the touchline and offered to re-arrange Simon Thomas' features, again, to make him more suited for butch roles. Simon politely declined the offer from the not very nice chap.

We limped home, you could say. There were a few players with knocks. But that did not explain why Mick O'Flynn started looking in the bar for a keeper for next week straightway. Perhaps he knew that Toby Manchip would not be available.

A much-needed touch of glamour was introduced in the proceedings in the bar as the members of the Beckenham Tennis Club gathered for their Christmas lunch, after we had polished off sandwiches and chips. There were a lot of sparkly tops on display. I left Colin Mant, Ian Lyons, Jay Hardy, Peter Harvey and Mick O'Flynn behind, with a silent Christmas wish that they would behave, before bracing myself for the journey home, for more tales from Ally Pally involving men in tight black dresses, a black Snow White in the urinals and £80 worth of unused drinks tokens.

Christmas Jumper of the day – there were a few on display. My Scandinavian Runes jumper was too subtle for the lads – with “not a single reindeer in sight”. Subtlety was not going to win the day which is why Simon Thomas’ jumper edged it over Toby Manchip’s.

Man-of-the-Match – Chisa Mkala with the biggest bag of votes from Santa, despite some dodgy boots.

23 December 2018: STC Sports Vets (A, 2-1)

Farnborough edge a tough encounter

Today's opponents STC Vets already had beaten us 2-1 at our place in our first game of the season. So, we knew they deserved respect, and that today's match at their place with a squad reduced to twelve, on a heavy pitch in overcast conditions, would test our mettle. Mick O'Flynn was unable to join us because of a chest, his own I hasten to add. Michael Hills was the first to get to the ground, having woken up in Staines this morning (I think that is the right spelling). The return in goal of Matt Angelo was a blessing and he seemed to be in good spirits after a recent family funeral. When I asked "How was the funeral?" he replied "You would have loved the buffet, Pat" which the rest of the squad found hilarious.

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Colin Mant, Michael Hills, Patrice Mongelard

Simon Harvey, Waine Hetherington, Chisa Mkala, Danny Mullins, Simon Thomas

Peter Harvey, Jay Hardy

Substitute: Phil Anthony

Supporter: Steve Hills

Absent Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Both teams made a measured start. Early tackles made it clear this was a competitive fixture. Both defences were alert and much of the play was in midfield where we blended the muscular presence of Danny Mullins, Simon Harvey and Chisa Mkala with the guile of Waine Hetherington and the pace and touch of Simon Thomas. Both goalkeepers were relatively untroubled in the first quarter of an hour or so. The pitch though heavy was not inhibiting passing even if the clay stuck to one's boots. The first-half chances were ours, mostly from corners. Peter Harvey was in the wars today and we had an early fright when it was feared he had hurt his neck in a coming together. More of the play was taking place in the STC half but without end product. Neither goal had been breached when Patrice Mongelard was replaced by Phil Anthony after half an hour. It was not long after that – no connection between the two events, that we took the lead. Waine Hetherington threaded a ball for Jay Hardy to run on to and beat the STC keeper from close range. The STC keeper was certainly not a small man and Jay felt the contact as he stretched a leg just in time to slide the ball under the keeper's body. We felt we deserved this lead which we preserved until half-time having withstood a couple of STC corners and long throws.

The second half was a much livelier affair. The few spectators got their money's worth in goal mouth incidents today. I do not recall any wind and the pitch looked level but somehow STC pressed harder with fresh legs and took the fight to us. Matt Angelo, who does not do ordinary, made several saves that caught the eye. One such save, where he pushed a pile driver against the bar was certainly memorable but there was even better to come, even if Matt would have preferred a less painful memory. Simon Thomas preserved our advantage with a last-minute block on the line which left the opposition cursing their luck. There was more of that to come. We were now playing more on the break and we doubled our lead on the hour when Simon Thomas provided an emphatic finish from an acute angle having ghosted in at the far post to crown a move which we thought had died when Jay Hardy was stymied by the keeper.

Patrice Mongelard replaced Colin Mant just after the hour and was soon involved, with others, in another almighty scramble in our box. Matt Angelo caught a powerful point-blank shot where it hurt most. I resisted the “one careful owner, hardly used” joke. The time did not seem right somehow. Nor was it the right time for Chisa Mkala to give away a penalty when he diligently tracked, and ended, the run of rangy STC midfielder who looked like he was related to Yaya Toure. Despite Matt’s antics the penalty was converted expertly. It was certainly game on, Farnborough looking to increase our lead on the break and STC seeking to draw level.

Matt was involved not long after in saving a header which led to another bout of pin ball in or box where STC were under the impression the ball had crossed the line in the melee that ensued but we believed with equal conviction it had not. The referee took our side in the absence of goal line technology. That was still a talking point in the bar afterwards. Yet we had chances to put the game to bed. Jay Hardy, Chisa Mkala, Danny Mullins and Peter Harvey all had one-on-one chances that they would have converted on another day. The one from Peter in particular stood in the mind – a yard out, on the favourite left peg, ball guided into the bottom corner only to come off the base of the post, travel back across the goal to hit the keeper and trickle out. Not long before that Peter had been the recipient of a tackle that deserved the adjective agricultural on account of the scything action.

Tempers were getting frayed as the clock ticked. One particular feisty, vocal and combative STC full-back stood out from the pack despite being a small man. I think as a general rule the smaller man tries harder. He was to cap the final whistle with an altercation with Peter Harvey which was unseemly in front of young spectators and not what the game deserved. The irony is that I gather he is a Spurs fan like Peter. Still, he’ll be in a better mood tonight, as will Peter.

The facilities in the bar were top notch. The bar staff were friendly and engaging. Piping hot sausage rolls, roast potatoes and that Christmas favourite - pigs in blankets (referred to as “Manty under a duvet” by Peter Harvey) made a most welcome appearance with only six of us left from the Farnborough contingent (we do not often lose in the bar but we did today). I took some time to chat to the opposition – which some of the lads interpreted as a sausage or roast potato quest by a plastic melt, when in fact the responsibilities of management, resting solely on my shoulders today in Mick O’Flynn’s absence, meant that a bit of PR was needed after the way the game ended. Jay Hardy helped by signalling to the STC manager that he would be happy to invite them to take in a Vets Cup Competition which he is thinking of organising next season.

Man-of-the-Match – Matt Angelo, who put his crown jewels in the line of fire, and who had his own guardian angel today after the funeral we talked about.

6 January 2019: Inter Vyagra Super Vets (H, 6-1)

Farnborough peak early against Inter Vyagra

This home fixture is usually claimed by frost or rain but today we got away with it, in more ways than one. We were not expecting a repeat of the 13-3 scoreline when we last met today's opponents nearly exactly three months ago. It was dry, not cold, nor windy and the pitch looked better than it has at corresponding times in previous seasons. We expected the post-Christmas lethargy to have some effect, but arguably, and in principle, that applies to both teams. I am not so sure, after our flaccid second half display.

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Colin Mant, Michael Hills, Patrice Mongelard

Colin Brazier, Waive Hetherington, Ian Lyons, Ian Shoebridge, Gordon Thompson

Peter Harvey, Jay Hardy

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, Mick O'Flynn, Obi Ugwumba

Supporters: George Kleanthous (with new ankle), Toni Harvey stylish and dapper in Farnborough scarf, Mike Footit, Michael Ugwumba Jr

Referee: Paul 'Play On' Parsons

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

It seemed to take a while for us to get going. It was clear, early doors, that Inter Vyagra would provide stiffer opposition this time round. Our passing was not the most fluent but we settled after an early goal from Jay Hardy, latching on to a perceptive through ball from the Farnborough king of assists, Gordon Thompson. The short through ball behind the Inter Vyagra defence for willing and smart runners, provided they stayed on side, would bring dividends today. And it did - our second goal, scored by Peter Harvey, and our third - scored by Jay Hardy - all assisted by Gordon Thompson, were carbon copies of the first. If you have not got Gordon in your Senior Vets Fantasy Football Team, you are a fool. However, sadly, Gordon's participation was cut short by a knock (which bled through his worn socks - we need new socks - please note Director of Football!). Gordon withdrew after thirty-five minutes (with Ian Lyons being re-inserted). That was soon after the half hour changes which ushered in Mick O'Flynn, Phil Anthony and Obi Ugwumba for Colin Brazier, Ian Lyons and Patrice Mongelard. Jay Hardy registered our fourth goal not long before half-time, assisted this time by Peter Harvey. There was clearly no problem with Peter passing to Jay today.

Although we were leading 4-0 at the half way point, and our defence had not really been tested, there were things to be said during the half-time talk. We could all see that we collectively were not playing as well as we could. My attention took in two other bits of information. First, George Kleanthous shared details of his ankle reconstruction (which contained scenes that could upset readers if I relayed them). George hopes to be back playing next season (provided that the surgeons operated on the correct ankle - his joke, not mine!). I speak for the entire squad when I say that we eagerly await George's return. I cannot say the same for our opponents.

Second, an elderly gentleman, a former Farnborough player in the 60s, in the Tugmutton Recreation Ground era - Mike Footit - came up, asking after Vic Farrow. Sadly, Vic passed away a few years ago but other names such as Bunny Beston and Ted Mace were mentioned by Mike. I hope he catches up with them, not least because football creates wonderful shared memories.

The half-time talk worked better for Inter Vyagra. I do not think any of your players would disagree with the view that we went all limp in the second half. We had the tonic of a fifth goal scored by Ian Shoebridge – assisted by Jay Hardy, early in the half. Ian's perseverance paid off, after it looked like the moment had passed; there was hesitancy in the Inter Vyagra defence and the keeper was lured off his line and Ian calmly stroked the ball beyond him.

Colin Brazier and Patrice Mongelard came back on for the last half hour, replacing Colin Mant and Ian Shoebridge. Mant returned to finish the game later after Ian Lyons developed a stiff ... neck. We edged further ahead with an unselfish assist from Peter Harvey for Jay Hardy to notch his fourth goal of the game. Jay had scored four goals against Reigate on 18 November, and today was his fourth hat-trick of the season. (Peter Harvey too has multiple hat-tricks including five goals on 13 November). It is good to see competition between the strikers, and potency.

The last quarter of an hour was not the climax we might have hoped for. We played terribly. Hesitancy, complacency, disjointedness, poor passing, sliced clearances and there was even a moment when Matt Angelo took out Phil Anthony. One wit who will remain nameless, suggested that Matt was merely neutralising the biggest threat to our goal. All I would say is that he supports a team that is still in the FA Cup and is hoping to draw a big team in the next round, and that he is a former Farnborough Vets Golden Boot winner. He had a sniff at goal today which must have got his circulation going.

We could not hold on to a clean sheet. A cross from the right was not cut out and an Inter Vyagra forward finished well with an acrobatic volley that left Matt very disappointed. We cannot begrudge our opponents that moment. It was deserved.

The game was played in a good spirit even if the referee, Paul Parsons, might feel it was not the most enjoyable of games for him. There was quite a bit of backchat but all was well in the bar. We even shared our showers with one or two Inter Vyagra Players. As an optimist I would like to report that two out of three showers in our changing room finally worked; as a pessimist I would say that one shower did not work.

What did work in full was our buffet arrangements, ably delivered by barmaid Leanne. It all went except for a half-eaten mini-meat pasty, left by Peter Harvey who made the error of expecting meat in it.

The Man-of-the-Match voting was perplexing to some, with eight players attracting votes. I even had to rule out a vote cast in the direction of Simon Thomas (had his best game for weeks – you know how the banter goes).

Man-of-the-Match – Jay Hardy, our ginger fox in the box, who christened his new boots with four goals.

13 January 2019: Baltic Vets (A, 3-1)

Farnborough come through a tough one

It was a while since we had played Baltic. But we knew enough from club folklore to expect a tough examination and that is what we got. Rumours that Farnborough refugee Des Lindsay had found asylum with Baltic were confirmed when he parked alongside me in the early bird car park. I asked him casually if he had taken the day off work tomorrow. I also asked if Baltic match subs were the same as ours. Des did not have a problem with match subs – it is laundry that caused him enormous difficulty with us.

Other early arrivals included Jay Hardy who had travelled with Matt Angelo. I am not sure what they talked about but Matt's effervescent exuberance and the testicular nature of his utterances caused Matt Ellis to ask who had put ten pence in Matt (Angelo that is). I think it was more a case of a £50 note.

Before the game in the changing room, we witnessed as our first football plastic fan moment of the day. This is a new feature which I am introducing in my Farnborough Senior Vets match reports to pander to the true or real fans. Colin Mant – a true one, donated a used match ticket for AFC Wimbledon vs Liverpool (Monday 5 January 2015) to Patrice Mongelard, a plastic one. Manty has a kind heart but I could see why as a true fan he might not wish to have the ticket a round to remind him of the result – a 2-1 win for Liverpool with two Steven Gerrard goals in this FA Cup third Round game. These days my team concentrates on the league.

Starting XI

Matt Angelo

Colin Mant, Michael Hills, Patrice Mongelard

Colin Brazier, Matt Ellis, Wayne Hetherington, Gordon Thompson, Obi Ugwumba

Jay Hardy, Kypros Michael

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, Mick O'Flynn, Peter Harvey, Simon Thomas

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

For the time of year, the weather was good for football – dry, no wind, mild although the pitch was a little claggy. It looked like it had been a while since the heavy roller rusting away alongside the pitch had been used.

Both teams started well. The early chances were Farnborough's and they fell mainly to Kypros Michael back after a long spell out injured and consequently quite rusty. I counted two or three one-on-ones that went begging. Jay Hardy and Matt Ellis were causing problems to the Baltic defence and their keeper was the busier of the two. It was also clear early on that the malaise which affected us in the second half of last week's game against Inter Vyagra had now dissipated. We were back to being organised, disciplined and taking better care of the ball. It was, of course, not all one-way traffic. Baltic posed questions. They were organised too, with big units at the back, pace up front and bite in midfield. And they had Des Lindsay who memorably had a 50-50 cruncher with Patrice Mongelard. "You'll feel it in the morning" he said. I think he meant the coming together.

The deadlock was broken shortly before the half hour by Jay Hardy who had a few sniffs at the goal. A peach of a cross from the boot of Matt Ellis found Jay in the six-yard box in a crowd of players, most of them bigger than Jay, but the forehead that mattered was Jay's as a sweet connection with the ball finally beat the able Baltic keeper.

We made four changes on the half hour with Colin Brazier, Kypros Michael, Patrice Mongelard and Obi Ugwumba making way for the four substitutes. I sort of lost track of further changes in the second half when the substituted players all returned but unscheduled changes were also made as Mick O'Flynn and Obi Ugwumba did not make their allotted hour and at one point we had twelve players on the pitch. Suffice to say that the full squad of fifteen were involved today and all played their part.

Just before half-time we had the cushion of a second goal. The big Baltic centre half dawdled on the ball in a dangerous area in his box, had his pocket picked by Jay Hardy who hopped clear to beat the keeper from close range. A good time to score pundits often say, as if there is a bad time to score.

The wind seemed to pick up in the second half and was now against us. Some felt there was a bit of a slope against us too. It is also fair to say that Baltic upped their game and began to press harder, winning more corners. From one such set-piece they got back in the game. Matt Angelo pulled off a fantastic point blank save to push a header against the bar. The ball rebounded back into the six-yard box, there was a crowd scene and a Baltic shot crashed against the post and hit Mick O'Flynn to trickle over the line. One moment of brilliance from Matt had been undone by his own team mate. For a while it looked like we would let this one slip away. This feeling became more acute after Peter Harvey uncharacteristically missed a penalty.

The referee's authority was felt when he made it clear that he would send players off if there was a recurrence of the momentary unpleasantness involving ex-Farnborough player Des Lindsay and Michael Hills. As often happens the player not involved in the original incident is the one that aggravates the situation. I saw more fire in Des in that moment than I had seen in however many games he played for us. I had the idea that he was a man of God – a Jehovah's Witness unless I am mistaken. This reminds me, I must one day tell you about the testicular take on a pair knocking on your door on a Sunday morning – but obviously not here in this report. The Farnborough webmaster would not allow it.

The last ten to fifteen minutes were tense. Baltic won corners and we threatened on the break with Kypros Michael once again involved. With barely five minutes left Matt Ellis produced another supreme pass that Kypros feared he had used all his talent to bring under control but he had kept enough back to drive a low shot past the keeper. There was no coming back from that for Baltic. The lads reckon that Kyp's ratio of goals to opportunities is about one in fifteen. A two-time European Golden Boot winner deserves more respect – I think it is one in ten.

Peter Harvey declared the showers to be Scandinavian. It was not quite what you might think.

Our second plastic fan moment came courtesy of South-East of England resident Kypros Michael who left promptly after our game so he could get to Wembley to watch his team in **the** game. I'll give you a clue – Kypros is hoping that Mauricio Pochettino will be managing his team this time next year.

I understand that our opponents put on a big food spread after the game at the Warlingham Sports Club. For once, I missed that particular gravy cruise liner but it must have all been splendid fare because the man who brought out the chicken nuggets and chips got Colin Brazier's Man-of-the-Match vote. I gather we were well beaten in the bar.

Man-of-the-Match – there were some great individual performances against the broader canvas of a solid team display – six players garnered votes with Michael Hills, Des Lindsay's new football buddy, getting the most.

20 January 2019: Glendale Vets (A, 2-3)

Disgruntlement abounds as Farnborough brought back to earth by Glendale

This game is usually waterlogged or frozen off. When it is on, we know it will be a hard game against quality opponents. Today it was played and many Farnborough players will be wishing it had not. Our first defeat since 30 September (also a 3-2 reverse) came after a sequence of twelve wins and one draw. It proved too much for many of the fourteen Farnborough players who were there today. The mood after the game was not good. Numbers had reduced from sixteen overnight with our water and first aid bag carrier, Colin Mant, the latest to drop out as we were making our way to the ground.

The weather was as good as it gets for football in winter – dry, no wind, early frost dissipated by pale sunshine, pitch not as claggy as last week (even though we were about one hundred yards from last week's pitch which Kypros Michael likened to a clay pit – one day they will find Homo Kypros in there – a Stone Age footballer that missed a lot of chances). Facilities were good – the groundsman, a Crystal Palace fan was a bit morose, but the changing room was spacious, the showers good and there was a splendid catering van selling a range of hot baguettes, toasted sandwiches and hot beverages at the Croydon Post Office Sports Ground in Warlingham. Parking was relatively easy once in the grounds of the complex.

Matt Angelo

Michael Hills, Ian Lyons, Patrice Mongelard

Waine Hetherington, Chisa Mkala, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson, Obi Ugwumba

Jay Hardy, Kypros Michael

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, Peter Harvey, Ian Shoebridge

Supporter: Ian Coles

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

I suppose I must tell you about the football. Glendale were as careful with the ball as we could be and had some technical players on show and some robust defenders quick in the tackle. It took us a while to get into the game. By then we were 2-0 down. Their first goal after less than ten minutes came from arguably their most dangerous attacker who fired in from twenty yards away on the right wing. We cannot be sure if it was a cross or a shot. Either way, by the time Matt Angelo adjusted his feet to get to the ball it had crossed the line. The referee – a Glendale player I think, could not have seen the ball cross the line but Matt Angelo was honest about it. It came out of the sun but as Matt himself observed the ball kept on the ground. Ten minutes later we went further behind from a superbly taken left foot free-kick that went into the top corner despite Matt's maximum dive. These two shots on our goal were, I think, the only two Glendale attempts on our goal in that half. I am not sure they even registered a corner.

What can I say about events at the other end? We created so many chances. A universal rule of football, at whatever level, must be that if you do not take your chances you get punished. In the course of the first-half we had six or seven dangerous corners. Ian Lyons nearly got to one such on the stroke of half-time. Glendale cleared off the line more than once, and their keeper was certainly the busier guardian. There were decent shots from Waine Hetherington, Chisa Mkala, Gordon Thompson, Jay Hardy and two or three glaring misses from Kypros Michael, one from under the bar on the goal line, and another from a yard out (Kyp called the latter his Andy Carroll moment but I think Andy hit the bar). All of this added to our frustration. Chisa Mkala

finally pulled one back, from a Jay Hardy assist, on the half hour just before Phil Anthony, Peter Harvey and Ian Shoebridge came on for Kypros Michael, Patrice Mongelard and Obi Ugwumba.

The second half was arguably more even. Glendale put us under more pressure but the more abundant chances and misses were still ours. Ian Lyons, Gordon Thompson and Simon Thomas made way for the return of Patrice Mongelard, Kypros Michael and Obi Ugwumba on the hour. In one case this did not help the team – Patrice Mongelard missed a clearance which set up a Glendale forward for their third goal. With fifteen minutes to go I had had enough, including, in particular, of being told what to do. *“Go wide, come in, play it short, be strong, clear it, play it first time, get your head round the game, watch the line, go up, go toes, get goal side, drop off, I thought I had a full game on the match sheet”*. At the age of sixty-one I did not need this. So, I took myself off for a second time and brought Gordon Thompson back to give us much-needed attacking impetus. My part in the third Glendale goal and a couple of missed interventions were clear signs that the time may be coming to call it a day.

I hope Kypros does not feel the same way. He was despondent, put an apology on the Group WhatsApp and declared himself injured for next week. He might not be the only one missing next week. There were a few walking-wounded after the game, body and pride. The most serious case is probably Peter Harvey, recipient of a scissor kick to the ankle that left him sore and cross (you would be if you had suffered two fractures in the past). Peter limped off for the last five minutes or so and Simon Thomas was back on to help us find an equaliser, but to no avail. We just ran out of time and Glendale had the tenacity and physicality to preserve their lead.

With ten minutes left Kypros Michael was instrumental in our second goal as he enabled Chisa Mkala to get his second of the game by squaring the ball across the six-yard box. That time he took the right option which is not always the case. But most of us would probably shoot when we get as close to the goal as Kypros did. And of course, all footballers know that you have got to be there to miss them.

We all held our breath in the final moments as Obi Ugwumba shaped to take a free-kick twenty-five yards out in a central position. We were all hoping for an Obi Special and nearly got it as the ball fizzed about two inches above the postage stamp.

I did not fancy a wake and I had to get back (as did Ian Shoebridge for his mum Pam) so I gave the post-match buffet a miss. Thoughtfully Lionel, who had the incredible nerve to note that my touchline coat was too ample for him, put a photo of two trays of rather splendid sandwiches on the Group WhatsApp. I am surprised anyone found the appetite.

Man-of-the-Match – four players did well in today’s people’s vote – with Gordon Thompson just edged out by Chisa Mkala. These two most direct midfielders garnered eleven out of fourteen votes cast today, and rightly so.

27 January 2019: Lads of the Village Super Vets (A, 7-1)

Farnborough back to winning ways, and with style

The prevailing mood for this match was to bounce back from last week's reverse, and more importantly to re-discover our brand of football which can best be described as sweat, smiles and short passes. Once again numbers dwindled overnight – Danny Mullins had failed to convince Mrs Mullins to let him off parenting duties, and Obi Ugwumba injured was.

So, it was the bare twelve on a cold blustery day which kept dry for the game at the Stone Recreation Ground in Dartford. The big pitch looked inviting even under overcast skies. The hot teas from the burger van were most welcome.

Starting XI

Chris Jablonski

Michael Hills, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard

Simon Harvey, Waine Hetherington, Chisa Mkala, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson,

Jay Hardy, Peter Harvey

Substitute: Sinisa Gracanin

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

The first five minutes or so of the game would certainly not have presaged the final score. Lads of the Village moved the ball well particularly in their defence and only encountered difficulty once they ventured into our half. Once that initial period passed the flow of the game was inexorably towards our opponents' goal. We scored five goals in a twenty-minute spell to take the game by the scruff of the neck. The movement, passing and connectivity were good. We just needed the clinical edge to our finishing. After ten minutes, Jay Hardy squared the ball back for Peter Harvey to produce a collector's item, a rare spotted right-footed strike that beat the keeper from just inside the box. A few minutes later Jay Hardy was back in action, this time on the right, as his attempted square ball in the six-yard box was unintentionally diverted into his own net, by one of the two tall Lads defenders.

Gordon Thompson was next to shine with two assists for two quick Simon Thomas strikes from close range. Our third came from the Lads keeper spilling a shot from Gordon into Simon's path and he made the tap-in look nonchalant. For his second Simon appeared to show more concentration as he drove the ball low into the bottom corner from close-range having been released by Gordon.

The half hour was about to elapse. I know because I was going to come off for Sinisa Gracanin when we were awarded a penalty. I thought the referee had missed the moment when Chisa Mkala was taken from behind as he shaped to tap the ball home. But to his credit the honest Lads defender involved made the referee's mind for him. I was getting changed on the line when Peter Harvey had to take the same penalty twice (scoring both times). Despite further opportunities we could not grow the score. At the other end Chris Jablonski had relatively little to do. I do not recall a single Lads corner in the half (or the second one come to think of it).

The half-time talk was redundant really. A few of the players went to relieve themselves. I think some of them had failed to spot the woman sitting in a silver Audi parked by the pitch. Gordon Thompson was afraid she might have got his number but I gather there was not much for her to see.

We started the second half where we left off. In fact, I think it is fair to say we created more chances in the second half than the first. Just when I feared we had all caught a severe dose of Kyprositis, Jay Hardy struck with an acrobatic finish from one of the many corners we won in the half. The keeper had pulled off two point-blank saves from headers in a crowded box (including from a marauding Michael Hills) but as the ball popped out Jay Hardy was there a yard out by the far post. He uncoiled himself horizontally like a deadly ginger scorpion and the net bulged.

6-0 became 6-1 when Lads of the Village were awarded a penalty after Simon Harvey was deemed to have interfered with the Lads full-back who had overlapped energetically and arrived in our box. Chris Jablonski dived the right way, got a hand to the spot kick ball but could not keep it out. He was disappointed, said he was expecting something harder, and was surprised. It would be churlish to begrudge Lads of the Village their goal. Their effort and spirit deserved it.

Michael Hills came off on the hour having pulled something. Patrice Mongelard re-joined the defence to cope with the rare Lads forays in our box. They just could not get the numbers into our box to trouble us.

We 'won' the second half with a sweet strike from Gordon Thompson. He spotted a Lads defender was slow to clear the ball in the box. Gordon was on it in a flash, nicked the ball, glided past the defender and flashed a crisp low drive into the bottom corner.

We could have had more goals in the last quarter of an hour. That we did not score more than seven today is down in large part to the Lads keeper. If we could vote for their Man-of-the-Match it would be him by a mile. It is not nice being beaten 5-0 at half-time at home in front of a crowd and there was an undercurrent of feeling amongst our opponents that we had packed our side with young players. I could understand where they were coming from and it is not something we have enjoyed when other teams have done it to us. The truth is that we took a team down there that was not markedly younger or older than our normal side – the combined ages of all twelve Farnborough players today was 565 years – giving us an average age of 47 years. And we were missing regulars like Phil Anthony (61), Mick O'Flynn (59) and Colin Brazier (60). Moreover, we did not have with us Ian Lyons and Kypros Michael who just look ancient and present a reassuring sight to the opposition.

Five of us made it to the Lads of the Village pub to be showered by our hospitable hosts with hot sausages, chicken nuggets, chips and an array of sandwiches including the best egg mayonnaise sandwiches I have had a lot of in a long time. We were well beaten in the bar and we missed out on the raffle too. Simon Thomas was stiffening up after the game but had to wait until all the food was eaten before I could get him home to compliment wife Amanda on her hair. I drove back on the M25 with Jay Hardy in my rear-view mirror shaking his wrists in a rhythmic fashion.

Understandably, the whole team felt better about our performance today. **Man-of-the-Match** votes were spread among the players but the one that caught the eye the most was Gordon Thompson.

17 February 2019: West Farleigh Vets (H, 4-2)

Farnborough win first game in February in front of biggest crowd of the season

Is it really three weeks since my last match report? The mind plays tricks I know but today's weather seemed a monsoon season and a winter away from that of the past two Sundays which brought us our first cancellations of the current campaign. Today we had as nice a mid-February Sunday morning as we could have wished – clear, bright, super dry, still. We also had the bonus of being the only team at home which meant we had the most spacious changing room and the big pitch, and in keeping with the big theme we had our biggest cohort of supporters in a while. Our opponents had made the journey all the way from the Kentish Weald and it took some of them longer than others to get to us. At one point it looked like we might have to loan them a couple of players but tantric referee Jim Grimley delayed just long enough to allow them to come. We nearly had a full house – a notable absentee being Kypros Michael, who had overdone the Valentine's Day moussaka.

Starting XI:

Rob Faulkner

Colin Mant, Michael Hills, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Chisa Mkala, Gordon Thompson, Obi Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, Joy Hardy

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, Mark Friend, Simon Harvey, Simon Thomas

Supporters: Steve Blanchard, Andy Chen, Andy Cobham, Neil Connelly, Mick and Jean Gearing, Max and Tony Harvey, Sarah and Steve Hills, Colin Holmes, Ian Shoebridge, Michael Ugwumba Jr, Gary Willinson

Referee: Jim Grimley

Linesman: Michael Ugwumba Jr

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

West Farleigh tipped us off, sportingly, that they had struggled to put a side together and had called on Brobdingnag for extra bodies. They had assembled the tallest collective we have faced this season and the early exchanges left us in no doubt that they had come to Farnborough to do a job on us. In the week when we lost one of the greatest ever goalies, their keeper caught the eye early doors, youthful, agile, good hands and feet, quick reflexes and abundant positional sense. They also had a Deano up front. Farnborough historians will know we struggle against teams with Deanos although we had dispelled that myth on 23 September down at West Farleigh.

Both teams started well without it being evident where a goal was going to come from. We had marginally more territory and the early chances came our way. We were forced to make an early change when Waine Hetherington – the pivot in our holding midfielder role – lost his hamstring and was replaced by Simon Harvey. Soon after we got our breakthrough. Vicious inswinging corners from Peter Harvey's left foot were causing difficulty and from one such missile there was a melee in the West Farleigh Box. Colin Mant had gone up to cause havoc and it looked from a distance that his legs, and the ball, had turned to rubber as he stood on a wet bar of soap seeking to connect with the ball. Eventually it fell to Michael Hills who had also gone up to cause mischief to lash the ball home through a forest of legs from close range in a central position to register his first goal this season. Michael was delighted to lose his cherry so to speak in front of his family.

On the half-hour – which seemed a long time coming – I think it was the late start that discombobulated our sense of time – our three remaining substitutes came on for Patrice Mongelard, Chisa Mkala and Colin Mant. We then witnessed a tribute to Gordon Banks from the West Farleigh keeper as he tipped a close range bullet header from our ginger wonder, Jay Hardy, over the bar. However, five minutes later the young maestro could not do anything to stop a belter from Jay who skipped past two defenders on the edge of box, spied the keeper had advanced a bit too far out, and flashed a fizzing shot against the underside of the bar and beyond the line.

2-0 at half-time felt the right score. West Farleigh were putting up a solid fight – some of their tackles were well spiced but they had not really threatened Rob Faulkner in our goal bar from a handful of corners where their stature disturbed our tranquillity. We scored early in the second half – too early some might think. Jay Hardy had found space in a crowd to swivel quickly to prod home from a Peter Harvey assist from two yards out. Did a smidgeon of complacency creep into our game at 3 nil up? Perhaps, probably, or more likely did West Farleigh raise their game? It was the latter I think because there was enough spirit and quality in their side to do so. They got back in the game with a crisp and powerful first-time volley at the far post after Phil Anthony lost the flight of a looping cross from the right.

But you cannot keep a good striker down. Peter Harvey had watched Jay Hardy draw level with him on 26 goals, he had even assisted the process. Our many fans at this game will have noticed Peter taking a position on the right wing, encroaching on territory that Simon Thomas has come to regard as his stage. I do not think this means that Peter dislikes Simon's antics on the wing. It is more that this gambit allows Peter to cut in and unload. This is what he did from the angle of the penalty area with father Tony watching almost in line with the trajectory of the ball as it began its journey from Peter's boot towards the West Farleigh goal. It was not without purpose or power (although we have soon Peter hit them much harder) but it had meaning and more importantly it had an aura of calm about it which tolerated no interference (it was after all destined to be our 100th goal this season) not even from the keeper who sank low to his knees opened his hands and eased the passage of the ball into the bottom corner. Peter was as delighted as we were surprised. His dad Tony ventured the thought that some other agency might have been involved in the goal but quickly decided it was a poor joke. I ought to mention that I spotted an article in today's Sunday Times Style Supplement about people who suffer from FOMOG (Fear of Missing Out on Goals).

At 4-1, we made the final changes as Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant and Chisa Mkala were back on for the final half hour. Suddenly we became less assured as we switched to a 4-4-2 system that left the midfield exposed. West Farleigh sensed this malaise and took advantage to reduce our lead to two goals with a shot from the right that Patrice Mongelard ought to have blocked. I cannot pretend that we were at our most comfortable or fluent in the last quarter of the game. That is not to say we were not creating chances. Simon Thomas was a quiff away from nodding a Peter Harvey corner home. Chisa Mkala thought he had scored when he managed to squeeze the ball past the keeper after one of his trademark lung-bursting runs but it lacked momentum to beat the covering defender. There was a 30-yard free-kick – an Obi Special Delivery – that a lesser keeper would have struggled to keep out. There was an anxious moment when West Farleigh had what looked like a decent shout for a penalty. There was a more anxious moment when a West Farleigh player slowed down clutching his chest. Referee Jim Grimley, calm, authoritative and communicative throughout, stopped play fearing that the Farnborough defibrillator might have to be pressed into service (after being signed out of course) but I am glad to say it was not more serious.

I am glad to say that enhanced match subscriptions today allowed us to raise £65 for Jordan Glen on behalf of Kent Sands United FC, a charity that supports fathers who have experienced the loss of a baby.

On my way back I went into our opponents' changing room to apologise for the absence of food after the game, very contrite, and conscious that West Farleigh are excellent hosts at their place. I explained that our caterer Leanne was unfortunately not able to feed us, and them, today due to unforeseen circumstances which arose shortly before the start of the game. There was some food in the clubhouse but it was for Matt Ellis' son's third birthday party. I had a job holding back Simon Thomas, Colin Mant, Jay Hardy and Gary Willinson from joining in but we repaired to the Woodman next door for a swift one on the way home. There, after I had bought the round, and whilst chatting to Paul Tanton and Andy Cobham, it was put to me by the imperious Simon Thomas and the mercurial Colin Mant, egged on by (strawberry blonde not ginger) Jay Hardy, that I had, for years, hurt their feelings in my match reports. "I am not surprised" said Mrs M "You are often quite rude and blunt about people". That put me in my place in Valentine's Day week. I recovered my composure after a small spinach, feta, baby plum tomato quiche and a couple of toasted San Francisco sourdough slices with pastrami and Dijon mayonnaise.

Man-of-the-Match – the excellent Jay Hardy who ended up locking up the club at five thirty in the afternoon after leaving the Woodman. Given his occupation I trust there was no danger of him locking himself in. He had certainly unlocked the West Farleigh defence today.

24 February 2019: Santos Vets (H, 5-0)

Farnborough go marching in

Another glorious day (the warmest February Sunday many could remember) as we welcomed Santos Vets to renew an acquaintance that had dropped off our schedule in recent seasons. This time last year we were bracing ourselves for the Beast from the East – today it seemed more a case of the Pet from the West to borrow an expression from tonight's Country File weather report. We were not quite sure what to expect from our opponents. Games against them have been close in the past. We had expected, or rather entertained the possibility of having fifteen players, but in the end only twelve played, with co-Manager Mick O'Flynn directing operations in the changing room and on the touchline. Once again, we drew a very decent crowd for a February game.

Before the game Mick O'Flynn moved as fast as he has this season to find us a replacement kit on account of our opponents playing in red. One of my jobs is to ensure this sort of thing does not happen. As you can imagine a few of the lads reminded me of that 'one job' I had to do. For a brief moment, it looked like I had also failed to secure food after the game but news came during the warm up that all was well and that Leanne Catering Solutions were going to deliver. It was not quite the relief of Mafeking, but welcome news nonetheless. Also welcome were the practical arrangements that Gary Willinson had curated for the nets and corner flags including an ingenious metal hook to lift the nets off at the end.

Starting XI:

Rob Faulkner

Colin Mant, Michael Hills, Patrice Mongelard

Colin Brazier, Sinisa Gracanin, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson, Obi Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, Jay Hardy

Substitute: Kypros Michael

Supporters: Mick and Jean Gearing, Tony Harvey, George Kleanthous, David Orji, Iggy Okafor, Ian Shoebridge, Michael Ugwumba Jr

Referee: Nick Kinnear

Linesman: Michael Ugwumba Jr

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

I cannot say we made the brightest of starts. Like dozy bumblebees emerging in spring weather, we lacked zip and urgency. Santos looked more purposeful initially but it was not long before we dominated possession and the flow became predominantly towards the Santos goal. Just when the provenance of our first goal was beginning to look uncertain after the first quarter of an hour Michael Hills took matters into his own feet. He made a forceful run to the edge of the Santos box in a triangular move involving Peter Harvey and Gordon Thompson before collecting a lay-off from Gordon in a central position and producing a delicate blend of power, precision and finesse with the outside of his right foot to finally beat the Santos keeper. Contrary to erroneous statistical rumours last Sunday this strike was indeed the 100th goal we had scored this season, and what a worthy specimen it was. There was a little less finesse a little later from Michael when in the second phase of play after a Farnborough corner he attempted the technically-challenging and potentially painful move known as a testicular trap in the Santos box. As half-time approached, we had more joy in the Santos box after Peter Harvey earned and converted a penalty to double our advantage. By then Peter's groin was showing signs of overwork and it

was not clear if he would finish the game. His shooting and movement were not up to his usual high standard even if his hunger for goals was not diminished, and he was still giving his team mates the benefit of his forceful views. Jay Hardy is another vociferous character – more on him later.

The second half was equally directional towards the Santos goal, if not more so. Peter Harvey settled things down further with a smart finish from another Gordon Thompson assist. Despite his undoubted appetite for the game, and the prospect of a hat-trick in front of dad “Beckenbauer” Tony, Peter listened to his groin and took himself off after an hour. This brought back Obi very soon after he had just vacated the pitch for the return of Colin Brazier. Obi was to have an opportunity to unleash one of his trademark free-kicks, but he must be getting old as the Santos defender in the wall got up after blocking the shot.

Jay Hardy became the focal point of our attack but he also became a frustrated figure as he spurned decent opportunities and failed to earn a penalty from the muscular attentions of the Santos defence. At one point he even tripped himself up as he fell over in an attempt to control a ball that someone had eventually passed to him. He admitted that he had lost his composure because no one was passing to him. He failed to appreciate a Brazilian cameo from Patrice Mongelard in midfield which our perceptive fans cheered. Out on the right, Simon Thomas had his own fan club as a number of Santos supporters felt compelled to ask “pretty boy” what hair care products he used. They were sure he was worth it. Jay Hardy could do with something to disguise his ginger roots.

Back to the game – and in particular the Kypros Michael show. Since his insertion on the half hour for Colin Brazier we had been treated to missed sitters and half-chances, penetrative bustling runs in the box, feeble headers, utter disregard for better-placed team mates and vicious left foot thunderbolts that stung the keeper’s hands. Finally, midfield maestro Sinisa Gracanin set Kypros free to run in on goal and lash a scorching shot into the net. We were not done – Gordon Thompson slid in from close-range to crown a Jay Hardy cut-back for our fifth goal and that was it. Simon Thomas had a decent sniff at the end from close-range (and I do not mean his shampoo) but the Santos keeper was once again in the right place.

In the end, the score was a fair reflection of the game. Our first clean sheet in twelve matches, since 4 November, was deserved. The Santos keeper made a number of saves that would have made a heavier defeat harsh. Santos competed in most areas but did not trouble our goal as much as they no doubt would have wished. The game was played in excellent spirit and we will look to arrange a second game against them next season.

The cheese and Branston pickle, ham and tuna mayonnaise bread rolls, mini-sausage rolls and pasties went down a treat as we basked in the sunshine and got a glimpse of the Jay Hardy on tour in Rotterdam experience with cod Dutch accent and herbal relaxant.

Man-of-the-Match – Gordon Thompson with his customary haul of fantasy football points from key contributions, assists and goals.

3 March 2019: Lads of the Village Super Vets (H, 6-0)

Football wins

Last Sunday seemed like two meteorological seasons ago compared to today. Breakfast was punctuated with the news first that the game was off due to a waterlogged pitch, then I was disappointed to hear that the potential opening I had at Norman Park was no longer there, only to be reprieved by the news that a forking party might make the Farnborough pitch playable – all within a space of ten frantic minutes. I lost count of the phone calls, text messages and WhatsApp notifications. Out of the confusion (comedy gold according to Peter Harvey) emerged a will to play the game and our opponents must be given credit for coming from Dartford to our village on a filthy morning - wet, blustery and overcast, with what looked like a weakened team. Credit is due also to the players who turned up for a bit of forking on a Sunday – including in particular Colin Mant, Simon Thomas and Sinisa Gracanin. Even referee Paul “Play On” Parsons joined in. Additional moisture suction was provided by a device procured by Gary Cochet Willison, which Simon Thomas handled like a pro, I am told.

Starting XI:

Rob Faulkner

Colin Mant, Michael Hills, Patrice Mongelard

Simon Harvey, Sinisa Gracanin, Kypros Michael, Simon Thomas, Obi Ugwumba

Peter Harvey, Jay Hardy

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, Colin Brazier

Supporters: Steve Blanchard, Max and Tony Harvey, David Orji, Michael Ugwumba Jr, Kayleigh Walsh

Referee: Paul Parsons

Linesman: Michael Ugwumba Jr

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

The surface was not the greatest but it did not hinder passing even if the going was heavy. Lads of the Village started better I felt and had won their first corner before their keeper had touched the ball. We established a measure of control after the initial ten minutes and it felt like only a matter of time before we would score. We were experiencing joy down both flanks. After a quarter of an hour Simon Harvey recycled a ball out of midfield to Simon Thomas out and deep on the right. Simon eschewed the usual multiple touches and sent in a cross which demanded a finish. I was not the only one to be surprised to see Kypros Michael move into a position from where he proceeded to apply a deft header which guided the ball low into the bottom corner against the base of the post and into the net. It had been looking like it would require something special to beat the Lads of the Village keeper. “Just like Zlatan” noted a delirious Kypros. I let this one pass, perhaps feeling a pang of guilt after maligning Kypros in my last match report, unfairly.

We huffed and puffed for the rest of the half but the Lads of the Village keeper was immense. The greasy surface was making some tackles look worse than they were intended to be. Peter Harvey went down and stayed down after impact with the keeper. I could not help noticing that Colin Brazier was the only one who stirred to take water to Peter. From a personal point of view, I was pleased to see Peter get up, with no damage done, as I did not fancy finding a new badminton partner for tomorrow at such short notice. In fact, Peter’s powers of recovery were remarkable given the way last Sunday’s game ended for him, with his groin in dire need of a sabbatical.

On the half hour, Patrice Mongelard and Obi Ugwumba made way for the introduction of Phil Anthony and Colin Brazier. Kypros Michael drifted into a more central position where he seemed to acquire an extra yard of inertia. We had reason to thank Rob Faulkner for his quick feet as he saved a low shot which threatened to bring Lads of the Village level shortly before half-time. The biggest unit in the Village had caught the ball well on the edge of the box in a central position but a largely under-employed Rob was alert when he needed to be. 1-0 at half-time did not flatter our opponents but we thought they would tire (not least because we play 90 minutes rather than the 80, they are accustomed to).

Our opponents started the second half better than we did. They won two early corners to put us on the back foot. The next goal was going to be crucial. Ten minutes into the second period it came from an unexpected source as the Lads of the Village keeper fluffed a clearance. The contact with the ball was not what he wanted and all he contrived was to roll the ball tamely to an unmarked Sinisa Gracanin on the edge of the box who promptly volleyed it back with interest into the net. Sinisa made it look it easy because of who he is. Our third goal followed quickly as Jay Hardy cut the ball back for Peter Harvey who swivelled and went for finesse by placing the ball low into the bottom corner beyond the reach of the keeper at full stretch. The quality of the strike would have beaten most keepers we come across. Kypros Michael was the next to shine as a bustling Jay Hardy (who thinks he might have busted his hand again) slipped the ball across in front of an empty net for Kypros to finish emphatically. Kypros will no doubt concur that passing to a better-placed team mate pays dividends.

On the hour Michael Hills came off for Obi Ugwumba and it had been my intention that Colin "Kepa" Mant would come off too but his hearing hardened and Sinisa Gracanin came off so I could return to the game. To be fair to Colin, his enthusiastic forking had delayed his arrival on the pitch and he missed the very brief team talk I gave before kick-off. The last quarter of an hour saw a dominant Farnborough register two more goals – both by Jay Hardy from close-range after good work by Simon Thomas and Kypros Michael respectively. For his second, our sixth goal, Jay Hardy wanted me to point out that he had his back to goal when the ball came to him. There was time for Colin Brazier, on fire down the left, to connect with a ball that had travelled from right to left and which could have led to the goal-of-the-season, potentially. That is all he will allow me to say about it.

The conditions had got progressively worse as the game went on and it was a bit of a relief for us, and even more so for Lads of the Village, when referee Paul Parsons brought proceedings to an end. Post-match pitch duties were completed as quickly as possible – it was not easy to wheel the goal back on the greasy and yielding pitch. Cold wet fingers and padlocks clashed. Colin Mant and Simon Thomas were prominent for these duties as they were before the game. Colin also went on to sweep both changing rooms.

Unfortunately, on this occasion, we could not reciprocate the hospitality that Lads of the Village always extend to us at their place. Our catering arrangements had failed once again. We have a crisis on our hands. Something must be done about it.

As we tallied the Man-of-the-Match votes Jay said he voted for Simon, adding quickly "Harvey that is" (with Simon Thomas sat next to him). We spent some time talking about how much we would like to tour Tongeren again. **Man-of-the-Match** – a superb Harvey, Simon, not Peter, for a muscular and perceptive performance in midfield which Dad Tony and son Max, and brother Peter, enjoyed enormously I am sure, despite the inclement weather.

10 March 2019: Reigate Priory Vets (A, 5-5)

Honours even in wind-assisted ten-goal thriller at Reigate Priory

What an eventful morning - it would not surprise me, if the wind speeds we experienced today, turn out to be another meteorological record. We never seem to get a full squad to travel to Reigate although it is not that far, and it is even less so if you do not take any wrong turnings. It is a wonderful setting, with other sports on show such as tennis and ladies' lacrosse. Parking is an interesting experience and the wooden clubhouse has a certain faded charm and our hosts are very hospitable.

A potential squad of fifteen came down to the bare eleven. This included Toby Manchip, once again responding without hesitation to our mid-week S.O.S for a keeper, and he was even ready by the time I turned up to collect him. I thought I was making good progress after Simon Thomas and Sinisa Gracanin joined us more or less on time, as we made our way to pick up the M25. However, despite the presence of Croatian satnav Sinisa I turned east rather than west at the critical juncture – at the time we were chewing over the latest scandal in the Senior Vets universe - Pizzagate. Thankfully, it only added around seven minutes to the journey but it will take years before Toby Manchip gets tired of mentioning it. We had won the home fixture against Reigate 8-1 on 18th November but were not expecting this game to be a breeze (Toby's witticism). We were expecting a much tougher outing and that is what we got.

Starting XI:

Toby Manchip

Michael Hills, Ian Lyons, Patrice Mongelard

Matt Ellis, Sinisa Gracanin, Kypros Michael, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson

Peter Harvey, Jay Hardy

Substitutes: None

Supporter: Waine Hetherington (first half)

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

The game was barely two minutes old when I had cause to think that an hour of Toby Manchip in the car had been worth it. I fluffed a pass back to the keeper – the grateful Reigate forward could not believe his luck but Toby made himself big and foiled what would have been a calamity from my point of view. The wind was having, and would continue to have, quite an influence on the game. The strong wind favoured Reigate in the first-half and we had trouble making progress up the field and yet there were moments of promise and hope whenever we could string passes together and release our forwards. We took the lead after about twelve minutes. Peter Harvey whipped a free-kick from the left which reached an unmarked Simon Thomas at the far post. Simon was probably surprised that the ball had travelled all the way to him and it looked like his body was not quite ready for it and the connection was not ideal. But he recovered the ball and recycled it to a predatory Jay Hardy lurking in the box. Jay's crisp first time shot was instant and in the blink of an eye the Reigate net bulged.

We hoped to defend that lead and for a little while Michael Hills kept our defence shut tight like a timorous clam but the wind then intervened. A Reigate forward chanced it from distance and the flight of the ball was enhanced beyond Toby's reach. Reigate went on to edge ahead just after the half hour when a cross from the left proved problematic in the wind and the ball was bundled in via a close-range header. Despite this reverse, we could see glimpses of what was

possible. Simon Thomas had two meaningful crosses that would have yielded more in calmer conditions. The Reigate keeper pulled off an acrobatic save to deny Peter Harvey.

At half-time, despite the absence of oranges (a new policy on my part) and water bottles (with a player who unfortunately was indisposed and could not make the journey) we knew that our opportunities would come with the wind now in our favour. Toby Manchip made a double save early doors that encouraged us further. We did not have long to wait to draw level and what an equaliser. Simon Thomas flighted a corner from the left and Peter Harvey launched himself to volley the ball first time with venom into a crowded penalty box. The ball kept low travelling with great velocity through a forest of legs into the net. Peter later confided that at the moment when he committed himself to the manoeuvre his thinking was that this would be either sublime or that he would be making a tit of himself. Thankfully it was the former. Our joy did not last long. Hesitancy in our defence saw a Reigate cross headed into the bottom corner by one of the smallest players on the pitch.

Goals came thick and fast in the last half hour. We scored three times in fairly quick succession. Peter Harvey was taken roughly from behind in the box. Matt Ellis tucked away the penalty with great aplomb, the right combination of power and accuracy beating the more than competent Reigate keeper who had guessed the right way. At 3-3 our tails were up, like engorged windsocks. The effervescent Jay Hardy collected a slide rule pass from Matt Ellis, beat his marker and advanced on goal in a central position with the keeper rushing off his line to make things difficult. Jay stroked the ball past the keeper. All twenty-two players stopped moving and watched the ball roll towards the goal in slow motion almost until it passed three inches on the wrong side of the base of the post. Ever the perfectionist Jay later noted that he should have struck the ball with the outside of his foot to counter the effect of the wind. Peter Harvey then carved open the Reigate defence bamboozling two defenders, advancing to the by-line and beating the keeper from a tight angle to curl the ball into the bottom corner with relish. We increased our lead with a Kypros Michael special twisting and turning whist still going forward, making defenders dizzy and dummifying the keeper before lashing the ball into the net.

At 5-3 up and with about ten minutes to go it looked like we would come away with a rare victory from this away ground. Reigate continued to press and we began to concede free-kicks in dangerous areas. Reigate had technical players who could strike the ball well and with the wind a factor we paid the price. Toby's erection (of a wall) failed, compounded by the schoolboy error of not having a defender at the post (though some see this as an anachronism in the modern game). A viciously struck free-kick brought Reigate to within a goal of our tally. The wind was now in their sails and yes you guessed it they drew level with less than five minutes left with a peach of a left foot curler that left Toby Manchip embalmed on the line, with a fixed look on his face but utterly still and peaceful. It was a goal worthy of winning a game except it did not, but it did mean that both teams left the pitch satisfied with their performance.

I would like to compliment the referee we had today – an elderly gentleman who handled himself and the two teams superbly. He was scrupulously fair, rightly taking exception to some of the fruity language that could be heard, not a little of it emanating from one familiar source in our ranks. The referee even congratulated Kypros Michael on his goal, saying this was the sort of skilled execution that he was happy to get out of bed for on a Sunday morning. "Thank you, Sir, replied Kypros, a polite middle-aged man".

After hot showers we adjourned upstairs to a cosy bar for drinks and a waiter service that delivered freshly-made sandwiches to our table. There was even a big screen which allowed

me, as a plastic fan, to watch the second half of the Liverpool-Burnley game. The journey home passed off without incident. I dropped off my passengers with Toby Manchip preparing to explain to son Oliver that he did not let in five goals in the first half.

Next week we are back at home in Farnborough for one of the four remaining home games we have this season. I am not alone, I feel sure, in looking forward to the aroma of hot take-away pizzas after these games.

Man-of-the-Match – a Harvey again this week, Peter, for two superb exhibits of the striker's art.

17 March 2019: Glendale Vets (N, 1-3)

Farnborough taught a lesson by Glendale but will we ever learn?

I drove past the Farnborough ground for this game, on my way to Norman Park near Bromley, where for £65 out of match subs, we could be sure of a game despite the heavy rains all week. Our opponents, Glendale Vets who like us think a game is better than no game, joined us there despite it meaning that we could not offer bar facilities, or food after the game. It looked like summer when we got to the ground, with two more seasons to be experienced during the game.

Our numbers dwindled to twelve, overnight. We even managed to get a replacement goalkeeper though he is a familiar presence. One absentee, Sinisa Gracanin, had been expected to play but my text at 8:53 am brought the news that he had just arrived in Kuala Lumpur (cue Mick O'Flynn to remark that it was a bit early for a visit to a curry house even on St Patrick's Day). Early arrivals Matt Angelo, Waine Hetherington, Patrice Mongelard and Simon Thomas put up the nets and staked the corner flags once Meryl Clarke had opened up. Late arrivals were Jay Hardy and Colin Mant who had gone to the wrong entrance to the park (probably not the first time for either of them, noted a resident of Bodiam, who was not blameless in the matter). This said, the referee was last to arrive having encountered heavy traffic in the Tunbridge Wells area. In a sense though we all lost our way today, more on that later.

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Colin Mant, Michael Hills, Patrice Mongelard

Peter Harvey, Simon Harvey, Waine Hetherington, Simon Thomas, Obi Ugwumba

Jay Hardy, Kypros Michael

Substitute: Gordon Thompson

Supporters: Michael Ugwumba (Jr), Tony Harvey, Mick O'Flynn

Fleeting supporters (jogging by - Sophie Bailey, Ellie Tull, Isabelle Mongelard on a 17.13K run)

Referee: Paul "Play on" Parsons

Linesman: Michael Ugwumba Jr

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

I have been pondering how much of the football to convey in this report. What comes to mind is either insufficient or unpalatable. We made a marginally better start, carving out the initial chances but our finishing whether from distance or from close-range, or our final ball, was always found wanting. The Glendale keeper was no mug. Glendale defended in numbers and relied on quick breaks by nimble forwards to trouble us. It was against the run of play when they scored after a quarter of an hour, and we were the architect of their goal. Colin Mant had played the ball back to Matt Angelo with ample time and space to hoof it upfield. This is what we thought, but Matt had other ideas. He likes to do his own thing. He tarried, overcome by the delusion that he was Brazilian, and tried to dribble his way out. You guessed it – he was robbed and there was not much we could do to stop Glendale walking the ball into the net. The second Glendale goal, a little over five minutes later, was more Farnborough seppuku. Michael Hills brought down the nippiest Glendale forward possessor of a wand of a left foot, unnecessarily in the box and the spot kick was converted with conviction. Gordon Thompson came on almost immediately to give us more attacking impetus with Obi Ugwumba making way as we re-arranged the deck chairs on the Titanic by pushing Peter Harvey up front and dropping Jay Hardy a tad deeper.

In the midst of two hail storms in the half, Kypros Michael and Simon Thomas had, and wasted, half decent opportunities in the Glendale box that added to our frustration. Waine Hetherington lashed a shot against the bar. Jay Hardy caught the eye (and nearly his marker's eye too) with an overhead kick that was probably unwise in a crowded penalty area. The half-time team talk was not enjoyable. Waine Hetherington departed the scene and Obi Ugwumba was back on. We were down to the bare eleven and as we found out later any injuries would be a problem.

The first five minutes of the second half were a nadir for us. If Glendale had scored two or three times in that brief passage of time we could not have complained. Slowly though we began to take the play into the Glendale box. We forced a few corners – there were two episodes of pin ball in their box, with Jay Hardy prominent where even Glendale players were asking “how did that not go in”. Midway through the half we fell behind further with gaps appearing or created in our defence which nippy Glendale forwards exploited, almost passing the ball into our net. Things were getting tetchy, and as often happens the perception was created that even the referee was on Glendale's side (all untrue of course). Paul Parsons had to have words with a few Farnborough players. Simon Thomas was one of those, having felt the great injustice of being pulled up for a foul throw. Soon he pulled up altogether and could not continue having damaged his ankle (no – not a fractured quiff as some intimated). Down to ten men, 3-0 behind and not getting much change out of the Glendale defence things were looking bleak. Then one of the Glendale players, Paul, appeared in our midst on our right flank with a Farnborough shirt. Suddenly we were transformed, energised by Simon Thomas' exit. We finished the game seemingly the better team. Jay Hardy provided a through ball for Peter Harvey to beat two defenders and the goalkeeper before rolling the ball into an empty net. We could even have narrowed the deficit further in the dying minutes but it would have been a travesty if we had snatched a draw out of the jaws of abject defeat. It was good to see different players involved in taking the nets down, including Gordon Thompson and the two Harveys one of whom knows a thing or two about ladders. The showers were better than I remembered.

The better team won today – period. Glendale played with a sense of purpose, organisation, composure, pride and solidarity that we could not match. They were compact where we were loose, had a big Farnborough helping hand with their first two goals, but you need more than luck to do the double over us this season. I cannot recall a single argument or cross word exchanged with each other between the Glendale players. The manner of our performance was, to me at least, deeply troubling. There was a torpor and lethargy about our game that was worrying and we could not blame the pitch for that, or older legs. More worrying, I think, was the poison of internal discord that ran through our performance. Michael Hills wanted to see Simon Thomas after the game – occasionally you say that to an opponent (but very rarely to a team mate though I must admit I have been tempted). I cannot help worry what will become of this lot after I am gone. This game was a test of character and temperament for us. We did not do well at all on both counts. We also failed to show the referee the courtesy that he deserves. I defy anyone to argue this was an enjoyable way of spending a Sunday morning. It is perhaps a blessing in disguise that we could not have the usual post-mortem after the game as we all scattered fairly quickly and made our separate ways home, or to work or to another football match. I had not envisaged my 600th game for Farnborough Vets passing off like this (after my debut in November 1996 shortly after my 39th birthday) but it did. I was home early to Mrs M's surprise and quickly rustled up a chorizo and closed cup chestnut mushroom fried rice to accompany an ice-cold San Miguel to cheer myself up whilst I waited for three more Liverpool points at Fulham.

Man-of-the-Match – votes had to be dragged out of the players today like impacted wisdom teeth. Some wanted to vote for the Glendale player, Paul, who sportingly came on for us when we were down to ten players. Peter Harvey with his goal keeping the score respectable, and Gordon Thompson with his football intelligence and diligence - shared the award.

24 March 2019: Catford Wanderers Vets (A, 2-2)

Hearts race as Farnborough snatch draw from jaws of victory

We look forward to this spring outing. Games against Catford Wanderers are keenly contested. The pitch is more than half decent. Hospitality is good. And we occasionally run into old friends. The spring sunshine added to the quality of the experience. After last week's debacle against Glendale, we were looking for a performance, let alone a result. Numbers were tight but we mustered thirteen with the late inclusion of Tom Naughton from our other Vets team, and debutant Gary Mason brought in today to make sure Michael Hills kept his head. The delayed kick off of 11:00 was helpful as waiting for Gordon to arrive with the kit felt a bit like waiting for Godot, with the absurdity of Matt Angelo's utterings to keep us entertained.

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Colin Mant, Michael Hills, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Gary Mason, Gordon Thompson, Obi Ugwumba

Jay Hardy, Peter Harvey

Substitutes: Phil Anthony and Tom Naughton

Supporters: David Orji, Michael Ugwumba (Jr)

Linesman: Michael Ugwumba Jr

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Chances were few and far between in the early stages as both teams looked to establish a foothold in the game. Farnborough had marginally more of the play and cohesive passing but both defences were as tight as clams. It took a set-piece to break the deadlock. Peter Harvey's quick feet and snake hips unbalanced his marker who resorted to an agricultural intervention which lifted Peter off the ground, well inside the box. The languid referee had little choice but to award the penalty. Peter rose like Lazarus to place the ball past the less than tall but agile Catford keeper into the top corner. Catford pressed for an equaliser but Matt Angelo was catching everything today and curbing his Brazilian tendencies. With Gordon Thompson on the left and Sinisa Gracanin on the right we had a balance and guile to our play allied with penetration that was pleasing whilst Gary Mason and Obi Ugwumba provided the muscle in midfield with Waine Hetherington pulling the strings. We needed some clearing headers in our box though, including one from Patrice Mongelard (which that smart lad Michael Hills described as just like Virgil) to preserve our advantage.

We made changes on the half hour with Tom Naughton and Phil Anthony coming on for Obi Ugwumba and Patrice Mongelard. It is fair to say that we lost some momentum then and Catford became more insistent. Yet, just when it felt the tide was turning, with five minutes to the break, the Catford keeper connected poorly with a clearance and it looked like he had passed the ball to the ever-alert Jay Hardy who was unmarked, lurking with intent just outside the Catford box. Jay's control of the ball was instant. He made the most of the Catford keeper having to come across a little diagonally and guided the ball in. Unlike a couple of weeks ago against Reigate, Jay's poke had the right angle and thrust to double our advantage.

2-0 up at the midway point with the not unreasonable prospect of more goals, there was probably not one among us who would have put money on a draw. The more clear-cut chances were falling to us but the finish was not there. Peter Harvey, Gordon Thompson, Jay Hardy and even Tom Naughton had chances to stretch our lead but came up short. At the other end Matt Angelo

distinguished himself with a stupendous save diving low to his left to palm out what would have been a Michael Hills own goal, after a header glanced off Michael Hills to move in the opposite direction Michael intended. Things started going awry with injuries taking a toll. First Jay Hardy twisted an ankle with an awkward landing and Obi Ugwumba was back on while Jay waited for the pain and discomfort to subside. It was not long before Gordon Thompson who had been shining brightly in the Farnborough firmament, came off with what he fears is a recurrence of a previous injury which kept out for three games earlier in the season. The wisdom of having substitutes was proven soon after when Phil Anthony came off with hamstring trouble and Patrice Mongelard was back on a little earlier than planned.

With a quarter of an hour left a Catford free-kick from the left found the Farnborough defence indulging in a tribute to the Easter Island statues. The smallest Catford player, all five foot two of him had run forty yards from the full back position, untracked and unchallenged, to get his head to the ball and Matt Angelo was finally beaten. If you think that was naughty there was more to come.

We still had chances to put the game beyond doubt and silence the very noisy home crowd. Peter Harvey was held back from behind in what looked like inside the box coordinates but the free-kick was taken on the line. Obi Ugwumba produced a peach of a thirty-yard cross for Jay Hardy at the far post and Jay's stooping header had the keeper beaten but was three inches away from the right side of the post.

With barely a minute left, the otherwise faultless and immaculate Michael Hills (who surely deserves to play a higher level of football on a Sunday morning) was tempted to bring down the youngest player on the pitch (whom one Catford player suggested to us was forty years old (which make me 85 years of age)) in a dangerous area. There was a bit of a commotion as the referee awarded a free-kick – you guessed it, on the line. There was even a female Catford fan who advanced on the pitch threatening to sort things out if a penalty was not awarded. When the free-kick was eventually taken the shot was sweetly struck with power and accuracy, beat the wall, making the most of the absence of a player on the post (much to Obi Ugwumba's displeasure), to give Catford a last gasp equaliser which was celebrated like a golden goal in extra time in the final of an inter galactic world cup. There was no time to go back to the centre circle even though in a real sense, things had come full circle.

Our old friend Roger French, ex-Farnborough Vets defender and co-Manager, appeared for Catford in an incident-packed last twenty minutes, reminding everyone, and Peter Harvey and Jay Hardy in particular, of why Norman Hunter is Roger's favourite player. Things were done and said in the heat of the moment but did not boil over.

In the end Catford would have been more pleased with the draw than we were but we cannot deny their spirit. The lesson as always is that if you do not put away your chances when you get them there is a good chance you will get punished. This is football.

As customary the enlightened Catford Wanderers Management laid on a wonderful spread for their visitors. I was late out of the changing room and missed out on most of it but rustled up a small bacon sandwich when I got back (though Mrs M would not believe I would eat anything small, ever).

Man-of-the-Match today – Jay Hardy who hobbled off momentarily with a badly twisted ankle but came back on to give as much as he got, and was three inches away from a happy ending.

New old boy Gary Mason also registered a couple of notches on the MoMeter. Next week it is Baltic at home with the prospect of another old friend, Des Lindsay, visiting us, and a fair share of our match subs going towards pizzas. Quite how many of us will be there is another matter as injuries are taking their toll and we have another eight games to play this season, before our European tour.

31 March 2019: Baltic Vets (H, 2-4)

Farnborough too generous on Mother's Day

Most of us went to bed probably thinking we did not mind losing an hour's sleep a long as we could have yesterday's sunshine for this game. Instead of going forward an hour it felt like we had gone back two seasons. It did not rain during the game but there was a general dampness that seeped into the soul and the wind was blowing in straight from the set of Game of Thrones beyond the Wall. Still, no one was late. Our numbers dwindled overnight to thirteen with co-Manager Mick O'Flynn too unwell to travel. In fact, Colin Mant had to travel to Beckenham before the game, to collect the kit from Mick. He was greeted by the sight of Mick in striped pyjamas and he confided later that he felt like one of the liberators at Dachau. The day was to prove more eventful for Colin. Mother's Day is always tricky for squad numbers but we were able to draft in three extra bodies from our other Vets team, in the shapes of Mark Harrington, Jon Gasson and Dean Murphy. It looked like Baltic too had reached out - their goalkeeper was a different class and era, his name was either Dorian Gray or he was just emerging from the onset of puberty.

Starting XI:

Rob Faulkner

Colin Mant, Jon Gasson, Patrice Mongelard

Mark Harrington, Simon Harvey, Sinisa Gracanin, Dean Murphy, Obi Ugwumba

Jay Hardy, Peter Harvey

Substitutes: Phil Anthony and Gary Mason

Referee; Nick Kinnear (who waived his match fee)

Supporters: Tony Harvey, Simon and Daisy Thomas

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

The game was barely five minutes old when Farnborough heads were left shaking ruefully. Colin Mant had cut out a through ball but was left facing his own goal and the obvious and sensible thing to do was to roll the ball back to Rob Faulkner. So, Colin put the right amount of pace and the correct angle to favour Rob's best (right) foot – but just at the moment when Rob decided to dash off his line. The result was not quite a Steve Blanchard classic but still suicidal. Rob could not re-adjust his position in time and the ball nestled into the bottom corner. It felt harsh. We had had more of the initial play and had begun to test the youthful Baltic keeper. This pattern continued until the next Baltic goal – a quick break, the nippiest forward on show lashing a twenty-yarder beyond the outstretched arms of our keeper. A great strike.

We then had one of those moments that will live long in the memory. If 2-0 felt a tad harsh, worse was to follow. We signalled to the referee that we were going to make two substitutions. Patrice Mongelard and Obi Ugwumba made their way off the pitch whilst Phil Anthony and Garry Mason were in the process of coming on. It is not clear what happened but the referee seemed not have realised what was occurring. Farnborough players all stopped whilst Baltic players carried on and the ball was punted goalward from thirty-five yards. Rob Faulkner was well off his line, taking a drink from a bottle and the ball sailed into the net. Our protestations came to no avail but what was more galling was that Baltic accepted the goal, rather unsportingly. I had not expected that from them as I made clear to them at half-time. I was disappointed that a man of Des Lindsay's sporting pedigree (and possibly a man of God too) felt that was OK. As Jay Hardy said to him later "You let yourself down there" but I would be very surprised if Des had trouble sleeping tonight.

It did not take long for Gary to signal that all was not well with his groin. But there was a silver lining. Five minutes before the break Dean Murphy curated a twenty-five-yard free-kick into the top corner which amazingly the Baltic keeper got a hand to, diverting the ball against the post, only for the ball to fall invitingly to Jay Hardy to poke home from close range.

Our spirits rose even higher when Jay Hardy poached another goal from close-range after excellent approach play from Dean Murphy and Peter Harvey, Surely, it was only a matter of time before we would draw level. The neutral would have thought so certainly as chances kept coming for Farnborough. Jay Hardy will feel he missed the best of them as he controlled a ball, looked like he could have walked it into the net only to flash his shot wide from two yards out. Dean Murphy will wonder for days how the exquisite crosses he put on Jon Gasson's and Peter Harvey's heads at the far post could not be glanced home. Obi Ugwumba crashed a long range shot against the cross bar. The Baltic keeper saved smartly from Dean Murphy as he applied a deft flick to a cross from the right.

Baltic were not out of it. On more than one occasion we did not apply the right amount of challenge and bite in the midfield (Gary Mason had limped off with Obi returning on the hour) and they had runners to get behind us. Sinisa Gracanin and Simon Harvey were channelling their efforts down the flanks and Dean Murphy, doing the work of two players in central midfield could not be everywhere. Moreover, Baltic had more tall players than we did and set-pieces could we know pose problems for us. And so, it proved with five minutes left after Baltic forced a corner. We could not clear the first ball. A Baltic header came off the bar and rebounded on the wrong side for us and Baltic had the numbers and the physical presence in the box to restore their two-goal advantage. In the midst of this disappointment there was a moment of dark humour as Colin Mant, running the line, called for Patrice Mongelard to be taken off (the two players had swapped places for the final ten minutes or so).

Baltic did to us what we did to them at their place in January. This was game twenty-nine for us this season and it is all taking a toll. We were missing a few regulars from injury, and for other reasons and there is a sense we are limping towards the line (Jay Hardy certainly was by the end of today and he said he ought really to have rested today to allow himself time to recover from the muscular attentions he received last Sunday). It is Avery Hill next week, another testing physical challenge in prospect. There is no prospect, I think, of Simon "Hurty Toe" Thomas being back for this one, even though according to the banter he played his best game for us today and some even queried why he could not take the kit given his low Dot Cotton score this season.

The number of players who were able to stay behind, from both teams, was lower than usual and as a consequence it looked like we had over-catered, despite the presence of Des Lindsay in the Baltic ranks. The Sunday Reserves, the cleaning ladies and our caterer Leanne all helped out with the crusty rolls (tuna/cheese/ham), mini-pasties and sausage rolls. We even had an appearance from Toby Manchip, whose sustenance took liquid form. He was there to hear Peter Harvey confide that he was rather fond of Mother's Day, and that it was really Father's Day that worried him as he gets cards from people he does not know on that day. Not a bad piece of Peter Harvey bingo that.

After the game it was revealed that Phil (Borat) Anthony had left his clothes behind in the changing room. What did he wear on the way home you might well ask (but you do not really want to know)? I wish to apologise here and now to any mothers in the Beckenham environs who might have glimpsed something disturbing, distressing or distasteful from the top of a bus between the hours of 13:00 and 14:00 today.

Man-of-the-Match today – Mummy’s boy today was Dean Murphy for a tireless performance, full of running, guile and neat touches – and yet more evidence that we badly need a Deano in our team.

7 April 2019: Avery Hill Vets (A, 2-2)

Both teams emerge with credit from a very good game

Games against Avery Hill are invariably tight affairs and today was no exception. Once again, we were able to draft in some extra bodies from our other Vets team. We would have struggled for numbers otherwise given the heavy toll from injuries with several players missing including 'Ginger' Hardy, 'Messi' Thompson and 'Hurty Toe' Thomas (forty-five goals between them) to name but three. In fact, it was reported that only yesterday at the Millwall v WBA match, Mick O'Flynn had been sitting two rows behind Millwall's Murray Wallace in the crowd and had offered him the opportunity to embellish his CV by turning out for Farnborough Vets. All I can say is that when Murray reads this report he will regret missing this game.

The weather was milder than we expected on a slightly misty, still but overcast morning. It remained dry throughout but the playing surface seemed to have retained moisture from the morning dew and was in fact a pleasure to play on, with both teams striving to play a measured passing game and to take care of the ball.

Starting XI:

Rob Faulkner

Michael Hills, Jon Gasson, Patrice Mongelard

Waine Hetherington, Sinisa Gracanin, Chisa Mkala, Dean Murphy, Damien Preston

Peter Harvey, Kypros Michael

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, Mark Harrington, Obi Ugwumba

Supporters: Jay Hardy, Steve and Sarah Hills, Mick O'Flynn, Iggy Okafor, David Orji, Michael Ugwumba Jr (linesman)

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Avery Hill took the lead about ten minutes into the game. Patrice Mongelard was not in the right place to intercept a deep cross whipped in from the right after we had lost the ball. The Avery Hill forward had made enough room and ran in to meet the ball to place a firm and accurate header beyond Rob Faulkner. Our response though was immediate. It took us about two minutes to draw level with a smartly taken low shot from the edge of the box by Peter Harvey who had carried the ball past two defenders and produced a sliding shot that skimmed the surface and had enough pace and placement to beat the otherwise excellent Avery Hill keeper. We noticed that he was quick off his line and adept at shutting down the angles and was almost unbeatable in one-on-ones – twice Kypros Michael had forced close-range saves out of him. Chisa Mkala found the same barrier when he slipped in behind the Avery Hill defence and penetrated their box.

On the half hour, Patrice Mongelard, Dean Murphy and Jon Glasson made way for Phil Anthony, Obi Ugwumba and Mark Harrington. We had a scare soon after when Peter Harvey went down after colliding with the onrushing Avery Hill keeper. At the time Peter was making a darting run through the heart of the Avery Hill defence and was clipped from behind knocking him off balance which meant his feet were off the ground when the keeper connected with him.

We feared we would miss Jon Glasson's towering presence against what is a taller than average team but with Michael Hills in an imperious mood we survived until half-time when we were able to enjoy oranges supplied by Mark Harrington. This made up for the absence of water bottles (our usual water carrier Colin Mant being unable to join us today).

We remained positive as the general feeling was that we had worked the Avery Hill keeper harder than they had exercised Rob Faulkner. We carried on working the Avery Hill keeper but could not finish the half chances we were creating. Avery Hill remained dangerous on the break. They had arguably the quickest forward on the pitch as we found out to our cost a little later. Changes were made on the hour with Michael Hills, Waine Hetherington and Damien Preston making way for the return of Jon Glasson, Patrice Mongelard and Dean Murphy. We switched to a back four and almost immediately fell behind. The Avery Hill Express managed to shrug off successive tackles from Mark Harrington and Jon Glasson in the centre our box before lashing the ball high into our net despite Rob's best efforts. With the quality that Avery Hill had this was always a risk but it felt harsh as it could be said to be against the run of play. For the second time in the game, we had to dig deep.

There followed a catalogue of chances, half-chances and misses. Crosses, corners and cut-backs rained into the Avery Hill box but lacked the finish we craved. Peter Harvey came close but could not dig the ball out from under his feet twice to produce a clean shot in a crowded box. Chisa Mkala leapt like an impala in the box to produce a close-range header that the Avery Hill keeper palmed away. Dean Murphy and Obi Ugwumba had shots that caught the eye but the blue Avery Hill line held.

With ten minutes or so left Mick O'Flynn's legendary tactical acumen decided to manifest itself. He changed our shape taking off Phil Anthony and bringing back into midfield the craft and guile of Waine Hetherington. A neatly worked free-kick involving Peter Harvey and a wily run by Waine almost paid dividends almost immediately.

With less than five minutes left Chisa Mkala produced another bustling run to enter the box from the right. He had muscled his way past the twin towers of the Avery Hill central defence, his touch had taken the ball clean through and as he shaped to angle his body with the ball now progressing towards the goal he was taken roughly from behind. This would have been a stonewall red card in a normal game but all we had was a free-kick on the edge of the box in a central position. Mick O'Flynn called for Obi Ugwumba to have it. In front of son Michael Jr and two other supporters he had brought with him, Obi delivered a trademark thunderbolt that had the added sheen of optimum height and destination. The Avery Hill keeper was beaten. There was not much time left after the re-start.

Both teams came off the pitch satisfied with their performances and with the feeling that a draw was the right result. It was also notable that the game was played in excellent spirit and there was no bad tackle, or flash of malice that anyone could remember.

A pussy walked into the bar. No this is not the opening line of a Peter Harvey joke. Jay Hardy got all excited but all pussy wanted to do was sniff the kit bags. There was no food that we could share with the cat as the lady that normally does the food at that ground was unavailable. We did not really mind. There were several other Vets teams there that we had played this season and there was plenty of chat to be had and big Steve behind the bar kept the refreshments coming.

Man-of-the-Match today – Peter Harvey for a performance full of character, endeavour and desire who let his cultured left foot do more of the talking although we found it hard to shut him up in the changing room afterwards.

14 April 2019: Riverside Wanderers Vets (A, 3-3)

Balti derby ends in honourable draw

This game was a battle between two teams sponsored by curry houses, with the Palace of India in Farningham versus the Village Cuisine in Farnborough. You could say on the day that Game of Thrones returns to our TV screens that this was a Game of Naans. I thought of a dodgy curry when Sinisa Gracanin had to run home soon after putting the kit in my car to attend to a plumbing emergency that was a shock to his cistern. Perhaps it was an iffy Ruby that kept Obi Ugwumba from showing up today. As a result, we had to borrow a Riverside player to start the game whilst fashion icon Phil Anthony got changed. The morning chill and grey skies dissipated as the morning wore on. The cold start afforded me a rare opportunity to give an outing to my vintage Arran sweater (circa 1978) which narrowly avoided a Peter Harvey bingo moment about sucking a fisherman's friend although he did mention trawling. Phil Anthony thought the jumper would look good on his dog Caesar and he even had the cheek to question my sartorial sense – yes, that's right, Phil the MAMIL and a sandals & socks man.

Only XI:

Rob Faulkner

Phil Anthony (eventually), Michael Hills, Patrice Mongelard

Mark Harrington, Wayne Hetherington, Sinisa Gracanin, Ian Lyons, Gary Mason.

Peter Harvey, Dean Murphy

Supporters: Paul and Rory Tanton

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

The Riverside pitch, or Eynsford Bowl, is notorious for its slope and curvature. The surface was lush and a little agricultural in places. It is the same for both teams you will say but it is a place where teams like to win the toss. We kicked up the mountain in the first-half and our aim was generally to not fall behind too much in the first half. In the end the deficit was one goal only and I would be lying if I said we were unhappy with that. The first threat on goal was ours - as Peter Harvey flashed a cross across the face of the Riverside goal which took the polish off the boot of an outstretched Mark Harrington at the far post. Dean Murphy blasted a ball against the angle of bar and post just as an off-side whistle went.

Despite these encouraging signs we fell behind after a quarter of an hour. Rob Faulkner had kept us in the game with a couple of stunning reflex saves from close-range but corners at the bottom of the hill are particularly problematic. From one such set-piece the ball fell kindly to a Riverside forward in a crowd of players and the ball was prodded over the line. It did not take long for us to draw level – a sort of reverse pass from Peter Harvey had released Dean Murphy on the right, the uphill slope was helpful and Dean's low finish arrowed into the net despite the presence of a more than competent keeper in the Riverside goal.

Parity did not last long. Riverside pulled ahead ten minutes later when the ball bounced off Phil Anthony's knee in an attempted clearance and fell kindly to a Riverside forward on his best foot with a propitious angle to curve the ball past Rob Faulkner. Worse followed for us when a muscular intervention by Gary Mason inside our box yielded a penalty for Riverside which none of us questioned. Despite Grobbelaar antics from Rob, and some diversionary theatrics from Michael Hills, the penalty was well struck. 3-1 felt like a mountain to climb. 3-2 felt less so after Peter Harvey earned and converted a penalty with five minutes of the half left.

We were cheered up as the second half got underway by the sight of Farnborough legend and Vet Paul Tanton (400+ goals for the club) and his lad. We would have been even happier if Tanton had been on the pitch. We felt that the slope would help us keep Riverside kettled in their half and by and large this was the story of the second half, interspersed with some forays into our half that were less dangerous than what we were engineering at the other end. Engineering is the right word for the equaliser that we struck on the hour or so when Peter Harvey's perceptive through ball released a marauding Dean Murphy who calmly guided the ball past the Riverside keeper. At that point it felt like there could only be one winner of this game and it would not be Riverside. There were certainly more incidents in the Riverside box. Dean Murphy and Peter Harvey had shots that drew very good saves from the Riverside keeper. Mark Harrington came agonisingly close from one corner. Waine Hetherington had a shot from the edge of the box that curved the wrong side of the post at the last minute. Our midfield quintet showed great spirit and there was resilience in our back line with Michael Hills snapping at anything loose and the two sexagenarians holding their own.

In the end a draw was a fair result. Riverside did enough in the second half to earn a point. We did enough to feel this had been a very good team performance with only eleven players. This draw felt better than some of the wins we have had this season although it will soon be hard to recall what victories feel like (our last one going as far back as 3 March). Injuries have not helped. Players not turning up when expected help even less.

I cannot end this report without a mention in dispatches for the referee today – a former Riverside player who filled in for a missing referee. Despite a touch of somnambulism, he was scrupulously fair and contributed to the good humour and sporting spirit in which the game was played despite the best efforts of one or two players with not much hair (on both sides).

Nor can I fail to record what a copious feast our hosts served up for us in the Five Bells Public House: piping hot vegetable samosas with sweet chilli dipping sauce, onion bhajis, sausage rolls, chicken breast nuggets, baby pizzas, egg mayonnaise and ham and tomato on white bread, and cheese and onion on wholemeal bread. No wonder we had nine out of eleven players in the bar (just one less than we had to start the game). To add to the atmosphere there was even a Jimmy Greaves look-alike in the pub, spotted by Tottenham fan Peter Harvey.

It is Easter Sunday next week – we will do well to get 11 players out and will once again need to call on our other Vets team probably. I do not think any of our injured players will be back. News from the crowded Senior Vets treatment room, received yesterday from matron Amanda Thomas, was that "Hurty Toe" Thomas was making progress but still could not strike a ball properly. We might have a very long wait for that, even after a full recovery.

Man-of-the-Match – six players carried favour with the voters today but the two most cracking poppadums were Dean Murphy who struck like a cobra twice, and Mark Harrington with a vindaloo of a performance.

21 April 2019: Sanatogen Vets (A, 9-3)

Kypros delivers tonic against Sanatogen

Here I was thinking this would be a short report since I was not likely to play a part in the game. But I find myself with twelve goals to report thanks in part to a Greek on fire, and two resurrections on Easter Sunday. On a bright sunny morning I made my way to the home of Sanatogen Vets in Eltham, not quite sure what to expect for our first ever game against these opponents. It looked like the Eltham Chapter of Hells Angels were having a rally in the grounds. A few of them watched the game, and there was a bevy of female supporters too.

With only eleven fit players expected I was delighted to see Jay Hardy and Gordon Thompson appear in our midst, like some Easter miracle, risen from injury. Another welcome Messiah-like appearance with Ray-Bans and what looked like a halo, was co-Manager Mick O'Flynn (but I will spare you the analogy Peter Harvey chose to make instead). It looked like Sanatogen Vets had cast a wide net for players although, to his credit, their manager Liam ended up refereeing the whole game in the absence of their usual official (and a good and fair job he made of it in a game played in excellent spirit). On a hot day Michael Hills had thoughtfully brought along a pack of large water bottles.

Starting XI:

Rob Faulkner

Michael Hills, Ian Lyons, Colin Mant

Waine Hetherington, Sinisa Gracanin, Simon Harvey, Danny Mullins, Gordon Thompson

Peter Harvey, Kypros Michael

Substitutes: Jay Hardy, Ahmed Lafia

Linesman: Patrice Mongelard (though nor running)

Supporters: Steve Hills, Kayleigh Richards

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

I will spare you the usual descriptive narrative to cover all twelve goals. Peter Harvey will accuse me, again, of being economical with the detail, but as he did not score perhaps this does not matter. So, this is how the scoring went

10th minute – a Peter Harvey corner was swung in onto the head of Danny Mullins to nod home. (1-0)

12th minute – a Sanatogen equaliser after a long ball over the top was headed on by a Farnborough player to what appeared to the naïve to be an off-side Sanatogen forward who kept his cool to slot the ball home. (1-1)

15th minute – Kypros Michael prods the ball home from less than a yard out from a Danny Mullins pass, after the two players combined in the approach play. (2-1)

22nd minute – Kypros Michael again after the Sanatogen keeper failed to hold on to a high speculative shot shanked goalward by Waine Hetherington. (3-1)

28th minute – Kypros Michael with a tap-in after unselfish play from Peter Harvey who had turned his marker and advanced to the by-line. (4-1)

40th minute – Kypros Michael with a stooping header almost on the goal line, after a Sinisa Gracanin corner had arrowed in, untouched by any other contact. (5-1)

In the midst of this feeding frenzy Peter Harvey had lashed a shot against the bar at 1-1, Simon Harvey had made way for Ahmed Lafia on the half hour and there had also been a welcome water break. Patrice Mongelard, walking the line, had failed to award one or two off-side decisions against Sanatogen, despite the clamour from Farnborough defenders, who had failed to appreciate that they had provided the last touch invariably.

Obviously, we were expecting to score more goals in the second half but Sanatogen too had reason to hope that they could narrow the gap as they had the players for the job. Simon Harvey was back on for the second period with Gordon Thompson taking a breather. Sanatogen had the better of the opening phases of the second half and we wobbled for a while. An early penalty, fiercely struck, gave them heart after Rob Faulkner had bundled a Sanatogen forward over and left the referee with no choice.

50th minute – Sanatogen penalty. (5-2)

Kypros Michael was then tackled fiercely in the box (by the player who had played in goal for the first-half but was now seemingly determined to put things right on his own) and came off injured. Thankfully it was not serious, “only a sandwich” said Kypros. He meant a kebab surely, I thought. This brought Gordon Thompson back in the fray and almost immediately he was on the scoresheet.

55th minute - the new Sanatogen keeper tried some unwise fancy footwork in a dangerous area and Gordon robbed him before walking the ball into the net. (6-2)

60th minute – Sanatogen score again with a smart finish after we fail to clear the ball despite Ian Lyons winning a header in the box against the tallest Sanatogen player. (6-3)

The last twenty minutes were packed with incident. Peter Harvey came off, feeling the effects of flu that had bugged him all week. This brought revenant Jay Hardy back, after a few weeks out with an ankle injury. Ian Lyons too came off after another physical tussle, feeling the effects of a big decking job and a marathon run in the days before the game. The resplendent Kypros Michael was back on (to Sanatogen’s delight no doubt). Before he departed Ian had made clear his view that Mick O’Flynn should replace non-running Patrice Mongelard as linesman and Peter Harvey took the flag. This could well be the first recorded instance of a linesman being substituted for the Farnborough Senior Vets. The goals kept coming for Farnborough.

75th minute - Jay Hardy restored his scoring with quick feet to finish an assist from Kypros Michael. (7-3)

80th minute – Gordon Thompson again, assisted by Danny Mullins. (8-3)

85th minute – Danny Mullins with an exquisite lob, assisted by Gordon Thompson. Duracell Bunny Danny revealed later that he opted to shoot as he was too tired to run any more. (9-3)

The game ended as it had started, in blazing sunshine. Cold beers were, I am sure welcome, as were sandwiches laid on by our hosts but I had to rush off home for Easter Sunday roast.

Man-of-the-Match – Kypros Michael, who found most of the Easter eggs a week early (according to the Greek Orthodox calendar), with surely the lowest average distance from goal for his haul of four goals in Farnborough history.

28 April 2019: Riverside Wanderers Vets (H, 3-2)

Farnborough cling on for narrow win

Two weeks ago, we clawed our way back to earn a well-deserved 3-3 draw against today's opponents, who will surely have thought they were about to do the same to us. In the end they ran out of time. We had run out of ideas long before the final whistle.

On an overcast and occasionally blustery day, punctuated by a Spitfire flypast, we mustered fourteen players, boosted in particular by the return for the first time this season, of Ian Coles. Another revenant was "Hurty Toe" Thomas. We hoped that the presence of attacking talent Jay Hardy, Kyros Michael, and Gordon Thompson, all absent two weeks ago, would tip the balance in our favour. So, it did but only just. Non-playing co-manager Patrice Mongelard watched proceedings, making notes, as usual.

Starting XI:

Rob Faulkner

Phil Anthony, Michael Hills, Colin Mant

Waine Hetherington, Sinisa Gracanin, Danny Mullins, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson

Jay Hardy, Kyros Michael

Substitutes: Ian Coles, Peter Harvey, Ahmed Lafia

Referee: Chris Coulbourn

Supporters: Tony Harvey, Ian Shoebridge

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

I cannot claim that we made the best of starts. There was a moment about five minutes into the game which encapsulated perfectly our disarray. Kyros Michael had got behind his marker, and seemingly, had a clear run on the goal. Words to describe what happened next fail me. I cannot say it was entirely unexpected, but surely there was a supernatural agency involved. After two gratuitous step overs Kyros nutmegged himself twice, left the ball behind and was tackled viciously by two blades of over-grown grass, bundled himself to the ground and was held there by embarrassment and the mocking jeers of his team mates.

On a more serious note, we had trouble moving the ball and struggled to come out of our half. Passes were going astray, we kept giving the ball away in unwise areas and seemed intent on playing ourselves into trouble. Only the calm assurance of Rob Faulkner in goal held a glimmer of hope. It was no surprise when Riverside took the lead after ten minutes. It was not one of their forwards but their left-back with a low centre of gravity, given the freedom of Farnborough, invited by hand-delivered embossed vellum, to advance fifty yards unchallenged, walk through our non-existent defence and lash the ball low into our net (for only his third goal this season). I am not sure that the Riverside keeper had touched the ball by then.

Yet in a flash, Gordon Thompson dragged us back into the game barely two minutes later. His Messi-like steps and sinuous run had bewitched his markers, twice, as he cut in from the left to work a shooting opportunity with his right foot. In one graceful and fluid movement he had set himself free and his eye for goal and deadly right foot did the rest. His powerful shot from inside the box could not be kept out. The Riverside keeper still had not touched the ball.

We wrested a degree of control which, whilst was not absolute, yielded two more goals. Kyros Michael gave us the lead with a surprise of a right foot shot that bamboozled the Riverside

keeper. I am not sure we knew Kypros had that in his locker. It was most welcome. Not long after Sinisa Gracanin arrowed a corner to the far post where it was met by a stooping Kypros Michael to double our advantage. Riverside must have missed the highlights of our match against Sanatogen last Sunday – when we scored an identical goal. This was the high point of our dominance – changes made on the half hour with the introduction of Peter Harvey, Ahmed Lafia and Ian Coles (and the withdrawal of Jay Hardy, Simon Thomas and Phil Anthony) gave our opponents more to worry about. Once again for a second consecutive Sunday the crowd demanded a Kypros Michael hat-trick – he had until the 60th minute to do this before leaving early on the Greek Orthodox Church Easter, to go and set up the barbecue at home (no other FOBG Senior Vets at the feast but I have been promised a photo of the fatted calf). We thought the moment had arrived when a corner swung in by Peter Harvey reached his head five minutes before half-time but Kypros was overcome by a tortoise reflex just then, and he retracted his head on the goal line.

We kept trying, and the early exchanges in the second half brought some good scoring opportunities for Kypros. One of these in particular drew a stunning point-blank save from the Riverside keeper that deserved a point at least. Once these early chances came and went, Riverside began to ask questions of their own. The symptoms that had afflicted us very early in the game returned. The final round of substitutions with Jay Hardy, Simon Thomas and Phil Anthony returning on the hour for the retreating Kypros Michael, Gordon Thompson and Colin Mant had emboldened Riverside further. It was not long before they narrowed the gap with a penalty conceded by Michael Hills for a tackle that was just as late as it was superfluous. A powerful left foot strike went in off the base of the post with Rob Faulkner going the right way. Whether the team was going the right way was in doubt. The feeling that this would not be our day grew after one of those misses that Harry Redknapp claimed his granny would score. Jay Hardy had squared the ball inside the box for Danny Mullins in splendid isolation, with not a single Riverside player within two yards. Danny did not take a touch to steady himself and instead shanked the ball high above the bar from ten feet with the Riverside keeper embalmed on his line.

Yet, as if by miracle we held on. But Riverside had given us quite a scare. We thought they would tire in the second half but instead we were the ones that faded. We could have paid the price for all those missed chances and in the end our relief was great as the final whistle blew. The post-match bread rolls were excellent and some were shared with the Sunday team. As we sat there in the clubhouse, discussing the art of the trombone, and watching the London Marathon runners finish their race I naively hoped to catch a glimpse of Ian Lyons. A little sadder and wiser, I was informed that Lionel was running the Beckenham half Marathon, or possibly the Chislehurst fun run, or was it the Beckenham Harris Primary Academy egg and spoon race. Phil Anthony was re-united with clothes he had left at the club several weeks ago. None of the charity shops in the Farnborough and Orpington would take the stuff. The bad news is that the clothes are coming on tour to Rotterdam. Talking of the tour, it was great to have Ian Coles back, a huge presence in the bar, sharing some hilarious memories of our previous European adventures (even if the python-like toilet habits and meaningful looks of some individuals should have remained secret). Another secret is the identity of the owner of the bottle of Pantene Pro-V Smooth & Sleek conditioner (just what a quiff needs if you ask me) left in the changing room.

Man-of-the-Match – Sinisa Gracanin, at times an oasis of Croatian calm and class in midfield chaos.

5 May 2019: Bird in Hand Vets (A, 0-3)

Tough examination for Farnborough at the University Ground in Chislehurst

Absenteeism takes its toll, in sport as in education. Today we were down to the barest of elevens and we needed to call on Steve Blanchard for his first game of the season. His fitness regime – entirely hop-based, is geared for him to peak on our European Tour at the end of May. Some of us were still traumatised by our last encounter with Bird in Hand Vets a year ago but this time, true to their word, they put an older side out. But as we found out quality ages well. This was our thirty-fourth game of the season and some of us were feeling the effects of such a long campaign.

On a dry, but cold and blustery day with the sun struggling to dissipate the clouds we could at least look forward to probably the best playing surface we were to experience this season, and measuring up against a side that knows a thing or two about how to play football.

Starting XI:

Rob Faulkner

Steve Blanchard, Michael Hills, Patrice Mongelard

Waine Hetherington, Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Hamed Lafia, Gordon Thompson

Peter Harvey, Kypros Michael

Supporters: The Hills gang - Steve and Sarah Hills + James, Josie, Max and Sienna Walker; Neil Mackenzie and Chris Webb

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

We made a calamitous start. We were a goal down after two minutes with the ball yet to leave our half. We were caught cold, surrendered the ball just outside our box, failed to clear the danger and the wise old bird leading the opposition attack did the rest with a simple yet slightly scuffed effort which Rob could not get to as his line of sight was obstructed. Despite this early reverse we could see that we would be able to compete if we took care of the ball and went through the phases as Mick O'Flynn put it.

As often happens in football – we fell behind further on the quarter hour. Again, it was self-inflicted – a clearance went astray on the edge of the box, the ball was picked up by the second crafty operator in the Bird in Hand forward line who shot low and early, surprising Rob Faulkner in goal.

We showed a lot of character to prevent things from getting worse. We created chances – Kypros Michael headed the ball straight at the keeper from close-range after a peach of a cross from Peter Harvey. Jay Hardy hit the side netting from fifteen yards out. Waine Hetherington chose finesse instead of power with a seemingly empty goal from a central position just inside the box. Sinisa Gracanin flashed a low drive across the goal just wide of the far post. These were encouraging moments. Kypros Michael seemed a tad more sluggish than usual – the cause later revealed to be a tight hamstring, perhaps strained while reaching for another kebab at the Greek Easter celebrations last weekend. Peter Harvey, up all night laden with the anxiety of a hospital visit for a loved one in Essex, was receiving some muscular attentions from defenders which induced a few linoleum moments. Gordon Thompson was his usual bag of South American tricks.

All of these positive things meant that we were not too dispirited at half-time. We were up against arguably the best Super Vets side in our programme and a neutral spectator unaware of the score would venture the view that here were two well-matched sides playing rather good football on a Sunday morning. Of course, our opponents had too much quality to let us have it all our own way. We had to defend and Rob Faulkner had recovered his poise in our goal after the two early infelicities.

The second half was an equally well-contested affair. It appeared to me that we managed to spend more time in our opponents' half. I recall two very good chances for Kypros Michael and Gordon Thompson. In both cases the Bird in Hand keeper had been lured off his line, left empty-handed as the ball was lifted or poked beyond only to trickle narrowly wide or encounter a covering defender. Bird in Hand remained dangerous on the break and with the enduring quality of their crosses. Rob Faulkner made two great one-on-one saves which gave us great heart. Michael Hills was having to use every inch of his pace to cover the ground. Steve Blanchard did not look like he was playing his first game of the season. Although we had little to show for it the measured connectivity of our play was encouraging.

There was a little less of the measured approach on seventy minutes when Waine Hetherington connected with a tricky Bird in Hand forward in our box. The contact was real, you could hear it but the forward stayed on his feet, kept control of the ball even, but somehow planted the thought in the referee's mind that a penalty ought to be awarded. The spot kick was converted and 3-0 felt harsh – almost like the Liverpool v Real Madrid game the other night. (There, I have mentioned it – part of the healing process along with my Barca beanie today, despite being accused by Mick O'Flynn of being a one-armed butler (He can give it but he cannot take it)). Michael Hills was delighted that another Farnborough player had conceded a penalty with a careless tackle. Peter Harvey felt compelled to point out to the referee that far worse challenges on him had gone unpunished in the first half. I could see the merit of Peter's argument but it had no bearing on the outcome.

In the end we could not reduce the gap. We had come close with a few set-pieces and the chances I mentioned, but did not have – on the day – the cutting edge which Bird in the Hand had. The hand shakes at the end were genuine as was the mutual respect. The game had been played in excellent spirit. The most tanned one in the Bird in the Hand midfield had put himself about a bit but wiser heads ruled the day.

Unfortunately, the caterers were having a day off but at least we got to experience superb showers.

Man-of-the-Match – Michael Hills and Rob Faulkner who garnered five votes each. Hillsy had the spur of a huge following in the crowd which drew an envious comment from Waine Hetherington. Rob Faulkner found himself in A&E later in the day with possible concussion – not sure how this could have happened, although we recall Rob showing great courage to dive at the feet of forwards more than once. He recalled catching a trailing boot – all entirely without malice. Latest news is that Rob had mild concussion but is OK, thankfully.

19 May 2019: FOBG Young Vets (H, 3-5)

Farnborough Vets treat big home crowd to eight-goal thriller

This now traditional end of season fixture is rarely without incident and today was no exception. With only two teams playing at home, we had the big pitch to ourselves on an overcast but dry and still day. Farnborough legend Nick Waller took team photos (twice in our case after immature schoolboy prank from Peter Harvey). Although a family affair with several of the opposition having played for us this season this was a serious fixture with important bragging rights at stake.

Starting XI:

Matt Angelo

Steve Blanchard, Michael Hills, Patrice Mongelard

Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Chisa Mkala, Danny Mullins, Simon Thomas

Peter Harvey, Kypros Michael

Substitutes: Phil Anthony, Mark Friend, Hamed Lafia

Referee: Paul "Play On" Parsons

Supporters: Steve Blanchard Jr, Morgan Brown, Andy Cobham, Roger French, Tony Harvey, Simon & Caroline Harvey, George Kleanthous, Toby & Helen & Oliver Manchip, Ian Shoebridge, Gordon Thompson, Nick Waller, Gary Willison

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

We did not have the best start despite carving out the earliest scoring opportunity of note when Jay Hardy rounded players and entered the box with space and time for a shot that was well saved by a more mature looking Gary Rosslee. We fell behind after ten minutes or so. A blocked shot took Matt Angelo by surprise as it looped up in the air. He was able to adjust his feet to tip the ball onto the bar but could not get up in time to prevent Alan Fines from giving the Young Vets the lead with an acrobatic overhead kick.

The sides looked evenly matched until the half hour when a speculative shot from distance from Matt Wright evaded the other Matt and we were 2-0 down. It felt harsh. The introduction of Hamed Lafia for Chisa Mkala soon after paid dividends. Sinisa Gracanin played a peach of a pass behind the Young Vets defence for Hamed Lafia who collected the ball, looked up and delivered an exquisite cross for Kypros Michael to crown the move with a looping header that sailed in over an embalmed Gary Rosslee on the line. I will no longer agree with anyone who says that Man Utd fan Kypros does not use his head for anything. 2-1 at half-time was a fair reflection of the game up to that point. Patrice Mongelard and Steve Blanchard were replaced in the Senior Vets defence by Phil Anthony and Mark Friend for the second period.

The second half was packed with incident. There were four goals in the last fifteen minutes. First though we drew level with Kypros Michael exhibiting once again the knack to be in the right place at the right time. A goal bound effort had hit the Young Vets' post and the attempted clearance by Gary Rosslee was blasted against one of his own defenders with the ball falling kindly for Kypros Michael virtually on the goal line. I have seen him miss from there but not today. We enjoyed a period of ascendancy that did not yield a goal unfortunately. We thought we had a good shout for a penalty when Danny Mullins was hauled down in the box in a crowd scene. Despite Danny's shorts being round his ankles referee Paul Parsons played on.

On the hour Chisa Mkala was back on for Simon Thomas. Simon's bench warming had barely begun before he was summoned to replace a lame Kypros Michael whose hamstring trouble had flared up again. What flared up also was a bit of handbags involving Jason Miller and Peter Harvey. It was all a bit unseemly in front of a crowd including children. Jason Miller took ten minutes out to regain some maturity having been ushered off the pitch by Simon Thomas playing a muscular role.

The Young Vets pressed harder but we held our own despite Matt Angelo's best efforts to throw the game away. In the space of two minutes, he managed to let the ball through his legs, before recovering the ball just in time. He then kicked fresh air as he came out to clear the ball leaving Matt Ellis with an empty goal two yards out. Inexplicably Matt lifted the ball over the bar.

With such good fortune we thought, with a quarter of an hour left, that a draw seemed the most likely result. That was before Sinisa Gracanin's attempt at cushioning a header back to Matt Angelo did not quite come off and Alan Fines snapped up the opportunity to find the top corner from close range. Alan was to extend his team's lead five minutes later with a powerful finish from close range. With five minutes left there was time for Chisa Mkala to produce one of his bustling runs behind the Young Vets defence and a vintage smart finish to narrow the deficit to one goal. All of Chisa's good work was undone a couple of minutes later when referee Paul Parsons adjudged that Chisa had bundled a Young Vet attacker to the ground as he leapt prodigiously to produce a clearing header in our six-yard box. Barry Grainger converted the spot kick and that was it. Not quite, there was time for Jay Hardy to hit the post before the final whistle.

Our long season can be summarised numerically thus: P36, W22, D6, L8 GF 142, GA 73.

Awards for the season will be revealed at our Club Presentation Evening on 8 June. Today, however, we bestowed the Dot Cotton Award. It is always an awkward moment in the changing room when management ask for a volunteer for the kit. 'My washing machine is broken' 'I am not playing next week' 'I have a very busy week ahead' 'I'll take it next week' 'My name is Des Lindsay' – are just some of the excuses. This season's winner is Toby Manchip, with only 3 games played and with a kit wash to game ratio of 33.33. Others with impressive figures were Phil Anthony – five kit washes over 24 games, Patrice Mongelard - five kit washes over 32 games (Mrs M will be wanting a word), and sore loser Mick O'Flynn – four kit washes over twelve games ("but I attended many more games"). Obviously, it will not do for the management to award themselves prizes, no dodgy practices at our club – we are not Manchester City, allegedly.

On this special occasion we decided to have food delivered from our sponsor Village Cuisine – the best curry house in Farnborough Village. Onion bhajis, mixed samosas, salads, vegetable curry, naan bread, chicken biryani to feed twenty-five duly arrived. We could not finish the food, despite the immense presence of Buffetsaurus Rex, Nick Waller.

Man-of-the-Match – Michael Hills, forgiven for a three-minute tantrum that left us with ten men at a crucial juncture. I hope nobody behaves like that on our forthcoming tour in Rotterdam. Dutch leave like this will not do.

11 November 2018

Farnborough Old Boys Guild Senior Vets - Remembrance Sunday Memorial Match

Tull's Wanderers (3) v Chavasse's Casuals (3)

News that Wellcome Super Vets would not be able to get a side out for today's game came on Monday morning, but was unwelcome none the less. It meant that after twelve consecutive matches this season, we were facing an unlucky thirteen, our first cancellation. Moreover, it was not down to the weather, although in the end the weather nearly won the day. The ten other Vets teams who were approached could not fill the breach (some were playing each other). So, the option was to "play with yourselves", as Mrs M put it. Word went out to football friends and acquaintances, relatives, past Farnborough Vets and we mustered the required numbers for two teams as set out below. Mick O'Flynn came up with two fitting team names, to remember World War Heroes: Tull's Wanderers (named after Walter Daniel John Tull) and Chavasse's Casuals (named after Noel Godfrey Chavasse). To remember these two extraordinary men let us remind ourselves of who they were:

Walter Daniel John Tull (28 April 1888 – 25 March 1918) was an English professional footballer and British Army officer of Afro-Caribbean descent. He played as an inside forward and half back for Clapton, Tottenham Hotspur and Northampton Town and was the third person of mixed heritage to play in the top division of the Football League. During the First World War, Tull served in the Middlesex Regiment, including in the two Footballers' Battalions. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant on 30 May 1917 and killed in action on 25 March 1918. He was remembered in a sea portrait (carved into the sand) on Ayr beach between 8:30 and 11:00 am today 11 November 2018.

Captain Noel Godfrey Chavasse, VC & Bar, MC (9 November 1884 – 4 August 1917) was a British medical doctor, Olympic athlete, and British Army officer, one of only three people to be awarded a Victoria Cross twice. The Battle of Guillemont was to see acts of heroism by Captain Chavasse, the only man to be awarded the Victoria Cross twice during the First World War. In 1916, Chavasse was hit by shell splinters while rescuing men in no-man's land. It is said he got as close as 25 yards to the German line, where he found three men and continued throughout the night under a constant rain of sniper bullets and bombing. He performed similar heroics in the early stages of the offensive at Passchendaele in August 1917 to gain a second VC and become the most highly decorated British officer of the First World War. Although operated upon, he was to die of his wounds two days later in 1917.

Tull's Wanderers

Toby Manchip
Patrice Mongelard
Mark Friend
Luke Johnson
Phil Trump
Waine Hetherington
Mike Puplett
Ronnie Blake
Matt Ellis
Robbie King
Simon Thomas
Alex Webb
Louie Dwight-Thomas

Chavasse's Casuals

Dave Salako
Mick O'Flynn
Phil Anthony
Michael Hills
Obi Ugwumba
Terry Bear
Sini Gracatin
Ian Shoebridge
Chisa Mkala
Toby Manchip Jr
Jay Hardy
Peter Harvey
Oliver Manchip

Referee: Paul “Play-on” Parsons (who donated his match fee to the club)

Supporters: Tony Harvey, David Orji, John Puplett, Amanda and Daisy Thomas, Sarah, Alex and Sophie Trump, Chris Webb

Before the game could start there was a call for a forking party to do a bit of work on the pitch. It was not quite the Somme but there were a couple of patches that needed a bit of work. On the whole, the top pitch at Farnborough was in very good condition after all the rain in recent days, particularly overnight, and it had been played on the day before. I am always up for a bit of forking on a Sunday morning. When Phil Anthony and I joined the party, there were four others already at it – Mick O’Flynn, Obi Ugwumba, Ian Shoebridge and Sinisa Gracanin.

After a two-minute silence in the centre circle, the game got under way. It was clear early doors that the two sides were well-matched. The midfield quartet of Chavasse’s Casuals were more used to each other and initially they caught the eye but there were not many chances being created. The first goal scored by Chisa Mkala came after fifteen minutes when he chased a long ball. As Tull’s keeper and defenders closed in, the ball was held up in the only patch of wet ground that could have had that effect (a bit of the pitch that Mick O’Flynn did not fork properly, did not go in deep enough). The intervention of geology and hydrology benefitted Chisa who was quickest to adjust his stride and he took the ball round the keeper for a confident finish (a bit like Mo Salah). They nearly doubled their lead a few minutes later when Patrice Mongelard guided a clearance onto his own crossbar from inside the six-yard box as he cut out a low cross from Jay Hardy meant for Mick O’Flynn. It could have been an own goal but I think preferable to letting Mick O’Flynn score. The words own goal were heard not long after though – uttered by a sheepish Toby Manchip, keen to deflect attention away from himself. There was a bit of a scene in our box as we defended a corner. It looked like Toby stopped a shot but as he stumbled the ball squirmed out of his grasp (from gloves he had retrieved from the attic for the occasion) and I shaped to clear our lines he shouted “keeper” and pawed the ball into the net. I suddenly remembered his nickname of “Clown Prince” when he was a regular.

2-0 at half-time felt harsh because apart from these two incursions in our box we exercised a good measure of control, with probing runs from Simon Thomas, Matt Ellis and Robbie King, and the quality of Waine Hetherington and Luke Johnson. The next three goals were scored by our team. A dynamic Alex Webb – only fourteen years of age had enlisted, to play in an accustomed position up front and began to influence the game. Seeing Alex and the Manchip boys do their stuff, I had the sense that footballing talent does not always come down the male line. I had the same thought when watching one of the O’Flynn boys a couple of years back. Robbie King reduced the deficit with a close-range finish after several of our players had a pop. Simon Thomas equalised for us, sliding in at the far post, with a goal that saw Mick OFlynn and a few others mutter “offside” (he did it again on the WhatsApp group hours later) but referee Paul Parsons, fireproof, saw it as a perfectly good goal. For our third goal, Simon was involved again this time putting his posterior in the way of a Ronnie Blake goal-bound shot that left Dave Salako unbalanced and wrong-footed. Simon tried later, unsuccessfully, to claim the goal was his – only he could deprive a 72-year-old of a goal, but perhaps he was acting. It would have been a much better performance from Simon if he had not produced a comical attempt a yard out, at volleying a ball served on a plate, by stepson Louie, at the tender age of twelve. I hope Louie will remind Simon of this miss for the next twelve years, at least, on every Remembrance Sunday.

For the last quarter of an hour one team had twelve players on the pitch. At seven years of age Oliver Manchip fancied a pop at the old man just like in the back garden at home. He was remarkably unfazed by the experience, made some useful interventions, and seemed more

mobile than his papa, as shown in the next phase of play. With two minutes left Patrice Mongelard caressed a back pass to Toby's good foot but the somnolent recipient could not stop the ball from going out of play for a corner. You can guess the rest – Peter Harvey swung the corner in and Jay Hardy – all five foot two of him got his head to the ball and I could not stop it from going over the line. Whether Jay would have scored this header if Luke Johnson had been on the pitch is a discussion point. Luke had been injured in the last quarter of an hour after contact with Jay as both challenged for a header. There was not much of the armistice spirit between them. Jay was called a ginger by Luke – something which he found hard to take, not because Luke has no hair, but because Jay sees himself more as strawberry blonde. I told Jay to make up with Luke, and reminded him that ginger is OK. Meghan Markle married one after all.

Daisy Thomas appeared like a poppy in the field to help us take down the nets.

For the second week running the showers at Farnborough were not as good as what was available in the trenches. But the rations served up by Leanne Macdonald were copious. They defeated us despite some help from the Sunday team. Even Mr Creosote would have struggled.

Man-of-the-Match: Twenty-six players, all mentioned in dispatches.

Season 2019-20

7 July 2019	Sands United Kent (H)	5-2	Farnborough Old Boys Guild supports Sands
1 September 2019	Erith Vets (H)	1-2	Artful dodgers from Erith pull off daylight robbery at Farnborough
8 September 2019	CUACO Vets (H)	4-4	Truffles and tripe from Farnborough in eight-goal thriller
27 October 2019	Ashburnham Wanderers Vets (A)	6-1	Joy of Six for Farnborough
3 November 2019	Sanatogen Vets (H)	3-5	Never mind the result, the performance was great
10 November 2019	Wellcome Super Vets (H)	3-3	Armistice spirit prevails as generous Farnborough and Wellcome both claim a share of the spoils
17 November 2019	AFC Greenwich Super Vets (A)	4-1	New management team comes from behind, with verve
24 November 2019	Old Tamponians Super Vets (A)	0-3	Old Tamponians brush aside anaemic Farnborough
1 December 2019	Orpington Vets (A)	2-2	Farnborough snatch draw from jaws of victory, just like in the good old days
15 December 2019	Wellcome Super Vets (A)	6-3	Farnborough on top in 9-goal thriller
5 January 2020	Inter Vyagra Super Vets (N)	5-3	Farnborough Senior Vets rise to the occasion
19 January 2020	Glendale Vets (A)	5-3	Farnborough repeat favourite score of 2020
26 January 2020	Lads of the Village Vets (A)	2-0	Farnborough keep the score down
2 February 2020	Greenwich Challenge (N)	3-2	Farnborough open post-Brexit Golden Age by coming from behind with panache
23 February 2020	Santos Vets(N)	3-2	Farnborough weather turbulence to nick it in extra time
8 March 2020	Catford Wanderers Super Vets (A)	5-3	All quiet on the pitch but game will be remembered for crackling clubhouse fracas
15 March 2020	Glendale Vets (H)	1-4	Manty blows golden management opportunity

Farnborough Old Boys Guild FC
Senior Vets, Season 2019-20



Back row, left to right:

Mick O'Flynn, George Kleanthous, Ian Coles, Colin Mant, Dean Statham, Joe Skinner, Simon Harvey, Gordon Thompson, Rob Faulkner

Front row, left to right:

Ian Lyons, Jay Hardy, Steve Blanchard, Patrice Mongelard, Waine Hetherington, Kypros Michael, Sinisa Gracanin, Peter Harvey

7 July 2019: Sands United Kent (H, 5-2)

Farnborough Old Boys Guild supports Sands

Today's game was in support of Sands – the UK Stillbirth and Neonatal death charity – organised by Farnborough stalwart Jordan Glen. The club and the Senior Vets were honoured to support this Charity and also to say thank you to Jordan for all he does for Sands, and for Farnborough. Fifteen players answered the Farnborough call under the managerial eye of Mick O'Flynn. Sands Utd had good numbers too, on and off the pitch.

FOBG Squad: Phil Anthony, Rob Faulkner, Mark Friend, Jon Gasson, Sinisa Gracanin, Barry Grainger, Jim Grimley, Jay Hardy, Michael Hills, Gary Mason, Chisa Mkala, Patrice Mongelard, Danny Mullins, Joe Skinner and Simon Thomas

Referee: Jim St John

Supporters: A decent crowd of around thirty-five people – and at least one enthusiastic dog

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

The overnight rain had freshened the air and tempered the pitch. Although overcast, it was a good day for football on a pitch that was in very good condition. The start of the match was preceded by a minute of applause from both teams clustered around the centre circle in remembrance of babies lost.

I spent my time on the subs bench picking up rubbish around the two dug-outs. I was doing such a good job that one of the Sands Utd players asked if I was part of the ground maintenance team rather than a playing member. He will have changed his mind after my stint in midfield, where I was glad to find my right knee held up, and in the words of one player I rolled back the year (note use of singular).

A neutral watching this game would have predicted only one winner after fifteen minutes, and it would not have been Farnborough. The quality of our opponents' football took us by surprise and it was only the excellence of Rob Faulkner in our goal that kept us in it. Last time I saw Rob he was injured. I would love to know what he has been on since. We could all do with some of it. He pulled off a string of saves with hands, feet, from close-range and distance. There was not much he could do with the Sands opening goal. Their youngest and most dangerous forward, Archie Hobbs-Moore, broke through on the right after twenty minutes or so to lash a low shot past Rob. Arguably, Sands scored the best two goals today although a certain Mr Thomas might beg to differ, more on that later.

We drew level ten minutes before half-time after a crowd scene in the Sands box. Their keeper fumbled a free-kick from Chisa Mkala and Michael Hills was in the right place at the right time to mop up and turn the ball in. By the time the first-half ended we had begun to test the Sands goal a bit more but their new keeper was proving difficult to beat and the score remained at 1-1.

The second half was more challenging for Sands. It was not long after the re-start when Joe Skinner tried a speculative shot from distance. The second Sands keeper inexplicably failed to gather the ball and our fox in the box, Jay "Tree Whisperer" Hardy, nipped in to tap the ball in. To their enormous credit, Sands fashioned an exquisite equaliser after an incursion in our box, a smart one-two and an even smarter finish by Jim Matthews. Barry Grainger nearly restored our lead with a twenty-yard scorcher that the Sands keeper miraculously got his fingertips to.

We then had the Simon Thomas audition for the role of main striker for the Senior Vets next season. Quick feet, balance, peripheral vision and spatial awareness were allied to provide two identical finishes a yard out, in a net emptied of defenders and keeper, for goals three and five. Goal four was a penalty stroked in imperiously after Danny Mullins had been interfered with in the Sands box. Simon even added the flourish of challenging for a header, a bold move which a surprised Steve Blanchard registered in the crowd. Simon does not usually put his quiff in harm's way like that. In the midst of all this, Mark Friend put a header against the Sands bar and Danny Mullins had a goal disallowed. In the end it did not really matter. We won with superior fitness and game management but really it was football that won.

With such a big number of players to juggle and being a bit out of clipboard practice Mick O'Flynn was not his usual smooth operator with the substitutions. For a short period in the second half, we had twelve players on the pitch and no linesman.

In recompense for his hat-trick, Simon Thomas was tasked with half of changing room sweeping duties. The consummate actor that Simon is could not quite hide the dismay on his face when he appeared with only half a dozen mini-sausage rolls left, and asked where all the food was. Leanne's goodies had been a great hit. I do not do this often, in fact never, but on this rare occasion I offered Simon my tuna and Branston roll. He declined but helped himself to my mini-meat pasty when I was getting a round of drinks.

The game was played in excellent spirit. Referee Jim St John – who had no hesitation in accepting to do the game, got no trouble from any of the players despite his near tantric moments. In fact, Jim had more trouble from a grey-haired shaggy beast (wolfhound?) that sauntered onto the pitch oblivious to the calls of his master for a good minute in the second half.

All match subscriptions, including donations from squad members who did not play, went to Sands– after deduction for the cost of the food – £143 (and no I am not going to explain where the £3 came from – it all went to a good home).

Man-of-the-Match – All the players from both teams. Hypothetically speaking, had we gathered Man-of-the-Match votes today Rob “Monkey Glands” Faulkner might well have edged it over Simon “Twinkle Toes” Thomas.

1 September 2019: Erith Vets (H, 1-2)

Artful dodgers from Erith pull off daylight robbery at Farnborough

Farnborough spirits were high before this game. The 3-1 derby win against Orpington last Sunday, the return of old team mates, sunny dry weather with a cooling breeze, bore hole-irrigated pitch in good nick, a big squad, old tight-fitting kit handed down from the Sunday team, and quality banter (specimen - "Jay the 90s called, they want their haircut-back"), a team photo by FOBG Official Photographer Colin Brazier (bizarrely clad in Bodiam chic high vis jacket), and to cap it all the best omen was we now had a Deano in our team and with a tattoo. All of this generated a palpable feel-good factor. Things went downhill after that.

FOBG Squad: Phil Anthony, Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Rob Faulkner, Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Peter Harvey, Simon Harvey, Waine Hetherington, George Kleanthous, Ian Lyons, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Patrice Mongelard, Joe Skinner, Dean Statham and Gordon Thompson

Referee: Paul "Play On" Parsons

Supporters: Colin Brazier, Tony Harvey, Ian Shoebridge

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

It is not often that a visiting team to Farnborough apologise for claiming all the points. To their credit our opponents did today, but we should also recognise their resilience and spirit. It is no exaggeration to say that we could have won this game 10-2. But instead, we lost 2-1. Such is football and once against the old truth was manifest - if one team repeatedly does not take its chances when they come, then more often than not they get punished.

The pattern of play was established very early on. We dominated possession, had mastery of the midfield, won numerous corners, got behind the Erith defence and set about testing their keeper. Our shooting left a bit to be desired however, and in Kypros Michael's case a lot. He will not enjoy being reminded (I do this with a heavy heart of course but only to help him come to terms with it) of the comedy moment when his right foot nudged the ball away from his shooting left foot, leaving him to swish fresh air, three yards out with the goal at his mercy. Many others had a go – Kypros again (motto: if you don't shoot you can't miss), Jay Hardy, Gordon Thompson, Waine Hetherington, Sinisa Gracanin but somehow the final effort, pass or shot did not add up. Of course, the Erith keeper and defence did not make it easy for us. Why would they? However, any neutral watching the game would have expected Farnborough to score first. I heard that Club Photographer Colin Brazier had his set his camera up behind the Erith goal.

It was 0-0 when we made five changes on the half hour, just saying. Peter Harvey was taken roughly from behind barely a minute after coming on and went on to have a frustrating and fractious hour. With thoughts of half-time forming, Erith made one incursion into our box as we failed to deal with a throw-in, the ball was angled behind our defence, drawing Dean Statham off his line and the clever Erith forward nipped in to guide the ball into an empty net. It was a bitter moment but we thought there was plenty of time to put things right.

Mick O'Flynn's half-time talk accentuated the positive, with the tactical insight that we needed to speed up the transition phase. It sounded knowledgeable, technical and fluent, usual O'Flynn spiel.

The pattern of the first-half continued with a sharper sense of frustration as we got closer to scoring, this time rattling the woodwork repeatedly. I counted five occasions when we hit the posts in that half – the two Harveys and Kypros Michael coming closest. At least three one-on-ones were thwarted by the Erith keeper. Several corners led to pin ball moments in the Erith box. Steve Blanchard and Ian Lyons had good headers that threatened. At times it looked like we would walk the ball into the net. But there was always a last defender on the line, or the Erith keeper who was immense. We threw the kitchen sink and the bath tub at Erith with Mick O'Flynn shuffling the pack furiously to get as many Farnborough attacking players bearing down on the Erith goal.

The last ten minutes or so were furious and frantic. We were undone by a quick Erith counter which saw a scuffed shot roll into the net beyond Dean Statham's outstretched hand. Erith joy was unconfined, understandably – smash and grab successfully executed. To make it more interesting with five minutes left we got one back – and even here the football Gods were grudging – a Jay Hardy shot beat the Erith keeper, only to come off the base of the post against the leg of an Erith defender and trickle over the line. In all conscience, despite his puppy eyes and boy band ginger fringe the dubious goals committee could not award the goal to Jay Hardy and OG is now joint top scorer. Jay started to give me a hard luck story about how he was robbed of a goal last week (and instead Peter Harvey got to take a penalty). I must have looked like I cared. I have no doubt that Jay will start scoring again, and soon. Form is temporary but class is permanent as football fans know.

We had a couple more sniffs at the Erith goal including a goal bound Joe Skinner header that was cleared off the line. In the end we ran out of time and Erith had ended our short-lived unbeaten run. It felt like daylight robbery but to be honest with you our finishing was so poor that police would suspect an inside job.

This week we had bread rolls, mini-pasties and sausage rolls from Leanne which went down well, even proving too much of a temptation for a couple of hungry lads from a visiting team who played our Sunday XI. I do not think we would have minded sharing the little we had, but we did mind that they did not ask first.

The handful of us left at the bitter end were cheered up by the appearance of Sarah Viner bearing a tray of hot sausages and accompanying rolls and condiments. By happy coincidence one of the sausages had turned vegan and was claimed by Mick O'Flynn. Naturally, I had two whilst the group was distracted by the discomfiture of a picnic table unable to cope with the weight of Ian Lyons' intellect.

Man-of-the-Match – Simon Harvey, who caught dad Tony's eye in midfield, and who nearly scored, like half our team.

8 September 2019: CUACO Vets (H, 4-4)

Truffles and tripe from Farnborough in eight-goal thriller

At least the weather was very good for football. Dry, sunny, with a cooling breeze and the pitch had been watered beforehand to suit our technical players. That was the idea anyway. "Grassmeister" Simon Thomas is taking a personal interest in the state of the Farnborough pitches and his eyes misted over when he spoke of adding fertiliser to the watering tank at the right ratio. No need for that, I suggest, us Farnborough Senior Vets can over-fertilise a pitch by just playing on it. As the only home team at Farrow Fields today we opted to use the big pitch. But our performance was far from big, even though visitors CUACO had let it be known that they did not have a proper goalie.

FOBG Squad: Phil Anthony, Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier, Ian Coles, Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Peter Harvey, Waine Hetherington, George Kleanthous, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Patrice Mongelard, Joe Skinner, Dean Statham, Simon Thomas and Gordon Thompson

Referee: Nick Kinnear (who donated his match fee to club coffers)

Supporters: Jordan Glen, Tony Harvey, Danny and Ethan Mullins, Paul and Rory Tanton, Gary Willison.

Director of Football (when we lose): Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

We started the game so well that after only two minutes George Kleanthous asked how it could be that the score was still 0-0. A minute later it was not. Gordon Thompson won a free-kick on the edge of the CUACO box, outthought everyone and slipped the ball behind the CUACO defence for ginger fox in the box Jay Hardy to poke the ball home. Was this the point at which the virus of complacency set in? Yet we had our warning – five minutes after we had taken the lead CUACO were level – a little to their disbelief, I would argue. A speculative cross cum shot from the right had got the better of Dean in our goal. He either misjudged the flight of the ball, or underestimated its pace, or just thought he could pluck the ball out of the air without the benefit of a degree of spring in his legs.

The rest of the half was largely one-way traffic. For the second week running, superior possession did not translate into goals, at least not for what felt a long while. We had opportunities aplenty but the finishing was poor. It was not until the latter part of the first-half that we edged ahead. Once again "give it to Gordon" was the key to unlock the CUACO defence as he embarked on a trademark mazy run into the CUACO box before slipping the ball to his left for Kypros Michael to surprise us all by lashing the ball high into the net. I have seen him miss so many from a similar position. Not long after, Kypros doubled his tally, courtesy of a Peter Harvey assist, by getting the benefit of a rebound, rounding the keeper and squeezing the ball home from a tight angle. ManU fan Kypros Michael was sharp today – he even pointed out that my stylish T-shirt, depicting five Liverpool Champions League Trophies, was out of date. Yes, but he'll never get to wear one of those.

3-1 up at half-time – the mood was positive and then Manager Mick O'Flynn's team talk was easy. Surely, I was not the only one thinking there were more goals in it for us despite our stuttering display. Or indeed that the only way CUACO could get back in the game was if we helped them. Yes, you guessed it – we did, and very generously. 3-1 became 3-2, 3-3 and 3-4 after a catalogue of Farnborough errors. I am not ashamed to say I was one of the culprits (before I am accused of bias, or of watching another game). CUACO had put an 18-year-old in

goal who was about five foot four, and tellingly moved a more than able centre half out of goal into his rightful position. As the scoreline changed the visiting team's spirits rose and they could sense a famous victory. Not even a Harald Schumacher moment could ruffle their feathers. Our keeper Dean had come off his line to make contact with CUACO's midfield bearded ginger wonder on the edge of our box. As I say, think Schumacher on Battiston in a 1982 World Cup match but without Schumacher's finesse. Dean was lucky not to be sent off. Thankfully, the bearded wonder was unharmed, unlike ex-squaddie Dean who thinks he has busted one of his ribs.

The conversation in the Farnborough technical area was not good. Three times Mick O'Flynn denied that he was Manager, claiming instead the title of Director of Football as we kept missing chance after chance. Danny Mullins left, having decided that his son Ethan had seen enough to give him nightmares. Come to think of it, Master Rory Tanton too saw things that the very young should not see. We are all in it together and it will not do to single out individuals. But I feel compelled by my team mates to mention the miss by Peter Harvey, normally so deadly, from a yard out. His first touch was not ideal but he had the use of his best foot. His dad Tony was as surprised as we were to see the ball sail high over the bar. We think Peter's new Adidas Predator boots might have something to do with it. Either they have been supplied by Puma, or he should ask for his money back. He had much to brood on as he was clattered in the box after he had executed a shot and had to hobble off as Farnborough claims for a penalty fell on Nick Kinnear's deaf ears (see what I did there).

As the minutes ticked away things were getting a bit frantic. With less than five minutes to go Gordon Thompson created an oasis of calm and space around him in a crowded box, engendered the vision to see an unmarked Jay Hardy, caressed the ball back for Jay to drive hard and low into the CUACO net for an equaliser. We then showed an urgency that we could have done with earlier in the game as we pressed hard for a winning goal. Successive corners followed and from the second one the ball fell to Gordon as he swerved past two defenders to line up a shot that drifted agonisingly wide of the post. A Farnborough winner at that point would have been harsh. Our visitors deserved something from the game.

We had drawn the game but it felt like we had lost, or that we should have lost. It is early days and we are having to adjust to new formations and rotations. It might get worse before it gets better.

I doubt though if we will have better crusty rolls than we had today. Leanne Catering Solutions had excelled. There were additional goodies, including vegan mini-sausages, from a club function last night that could not be finished off despite our best efforts.

Man-of-the-Match – “Trufflemeister” Gordon Thompson, the king of assists.

27 October 2019: Ashburnham Wanderers Vets (A, 6-1)

Joy of Six for Farnborough

After all the rain this week what a lovely morning for football – dry, still, sunny, blue skies, almost like Barbados or Mauritius, for my return after an absence of six weeks. In that time the team had played five matches and won them all, causing Mrs M to note that there was “a message in there somewhere”. In that time too, new match reporters had been talent-spotted, producing accurate reports that were a welcome change from the fiction I normally make up.

The extra hour in bed helped a number of us to recover from Mick O’Flynn’s 60th birthday celebrations on Friday. The impresario for this Joy of Sixty was Phil Anthony. The appearance of a nipples wonder on a cold night confirmed what many of us have long suspected – namely that Phil has had a taste by-pass. There was also a blonde woman in a terrible wig and a worse Irish accent who offered to tarmac Phil’s drive but we don’t have time to go into the sordid details.

FOBG Squad: Phil Anthony, Colin Brazier, Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Peter Harvey, Waine Hetherington, Michael Hills, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Patrice Mongelard, Danny Mullins, Mick O’Flynn, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas and Gordon Thompson

Supporter: Miss Claire Skinner

Director of Football: Mick O’Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

We lined up with fifteen players, all playing a part in the game with only Michael Hills and Peter Harvey playing full games. In Peter’s case it was in his new position as goalkeeper. He is making it his own.

Ashburnham made the slightly better start, seeing more of the ball initially, defending in numbers and robustly, looking to hit us on the break. Michael Hills had his hands full with their most dangerous player and the first scoring opportunity of note fell to Ashburnham drawing a fine save with his legs from Peter Harvey, quick as a flash off his line. On the quarter hour, our king of assists Gordon Thompson weaved his magic, penetrating deep into the Ashburnham box on the left, before lofting a cross to the far post where Simon Thomas unfurled his long legs for an acrobatic volley to give us the lead. It was a bit against the run of play but the tide started turning with that goal despite Ashburnham forcing a number of corners.

Just after the half hour, Simon Thomas quiffed the ball back across goal for Jay Hardy to finish emphatically from a yard out. Joe Skinner added our third, also from close-range after the Ashburnham keeper spilled a driven cross from Simon Thomas. We are not sure if Miss Skinner saw daddy score but with Christmas coming my advice is to say that of course she saw daddy score the best goal of the match with a bullet of a shot that nearly split the net. At 3-0 up, we relaxed a bit and were slow to close the ball down on the edge of our box and Ashburnham produced a smart curling shot to register a goal that gave them hope as half-time approached. It was a deserved goal based on their first-half showing.

With the benefit of the not inconsiderable slope, we thought that we would grow the score in the second period. For a good twenty minutes however the Ashburnham keeper kept us at bay producing eye-catching saves to keep out a 30-yard pile driver from Michael Hills, a rasping shot from Jay Hardy and foiling one or two one-on-ones. We started to think we could walk the ball into the net. Then came what could be seen as the controversial moment of the game. Simon

Thomas was brought down from behind in the box, as he launched on a clear run on goal. The linesman – an Ashburnham player, conferred with the referee and awarded the penalty which according to one of his team mates ‘ruined the game’. This was a brave decision by the linesman. It will be a while before his team mates buy him a drink, I suspect. Peter Harvey came all the way from our goal to finish with aplomb. I do not suppose it crossed his mind that his penalty could have been saved, with our goal bereft of a keeper. Peter could now boast a conversion rate of 100%, as he reminded Kypros Michael.

Mick O’Flynn’s senses, still sharpened up after his Friday night experience, executed tactical changes as we dominated the last ten minutes. More goals came – Sinisa Gracanin blasted the ball home after another crowd scene in the Ashburnham box and celebrated as if Croatia had won the world cup. There was just enough time for Kypros Michael, to put the icing on the cake by rounding the keeper and slotting the ball between the posts with virtually the last kick of the game – I could not help wonder if this had anything to do with the betting in Paphos.

A handsome win with six different scorers put a smile on every Farnborough face. There was some puerile behaviour in the showers at my expense which created more mirth – how I have missed all of that, and the top banter. Even more chuckles came from Senior Vets section in the October issue of ‘The Guild’, the new official club monthly magazine. I am not going to repeat my own words – get your own copy, suffice to say that I have been banned from writing anything for the November issue.

The platter of hot sausages, bacon rolls, roast potatoes and assorted sandwiches enhanced the feelgood factor. I was strategically positioned for that, of course, my best position all day some might say. For a moment I was reminded of the shift that Farnborough legend Nick Waller – *Buffetsaurus Rex* – used to put in after games – having seen him in jaw-dropping action last Friday at the Village Cuisine in Farnborough Village for Mick’s birthday curry.

We now have a run of three home games to come – weather and pitch permitting.

Man-of-the-Match – by a long chalk, Michael Hills, playing in a team where he is truly valued.

3 November 2019: Sanatogen Vets (H, 3-5)

Never mind the result, the performance was great

The Vets football grapevine had already warned us that today's opponents would be unrecognisable from the team we beat 9-3 at their place in April. The manner of today's defeat too will linger long in the memory. There were probably no more than two or three Sanatogen players from that match – the rest really stretched the definition of Senior Vets (more Farley's rusks than Sanatogen tonic quipped Colin Mant). We heard at least one player was on Barnsley's books very recently. One of them was built like he played rugby in the World Cup final in Japan yesterday. With three defenders over the age of sixty in our ranks, we had cause to be apprehensive.

After the recent deluge which had caused the cancellation of all matches at Farnborough yesterday it was a relief to be able to play today, in conditions that were relatively good, even if the pitch was a little too moist. Another consequence of yesterday's rain was that we got to eat food that had been destined for our First XI match yesterday. How the other half eats.

On a day when we could have done with sixteen players, we could muster only thirteen. Plus, we were short of defenders. I was myself looking forward to writing a match report entirely from the perspective of a spectator (even though some of my team mates would argue all my match reports are cast in that way).

FOBG Squad: Phil Anthony, Colin Brazier, Jordan Glen, Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Waine Hetherington, Louis Hussey, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Mick O'Flynn, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas and Gordon Thompson

Referee: Paul "Play on" Parsons

Supporters: Gary Newnham, Patrice Mongelard, Miss Claire Skinner, Gary "moist" Willison

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

The game was twelve minutes old before the Sanatogen keeper touched the ball. By then Jordan Glen in our goal had already made two or three excellent saves. Sanatogen must have felt they could walk the ball into our net. They strolled about with one-twos, flicks and feints without finding the finish which their dominant display foreshadowed. They even caused Waine Hetherington to discard his gloves after ten minutes. Jay Hardy nearly surprised them by breaking through to put the ball against the bar, against the run of play. On the quarter hour the inevitable happened despite an excellent save from Jordan Glen who could only parry the shot into the path of another forward arriving in languid and splendid isolation to tap the ball into an empty net.

What followed was a sort of triumph of experience over innocence as we rallied, steadied our shape and had the temerity to take the lead. First Jay Hardy lashed an acrobatic left foot volley (following a lay-off from Gordon Thompson) against the post but was quickest to rise to meet the rebound and steer the ball home from close-range despite the attentions of keeper and defender. Ten minutes later we had another gem of a goal. This time Simon Thomas cushioned a ball back to the edge of the box for Gordon Thompson to produce a sumptuous 20-yard half-volley to nose us ahead against all odds. The crisp clean strike left the Sanatogen keeper grasping thin air.

The half-time talk was very positive, and rightly so. We had given an excellent account of ourselves. Throats were a little parched, however, from the absence of our water bottles – three

weeks now in the possession of Steve Blanchard, and no one seemingly bothered to do something about it. And they say football is about details.

The second half was barely two minutes old when we deployed what was to become our weapon of choice for the rest of the game – a long punt forward from the boot of Jordan Glen. Kypros Michael got to the ball ahead of the Sanatogen defence but could only divert the ball against the post. We'll never know what might have happened if the ball had gone in. Ten minutes later we were 3-2 down. For the Sanatogen equaliser, we were too slow to close the ball down on the edge of the area and a well-struck shot left Jordan Glen powerless for once. They regained the lead courtesy of a penalty awarded by Paul Parsons. We have honest referees at Farnborough and none of us argued with the decision. It was 4-2 with a quarter of an hour left, after intricate and unchallenged Sanatogen passing in our box.

With only two substitutes and several players carrying knocks it was difficult to keep pace with the changes. We were not out of it – there were at least three occasions when Kypros Michael got behind the Sanatogen defence following a route one punt from Jordan Glen. However, a somnolent Kypros could not find the final shot or the pass across the box to an always willing and available Simon Thomas. Another time Kypros got through, was about to pull the trigger but then was interfered with from behind, with the ball running on to Gordon Thompson (advantage played by the referee) whose instant shot was acrobatically saved by the Sanatogen keeper (best save of the game probably). Minutes later, another swift break against tired and sore Farnborough legs resulted in a fifth goal being walked in by Sanatogen. They went on to crash the ball against our bar in the dying minutes.

The last goal of the match was ours, however. Kypros “lino” Michael had been on the ground a lot in the half but he stayed on his feet despite the muscular attentions of the Sanatogen prop forward – and pulled the ball back for Waine Hetherington to poke home from close range. Referee Paul Parsons heard long, loud and unseemly protestations from Sanatogen about the ball going out as the bout of Greco-Roman wrestling was being enacted - but the goal stood. We deserved at least one goal from our second half showing.

The mood in the bar was good. The First XI sandwiches were great. Fillings for extra rolls arrived courtesy of Sarah and Steve Viner. An ex-Farnborough player from the 70s dropped by and put on a French accent. We even had a Frank Spencer moment as Steve Viner, Ian Couchman and, yes in a supervisory role, Colin Brazier, attempted to assemble some bar furniture. Fortunately, a young lady – Miss Saines, I think, was reading the instructions.

Our opponents certainly had a lot of skill and athleticism on show - but their style left something to be desired. If you are that good, and playing against genuine Senior Vets, do you really need to argue so much with officials and challenge decisions constantly? A bit of advice - that sort of thing creates a bit of an atmosphere and before you know it nobody wants to play you. Next week – it is Remembrance Sunday, with an 11:05 kick off for our home game against Wellcome Vets. Hoping for a firm pitch instead of the Somme. We'll be missing a few casualties from today and the rest of the squad will have to rally round. Sini Gracanin is off to Bangkok – Mick O'Flynn is hoping he does not come back as Sindy.

Man-of-the-Match – Jay Hardy, little man, ginger terrier, marzipan monster, but such a big heart and a huge presence on and off the pitch.

10 November 2019: Wellcome Vets (H, 3-3)

Armistice spirit prevails as generous Farnborough and Wellcome both claim a share of the spoils

A cracking game played in excellent spirit on Remembrance Sunday, good weather conditions, big crowd, fantastic farewell to Mick O'Flynn, not a bread roll or mini-sausage roll left, six goals including a couple of crackers from Wellcome – what more could you want.

This game also marked the end of Mick O'Flynn's tenure as co-manager – the end of an error, some might say. A new dynamic duo has already stepped up to the plate in the form of Ian Coles and Colin Mant, to utter silence, it seems, from the rest of the squad (no doubt in shock from the realisation that anyone would want the job). Colin even brought water bottles, having given up on the ones which Steve Blanchard is very attached to. On a historic day, before a ball had been kicked Phil Anthony achieved the status of Farnborough legend by being the only player known to have suffered an injury in the pre-match photo.

FOBG Squad: Phil Anthony, Andy Chan, Ian Coles, Jay Hardy, Peter Harvey, Dan Herbert, Wayne Hetherington, Michael Hills, Louis Hussey, Colin Mant, Danny Mullins, Joe Skinner, Dean Statham, Simon Thomas

Referee: Paul "Play on" Parsons

Supporters: Jez Allen, Steve Blanchard, Tony Harvey, Lee Hudson, Kayleigh Richards, Ian Shoebridge, Miss Claire Skinner, Gary "moist" Willison.

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

After last night's rain it was a relief to get the news early this morning that the pitch had been passed fit for play. The surface was a little greasy but the ball ran true.

After an impeccably-observed two-minute silence at 11:02, the game got under way. We made the better start – more passing but without really troubling the Wellcome keeper. Our opponents appeared to be working harder and made us wait before we could take the lead. They were playing quite a high line (as they did throughout the game) inviting the angled run or pass to unlock their defence but we could not quite find the killer ball. Peter Harvey was first to show, clean through but was caught in two minds as neither a cross nor a shot ensued. At the other end, Dean Statham could liven things up at any time by rushing off his line to intercept an imaginary or even a real ball, and was nearly caught out after fifteen minutes. We got the breakthrough we deserved after twenty-five minutes when Jay Hardy slipped his marker, advanced on goal and slipped the ball sideways for Danny Mullins to poke home from close range.

This should have served as a platform for us but instead we found ourselves at the receiving end of two Wellcome goals in ten minutes. Their equaliser was a sublime twenty-five yarder that went in off the angle of post and bar and they took the lead after we were slow to come out from a Wellcome corner.

The score felt harsh at half-time. We did not wait long in the second half to draw level. Five minutes in, a Dan Herbert Cross was met at the far post by Simon Thomas. The Wellcome keeper could only parry Simon's shot in Danny Mullins' path two yards out and we had our equaliser. The next half an hour or so was a catalogue of misses from Farnborough. At one

point, Tony Harvey was heard to say repeatedly “I would have scored that”. It was all very well saying that but he should clearly have passed those genes on. Lee Hudson, an endangered species as Peter Harvey’s friend, kept offering to retrieve the ball from behind the goal. But, of course, Peter Harvey was not the only Farnborough player to have run out of luck. On the hour, Michael Hills ran from his box to the opposition box, with the ball, beating three or four players, only to fluff his shot at the climax. Joe Skinner put a peach of a cross from Simon Thomas over the bar from two yards out. Farnborough frustration spilled over as Simon Thomas exchanged pleasantries with the Wellcome player who was running the line, a case of semaphore Tourette’s perhaps. Simon was advised to cut out the drama and focus on what he does best. With fifteen minutes left, Jay Hardy penetrated the Wellcome defence and crossed the ball for Danny Mullins to give us a deserved lead. At 3-2, I confess we all thought more goals would follow for us. And we had our chances, oh, how we did. Danny Mullins, Peter Harvey, Simon Thomas all had decent scoring opportunities that they have buried many times in the past.

And yes, you guessed it. We paid the price with ten minutes left as Wellcome crafted the best goal of the match with a deep cross from our left that travelled a long way and got the header it deserved. Arguably, it was their only scoring opportunity of the second half. Our keeper Dean Statham looked like he was injured in the move and for a moment it looked like Mick O’Flynn was going to have to go in goal. But Dean recovered and we had time to miss two or three half chances before the final whistle went. Obviously, Wellcome were happier with the point than we were but they made their luck.

The clubhouse experience was enhanced by a Farnborough Quiz devised by Mick O’Flynn – sample question – who gassed the Farnborough Tour Party in the Arras Tunnels in 2018. The quiz was won by Patrice Mongelard, by virtue of not only being the answer to some questions, but also of having the longest remembrance as a Farnborough Vet.

As I left the club Jay Hardy suggested to the new management team that all the players should grow moustaches (like the Village People perhaps). Jay is not quite management material but he is the man you want with you in the trenches.

Man-of-the-Match – hat-trick hero, Danny Mullins, putting in a huge shift for the gaffer, who will get a jug at the next game he plays for us.

17 November 2019: AFC Greenwich Super Vets (A, 4-1)

New management team comes from behind, with verve

This game was eventful and the build-up even more so. At one point during the week, it did not look like we would have a game to mark the start of the Coles-Mant era. Our original opponents Reigate Priory Vets could not raise a team to visit Farnborough. Normally, we are the ones who suffer a touch of travel sickness when it comes to visiting them but the virus had clearly mutated to affect them. AFC Greenwich Super Vets were at a loose end and as we say a game is better than no game, even an away one. We also survived a Saturday scare to find a referee in Ian Clarkson, initially in the frame to do our home game against Reigate, now willing and able to do our away game against Greenwich. We managed to confuse ourselves about the location of the ground with Colin Brazier's invaluable assistance. Thankfully, the two venues in question were opposite each other.

To add to the quality of the experience, we had keeper Matt Angelo, Rain Man on steroids, lock himself and his kit out of his car, and engaging in Chinese whispers with Phil Anthony with the result that after hot-wiring his car, he was half an hour late taking his place in goal, and even then, I had to find socks for him (and the referee). Matt was replacing Deano in goal after some mid-week turbulence. We are back to being Deano-less but we had Matt back and he wasted no time reminding us of what we have been missing.

Talking of turbulence, an under-12 game took place on the pitch we would be using – not sure why we had to use that pitch when so many other and better pitches seemed to be available. As the two junior teams were coming off the pitch it looked like it was going to kick off between some of the adults involved, in the best traditions of Sunday morning football. Our game was a more sedate affair.

The facilities at our home ground would have been better but we were where we were, on a pitch best described as a leveller, bumpy, clumpy, narrow and with a forest of brambles all down one side.

FOBG Squad: Matt Angelo, Phil Anthony, Ian Coles, Jay Hardy, Waine Hetherington, Michael Hills, Louis Hussey, Colin Mant, Danny Mullins, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson, Jason Windsor

Referee: Ian Clarkson

Supporters: Bob and Ronnie Hewitt, Steve Hills, Patrice Mongelard. Mick O'Flynn, Ian Thomas.

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Waine Hetherington played the first-half hour in goal. Unfortunately, he could not claim a clean sheet. That cherry went after twenty minutes when a shot from a Greenwich forward, allowed too much time and room on the edge of our box, came off Colin Mant and looped over Waine. This was against the run of play although we had not really threatened the Greenwich goal seriously up to that point. We did though draw level with ten minutes of the first-half left. Jay Hardy had connected first time with a loose ball on the edge of the Greenwich box to arrow a crisp and powerful drive into the bottom corner with the Greenwich keeper rooted to the spot.

From that point we became more dominant. We had a goal by Gordon Thompson disallowed because Simon Thomas had been off-side and active in the build up to the move. Cue more

drama from Simon who was spoken to by the referee. Near the end of the first-half we had a good shout for a penalty turned down because Jay Hardy had gone down in a theatrical manner (that is Simon's job) when tapped from behind. The last meaningful action of the half saw Simon Thomas slip the ball to Jay Hardy clean through on goal with a shot narrowly screwed wide when a square pass to a free Danny Mullins arriving like a train would have yielded more.

The second half was a pleasure to watch and, no doubt, play in. The quality of our team performance buoyed every one up. More Farnborough goals were expected. In the end, we could have had more than the three we eventually registered. Ten minutes into the half saw Jay Hardy in a one-on-one with the Greenwich keeper. The ricochet fell kindly to a marauding Simon Thomas unmarked. Simon steadied himself, conveyed a sense of technical difficulty and ever so carefully rolled the ball into an empty net with the right mix of aplomb and nonchalance, as if to say "This one is for you dad".

Not long after, Jay Hardy hit the base of the post. But we did not have to wait long to double our lead. Jay notched his second of the game after his run was spotted by Louis Hussey and Jay steered the ball low into the bottom corner. Louis' perceptive and penetrative passing has added a new dimension to our game and greatly improved the service to our forwards. We then had a comedy moment when Greenwich tried to pull a fast one. Referee Ian Clarkson had stopped play to tend to an injured Greenwich player just as Gordon Thompson, today at his most sinuous and slippery, was poised to cash in. From the re-start Greenwich had the nerve to mount an attack instead of giving the ball back to us. More chances came and went for us – Simon Thomas put his body in the way of a pile driver from Danny Mullins in the six-yard box. Louis Hussey hit the base of the post exactly where Jay Hardy had earlier. Jay was not to be denied though. With five minutes left he completed a move initiated by Simon Thomas to poke the ball home and complete his first hat-trick of the season. There was time for Matt Angelo, who had a clean sheet today, to pull off a vintage flying save, catching the ball at the second attempt as he ran out of pitch.

Greenwich did not really have clear-cut chances in the second half. True, they forced a number of corners but our defence held firm with Michael Hills, Colin Mant, Ian Coles, Joe Skinner and the immense Danny Mullins catching the eye in the midst of an excellent collective performance. After the game a number of us made our way across the road to the other club house where some even had showers.

Jay Hardy was seen stroking a pussy in the bar, not a ginger one, but the cat took a liking to his kit bag, not unlike sniffer dogs at airports. Jay must have inhaled something because he proceeded to make a complaint about the accuracy of last week's match report. I am used to such delusions and distortions. However, it gave me an idea. As a result, this week's report sees the introduction of a new exciting feature – the Jay Hardy corner. This is where I take the opportunity to mention anything from the previous game which I somehow inexplicably overlooked in my report. This could be a winner. Jay Hardy asked me to mention that in last week's game against Wellcome Vets he produced what he called a David Platt moment, and there was also an acrobatic volley which crashed against the bar. I have to admit that a bit like Prince Andrew, I have no recollection of these moments.

Man-of-the-Match – Joe Skinner, playing on his least favourite pitch and rising above it.

24 November 2019: Old Tamponians Super Vets (A, 0-3)

Old Tamponians brush aside anaemic Farnborough

To think I gave up a visit to Pizza Express in Woking to watch this game. A week is a long time in football. This time last week, we had special ones as our new managers, the team was at ease with itself, our football brand was vibrant. Today was a shocking experience. On paper we had such a strong squad. That might have been part of the problem. Old Tamponians looked old, and commented enviously about our young players. In the end, however, vast experience, a settled system, team unity, a no-nonsense approach and a bit of luck won the day. It is not unusual for reports of games between our two sides to talk of Old Tamps soaking up Farnborough pressure but that would not be fair or accurate today. We created pressure, certainly, but for ourselves, and we are the ones who did not cope too well.

FOBG Squad: Matt Angelo, Phil Anthony, Ian Coles, Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Simon Harvey, Waine Hetherington, Michael Hills, Louis Hussey, Colin Mant, Chisa Mkala, Danny Mullins, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson

Supporters: Steve Blanchard and granddaughter Georgina Stanford (favourite food marshmallows), Steve and Sarah Hills, Patrice Mongelard, Mick O'Flynn, Claire Skinner.

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

We were directed to the "Quaggy" for our game, the pitch furthest from the clubhouse. I discovered that the origin of the name was not quagmire but the River Quaggy, a 17km long river passing through the South-East London boroughs of Bromley, Greenwich and Lewisham. In its upper reaches, further from London, it is known as the Kyd Brook. Whenever we play on the Quaggy we wonder who will be the first player to put the ball over the fence into the traffic on the A2213 (Kidbrooke Park Road). We won that contest.

I think we were complacent. The first opening quarter of an hour was too encouraging for us and we must have thought we would walk the ball into the net. The first incursion of note came after five minutes when Danny Mullins and Chisa Mkala hustled their way into the box with the ball falling to Simon Thomas fifteen yards out, inviting a right foot curler into the top corner. Instead, Simon produced neither shot nor cross and the ball eluded a lunging Chisa Mkala by inches at the far post. Ten minutes later, Gordon Thompson crowned a mazy run on the edge of the box with a shot that was agonisingly wide.

The biggest smile on Farnborough faces in the first-half was when I fell over on the slippery embankment by the pitch. This was not ideal for my injured knee. A caring Jay Hardy washed my hands and got me a towel (just like in a care home he muttered) and offered to get me a Zimmer frame for our next game.

We chose to ignore the warning signs. Old Tamps forward Roy found himself in splendid isolation two yards out to meet a cross which he put over. Set-pieces were always likely to prove a potent weapon for Old Tamps and on the half hour we went limp again in the centre of our defence and the ball was in our net despite Matt Angelo getting a hand to it. As the first-half ticked away, we kept missing chances. Simon Thomas quiffed a cross from Danny Mullins over the bar. Then Danny Mullins, himself a yard out from a tight angle lashed the ball into the A2213. That summed up our first half. Old Tamps had had a fraction of the chances we had, yet had the lead.

The second period was to prove even more frustrating for us. Ten minutes in, Danny Mullins put a first time cross from Waine Hetherington over from about the same position as Roy had earlier – except that Mullins is much taller and younger. A pattern set in quite early – we began to go long. The individual became more important than the collective. Connectivity was lost. Our short game had vanished as the midfield was by-passed. Individual athletes like Danny Mullins and Michael Hills were trying to do too much. Surely, it is not right that a centre half should have more shots on goal than any other player and yet that is what Michael Hills did.

Midway through the second half, we fell further behind as Chisa Mkala diverted a ball past Matt Angelo. Quite what Chisa was doing in our six-yard box was not clear but by then we had lost shape, method, discipline. We now had a mountain to climb. Ten minutes later it became Everest as Old Tamps carved out a third – Matt Angelo had done well to save the initial shot but although we had the numbers – three to one – we could not retrieve the situation and the same forward bundled the ball through several pairs of outstretched limbs. The last quarter of an hour was not a great watch to be honest. Old Tamps sat back, compact, organised and in numbers, waiting for a quick break, and we kept putting shots wide or finding the keeper.

Frustration grew of course and normally placid players like Sinisa Gracanin began to lose their cool as Old Tamps defended what they had fiercely, and disrupted our play and run the clock down. The referee made several interventions to speak to players from both sides. The atmosphere got more niggly than many of us could remember in this fixture. Both teams played in red today, Old Tamponians in a darker red than ours but I did think there would be a few passes going astray, well more than usual. The referee – an ex-Old Tamps player did his best to steer a neutral course but at times it was not easy, and right at the end had to send off one of his own as physicality outweighed skill.

I am glad I did not have to sit in the Farnborough dressing room. It cannot have been a barrel of laughs.

After he left, Chisa's own goal was described in the bar as a lovely deft touch, instinctive, his best finish of the game which wrong-footed the keeper. It certainly was a decisive moment in the game. But to be honest there were many decisive moments in the game, many before then, and Old Tamponians got the rub of more of them. Jay Hardy went over to watch the girls football match on the pitch opposite the bar, and claimed he had seen a great finish. I think he meant the football. Jay "I go past a lot of old people on the motorway" Hardy had trouble getting past old people on the pitch today. To be fair he was not the only one.

Colin Mant used his influence to get us in the Executive Lounge. The initial tray of roast potatoes and cocktail sausages was followed by a bigger tray of samosas, onion bhajis, pakoras and chicken nuggets, topped off by slices of pizza (and luckily half the team had left by then). We enjoyed this so much that we did not mind Old Tamps player Roy coming over to talk us through the headed goal he did not score. We'd still be hearing about it if he had scored.

Man-of-the-Match – our first petulant instinct had been not to record any Man-of-the-Match votes today, presumably after such a poor performance. But the show must go on. After votes were counted, including the two protest votes for the old Management Team of O'Flynn and Mongelard, Gordon Thompson emerged from the wreckage.

1 December 2019: Orpington Vets (A, 2-2)

Farnborough snatch draw from jaws of victory, just like in the good old days

On a cold, dry and crisp day most players would, like Prince Andrew, find it hard to sweat except Phil “Sniper” Anthony who has overactive glands. With the new management team having lasted a tad longer than Leroy Rosenior, Mick O’Flynn sauntered back out of retirement in the adjacent road to restore the emanations from his *homo footballus* brain, and the velvet touch of the Blarney Stone, to our Sunday mornings. Our games against Orpington are rarely dull affairs and today was no exception, with the appearance of Toby Manchip in goal providing added ambience.

FOBG Squad: Phil Anthony, Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Peter Harvey, Simon Harvey, Michael Hills, Louis Hussey, Toby Manchip, Joe Skinner, Peter Sofoluke, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson, Bram Wouters

Supporters: Steve Blanchard, Ian Lyons, Patrice Mongelard, Mick O’Flynn, Kayleigh Richards, Dave Salako.

Director of Football: Mick O’Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

The pitch at the Beckenham Sports Club in Foxgrove Road (BR3 5AR) is our favourite surface, arguably, and the repository of many memories. The clubhouse is not without considerable charm and we know we can always expect a tough assignment against Orpington. To the quality of the experience today was added an excellent display from a firm and fair referee. There was even a retro band rehearsing in the clubhouse to mark Mick O’Flynn’s restoration.

We surprised ourselves with the quality of our display in the first-half hour. The passing was short, assured and the system felt right. Even the re-shuffling of players was felicitous. Orpington could not penetrate our box and it felt like it would be only a matter of time before we would breach their lines. On the quarter hour Peter Harvey was taken roughly from behind in the box and there was no dispute about the award of a penalty. Toby Manchip crafted a comedy moment by appearing to stride forward to take the spot kick but wild horses would not have kept Peter Harvey from the job. A classy finish in the top corner ensued and it was with the run of play. Barely five minutes later, our King of Assists Gordon Thompson put a peach of a cross onto Jay Hardy’s forehead at the far post and our ginger fox in the box doubled our lead. At that point it felt like it would be our day. A volley on the spin with his back to goal that fizzed narrowly wide from Peter Harvey brought shouts of “Class, Class” from the crowd, well from Patrice Mongelard, who spent the game encouraging his team mates in his unique way.

Of course, football has a habit of reversing fortunes in a flash. As Toby Manchip himself observed in the bar afterwards – the first-half hour had been among the best half-hour he had seen from a Farnborough Vets team, and then he got involved. I think he was being a tad harsh on himself. Changes on the half hour might have affected our rhythm but there was always enough quality in this Orpington side to cause us problems. They hit the post with a low drive from the edge of the box and began to cause problems with what seemed like their weapon of choice – the long throw-in hurled into our box from clearings in the trees, after “worse encroachment than in Rhodesia”. The dendrophobe taking these long throws kept asking himself to watch the trees, which appeared to cramp his style. I would not get him a chainsaw for Christmas. Orpington corners and free-kicks mounted and the inevitable happened about ten minutes from half-time. We failed to clear a free-kick and hesitancy afflicted both Michael Hills and Toby Manchip at a crucial moment as the ball was headed across our goal. Toby flapped like a seal and Orpington

halved the deficit with a close-range header. That they did not draw level from the last corner of the half, owed much to the presence of Michael Hills who made a point-blank goal-saving headed clearance on the line.

There was much to ponder at half-time and Mick O'Flynn's legendary tactical acumen was being severely tested. The second half was barely a couple of minutes old when Mick asked me to make a note as Peter Sofoluke, making a very encouraging debut, nearly scored following what Mick called a tactical switch. The problem was that Orpington too had made a tactical switch and put on a new keeper who proved to be more than useful and could kick like a mule.

Our passing game was to some extent restored but we never really created clear-cut opportunities. A couple of times it looked like Gordon Thompson would glide into the box with the ball glued to his boot but he overran the ball. As we pressed forward, there was always the danger of Orpington danger man Kevin" Lord of the Rings" punishing us on the break. In reality both defences were coping well and both midfields were putting in quite a shift. An Orpington free-kick was tipped onto the bar by Toby Manchip, with about five minutes left and we thought we had weathered the storm. But it was not to be. With barely a minute left an Orpington corner was allowed to travel a long way to reach an Orpington head in the middle of ten Farnborough players and that was it. It was not quite daylight robbery but Orpington were happier than we were with the point. It was a fair result in the end. We failed to capitalise when we were on top and for all our passing and cohesive play, we could not find the cutting edge as often as we would have liked. The opposition had something to do with that, of course.

The mood in the clubhouse was very good, with excellent hospitality from our hosts, and a universal feel-good factor to have Mick O'Flynn back in our midst, seemingly in good health. I had not realised that watching football could make Dave Salako so hungry. I dread to think what would have happened if had been there for the full ninety minutes. An assortment of sandwiches, cocktail sausages and a what looked like an apple and cinnamon traybake got the Salako seal of approval. The quality of the post-match analysis and conversation was enhanced by the presence of Toby Manchip, I think, wryly observing that his two games for the Senior Vets had cost him nearly "a ton". I think too that Joe Skinner got over me crumpling his dry-cleaned olive-green shirt which he had left behind in the changing room. I was only thinking, foolishly perhaps, that someone might nick the shirt. Even Simon Thomas forgave me for asking him to focus on the game and to quiff the ball properly from the touchline. There was petulance in his youthful rejoinder but I will rise above it. I know actors can be over-sensitive about criticism.

Man-of-the-Match – Lou Hussey, health and poise restored from last week, with nine out of fifteen votes cast, holding the midfield together with the efficiency of a silent assassin.

15 December 2019: Wellcome Super Vets (A, 6-3)

Farnborough on top in 9-goal thriller

After last week's cancellation – wrong time to play Old Tamponians – we were looking forward to today's game, and taking comfort from the thought that today's venue in Foxgrove Grove, Beckenham, was the best-drained ground in England. We took a squad of fifteen players over, including the returning Kypros Michael and top club geezer Toby Manchip who stood up at short notice after being asked to stand down earlier in the week.

FOBG Squad: Phil Anthony, Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Peter Harvey, Simon Harvey, Dan Herbert, Waine Hetherington, Michael Hills, Louis Hussey, Toby Manchip, Chisa Mkala, Joe Skinner, Kypros Michael, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson

Supporters: Nicholas Michael, Patrice Mongelard, Mick O'Flynn, Claire Skinner.

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Farnborough had more of the ball from the off but had trouble beating the off-side trap and the Wellcome keeper was quick off his line to mop up anything lofted over or put through without optimum pace or angle. A rusty Kypros Michael blazed the ball over the bar from just inside the box after ten minutes but he was just warming up. Just after a quarter of an hour, a corner from Simon Thomas found Kypros' head at the far post and we registered our first goal via the underside of the bar. It was all going well until Mick O'Flynn made the first raft of substitutions. Barely a minute later, Wellcome got their equaliser, after walking the ball through or defence and putting Toby Manchip on the floor.

The next ten minutes or so were frustrating for us. Kypros Michael chased down the keeper to the edge of the box, nicked the ball off him, turned and shaped to roll the ball into an empty net. It was far out and the angle was not propitious. It was no surprise really to see Kyp fluff it. We had a scare when Michael Hills cushioned a header back to a somnolent Toby Manchip who missed the ball and we all watched the ball roll agonisingly wide with a Wellcome forward closing in. We'll never know if Michael Hills would have snuffed out the opportunity but he was there to make things difficult. We edged ahead around the 40th minute mark when Waine Hetherington threaded an imperious pass for Gordon Thompson to run on and on and beat the keeper at the near post. It did not take long for Wellcome to draw level for a second time. We could have done with VAR. While we waited for an off-side flag that never came, the nippy Wellcome forward went round Toby Manchip who was going down in instalments, before squeezing the ball home from a very tight angle. It was not entirely clear if the ball had crossed the line, there was a suspicion that Michael Hills had re-directed the ball to help it over the line. The Wellcome linesman was unsighted, the referee was undecided but the Farnborough spirit of sportsmanship intervened as both Michael Hills and Toby Manchip declared the ball had crossed the line. So, no own goal for Michael Hills.

There was still time left in the first-half for class to manifest itself. Peter Harvey had been introduced on the half hour to shake things up. In less than five minutes he found the net twice. First, he latched on to a quick throw-in from Waine Hetherington on the right, tuned his marker, and lashed the ball home with a right foot thunderbolt (a collector's item). Moments later he skipped away from his marker on the left to make the most of yet another Gordon Thompson assist by rounding the keeper and rolling the ball in with his trusty left peg. 4-2 at half-time felt like the right score.

Surely there would be more goals in the second half, we thought. Mick O'Flynn rolled back decades with a Brazilian moment as he executed a tricky task of bringing a difficult stray ball under control, with panache. Not long after, that same panache had rubbed off on Kypros Michael as he burst through to claim a through ball that Chisa MKala had caressed through the centre of the Wellcome defence. I am happy to report that Kyp did not fluff it. The net bulged. His cousin, the Wellcome linesman did not interfere, and his son Nicholas (whom Mick O'Flynn urged to give some of his luxuriant hair to dad Kyp) captured the glorious moment on his phone. It will make a welcome change from the usual videos involving Kyp. Sadly, another moment was not recorded ten minutes later after a cut-back from Michael Hills at the end of a penetrating run, fell to Kyp two yards out. That was not to be worst miss of the game, more on that shortly.

There was a frisson when Wellcome managed to get a third goal from a corner. Our defenders will know they ought to have done better. I don't think that Toby Manchip had much else to do in the half, apart from picking the ball out of his net.

We then had one of those moments that will live long in the memory. Jay Hardy had driven a free-kick towards the top corner. The Wellcome keeper – a better operator than the final score suggests, got to the ball but the power and placement meant he could only parry it up in the air, in a perpendicular trajectory directly above his head. Gravity brought the ball back down and standing on the line in front of the keeper, free, unhindered, hungry, quivering with excitement was Simon Thomas. Kyp reckons even he would have scored, nay even his two-year old niece would. But the ball skidded on Simon's over-gelled quiff, bounced up and the moment was gone. Simon gave his permission to the match reporter to say he (Simon that is) was shit in the air. This is not entirely accurate.

There was just time left for Jay Hardy to put a deserved gloss on the scoreline by making the most of a delicate Peter Harvey assist by carrying the ball at an angle in the box, outpacing chasing defenders and directing a powerful low shot into the bottom corner. That was almost the last kick of the game.

As the final whistle was blown, many of us went to the referee Kevin (a Wellcome player and Manager) to congratulate him on the impartiality he had shown in his display. True, there had been a bit of gyp from one or two of our players which required a pause but in the end the game was played in excellent spirit.

The clubhouse scene was lively as the place was decked for a posh lunch for the tennis club once the footballers had vacated the premises. Ladies in smart attire were greeted on arrival by the sound of Toby's harmonica (even though according to Simon Thomas Toby's organ was out of tune). Manager Mick O'Flynn had asked Toby to bring harmony to the team but he heard harmonica. The food went – including the cold sausages which Joe Skinner seemed very keen to ingest.

You will recall that in a recent match report (17/12/2019 v AFC Greenwich Super Vets) I introduced a new feature - the Jay Hardy corner. In essence this is where I make up for a failure to show appreciation. It is a sort of correction and clarification if you like. I do this by including a reference to a past occurrence that should have been recorded because of its momentous significance to the player involved. Jay Hardy – who else - was the first beneficiary. Well, now we have a second one – and I am sure there will be many others. Toby Manchip has asked me to mention that in the match against Orpington on 1 December - *There was also a right-handed full tip down low onto the post in the first-half hit by their second half goal-keeper.* I recall the ball

thumping against the post but I must have been dazzled by the brilliance of Toby's intervention to do it full justice. Toby also reported that he wet himself in the second half – obviously this is not the place to go into details. Perhaps a tampon might have helped. No such problem today, at least not at the ground.

Man-of-the-Match – five players were favoured by the ballot today, with Waine Hetherington walking away with a working majority. He did though walk away leaving Sinisa Gracanin at the ground and the bag of balls. A player who did not get votes today – Jay Hardy, did walk away with the £30 prize in the football raffle organised by Orpington Vets. His lucky pick was Cardiff City, and, in fact, he also ended up with the kit, the balls, the first aid bag and the water bottles. He also got some advice about a waxing regime for his tumescent Biggles moustache.

5 January 2020: Inter Vyagra Super Vets (N, 5-3)

Farnborough Senior Vets rise to the occasion

This “home” game ended up being played at Norman Park owing to the Senior Vets inferior status in the club hierarchy. Not for the first time in recent seasons, Meryl Clarke came to our rescue. Pitch allocation, nets, step ladder, pegs, corner flags, instructions on which entrance to use, hot showers, pitch condition status reports were all delivered by Meryl with customary efficiency. On a dry but cold day the surface was a tad heavy and tufty but we were grateful to be getting a game after two inactive Sundays. We mustered fourteen players, including the welcome return of some very old faces. Early arrivals Wayne Hetherington, Sinisa Gracanin and Simon Thomas put the nets up while Patrice Mongelard pitched the corner flags.

FOBG Squad: Matt Angelo, Phil Anthony, Ian Coles, Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Wayne Hetherington, Michael Hills, Louis Hussey, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Mick O’Flynn, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson

Referee: Paul Parsons

Supporters: Steve Blanchard, Patrice Mongelard, Kayleigh Richards and Claire Skinner.

Director of Football: Mick O’Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Before the game started, there was a lot of whingeing and moaning, including in particular from Man U fan Kypros Michael, no - not about his team being 27 points behind the league leaders and having played a game more, but about the state of the blue kit, last “washed” by Patrice Mongelard. Kyp was so incensed that he volunteered to take the kit today so that Mrs Kyp could show us how it should be done. The banter at my expense was rich – I had washed the kit in a river in Mauritius, I was exposing the team to the risk of trench testicles. I was even invited to hang the spare kit to dry on the cross bar.

The damp and not fragrant kit though did not explain our flaccid display in the first quarter of an hour. We were in control but there was no prospect of a happy ending to all our thrusting for a long time. In what seemed like a very long half, particularly to spectators with feet getting colder by the minute, it took us until past the half hour mark to register our first goal. Jay Hardy finished with alacrity from close-range after Kypros Michael had unselfishly fluffed his opportunity. Five minutes later Lou Hussey produced a pass that people say English players do not have in their locker, unlike say Brazilians and Argentinians. From the edge of the box faced by defenders Lou slid his foot under the ball and flicked it up above the Inter Vyagra defenders into a deadly arc in the path of Kypros Michael who finished the move with a rasping shot that bulged the net. Lou Hussey completed a golden ten minutes for us latching on to a Jay Hardy assist by putting the keeper on the ground before stroking the ball with majesty in the net.

At 3-0 up the legendary O’Flynn tactical acumen became reality as two substitutions were made. Five minutes later it was 3-2. Our defence went all Easter Island as a cross to the far post was eased into our goal. Soon after, we were overrun on the right and a low cross into our box was swept in to the great delight of the author of the cross. It had been coming. However, we contrived to end the half 4-2 up after Kypros Michael made the most of a low Jay Hardy cross. We had waited half an hour for a goal and then six came along in hardly any time.

We carried on as we left off, after play resumed. Lou Hussey plated another goal for Kypros who provided a bit of a flourish by sending the keeper the wrong way. It is extraordinary that this was

our last goal of the game with about forty minutes left. It was not for lack of trying. We hit the woodwork three times in the second half after Inter Vyagra had scored their third with a delightful lob on the hour. A Jay Hardy shot come off the inside of the post and fell to Kyp (enough said). Kyp bamboozled two defenders before lifting a shot against the inside of the other post. Lou Hussey got in on the act too by winning the crossbar challenge from three yards out.

There were some delightful cameos in the midst of all this. Matt Angelo pulled off a worldie by diving low to his right to palm a low drive around the post. Gordon Thompson did several Messi impressions. Lou Hussey had another south American moment in the box to set up an off-side Kyp. Sinisa Gracanin was a box-to-box metronome with finesse and technique. Simon Thomas was a slippery customer, on the wing, toes twinkling furiously.

There were some scenes too that were less easy on the eye. Kyp had a Humpty Dumpty moment with a 5.9 for artistic impression as he tripped himself in the centre circle after a failed attempt to control a ball. This was almost as farcical as him getting caught in the nets behind our goal in the warm-up. There was a Laurel & Hardy moment as Sinisa Gracanin and Michael Hills contrived to confuse each other in our box and were fortunate not to be punished for it as the normally reliable Inter Vyagra forward slid in to squeeze the ball just wide of the post. 5-4 would have made for an interesting final ten minutes.

Kyp produced more dizzying twists and turns than the two model aeroplanes that whirred overhead at an altitude that we thought a tad risky. Those marking him might want to take seasickness pills. In football there is a saying that twenty goals a season are a mark of quality for strikers. Quite so, but after witnessing several displays by Kyp this season I would argue that sixty misses a season are an even more important metric. After all you've got to be there to miss them.

And, most memorably we had twenty-five minutes or so of Mick O'Flynn on the pitch, health restored, pecker up, buzzing here and there, white hair like a beacon of hope and victory over adversity.

Phil Anthony produced a couple of Irish jokes but I will not encourage him by repeating them here.

In truth we went a bit limp at the end, in attack, and could have twice the number of goals we scored. Generally, the defence held firm., stiffened by the return of Colin Mant and Ian Coles, and the peerless Michael Hills who will score from thirty-five yards eventually, one day.

The après-match was brisk. The showers were hot but not for lingering. There was no bar to go to. This is what happens when home games are sacrificed on the altar of competitive matches. And there is no food corner in this report as a result – which explains why it is a bit shorter than usual.

Man-of-the-Match – Lou Hussey, who managed to attract more votes than the scorer of a hat-trick – only fair, Lou would argue, as he curated two of those goals on a Meissen plate for the Paphos Express.

19 January 2020: Glendale Vets (A, 5-3)

Farnborough repeat favourite score of 2020

The odds of this match being claimed by the weather, like last Sunday, were short indeed earlier in the week. However, a dry thirty-six hours or so, and the determination shown by our opponents to get this game played meant a run-out on a cold but dry and sunny Sunday. Phil Anthony's tights were made for weather like this. We had the pick of six pitches at the Croydon Postal Sports Ground but unsurprisingly settled for the one that showed the most signs that the sun had worked on the sharp morning frost. In the end the surface moistened but held up relatively well.

Changing room antics were livened up by the appearance of Manty's lucky panties – pale blue, lacy, reinforced faux velvet gusset with a shade of piccalilli – not quite Victoria's Secret, more Manty's Secret. There was also a pair of plastic tits being thrown about – not it was not Kypros and Patrice, but a small female rubber torso which the office Secret Santa had gifted to Michael Hills, as a sort of stress reliever. Needless to say, this appealed greatly to the juvenile wing of the Farnborough Senior Vets who tittered with gusto.

FOBG Squad: Matt Angelo, Phil Anthony, Sinisa Gracanin, Dan Herbert, Waine Hetherington, Michael Hills, Louis Hussey, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Mick O'Flynn, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson

Supporters: Patrice Mongelard and Claire Skinner.

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Glendale started well registering the first two or three shots on goal. We stuttered initially as usual, with early half chances falling to Kypros Michael. Farnborough fell behind against the run of play after a quarter of an hour. A long throw-in caused problems in our box, defenders not helped by the bright low sun, and we did not have the numbers in our box to clear the danger away. Glendale are a relatively big side and they have learned to make the most of set-pieces. The ball was bundled in at the far post after two or three exchanges of head tennis. Mick O'Flynn felt that the dreamy linesman, Patrice Mongelard, should have signalled a foul throw but the moment had passed.

The next quarter of an hour or so was frustrating for both teams, with defences on top and the final passes not quite up to the mark. We had a lot of joy down both wings and our midfielders were starting to turn the tide but we had to wait what seemed like a long time before we drew level. Gordon Thompson drifted inside from the left with quick crab-like steps and spied an opening which he duly exploited with a peach of a twenty-yard curler into the top corner. The very good Glendale keeper was at full stretch but the shot was too good from a master craftsman.

It did not take us long to edge ahead. After a few missed chances which fell to Kypros Michael and Simon Thomas, these two players combined and Simon was left to tap-in with aplomb at the far post after Kypros had got the better of his marker and flashed a low cross which beat the Glendale keeper. 2-1 was no less than we deserved. It would have been 3-1 if Kypros Michael, much to his fury, had not been ruled initially off-side after having rounded the keeper to squeeze the ball home from a tight angle. He loves squeezing the ball home from a tight angle, does our Kypros.

I should give a mention to the Glendale representative Pete Smith who did an excellent job refereeing the game. As the visiting team, we felt he was very fair, given the stick he was taking from his own players. There was a flicker of discord when a Michael Hills tackle was deemed to pose a potential challenge to the way of life of a tricky Glendale winger with a mortgage and four kids to support looking to go to work in the morning. But the players shook hands and got on with it.

2-1 at half-time felt right, and we were soon eased into a zone of relative comfort when very early after the re-start Kypros Michael converted an exquisite through ball from Dan Herbert, curator of a masterful midfield performance today, to double our lead. We were to score again - twice - in relatively quick succession. Michael Hills had another of his trademark barnstorming runs out of defence and entered the box where he was interfered with. The spot kick was gleefully converted by Kypros Michael. An even better goal followed - our fifth - after Simon Thomas had penetrated on the right and delivered a cross aimed for the far post. A Glendale head temporarily delayed the connection of the ball with Kypros Michael's left foot but connection there was, and so sweet that any watching diabetic would have had to avert their eyes.

Did we get complacent at 5-1 up? I think there was a smidgeon of complacency that crept into our game. I lost count of the number of times we outnumbered Glendale defenders in their box. Lou Hussey appeared to have dropped anchor in the Glendale box. Joe Skinner had discovered wings on his back going forward. This meant gaps in our midfield and defence and a side with Glendale's quality was always going to exploit this. Colin Mant and Michael Hills had a Chuckle Brothers moment in the heart of our defence which went unpunished. But 5-1 became 5-2 before Glendale hit the bar and won several corners when they were at their most dangerous. Matt Angelo caught the eye with one or two acrobatic interventions in a crowded box.

Mick O'Flynn made it even more interesting when he was adjudged to have brought a Glendale forward from behind with ten minutes left, the only blemish in an otherwise sparkling half. We had no difficulty with the referee's decision and Glendale notched their third. We held on though, with Sinisa Gracanin and Dan Herbert putting in a mighty shift helping out the defence. This gave us our second 5-3 win of 2020, out of two games played.

We had the vast bar to ourselves and the Glendale players, and a tray of ham and cheese sandwiches was most welcome. The drive home was livened up by the presence of Matt Angelo in the car. No need for radio or satnav. A couple of the lads in the back had headphones on, I think.

Man-of-the-Match - Kypros Michael, scorer of a hat-trick, who could not be denied this time round, way ahead of the peloton.

26 January 2020: Lads of the Village Vets (A, 2-0)

Farnborough keep the score down

We always look forward to this away trip. It is only three exits from Orpington on the M25, provided you turn off before the Dartford Tunnel. The rain drains off into the nearby quarry, so the pitch is invariably playable though a tad claggy. There is a catering van by the changing room. The pub after the game is cosy and welcoming. Our opponents always praise the Fountain of Youth from which many of us apparently drink deep. Our numbers had dwindled to twelve overnight and we had to warm up without balls for a bit, and when the balls did arrive caretaker Manager Patrice Mongelard fell over attempting a shot in the warm-up, and this seemed to put the (Farnborough) lads in a good mood. Phil Anthony wished he had filmed the moment – his idea of a joke. It was overcast but stayed dry, and in the absence of wind it was certainly not as cold as last Sunday.

FOBG Squad: Matt Angelo, Phil Anthony, Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Simon Harvey, Dan 'Babyface' Herbert, Michael Hills, Colin Mant, Gary Mason, Joe Skinner, Simon 'Dorian Gray' Thomas, Gordon Thompson

Supporters: Rob Mckie, Patrice Mongelard and Kayleigh Richards

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard (mistaken for a journalist by a Lads of the Village player who was a fan of FOBG Senior Vets match reports)

A neutral observer of this game would give Farnborough 75-80% possession, and then wonder at how the final score was only 2-0 (with our second goal coming in the 85th minute). Of course, it was not all down to us. Lads of the Village defended in numbers, with no little skill and spirit, and did not shirk a challenge. They will be the first to agree that they did not pose too much of a threat up front. For a good while neither did we. Final balls were not good enough, crosses were overhit or inaccurate, we lacked numbers in their box, corners were wasted. The Lads keeper was no mug and when he was beaten the bar came to his rescue (from Dan Herbert's shot on the quarter hour). Simon Thomas had two gilt-edged opportunities between the 20th and 30th minutes but dallied, took one touch too many, and produced weak shots. Simon thought he had broken the deadlock after thirty-five minutes by turning a cross from Joe Skinner into the net but the assiduous Lads linesman had perceived an infringement to the off-side rule. Five minutes later there was no such perception after Gordon Thompson, the Farnborough King of Assists, drifted down the left all the way to the by-line, prompted by a Simon Harvey pass, before cutting a low ball back for ginger fox in the box Jay Hardy to poke home. It was a slick move, too quick for the linesman's reflex action.

It was clear at half-time that we were not committing enough players forward. It was not clear why or how timidity had crept in our game. The Lads fierce tackling must have had something to do with it. Moreover, as Gary Mason noted "the talking was crap". Michael Hills had threatened spasmodically with his penetrating runs but as partner Kayleigh noted he needed to take his time in front of the goal. At other times, she advised him to improve his aim, for example as when a shot from the edge of the box moments into the second half, faded just wide of the post.

At the other end Matt Angelo was not exactly over-worked. In fact, he seemed to spend more time in the centre circle than in his box in the second half. This did not, however, prevent a Matt moment - we always get at least one per game, when he passed the ball straight to an unmarked Lads forward in the box when there were acres of room on the other side and no player from the

opposing team. It was fortunate that said forward, no doubt very surprised at his good fortune, snatched at his shot and the ball went wide with Matt diving to his right to create the illusion that he had made a save. The award of a corner was fortuitous as the ball was already heading there in my view. Matt later revealed in the intimacy of our car journey that he was once, in the line of duty, clumped on the head by Jeremy Corbyn. Jeremy has not been the same since.

The second half was no less frustrating for us. Lots of foreplay but no penetration, as Kayleigh was telling me in our technical area. Sini Gracanin, Michael Hills, Gordon Thompson all threatened with shots but the Lads keeper was either equal to them or we were narrowly off target. Our low football intelligence found expression in the execution of the four or five corners we forced in the half. Our tallest player took them, they were invariably hit long to the back post where we had no presence, or if we did it was our shortest player Jay Hardy. To be fair to Jay he was the author of the most dangerous header we had in the half, twisting his neck muscles to put a whipped cross from Simon Harvey a foot wide of the post. It took us until the 85th minute to double our lead. Sinisa Gracanin injected a bit of class in proceedings with an incursion in the Lads box, the ball was recycled to an unmarked Simon Thomas at the far post who tapped it in.

Michael Hills took himself off with a few minutes left, in an act of self-control, after exchanging words with 'The Mullet'. At times the robust ministrations of the Lads of the Village defence raised eyebrows and Jay Hardy and Simon Weston in particular were taken roughly from behind several times. The word "Referee", articulated clearly and with a degree of physical distress, in Simon Thomas best RSC voice, appeared to fall on deaf ears, whilst Jay Hardy seemed to enjoy the experience. This said, there were no clear and obvious flashpoints, most players shook hands at the end (except The Mullet (he had fins perhaps) and the referee did a fair job.

The experience in the cosy Lads of the Village pub was priceless. This is not an occasion to miss. The hospitality and the banter were great as usual. Lucky Panties (100% record) Manty won the £20 Football card raffle through his well-known affection for a West London club and promptly bought a second round - including one for the Lads of the Village management. Joe Skinner showed more signs of having overdone his 40th birthday celebrations by falling off his stool – a touch of cramp he said, and the fiery Lads of the Village centre half was nowhere near him. Matt Angelo paid his own homage to Python Terry Jones' Mr Creosote by inhaling several egg, ham and cheese and onion sandwiches, and reaching for several wafer-thin chicken nuggets. He is not the Messiah - he is a naughty boy.

Next week we start a run of five consecutive home games. The smart money is on at least one of those being played at Norman Park. I'll be on to Meryl just in case. Talking of money, I must drop into my local HSBC to get that £50 note from Jay Hardy checked out.

Man-of-the-Match – Sinisa Gracanin, our Croatian technical player who will celebrate his Man-of-the-Match award, and Brexit next Friday, by lighting one of Gwyneth Paltrow's candles.

2 February 2020: Greenwich Challenge (N, 3-2)

Farnborough open post-Brexit Golden Age by coming from behind with panache

This souvenir edition marks the first game played by the Senior Vets after our liberation from EU tyranny. It required a tour de force to get a game this week after our original opponents exited. We were able to strike a deal with a new team after twenty-one attempts. Greenwich Challenge were an unknown quantity but their Twitter Feed, and pre-match warm up routine, presaged a tough encounter for us, and so it turned out.

Cognoscenti of our reports might recall previous editions have included titles of episodes of “On the Buses” and “Dad’s Army” as well as the 100 words Cambridge University deemed Fabio Capello needed to manage England. As a jeu d’esprit, today’s inaugural Brexit report includes many European words. The first reader who identifies as many of these words as possible gets a free aperitif.

First though, a zeitgeist detour to reflect recent media froth which left some football fans choking on their breakfast croissants. Ann Francke, Chief Executive of the Chartered Management Institute, called for a ban on sports talk in the workplace because it could exclude women and lead to laddish behaviour. Well - I have news for Madame Francke. As a champion of neuro diversity, I have been looking for a woman that likes football but all the good ones appear to be taken. And, of course, laddish behaviour is not de rigueur among the Farnborough Senior Vets.

Late additions, one no-show and the frisson of having to find a new keeper moments before the game added to the challenge for today. With Matt Angelo’s withdrawal at 4.43 am, we had no guardian angel, no backstop, but Jordan Glen came to the rescue.

FOBG Ensemble: Jordan Glen, Matt Ellis, Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Simon Harvey, Waive Hetherington, Michael Hills, Ian Lyons, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Chisa Mkala, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson

Referee: Paul Parsons

Impresario: Mick O’Flynn

Tifosi: Tony Harvey, Rob Mckie, Patrice Mongelard, Kayleigh Richards, Claire Skinner

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

We now have control of our borders, money and laws but control of this game was harder particularly in the fierce wind. We ended up with a game of two halves and this is no cliché. The playing surface was the same for both sides, a bit heavy, lush, bobbly but the wind favoured one side over another in each half. This said even though we were playing into the wind the early chances fell to Farnborough. Kypros Michael, Gordon Thompson and Jay Hardy all had half-decent opportunities in the first quarter hour to edge us ahead. The Greenwich tackling was not for the faint-hearted. A couple of their defenders and their central midfielder let it be known that bonhomie would be in short supply. Referee Paul Parsons was kept busy today (with more yellow cards flashed in this game than for the whole of last season).

Once they had weathered our initial thrusts Greenwich began to use the conditions to their advantage. Our passing got laboured and we began to play some loose balls at the back. That is how we gave away a penalty after twenty-five minutes with Jordan Glen bringing down their forward after having come off his line to tidy up a defensive reverie, and overrunning the ball before barrelling into a Greenwich forward. The spot kick was converted with aplomb. Our

malaise was not over. Ten minutes later, a vicious Greenwich free-kick was whipped in from the right, harvesting a gust of wind, skimming off the top of Joe Skinner's head and using the power imparted by his neck muscles to nestle into the top corner. It was not quite a farce but things were not great in the Farnborough camp. A substituted, semi-injured and tired Jay Hardy threatened to go home in a fit of pique but was persuaded to hang around for the second half after a herbal relaxant. Despite the adverse scoreline snake oil salesman Mick O'Flynn was in no doubt that we would turn things round and the doomsters and moaners would be proved wrong as we unleashed our potential with a fair wind in the second half.

And what a half this proved to be. Matt Ellis and Chisa Mkala had been introduced towards the end of the first-half and together with midfield maestro Sinisa Gracanin set about the task in hand. The half was barely five minutes old when the central tackle-happy Greenwich midfielder conceded a direct free-kick in a dangerous area. Up stepped Matt Ellis, to shake things up with a twenty-five yarder that swerved, dipped leaving the Greenwich keeper to grasp thin air as the net bulged. Ten minutes later a muscular run by Chisa Mkala took him past three defenders on the wing before he crossed the ball for Kypros Michael who produced a superb connection to guide the ball low into the bottom corner. It did not take long for the coup de grâce, administered by Matt Ellis after Jay Hardy had cut through the heart Greenwich defence with a Riverdance step. Matt still had work to do but was the epitome of sangfroid as he lifted the ball over the Greenwich keeper. The Farnborough crowd went wild. The impasse had been broken.

To their credit Greenwich then came back into the game and there was as much of a risk of an equaliser as of another Farnborough goal. The Greenwich keeper pulled off some great saves in ones-on-ones to frustrate Kypros and Chisa. At the other end, Farnborough had to defend with spirit and players were booked on both sides after a contretemps or two. Ian Lyons made a muscular return after months of injury, libero Michael Hills, scrapper Simon Harvey, steady Manty and bearded wonder Joe Skinner were in the thick of it. In the end the entente cordiale between both teams just about survived. Simon Thomas had to use all his thespian skills to calm things down once or twice. Referee Paul Parsons likes to let the game flow but could not quite be his tantric self today as he asserted his authority with his whistle and his yellow card.

A re-match with these worthy opponents is a distinct possibility.

There was no schadenfreude in the changing room, just a few sans culottes and enfant terrible Colin Mant's lucky panties held aloft. Ann Francke would take a dim view of Manty.

To our chagrin, we had to move this game to Norman Park from our home in Farnborough and consequently there was no après-match hospitality, so no canapés, hors d'oeuvres and other buffet mignons morceaux to tell you gourmands about.

Man-of-the-Match: today's Man-of-the-Match making strides towards the Farnborough Ballon d'Or is Joe Skinner, whose faux pas was forgotten, forgiven and fortunately missed by daughter Claire.

23 February 2020: Santos Vets (N, 3-2)

Farnborough weather turbulence to nick it in extra time

This game had adversity written all over it. There was doubt about whether, and where, it would be played. Then we struggled to find a referee until team player par excellence Phil Anthony put his hand up in the pub on Friday night. The late availability of Sinisa Gracanin (also confirmed in the pub) helped Phil to come forward as he felt Sini was an adequate replacement who would not weaken the team in his absence. Manager Mick 'Tantric' O'Flynn hurt his back on Sunday morning, depriving us of his legendary tactical acumen. We were down to twelve players, still one better than our opponents who had the bare eleven which meant both linesmen were Farnborough folk.

Storm Ciara blew in a fortnight ago and it was Ciao football. Then the menace of Dennis blew the next game out of the water. That was the third weather-related cancellation in 2020 alone. And they say momentum is everything in football. With our home pitch in the advanced stages of being converted into a wetland habitat for migratory flamingos, we found ourselves at Norman Park again for the second time in as many months. The playing surface itself was not bad for the time of year, the rain held off but not the wind which made playing the sort of football they would wish very difficult for both teams throughout the game.

FOBG Squad: Matt Angelo, Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Sini Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Wayne Hetherington, Michael Hills, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson

Referee: Phil Anthony

Fans: Patrice Mongelard and Kayleigh Richards

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

With corner flags bending in the wind and the goal nets billowing like sails on the Cutty Sark, we had most of the wind-assisted possession in the first half, won numerous corners and yet found ourselves 1-0 down at half-time. A defensive mix-up had resulted in Santos taking the lead after a quarter of an hour or so. Our normally assured technicians in midfield were not finding their touch. Our three nominal forwards, Kypros, Jay and Simon were all over the place and seemed to have confused themselves and their team mates.

Santos were robust, combative and there was nothing saintly in the tackling from two or three individuals. Their keeper was not to be underestimated and he even had luck on his side when our threat of an equaliser was most manifest. A masterly twenty-yarder from Sinisa Gracanin flew past the keeper's grasp, crashed against the underside of the bar, came down with force, rebounded behind the keeper up into a sensitive area that left him gasping for air as he dropped on the ball inches from the goal line. Our frustration was palpable, allied with the realisation that Santos would have the wind behind them in the second half. The half-time talk revealed Simon Thomas was having an existentialist crisis coping with a 3-4-3 formation as he thought we were playing a 4-3-3.

Things did not improve initially in the second half. We fell behind further on the hour after a quick transition by Santos. One minute we outnumbered them in their box, and the next minute it was two against one in our box as a cross was brought down and the ball stroked into the net beyond Matt Angelo who had little choice but to come off his line. There were similarities between both

goals by Santos – both smart finishes well-taken technically, both against the run of play, both capitalising on Farnborough shortcomings and naivety.

We had the greater possession again, found ourselves in the Santos box often but the final pass and shot lacked belief. Tempers were getting frayed. Things were said and done. Referee Phil Anthony was tested but kept a lid on it. Michael Hills was shaping to walk off before things got out of hand, but was persuaded by Patrice Mongelard to show solidarity with his team mates in difficult times.

Relief then came. With about twenty-five minutes left Sinisa Gracanin imposed his class on proceedings. A cut-back from Kypros Michael on the edge of the box was imperiously dispatched first time with a sweet, clean, technically perfect connection that propelled the ball in a powerful trajectory a foot off the ground into the bottom corner. This was the best riposte to the verbal abuse that Sini had endured moments earlier from the follically-challenged centre half.

Taking heart from this we pressed hard for an equaliser. The Santos keeper made several crucial saves. We missed some decent half chances with Simon Thomas and Kypros Michael prominent. A defensive mix-up in the Santos defence resulted in a tame clearance landing on an unmarked Jay Hardy's chest by the penalty spot. Jay created a moment of calm around him, brought the ball down and stroked it into an empty net with the Santos keeper having been lured off his line by his own player. At 2-2 things got frantic but there was not long to go. Santos defended like demons.

Looking like he had over-indulged on Valentine's Day Moussaka, Kypros Michael appeared leggy, lethargic and listless at times. It might have been a clever disguise to lull Santos into a false sense of security until extra time. Just when most players were anticipating the final whistle, with the thought that a draw would be a fair result - Kypros struck like a Greek warrior coming out of a Trojan Horse. Waine Hetherington mastered the ball in midfield before releasing the Paphos Express who hustled his way past the last defender, held him off over five yards before letting his lethal left foot do the rest. For the second consecutive game this February at Norman Park, we had climaxed late and overcome a two-goal deficit for a 3-2 win. We seem to like coming from behind there.

Santos were clearly not overjoyed with this turn of events, put a lot of pressure on referee Phil Anthony, in vain, to penalise Waine Hetherington for an infringement in the build-up. There was nothing saintly about some of the language and posturing that followed. This left a bit of an aftertaste. There were fewer handshakes than we are used to at the end of the game. My invitation to our opponents to come back to our club in Farnborough made before the game was understandably perhaps seen in a different light after the game. It meant that a handful of us had to eat all the food but we took one for the team, with a bit of help from Vince Wray and his boys. News of an alleged incident in the changing room back at Norman Park nearly put me off the beef mini-pasties I was polishing off. It seems that Meryl had walked in on Manty in his lucky blue panties. She must be traumatised and I can only offer my apologies on behalf of the club.

Next week – the fifth home game in a row on paper – I would not bet on it being played in Farnborough.

Man-of-the-Match: Sinisa Gracanin, a Ferrari in the midst of Austin Allegros.

8 March 2020: Catford Wanderers Vets (A, 5-3)

All quiet on the pitch but game will be remembered for crackling clubhouse fracas

After all the trouble we had to get a game this weekend, I would like to think it was worth it in the end. We were due to play away in Reigate, then that was off, then on again, before being called off on Friday afternoon. By Saturday lunch time, luckily, we had a game in Catford and we managed to muster a team, including birthday boy Gordon “Venezuela” Thompson (a year younger than thought by some) but excluding the other birthday boy Simon Thomas whose wife arranged extra celebrations after the Reigate game was finally called off.

Earlier in the week I had offered my services as a goalkeeper but Mick O’Flynn said “I am OK with Manchip”. He must have known at the time that he would not be the one who would be giving Toby a lift to the game, and back. The things I do for this team. It appears I interrupted an underpants-clad Toby’s morning preparations by turning up on time at his house. I hope the plumbing at the Catford Wanderers ground was up to Toby’s weighty job. It would have been a shock to the cistern. I am not sure which was more of a risk – that, or Manchip coughing and spluttering in the changing room, whilst explaining his car was the last one through the Mont Blanc Tunnel less than fourteen days ago.

FOBG Squad: Steve Blanchard, Matt Ellis, Sini Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Waine Hetherington, George Kleanthous, Toby Manchip, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Danny Mullins, Patrice Mongelard, Mick O’Flynn, Joe Skinner, Gordon Thompson

Supporter: Nicholas Michael

Director of Football: Mick O’Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Most of us, with one exception, made it for the earlier kick-off time of 10:15 to accommodate the second game at the ground between two younger sides who seemed very pumped up for the occasion. The sun was out, there was a refreshing breeze and the pitch made a mockery of all the recent rain.

We took an early lead in the fifth minute when Jay Hardy powered a drive from just inside the box after the ball had been played back to him by Danny Mullins. The crisp whipped finish surprised the otherwise more than competent Catford keeper. We could not grow the score because Catford would not let us. We were outnumbered in midfield and they started to create opportunities. Not that they needed help but we decided to give it to them anyway. Our lead did not last long – a scuffed Catford shot from the edge of our box was going wide until Mick O’Flynn decided to intervene – with possibly his wrong foot (not sure he had a right one) – and steered the ball low into the bottom corner, with Toby embalmed on the line.

Things got worse a little before half-time – the Catford “Barry Gibb” had appeared to spring the Farnborough off-side trap and had advanced majestically to poke the ball through Toby’s wide-open legs from a tight angle. There was a bit of debate about when the juvenile Farnborough linesman (son of Kypros, Michael) had raised his flag. To their credit Catford did not kick up a fuss and we got on with the game (although Farnborough consciences were not all clear it seems). To rub salt in the wound we took the lead with a few minutes to half-time – Kypros Michael twisted and turned like a dervish on the edge of the box in a central position, induced vertigo in his markers, himself, and team mates, before taking what appeared the most difficult option to steer the ball low in to the corner. This made up for his previous forty minutes.

As we came off for half-time with the score at what we thought was 2-1, Mick O'Flynn approached the referee and Catford Manager to concede the goal that had been ruled off-side. So that was the second goal that Mick gifted to Catford and it was really 2-2. Mick was now on a hat-trick for Catford. I cannot confirm rumours that he was voted their Man-of-the-Match.

We started the second half on the front foot. Jay Hardy must have thought he had scored when he rounded the keeper and slipped the ball goalward. He had not expected Roger French to stick doggedly to his purpose of denying Farnborough a goal and the last-ditch sliding clearance was vintage stuff. Danny Mullins made one of his leggy trade-mark lung-bursting runs into the opposition box only to be brought down or flung up (depending on your perspective) by the Catford keeper. The referee took the view that Mullins had overdone the theatrics. However, Catford relief did not last long. Jay Hardy, Danny Mullins and Matt Ellis weaved something glorious capped by a precise low finish into the bottom corner by Matt from Danny's slide rule cutback. It was just like Brazil I thought (not Alan Brazil before you ask). We doubled our lead not long after that after Jay Hardy was taken roughly from behind in the box. Matt Ellis converted the penalty with nonchalant *savoir-faire*.

The best goal of the game was just around the corner. A Matt Ellis cross into the box saw Jay Hardy position his body to execute an exquisite bicycle kick with his back to goal. The keeper never moved and we had a solid contender for goal-of-the-season as Jay Hardy narrowed the gap between himself and Kypros in this season's Golden Boot race.

With twenty minutes left it was time to be kind to the elderly and Mick O'Flynn made way for Patrice Mongelard, back after months off with injury. My return though was not as welcome or glorious as that from George Kleanthous, out for longer and with broken bones. There was time for Catford to get their third goal after Toby Manchip came off his line to catch fresh air from a Catford free-kick and the Catford Captain who had gambled on a Manchip cock-up (short odds) was left with a tap-in into an empty net.

In the end the result was a fair one – which even the most ardent Catford Wanderers fan, a formidable female presence on the touchline, would probably concede. It was good to see her there on International Women's Day. The match was played in excellent spirit, a fact noted by the referee.

The shower scenes were enlivened by a big hose. But this was nothing compared with the excitement that we were to experience in the clubhouse. It all kicked off after Roger French left. Tables and chairs went flying, punches were thrown, food went flying, a pizza slicer went missing allegedly. The two teams on the adjacent pitch had taken their animus into the clubhouse, although some thought that the two players involved were from the same team (just like Farnborough I thought). The main protagonist reassured us that it was not gang-related. I am not quite sure what it was about – it was sudden, loud, indistinct, a confused melee sparked by what sounded like the word crackling. I did not think there was any in the buffet. The tennis club ladies had an experience to remember (and I do not mean showing Toby how to catch balls). I managed to rescue some sausage rolls and chicken dippers from the wreckage. The Catford "Barry Gibb" attended to the furniture.

Man-of-the-Match: George Kleanthous, a revenant, the Farnborough Mummy, who gambolled like a new-born lamb in the spring sunshine, and whose gamble with his ankle paid off handsomely.

15 March 2020: Glendale Vets (H, 1-4)

Manty blows golden management opportunity

A pre-match message from Manager Mick O'Flynn said "I'm not there this morning. Manty can you take over please?" Meanwhile, factotum Patrice Mongelard was grappling with the reduction of the squad from sixteen to twelve players and eventually thirteen, after sorting out the fixture, the ref and the food, and looking after the balls, first aid bag and water bottles. Well not quite the food as our caterer was not able to leave a family member to attend to us. The effects of the Coronavirus were being felt at grassroots level too with two squad members self-isolating for precautionary reasons.

There was also the unfamiliar feeling of finally playing a home game at Farnborough since 10 November. I am not sure it was worth the wait as the pitch was found to be not conducive to our passing game. I have my doubts about that theory on two counts – first, it always seems to affect us more than the opposition, and second, half of our players will tell you the other half do not pass to them. By the time the game ended we had the unfamiliar feeling also of losing a match since 24 November. This will do us good.

There were grumbles before the game too about the quality of the washing of the kit, Sinisa Gracanin's responsibility, with the usual quips about hoping he takes greater care when washing cars.

FOBG Squad: Matt Angelo, Phil Anthony, Steve Blanchard, Sini Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Simon Harvey, Wayne Hetherington, George Kleanthous, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Patrice Mongelard, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas

Referee: Paul 'Play On' Parsons

Supporters: Michael Hills (?), Hannah and Michelle Kleanthous, Claire Skinner, Ian Shoebridge

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

There were rumours that the hooded and masked figure lurking at the back of our new stand was Michael Hills. I could not be sure unless I had misunderstood the concept of self-isolation.

This was one of those games where there is not much football to talk about, at least not from the Farnborough perspective. We played against the wind in the first-half but that did not explain the lethargy, lack of cutting edge, misplaced passes, lack of football intelligence that infected our game. Matt Angelo pulled off a string of saves to preserve our dignity and keep the score down to 1-0 at half-time. We could not penetrate down the flanks nor through the middle. Our initial formation of three at the back proved costly, particularly with the wide midfielders unsure of when to defend and when to attack. Glendale had overrun our defence on the half hour to steer a low shot into the bottom corner. At the other end we mustered one volley from Jay Hardy that fell to his wrong foot which the Glendale keeper saved well. We could not find the final pass in the Glendale box to unlock a defence packed with big units.

The second half saw a more even contest initially. We made the most of the wind direction and began to pose questions in the Glendale box. We had a period of about twenty minutes when we looked the team most likely to score. Sinisa Gracanin had a header saved on the line, Jay Hardy and Simon Thomas came agonisingly close to a decisive contact with the ball in dangerous areas. Colin Mant, a shadow of our 2008 Golden Boot, toe-poked tamely from close-range after going up for a corner.

The introduction of Patrice Mongelard early in the second half was marked by an intervention which the Glendale winger would have found very brusque. “A tackle from tired legs” quipped Manty – but he was being charitable, as was the referee, who played on.

Just when we thought we were on the cusp of an equaliser Glendale doubled their lead. A cut-back from their very tricky forward with a low centre of gravity and a superb left foot had found an unmarked Glendale midfielder whose run into our box was witnessed by Easter Island statues wearing Farnborough colours, and the crisp incisive move got the finish it deserved into the top corner.

There was a brief moment of hope when Simon Thomas narrowed the deficit. He had timed his deep cross to the far post from the left wing just right as a passing zephyr took the ball over the flailing arms of the back-peddalling Glendale keeper, and into the net. The thespian that is Simon managed to convey the sense that he meant that outcome. This was not Simon’s only useful contribution today – he dispensed many squirts of hand sanitiser to his team mates.

There was to be no comeback. Glendale put a deserved, if somewhat flattering, gloss with two late goals in the space of five minutes. Their third goal was a tad fortuitous with the ball falling kindly to one of their players in a crowded box following a corner, who poked it home from two yards out. Their fourth came as tired Farnborough legs could not stop a run from the Glendale left winger who curled the ball inside the far post. Glendale had more than avenged the 5-3 defeat we inflicted on them at their place in January. That day a resplendent Kypros Michael had scored a hat-trick. Today he could not buy a goal – would probably be too slow to get his money out. The better team won today, no question.

The atmosphere in the clubhouse was a little subdued, largely because numbers were low. We lost to Glendale in the bar too. The absence of food was a factor, but then you expect me to say that. The analysis of our game was not uplifting. Jay Hardy who aspires to a higher standard of football was particularly upset at the manner in which we lost the game – *“our worst performance of the season – some people should take a long hard look at themselves - make sure the match report says so, spare no one”*. Matt Angelo and Colin Mant seemed to be in good spirits, however, and tittered furiously during their flatus aroma contest, a sort of race to the bottom. My own personal favourite moment was when Colin Mant asserted that he once weighed 10 stone 3 lbs, his dancing weight.

Man-of-the-Match: We had thought initially of suspending the voting because of the coronavirus, and because we were poor but that would have been unfair on Steve Blanchard, the only outfield player to emerge with credit from the wreckage today.

Season 2020-21

16 August 2020	Nutfield Vets (A)	5-2	Senior Vets blow away Covid cobwebs
23 August 2020	Orpington Vets (H)	4-3	Local derby ends prematurely on a dark note
30 August 2020	Erith Vets (H)	9-1	Senior Vets come from behind, copiously
6 September 2020	Greenwich Challenge (A)	2-1	Senior Vets come through stiff examination
20 September 2020	Sands United Kent (H)	2-4	Farnborough Old Boys supports Sands
27 September 2020	Erith Vets (A)	0-2	Farnborough pay the price for lack of cutting edge
11 October 2020	Inter the Valley Vets (H)	5-1	Lefties shine as Senior Vets get back to winning ways
18 October 2020	CUACO Vets (A)	4-0	Senior Vets register first clean sheet of the season, and Kypros hits the target twice
6 December 2020	Old Tamponians Super Vets (H)	4-2	Farnborough come through sticky second period to overwhelm Old Tamponians
13 December 2020	Wellcome Super Vets (A)	3-6	Carry On Scoring as Farnborough turkeys get stuffed

16 August 2020: Nutfield Vets (A, 2-3)

Senior Vets blow away Covid cobwebs

Our season had, like Julius Caesar's, ended on the Ides of March and here we were five months later back in play, albeit with some necessary Covid adjustments. Wayne Hetherington had met a man in a pub, in his pub actually, and arranged today's extra game against Nutfield Vets. As God moves in mysterious ways, we had ended up playing the game in Epsom at the Nescot Sports Ground. There was a rumour we were next door to the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses but I think this was an attempt by the lads to hear one of my testicular jokes again. I resisted the temptation.

Less easy to resist was the compelling aesthetic of our new kit, courtesy of our new sponsor. Inspired by the retro aura of the kit stripes in Escape to Victory it effortlessly blended the bacon and egg colours of the Guild with the energy of a club going places. Yellow provided a tasteful base colour, stylishly punctuated with red. Eyes were inexorably drawn to the club badge ready to be kissed in a gesture of resonant symbolism, once the goals started flowing.

FOBG Squad: Matt Angelo, Giles Foister, Jay Hardy, Wayne Hetherington, Michael Hills, Ian Lyons, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Patrice Mongelard, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson and Ricky Young

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Kit sponsor: The Dog and Duck, Outwood

Supporters: Kayleigh Richards, Chris Webb

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

The later kick off of 12:30 was unusual, and it seemed to take longer to find the pitch in the vast complex. The loquacious referee, who clearly enjoys his role, added to the anticipation. Collectively, we looked a tad older than our opponents. The pitch was dry, tufty in places and likely to be a challenge for owners of rusty touches.

There was not much to separate the teams initially. After a quarter of an hour Kypros Michael, looking trimmer than the photos of meaty beachfront barbecues from Cyprus presaged, broke through to convert a Gordon Thompson assist by lofting the ball over the keeper who had unwisely ventured off his line. Kyp had peaked early, more on that later.

An even better goal followed five minutes later when Michael Hills burst through from the back, to connect with another Gordon Thompson assist, slip the ball behind the Nutfield defence, and carry on unencumbered, to guide the ball low into the bottom corner. Things do not always climax that way for Michael but this was a happy ending witnessed rapturously by partner Kayleigh.

At 2-0 we were in control but then Matt Angelo had a moment, making Sylvester Stallone look good in goal, when he came out to gather a through ball, having put himself in a prone position needlessly. The ball escaped and the Nutfield forward had an empty net to fill. Matt will beat himself up over this but he did many other things in the game that were very good and his name should already be on Manager Mick O'Flynn's team sheet for next week.

A fairer reflection of the game came just before half-time when yet another pass from the King of Assists, Gordon "Samaritan" Thompson set up Jay Hardy for a powerful crisp finish that the Nutfield keeper could not keep out.

The second half was even more eventful. Long before the second water break, we had grown the score to 5-1, with an own goal (an exquisite header in the top corner from a Farnborough free-kick which Michael Hills speared into the box); and a vintage strike by Ricky Young who chested the ball in the box, made room, swivelled and steered the ball beyond the keeper. At that point things could have got a little one-sided but to their credit Nutfield fought back. Injury to one of their players resulted in the introduction of a 13-year-old, who promptly embarrassed the Farnborough defence with a very good goal. He told me he was playing with a hangover (surely not, what do they put in Dandelion & Burdock these days?). Mick O'Flynn thought that I might have misheard the lad (how would he know?) and he was saying he had stayed up late to watch the film "The Hangover".

The Young Whippet then caused Michael Hills to be the first Farnborough Senior Vet to be booked this season. Michael had in the eyes of the referee interfered with the minor, fortunately just outside our box, to impede his progress. After a couple of scares from Nutfield free-kicks and corners we re-established a degree of control but without adding to the score.

Kyros Michael fluffed two or three chances, keeping up his ratio of misses to goals. Gordon Thompson hit the post after some nifty footwork. Jay Hardy put a free-kick against the bar (and did worse when he was asked to re-take it). Simon Thomas confessed he ought to have done better on a couple of occasions. He could not fathom why he did not earn a penalty when taken roughly from behind. Even Colin Mant nearly produced a reminder of why he was Golden Boot eons ago.

More goals would not have flattered us but in the end our opponents deserved credit for their spirit and the way they played the game. It felt strange to go home without the customer experience of a shower, beer and après-match analysis but this seemed a price worth paying for being able to play football again, and to see the lads, including very useful additions to the squad. I kept my eyes peeled for a pair of Jehovah's Witnesses as I made my way out of the area but in vain.

Man-of-the-Match: Michael Hills, in spite of the Neanderthal touch with the plucky young lad.

23 August 2020: Orpington Vets (H, abandoned after 81 minutes with the score at 4-3)

Local derby ends prematurely on a dark note

This game was our first home game since 15 March and sadly it ended with a serious injury to an opposition player that caused the match to be abandoned after 81 minutes, just as it got more interesting. We wish the Orpington player all the best.

The COVID protocol in place at the club meant restricted access to the changing rooms, masks, no showers, no food etc. The Orpington players seemed delighted to be told to use the back entrance, although they all got changed by the pitch. The Farnborough big pitch was ours, courtesy of a Sunday team game being called off, and we were delighted to have the run of it. The excellent work done by a dedicated team through the spring and summer had paid off handsomely. The clubhouse too was looking good after a bit of a refurb.

There was no truth that Matt Angelo had been dropped after last week. Having to wait over the weekend for the results of a Covid test (negative) meant that Matt could not be considered for this game. You might think it fortunate that they did not test Matt for other conditions but I could not possibly comment. Mark Harrington ended up between the sticks as our Young Vets did not have a game. Toby Manchip called me after the game to say he thought the 23rd was next week – he clearly lives on another planet. Other drop-outs meant that Matt Ellis also got a bit of a game despite not having the right shorts. Another one who felt he did not have the right shorts was George Kleanthous. His medium shorts could not be traced. He ended up with a man's pair that gave him a retro "Stanley Matthews" look, much to daughter Hannah's amusement – one for the family album.

The day was also notable for birthdays, for Phil Anthony (63rd – honest!). The real 80-year-old this week was Tony Harvey. Another birthday today was Daisy Thomas – her 7th – the mental age of Phil's jokes – more on that later. Talking of jokes our Manager Mick O'Flynn turned up with a shaven head, not unlike Yul Brynner. Not many people know this but Yul never wore cologne.

FOBG Squad: Phil Anthony, Matt Ellis, Jay Hardy, Mark Harrington, Waine Hetherington, Michael Hills, George Kleanthous, Ian Lyons, Kypros Michael, Patrice Mongelard, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson and Ricky Young

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Kit sponsor: The Dog and Duck, Outwood

Referee: Paul Parsons

Supporters: Peter Harvey, Hannah Kleanthous, Rob McKie, Danny and Ethan Mullins, Kayleigh Richards, Claire Skinner, Paul and Rory Tanton,

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

The more impressive team in the opening exchanges was Orpington, moving the ball about with confidence, with players comfortable in their positions, knowing what they were doing, with quick wingers and the canny "Lord of the Rings" Kevin as the spearhead. Yet the first goal was ours. A little against the run of play a George Kleanthous cross from the edge of the box had found the meaty forehead of Ricky Young for a bullet header after five minutes. 1966 was a good year for football according to Ricky, fifty-five next year. Our lead lasted about a quarter of an hour. We conceded a corner after being outnumbered at the back. The corner was swung in. A reliable witness informed me that Simon Thomas decided to get his quiff out of the way, the

ball reached an Orpington head and from there hit Michael Hills on the back on its way into our net. Orpington deserved that goal such was the pressure they were putting on our goal and only Mark Harrington's safe hands, sound positioning, quick feet and thinking had kept them at bay. Midway through the half another George cross found Michael Hills at the far post and there was a happier ending for Michael as we restored our lead. We had begun to turn the tide and it seemed only fair when Ricky Young was brought down in the Orpington box and the normally tantric Paul Parsons had no choice but to blow his whistle. Kypros "too may kebabs" Michael skewered the spot kick home with gusto to give us a 3-1 lead at half-time.

The second half was certainly eventful. Michael Hills assisted the Orpington second goal by heading a diagonal cross backwards and beyond an advancing but silent Mark Harrington and Kevin did the rest with his quick feet and low centre of gravity. It did not take long for Jay Hardy to restore our two-goal advantage with our third headed goal, again laid on by a cross from George Kleanthous. Jay produced a deft header to guide the ball inside the post from two yards out – a moment of great finesse. Sadly, that was to be the end of our finesse for the half. Like last Sunday we produced a catalogue of misses, many from close-range after good approach play. Ricky Young put a header against the cross bar; Jay Hardy, Michael Hills, Gordon Thompson, George Kleanthous and Kypros Michael all had good opportunities to stretch our lead. That was not the sum of our frustrations. Simon Thomas was moved to articulate an existentialist crisis by asking "What is the point of me being here?" as the ball kept a social distance from him. Please no need to send answers to this one.

With just under ten minutes left Orpington found a way to reduce their deficit. One of their more dangerous players shimmied his way on the edge of our area to set up a shooting opportunity. Sadly, he appeared to stub his foot into the ground as he released his shot, found himself off balance and he ended up, we thought, dislocating his knee. Michael Hills was nowhere near him because he was elsewhere busy diverting the shot into our goal, off the base of the post, his third assist, technically, for an Orpington goal. He should be their Man-of-the-Match. That was the last action of the game as players from both teams gathered round the distraught and distressed Orpington player on the ground while an ambulance was summoned. The Princess Royal University Hospital in Orpington is within shouting and shooting distance of our ground, and yet it took an hour for the ambulance to arrive. As I write this report - I have news that the player has been discharged from the PRUH and transferred to St George's with his patella in two pieces.

We'll never know what the eventual score might have been. Both teams had enough quality to add to their tallies. Notwithstanding this unfortunate ending the game was played in excellent spirit.

As we sat outside for a beer, mood subdued, birthday boy Phil Anthony shared a joke from one of his presents – How does Darth Vader like his toast? Answer: on the dark side. There is plenty more where that came from, unfortunately.

Man-of-the-Match: George "Stanley Matthews" Kleanthous – three assists in his lucky shorts – a Greek bearing gifts.

30 August 2020: Erith Vets (H, 9-1)
Senior Vets come from behind, copiously

Nobody could have predicted this result.

The squad reduced overnight to thirteen players, with Phil Anthony having been taken roughly from behind in his Saturday game. I could not do it. Play two games in a weekend, I mean. You have to admire 63-year-olds who do this to their bodies. Ever the team man, Phil limped his way to Farnborough and “ran” the line in both halves.

The recent rains had greened and softened the Farnborough top pitch for our first outing of the campaign on it. Conditions were good for football, a little overcast but dry with a light breeze and a drinks break was unlikely to be required. In addition to our supporters there was a steady stream of ramblers and dog walkers using the footpath by the pitch. The adjacent big pitch was hosting a game by one of our Sunday sides. It was as close as you could get to a normal scene in these abnormal times.

FOBG Squad: Matt Angelo, Phil Anthony, Ian Coles, Jay Hardy, Dan Herbert, Waine Hetherington, George Kleanthous, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Patrice Mongelard, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson and Ricky Young

Director of Football: Mick O’Flynn

Kit sponsor: The Dog and Duck, Outwood

Referee: Paul Parsons

Supporters: Hannah and Michelle Kleanthous, Ian Shoebridge, Claire Skinner, Amanda and Daisy Thomas.

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

I repeat nobody could have predicted this result. The evidence of the first fifteen minutes pointed indubitably to an Erith victory. Their game plan was working – defend in numbers, concede the midfield and play long balls to two willing and able forwards who would chase and cause problems in our box. They nearly scored after five and ten minutes – only last-ditch interventions by Matt Angelo and our defenders saving our blushes. On the quarter hour the Erith tactic paid off and the ball was lofted into our net after our defence had been discombobulated.

At the other end we were creating situations in their box. Shots and crosses were coming in, we were finding space in their box and penetrating but their keeper was pulling off incredible saves for a relatively small man or we were falling just short – Jay Hardy and George Kleanthous had headers that would have made them wish they had more inches to play with. Our best chance came when Kypros Michael broke through the Erith line and advanced on goal – from five yards out he opted for power over finesse and the Erith keeper got a strong wrist to parry the fierce shot. He did the same moments later with a Ricky Young thunderbolt from close range.

Midway through the half manager Mick O’Flynn brought his legendary tactical acumen to bear on the game. If Pep or Jurgen did this, you would read about it in the papers. He withdrew Patrice Mongelard and Ricky Young and inserted Ian Coles and Dan Herbert in the game. This was transformative. This is what followed (times are approximate (like all my match reports some would say)):

30th minute: 1-1, Jay Hardy lashed a shot into the top corner after a through ball from Dan Herbert

35th minute: 2-1, Jay Hardy sent the keeper the wrong way before swerving a close-rangeshot into the net, played in by Kypros Michael

40th minute: 3-1, a crisp low shot – a characteristically classy finish from Gordon Thompson after a Dan Herbert assist

There was even time for George Kleanthous to put an acrobatic volley against the bar. As the half-time whistle went, I was moved to mention to Ricky that the score was 0-1 when he came off. Of course, he could have said the same to me but was too much of a gentleman.

Ricky Young and Patrice Mongelard resumed for the second half and within a minute Ricky delivered.

46th minute: 4-1, Ricky Young tap-in after Jay hardy had back-heeled the ball into play from the byline. Jay Hardy called it a Premiership standard move (even if he said so himself). It was a slick move indeed.

50th minute: 5-1, Dan Herbert swivelled and shot low from close-range to convert a pass from Gordon Thompson

60th minute: 6-1, Dan Herbert again after a crowd scene in the Erith box

70th minute: 7-1, Kypros Michael after a mazy run – he spun, twisted, spiralled, went left, went right, shuffled, pirouetted, dummied, bamboozled – to finish from close range. I felt dizzy just watching it. One moment like this from Kyp is worth ten misses (it usually is I hear you say).

80th minute: 8-1, Kypros Michael again – a Greek mezze this time after George Kleanthous headed the ball to Kyp after a cross from the right and Kyp headed it on.

85th minute: 9-1, Dan Herbert in the right place and the right time to pick up the pieces after the ball had come back off the post following a Ricky Young intervention.

There was time for a very sporting gesture from the Erith No9. A fierce competitor with abundant skill he showed grace in adversity by turning down Paul Parsons' generous offer of a penalty after Matt Angelo had dived at the forward's feet to palm the ball away in a one-on-one. I should credit also the three Erith team members who went toe to toe with us in the bar afterwards (a three all draw I think). Simon Thomas was there at the final bell, fully enjoying what he called an enhanced bar experience. You'll have to ask him. I want no trouble with another Farnborough Manager. It is hard enough coping with Mick O'Flynn.

I cannot recall an easier game against Erith Vets. I first played against them over twenty years ago. Over the years they have always given us a tough game. It is also rare that we score all our goals from close-range like we did. All were from inside the box and most from inside the six-yard box. This might not happen again this season. Another thing which I hope will not happen again this season is the sight of paramedics rushing to attend to a suspected heart attack in one of the footpaths that run behind one of our pitches. News of a walker in distress had sent a rush of people including several from the Erith contingent to provide assistance before the professionals arrived. We wish whoever it was, well.

Man-of-the-Match: Dan “Baby Face” Herbert – after a very close contest with Joe Skinner. These two players claimed 73% of votes cast, after discounting Daisy Thomas’ vote for Dan and Claire Skinner’s vote for Dad not Dan.

6 September 2020: Greenwich Challenge (A, 2-1)

Senior Vets come through a stiff examination

Schools went back only this week and it felt a tad early to encounter today's opponents for what we knew would be a severe test. We had shaded our first encounter with them on 2 February, 3-2, and upon reading the report of that match – a classic, even if I say so myself, as it was the first of our Brexit era, I thought today's affair promised to be no less challenging. More so, since we were reduced to thirteen players and were bereft of Mick O'Flynn, our self-anointed tactical genius and Director of Football.

The pitch at the Footscray Rugby Club in SE9 was looking very good. The mild sunshine and light breeze made for excellent playing conditions. We did not really miss changing rooms on a day like this.

FOBG Squad: Matt Angelo, Peter Harvey, Waine Hetherington, Michael Hills, George Kleanthous, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Patrice Mongelard, Andy Osborne, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson and Ricky Young

Boot Room: Phil Anthony

Kit sponsor: The Dog and Duck, Outwood

Supporter: Claire Skinner

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

We knew within moments of the start that we were in for quite a game. Greenwich moved the ball with confidence, taking good care of it with short passes and triangulation. The flow of the game was towards our goal and our wide midfielders Gordon Thompson and Joe Skinner had to put in quite a shift to support the back three of Michael Hills, Colin Mant and Patrice Mongelard. Up front Ricky Young and Kypros Michael were tussling with tall, mobile defenders who were comfortable on the ball. The midfield was not for the faint-hearted with Peter Harvey, Waine Hetherington and George Kleanthous on the deck often and in the wars. Clear scoring chances were not abundant for either side early doors.

We broke the deadlock just after the quarter hour. Peter Harvey swung in a corner of great quality and purpose and Ricky Young was in the right place at the right time to head the ball in, his fourth goal in as many games. Clearly this is golden boot form, and travelling to and from games in the aura of a former golden boot, seems to be rubbing off on Ricky (although Manty is too modest to say so). Our lead, which the Greenwich lens will have seen as a little against the run of play, did not last long. In attempting to play the ball out of our defence some five minutes later we lost our way and conceded possession in a dangerous area to one of the more than able Greenwich midfielders who unleashed a fierce shot from twenty-five yards which surprised Matt Angelo in goal with a postage stamp finish.

The introduction of Andy Osborne and Simon Thomas on the half hour gave us useful height and more of a threat on the right. Either team could have gone in at half-time with a slender lead. Michael Hills had a header saved on the line from one of our corners. At the other end Michael Hills, again, nearly sliced a clearance into his own net and only a diving and scrambling Matt Angelo avoided yet another Hills OG.

The second half was packed with incident. After having a good shout for a penalty turned down, to Simon Thomas' chagrin we needed two fingertip saves from Matt Angelo to keep us in it. We

carried a threat ourselves. Kypros Michael threatened to get behind the Greenwich defence more than once and when he did the final ball was not quite optimal. Midway through the half, Kypros was bundled to the ground by defensive clumsiness rather than malice in a central position just outside the box. Peter Harvey and Michael Hills clustered around the ball and eventually it was the right foot of Michael Hills that edged the computations. The shot was perfect, with the right amount of power and dip, creating an arc too good for the Greenwich keeper and we had restored our lead.

The rest of the half was not quite the Alamo but Greenwich will feel aggrieved they did not get back in the game. Matt Angelo was busy. In fending off a goal-bound header he took a knock and was deemed to be concussed by the referee – how could he tell I hear you wonder – and Matt was asked to leave the pitch. Peter Harvey took the gloves until Matt re-appeared for the last ten minutes. Joe Skinner had resumed in defence and brought useful muscularity to the proceedings as did Andy Osborne for set-pieces. We needed to be resilient.

In the last quarter of an hour, we had at least two gilt-edged chances to extend our lead and ease our nerves. Simon Thomas with a clever run across the box, had unshackled himself from his marker, spun and set up a shooting opportunity about four yards out that would just not curl in at the last. Kypros Michael had an even better opportunity following a characteristic Gordon Thompson through ball but he could only roll the ball inches wide of the base of the post from inside the six-yard box.

It was a relief to hear the final whistle, I will not lie.

This was a hard game, bruising at times, but played in excellent spirit. There was the usual banter – inevitable with competitors like Peter Harvey and Michael Hills on the pitch. There was even the sight of several of our own players arguing with each other because they felt that a very obvious pass to them was overlooked by a stupid and selfish team mate. I suppose it shows they care but on reflection, I know that they regret whatever was said in the heat of the moment.

The referee had a good game. It was not easy out there. He kept things moving, was a bit tantric with the whistle but was even-whistled. He handled the Matt Angelo situation very professionally I thought. He had two notable exchanges with us. One was when he told Simon Thomas, perceptively: “You do not tell me how to referee the game and I will not tell you how to play football”. After the game he came round to say goodbye and apologised for not doing the “social thing” because his wife would kill him. I suggested a couple of my players might save her the trouble. To his credit he took that moment of flippancy very well.

Four of us made it to the bar upstairs for a swift pint where our hosts arranged for a chip butty to come our way. There was time for Simon Thomas to show off his Fitbit – it captures the movements of his wrists apparently.

Man-of-the- Match: by a long chalk George Kleanthous, our Duracell.Bunny, with votes going to another five players, and a mention in dispatches for Mad Bunny Matt Angelo.

20 September 2020: Sands United Kent (H, 2-4)

Farnborough Old Boys Guild supports Sands

I was not around for last Sunday's match. I was in Greece (a part from whence there was no need to quarantine). Although our two Greeks scored in that game, it did not go well. The fallout has cast a long shadow. At times like this I hear a voice in my head that says "it's only a game, there are more important things in life". No, it is not Mrs M, but it could be, and I would have to agree with her, as always.

Our visitors today reinforced that feeling. Today's game was in support of Sands – the UK Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity – organised by Farnborough stalwart Jordan Glen. The Club and the Senior Vets were honoured to support this Charity and also to say thank you to Jordan for all he does for Sands and for Farnborough Old Boys Guild.

Fourteen players answered the call for this 12:30 kick off, including Toby Manchip who said he had come to experience the Joy of Six, although I might have misheard him. In the absence of two other members of the Management Triumvirate – Phil Anthony and Mick O'Flynn, the team came under the benevolent dictatorship of Patrice Mongelard.

FOBG Squad: Steve Blanchard, Giles Foister, Dan Herbert, Waine Hetherington, George Kleanthous, Toby Manchip, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Patrice Mongelard, Andy Osborne, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson and Ricky Young

Referee: Paul "Play On" Parsons – officiating for his second game of the day at Farrow Fields and who kindly waived his match fee in support of Sands Utd.

Kit sponsor: The Dog and Duck, Outwood

Supporters: Jay Hardy; Katy, Imogen and Elliot Herbert; Helen and Oliver Manchip; Claire Skinner; Lorna Stewart; Chris Webb

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

What a lovely day for football. Dry, sunny, a light breeze and the Farnborough big pitch in excellent nick. The start of the match was preceded by a minute of applause from both teams, and many players and spectators from the previous game still about, for babies lost. Self-appointed overall club captain Toby Manchip won the toss in the centre circle but that was all he won today. He owes £7 for this weekend to son Oliver who had the canny sense to strike a deal that gives him £1 for every goal dad Toby lets in on Saturdays and Sundays. Smart lad – who will have a bumper Christmas kitty – with his dad's business acumen and his mum's football talent.

In the pre-match team talk I had warned our players not to under-estimate our opponents. And they looked younger than 15 months ago, unlike us. The first-half hour was not great from our point of view. Normally intelligent players seemed to have trouble working out what they were meant to do. The first two goals – scored by our opponents after five and ten minutes, were the result of Farnborough errors. Joe Skinner, a look-alike for the bearded man in Alex Comfort's 1972 seminal publication, will wish he had done better with the clearing header that went backwards and sideways to set up a Sands forward – Callum Hatcher, who lashed the ball home despite Toby Manchip getting a hand to the shot. The second goal, again from Callum Hatcher, stemmed from another Farnborough error after Giles Foister mis-controlled the ball after a poor goal-kick from Toby Manchip who had started to show signs of stiffness in his movements. I often think Toby Manchip in goal is an apt metaphor for the frailty of the human condition. One

minute all is well, the next it is quite the opposite. On the half hour Jordan Glen made it 3-0 to Sands with the Farnborough defence discombobulated and players out of position and confused.

Changes on the half hour helped not least because Dan Herbert was introduced in the midfield and he soon began to make his presence felt. It was a long while before we could get a Farnborough player to pick up the linesman flag which Patrice Mongelard had been wielding. That was not the only sign that we were a bit hard of thinking today, collectively. Jay Hardy on the touchline, and injured, could see what was not working and his insight – and post-match analysis, proved most valuable.

The second half did not start well for us. A few minutes in, Giles Foister sliced a clearance into his own net, while attempting to cut out a Sands cross, with Toby embalmed on the line.

From then on however we went on to have a much better half. In fact, we ended up winning the second half, with two beauties from a classy Dan Herbert. The last half hour was ours with chances spurned, corners, free-kicks on the edge of the Sands box. The Sands keeper was the busier and pulled off a few blinders to foil George Kleanthous and Gordon Thompson. There was not much he could do on the hour when Dan Herbert beat two defenders in the box, advanced along the by-line and curled a beauty into the far corner. At 4-1 we felt we could get back into it. Ricky Young had hobbled off with a pulled hamstring and Kypros Michael had a second, much more productive spell up front. He was a new man, sharp, alert, energised and with fifteen minutes to go produced one of his mazy slaloms in the box to set up Dan Herbert for a crisp finish. Andy Osbourne dropped back into the centre of our defence for a most influential period and we entertained hopes of turning the tide. Sands could still be dangerous on the break and even found time to bundle a hobbling Toby Manchip into our net after Toby had gathered a high ball under pressure but thankfully Paul Parsons did not see this as a perfectly good tackle. In the end we could have done with an extra fifteen minutes. Sands were more relieved than we were to hear the final whistle, I suspect.

All our match subs - £140 went to Sands Utd to support their charity work. There was another £10 added to the pot by Colin Mant's neighbour Doreen Thurgood (who wished to express her support for the work Sands Utd do) and who used to be Black Sabbath's Road Manager. Manty should ring her along to our games – she must have some stories to tell.

Man-of-the-Match: All the players from both teams.

But for the record Farnborough votes favoured Dan Herbert by a long wick. His reward is to experience the joy of one of Gwyneth Paltrow's candles – the one that is *made with tart grapefruit, neroli, and ripe cassis berries blended with gunpowder tea and Turkish rose absolutes for a scent that's sexy, surprising and wildly addictive* – oops getting my Joys confused again.

27 September 2020: Erith Vets (A, 0-2)

Farnborough pay the price for lack of cutting edge

Four weeks is a long time in football. Four Sundays ago, we beat today's opponents 9-1. Five players scored that day and none of them were available today. There were other players missing which made it a good day to play us. The Erith team looked unchanged except for a very youthful keeper and, clearly, they wanted it more. We got what we deserved.

The Queen Mary University Ground in Chislehurst is a wonderful setting and the pitch was in excellent condition, probably the best surface we are likely to play on this season. The morning was overcast but stayed dry, and the breeze though on the fresh side did not make it too challenging to get changed al fresco. Colin Mant will have to think again about doing that in the winter.

FOBG Squad: Matt Angelo, Sean Blackwell, Steve Blanchard, Jay Gasson, Sinisa Gracanin, Danny Hetherington, Waine Hetherington, George Kleanthous, Colin Mant, Patrice Mongelard, Andy Osborne, Neil Pearce, Joe Skinner, Bram Wauters

Kit sponsor: The Dog and Duck, Outwood

Supporters: Phil Anthony, Hannah and Michelle Kleanthous, Natasha McCartney, Claire Mills Skinner; Lorna Stewart

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Sometimes less said the better. And today is one of those occasions. I cannot recall a game in a long while where we gave the opposition keeper so little to do. He will have enjoyed this Vets football lark and he will have fond memories of this game when he becomes a vet, in fifteen years or so. This said Erith could have played Captain Tom Moore in goal today and they would still have edged the game.

Both teams moved the ball well on the lush surface but Erith carried the greater threat from the off. Matt Angelo kept us in it for long periods with eye-catching saves. A point-blank block brought tears to his eyes as the ball impacted high on the thigh. Shouts of 'one careful owner, rarely used' did not help. We could move the ball at the back and in midfield just as well as Erith but it was in the final third that we got stuck. The incision, the penetrating runs, the final passes, the crosses were never there. There weren't too many shots either. Erith managed the game better, getting big numbers behind the ball, packing their box and looking to release their most dangerous player up front.

We fell behind from a penalty just before the half hour. Jay Gasson was the unfortunate player who fell victim to the new hand-ball rule, having dropped back to help out in defence. It felt just as harsh as what I have seen on the box latterly. The spot kick was hammered home with glee. We spluttered on to half-time without falling further behind, and without giving any signs that we would find a way back into the game.

The second half was not much better from our point of view. There were perhaps a couple of half chances for us with shots from distance but we never occupied the Erith box and could not keep the ball for the length of time we wanted. There was not much relief to be had except for a moment when 'Mad' Matt Angelo went for a quick one in the bushes.

The second Erith goal came late, again from a set-piece, and with not a little help from Farnborough. An Erith corner had led to a cross into our box which was met by Colin Mant. But the contact was not as he would have wished and the ball fell invitingly two yards out to the Erith hit-man who lashed the ball into the top corner before anyone could react. And that was it. Erith had their revenge and we cannot argue that the better team won today. The game was played in excellent spirit and the referee had a trouble-free game on his hands.

So, that was our third consecutive defeat. Mick O'Flynn revealed that he was glad he was Director of Football rather than Manager. He labours under the notion that Managers get sacked, but Directors of Football go on. When we win games, he is wearing the hypothetical Manager's sheepskin coat, when we lose games, he has the Spiv's sharp suit on.

We need to turn things round but injuries are piling up and it could get harder. Inter Vyagra at the barracks next Sunday. Let's hope we are up for this one.

Man-of-the-Match: Matt Pearce, by the slenderest of margins from George Kleanthous, two out of only a handful of Farnborough players that emerged with any credit from the wreckage today.

11 October 2020: Inter the Valley Vets (H, 5-1)

Lefties shine as Senior Vets get back to winning ways

After the limp performance against Erith Vets, we wanted a different outcome with the visit of Inter Vyagra last Sunday. But they practised the withdrawal method the day before, explaining that rain and mud compounded by the absence of changing rooms and showers, would make it hard for their players to perform.

A week later - illness, injury, the international break (aka quarantine after a Covid-dodgy visit abroad) and internecine strife meant that we could only muster twelve players and that is with the light brigade in the form of Barry Grainger, Jason Miller and Stuart Rossco, helping out their seniors. Unlike last Sunday, the conditions were perfect – dry, sunny, blue skies, imperceptible breeze, a superb playing surface true, well-drained, with a little bit of zip from the morning dew.

FOBG Squad: Matt Angelo, Steve Blanchard, Sinisa Gracanin, Barry Grainger, Waine Hetherington, George Kleanthous, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Jason Miller, Stuart Rossco, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas

Kit sponsor: The Dog and Duck, Outwood

Referee: Paul “Play On” Parsons

Supporters: Neil Connelly; Ian Shoebridge, Paul, Rory and Samantha Tanton.

Chief Football Correspondent and Manager du Jour: Patrice Mongelard

As advocates of quality over quantity, Charlton fans Inter the Valley, play only a few games every year and today was their first outing this season after a six-month break. They looked so composed and fluent in the first quarter of an hour that one of their players suggested they should take a six-month break more often. We had a job getting hold of the ball in these initial stages, and to the impartial and trained eye there was only going to be one winner and it was not going to be Farnborough. This feeling was reinforced when fluffer Kypros Michael started to go through his extensive repertoire of misses. The first clear-cut scoring opportunities fell to Farnborough. On fifteen minutes Kypros Michael twisted clear of his markers in the box, enjoyed a clear sight of goal, need not have bothered about the keeper but chose to strike the ball with his right foot from three yards out. As Kypros barely trusts that foot to stand on you can guess the result as he shanked the ball wide. Five minutes later, Barry Grainger bamboozled his marker and rolled the ball back to George Kleanthous on the edge of the box, only for George’s shot to clear the netting behind the goal. On the half hour we thought surely that would be it when Barry Grainger wriggled free and advanced on goal in a central position and we expected the cultured left foot to do the rest but the ball was rolled just wide of the post. “My Mrs would have scored that” – opined Paul Tanton on the touchline. I could not possibly comment.

The score was still 0-0 on thirty-two minutes when Matt Angelo had to dive to his right to palm a low fizzing shot from the edge of the box, round the post. Matt did not have too much to do in the first-half but when called upon he was there, for example, at corners.

Five minutes from the half-time whistle, Kypros Michael produced a trademark thunderbolt from inside the box after his usual trickery to make space and scatter markers, to give us a deserved lead. As always, we had to wait for it from Kypros, but it was worth it. We could have had something even better almost on the stroke of half-time. Barry Grainger had curated a cross to the far post which Kypros met on the volley only to see his shot come off the inside of the post and roll back along the goal line before being hacked away. The mood at half-time was positive.

We had contained the initial burst from Inter and fashioned many opportunities and surely more would follow, we thought.

An early chance was blasted high and wide with his right foot by Kypros, after Waine Hetherington had slipped him in. "I live nearer than that Kyp" observed Matt Angelo helpfully, from fifty yards away. Matt lives in Petts Wood. George Kleanthous had a shot cleared off the line. We forced a few corners.

On the hour an impudent back heel from Barry Grainger set up Kypros for his second of the game – another belter from the left peg. A few minutes later we were in cruise mode. Simon Thomas and Waine Hetherington had combined to give Barry Grainger a shooting opportunity on the edge of the box and the ball was arrowed inter the bottom corner in a crisp fluid strike.

At 3-0 we eased off, I felt, or got complacent. We were not helped when Matt Angelo came off his line to gather a ball on the edge of the box, tripped himself up and fell awkwardly. Kyp pointed out knowingly to me from the centre circle that this was the usual one per game moment of madness that we had been expecting from Matt. Being in a more sympathetic frame of mind, I feared I had witnessed the first case of self-dislocation of the shoulder but thankfully, mad Matt was able to carry on.

Moments later an exquisite Inter free-kick crashed against our bar and although Matt punched away the rebound it looked like a feeble attempt hindered by the shoulder and the ball was bundled acrobatically into our net. Someone had blundered but in fairness it was no more than Inter deserved (though Manty will chide me for saying so). Now running the line, Steve Blanchard, felt moved to point out that Inter had scored when he was off the pitch. We wobbled for a moment. Joe Skinner made a goal-saving clearance at the far post much to the annoyance of the dreadlocked wonder from Inter who had scored earlier.

The next goal was going to be important and given the firepower we had on show it felt right when we scored twice in the space of five minutes. Simon Thomas put a ball over the top which Kypros converted for his hat-trick. Kypros then set up Barry Grainger for his second, and our fifth. Barry made that look easy after putting the Inter keeper on the floor with a drop of the shoulder, and rolled the ball into an empty net.

We were a bit like the walking wounded at the end. Steve Blanchard had come off and gone back on after Waine Hetherington told manager Patrice Mongelard "I can't sprint". What's new? I thought. Simon Thomas was now nursing his hamstring as well as his quiff. But thankfully there was no time for Inter to get back at us. Going into games with just twelve players is not ideal but we got away with it today.

As well as Barry Grainger's stylish display the other two newcomers today also had eye-catching performances. Jason Miller was all bustle and hustle, energy and sinuous trickery and powerful long throws. Scott Roscoe was solid, full of movement and composure and chat. Since the days of Colin Brazier, the best left-back the club has ever had (self-appointed), we have had a bit of a problem in that position and Scott made it his own. He even had time to join in the banter, pointing out after yet another Kypros miss that "You can't be that bad all the time Kyp" only to hear Matt Angelo say "Yes, he can".

We made the most of the Covid-restricted hospitality rules once Steve Blanchard had mastered the electronic art of ordering drinks. He used a pad and paper in the end. There were even

some rolls from yesterday – onion & cheese, ham & pickle, ham & tomato and cheese & tomato, which lifted the mood even further.

Man-of-the-Match: George Kleanthous, for an indefatigable and effervescent display full of heart, guile and bite. The bookies will stop taking Player of the Year bets on George soon.

18 October 2020: CUACO Vets (A, 4-0)

Senior Vets register first clean sheet of the season, and Kypros hits the target twice

Autumnal colours are usually resplendent for this game, in the leafy environs of the Old Dunstonians Sports Club, in BR3 3SS, in the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness. No mists today, no sun but not Pearl Harbour either, which meant we did not mind stripping al fresco in these Covid times. There were fourteen of us – it would have been fifteen if we had got our communications right – but we had shirts for thirteen players only. We had even fewer players at the end but that was due to injury as the pitch did no favours to dodgy hamstrings. The grass was lush, the surface was not too claggy despite an abundance of worm casts. There were white and blue lines on the pitch. It was a toss-up between moulded or studded footwear.

FOBG Squad: Phil Anthony, Sean Blackwell, Steve Blanchard, Matt Ellis, Tom Girling, Sinisa Gracanin, Waine Hetherington, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Jason Miller, Patrice Mongelard, James Rutter, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas

Kit sponsor: The Dog and Duck, Outwood

Supporters: Claire Mills-Skinner, Demi Mills-Skinner, Lorna Stewart (aka Joe's fan club)

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn (who celebrated his 61st birthday on Friday)

Chief Football Correspondent and Manager du Jour: Patrice Mongelard

We did not exactly get out of the blocks. Yet, after only ten minutes we had edged ahead – with a close-range header from Matt Ellis who had pulled away at the far post to give a delightful cross from James Rutter the finish it deserved. More goals would follow, surely, we thought but that was not the case. It would have been a different story if Kypros Michael had converted any of the half dozen chances that came his way, crafted either by himself or by others. I cannot say we were in control of the game but I cannot say that our opponents were creating much despite moving the ball well. Tom Girling, playing only his first game in goal for us, was very sound. He maintained a high line, was quick on his feet, agile and dextrous. He had much to say also. In fact, several players noted what a refreshing change it was to have a keeper that talked sense behind them. His distribution would have been enhanced if he had known more of the names of the players. At one point he appeared to be confused by the geometry of the pitch but that was because there were blue lines where he expected white ones.

The first-half did not exactly bristle with incident. Whilst the score remained at 1-0 our opponents could hope they would get back in the game. It did not look like we would increase our advantage.

The second half was a very different affair. Three more goals were scored. One goal was disallowed and one was not given. What did not change was the catalogue of misses from Kypros, like a Kama Sutra of misses, one-on-one, from close range, from long range, from behind, from the side, full frontal, tap-ins, volleys, half-volleys, headers, left foot, right foot. But you have got to be there to miss them. It does not matter if you miss a dozen, if you get one in, occasionally. Kypros is our Taxi Light Man, always available to have a go. You have to admire the ambition and the spirit.

Before we could increase our lead, we had to live through a CUACO equaliser that was eventually ruled off-side after the referee, who had a very sound game, was persuaded to listen to what the linesman had to say. Pity for CUACO as the finish was rather good but the approach play was

not legal. They were to threaten again late in the game but Joe Skinner made a clean sheet-preserving headed clearance off the line.

On the hour Matt Ellis was taken roughly from behind in the box and Kypros claimed the ball for the spot kick. I was not the only one who felt he would fluff it, but the shot, at a comfortable height straight down the middle of the goal, managed to miss the keeper. His relief must have been great, but not as great as ours. Ten minutes later he was teed up by Matt Ellis for a shot from just inside the box which screamed into the top corner. This made up for the one he put against the angle of bar and post from two yards out moments earlier, and the one that would have been a conversion in rugby, moments later.

Several of the CUACO players felt that the score flattered us, and said so. Their chagrin mounted when Steve Blanchard bundled their burly forward over in what he thought was the penalty area only for the blue lines to say otherwise. The free-kick went under Matt Ellis in the wall but Tom was alert in goal.

In the last quarter of an hour, we had more chances to score. In fact, Matt Ellis was convinced he had scored his second after he had produced a crisp rasping drive that beat the keeper, came off the underside of the bar, bounced behind the line but the angle did not convince the referee. We could have done with a Russian linesman I thought but apart from a vociferous Simon Thomas, exercising his vocal cords more than usual today, nobody appealed with any conviction.

However, there was no doubt with ten minutes left when Simon Thomas floated a free-kick into the box which the keeper deflected onto the underside of the bar and behind the line. Several of our players shouted own goal but that would have been harsh. Simon clearly wished that Farnborough would score from the free-kick, as if it was a cross intended for the far post. There was still time for Kypros Michael to put a shot on goal out for a throw-in as he arrived at pace in the six-yard box to latch on to a clearance by the CUACO keeper after Matt Ellis had driven a low shot through a forest of legs. I think Kypros used his right foot for that one.

As we walked off Colin Mant noted that this was our first clean sheet of the season and that although he did not really like to talk about it, just like his Golden Boot, the thought had occurred to him that not even Michael Hills had managed one for us this season.

As I left the ground after a couple of Covid-compliant refreshments brought to our table I could see a line of targets had been set up awaiting the arrival of the toxophilites. Good thing Kypros does not do archery I thought, we'd never get the insurance cover.

Man-of-the-Match: Matt Ellis, despite not getting a return pass from Kypros, although he did receive eight out of fourteen votes cast.

6 December 2020: Old Tamponians Super Vets (H, 4-2)

Farnborough come through sticky second period to overwhelm Old Tamponians

Today we played game number 10 of this stop-start season. We should have done so long ago, but a combination of precipitation and contamination claimed the last six games. In these dark and uncertain times, how many of our remaining twenty-two games will we get to play? It could all still end in tiers, and tears.

Referee Paul Parsons was grateful, as we were, for the FA dispensation to allow match officials to travel between tiers. Manty, who works for the Government but is not allowed to say which bit, had suggested, with rare subtlety, that since all referees have impaired vision, Paul could have done our game to test his eyesight, in any case. It turned out there was nothing wrong with his eyesight nor his pace (more on that later).

Some players came already changed to avoid the alfresco changing facilities on a ground sheet in overcast conditions, with little wind and only the memory of early morning showers. They had gambled on the all-yellow kit being used today. We had enough, bar a pair of shorts and a shirt for sixteen players. Yes, sixteen players – tactical supremo Mick O'Flynn had what Premiership Managers lack and that is five substitutes to play with. All were needed today. Thankfully, Colin Mant had changed already and we were spared a sight of his lucky pants – a pair of ladies' knickers so skimpy one could cough them off.

Our last game, on 18 October, a 4-0 win, had given rise to some frustration with the Management's long-established policy of giving all available players at least one hour of game time. Today only one player mumbled a grumble. If it lingers, this frustration can be addressed with two words, involving sex and travel.

FOBG Squad: Matt Angelo, Phil Anthony, Ian Coles, Giles Foister, Sinisa Gracanin, Wayne Hetherington, George Kleanthous, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Patrice Mongelard, Andy Osborne, Stuart Ross, James Rutter, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson

Kit sponsor: The Dog and Duck, Outwood

Supporters: Claire Mills-Skinner and Lorna Stewart.

Director of Football: Mick O'Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Boot Room: Phil Anthony

Our last game against today's opponents had not ended well for us. We expected a tough game. And that is what we got. We knew Old Tamponians were adept at soaking pressure, took good care of the ball, defended robustly and could produce the right degree of incision into our box. Yet we had the better start, with the direction of play towards the Tamponians goal. After fifteen minutes or so we had edged ahead with Joe Skinner converting a George Kleanthous cross from close range. The goal had been coming but we could not quite find the right final pass. It was also clear early doors that Kypros Michael was more rusty than usual after the long lay-off, so rusty in fact the club were expecting Rio Tinto to put in a bid for him. But Kypros was, as often, to have the last laugh, as we shall see. Before the half hour was up, we could have had a second but George Kleanthous' header from a Kypros Michael cross came off the crossbar with the Old Tamps keeper beaten.

Substitutions on the half hour affected our rhythm but in fairness Old Tamps were making a fist of it even without creating any clear chances. There was a bit of excitement when Stuart Ross was taken roughly from behind by the Old Tamps' rough diamond and our fiery Scot reacted. Referee Paul Parsons sin-binned Stuart. I had not noticed this had happened, so frequent is the feeling that we play with ten men, until Colesy confirmed my assessment that "We are one player short". We did not even get the free-kick!

The usual half-time talk from Mick O'Flynn was not testicular, and seemed to have done the trick as we edged into a 2-0 lead very early in the second half. An exquisite half-time cross from James Rutter had found Andy Osborne at the far post and the big man did the rest. It was good to see one of our many crosses in the box finally find a Farnborough head for once, and with deadly result.

It was not a surprise to see Old Tamps rally and we had to dig deep as energy levels were being sapped by the heavy pitch and there were beginnings of what I have called Easter Island defending and midfield play on our part. A tackle on the most dangerous Old Tamps player by Patrice Mongelard in the centre circle drew admiring gasps from the Farnborough crowd. However, there was too much quality in the Old Tamps side for things to stay as they were. We contributed with poor defending but there were classy touches in both their quick goals as they drew level with close-range finishes from well-timed runs into our box.

On the touchline Ian Coles and Patrice Mongelard were moved to just say that it was 2-0 when they came off. Seriously, it could have gone either way with twenty minutes to go. Kypros Michael hit the base of the post after another of his usual mazy runs. Then he could not find a right foot to shoot with after breaking through and advancing far into the Old Tamps box. Old Tamps were playing a high line and it felt like it was only a matter of time before we would capitalise. Gordon Thompson and James Rutter were doing what George Kleanthous had done earlier in the game, imparting forward momentum to our play. We regained the lead after Gordon had driven deep into the Old Tamps box and crossed the ball. For once we had bodies in there. Joe Skinner made the first connection but his shot was parried by the keeper only for the ball to fall at the feet of a grateful Simon Thomas who tapped the ball home with nonchalance from a yard out.

The game was not yet won. Sinisa Gracanin had to bring his class to bear in the midfield to steady the ship. We still had some hairy moments to weather at the back – with Colin Mant and Ian Coles back in harness. We had a fourth goal in our locker though. A Stuart Ross long range shot was nearly spilt into the postage stamp by the Old Tamps keeper. Gordon Thompson was fouled professionally from behind when clean through on goal. We even had the sight of a fast breakaway made to look pedestrian when referee Paul 'Road Runner' Parsons outran the Farnborough forwards. Still, it was not tantric Mick Gearing with the whistle, but clearly yards of Farnborough pace have been lost during lockdown. With not long to go, Kypros – who, according to George Kleanthous is Mister 20% in that he needs five chances to score, (many will dispute that %) finally broke through forty yards from goal and made his sinuous way towards goal once again. As defenders and keeper converged Kypros stroked the ball with his left peg as he went to ground and the ball rolled towards goal, kissing the inside of the post as it found the back of the net. Just like Man U – must have thought Kypros. There can be no better tribute for Kypros.

And that was it. A fair result for a tough game with one minor flashpoint, played in very good spirit by two good sides who were gasping for a game.

Man-of-the-Match: today it is a threesome, or if you prefer, a Holy Trinity of George Kleanthous, James Rutter and Gordon Thompson with four votes each.

Before I go there are two other celebrations to mention in the form of two very recent shared birthdays among the squad – Jay Hardy and Toby Manchip, both a year older and, we hope, wiser.

13 December 2020: Wellcome Super Vets (A, 3-6)

Carry On Scoring as Farnborough turkeys get stuffed

This used to be our favourite fixture of the season. Why? - the friendliness of our hosts, the quality of the pitch, the setting (imagine tree-lined pitch, cricket score board, mock Tudor wooden clubhouse with cricket, football and tennis memorabilia in the leafy suburbs of Beckenham). It is also our Christmas jumper fixture. Once again my Icelandic Runes motif proved too sophisticated – “Where’s the f***** reindeer Pat? Did you eat it?”. Who can forget the occasion when Colesy had his carrot revived by his favourite elf? We are, of course, still talking Snowman jumper here. Then there was the happy conjunction with the Beckenham Ladies Tennis Club Christmas Party where Manty had his gluteus maximus palpated after he casually mentioned his early career as a Ballroom Dancer on cruise ships in the 1970s. No such fun today in the age of Covid but we had a marquee to ourselves.

Today we made more memories.

It started to go awry when Toby Manchip persuaded the opposition and the referee that we should have a minute silence before kick off as a tribute to Barbara Windsor. It would not be an exaggeration to say that was Toby’s finest contribution to the game.

FOBG Squad: Phil Anthony, Ian Coles, Giles Foister, Sinisa Gracanin, Peter Harvey, Waine Hetherington, George Kleanthous, Toby Manchip, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Patrice Mongelard, Andy Osborne, Stuart Ross, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson

Kit sponsor: The Dog and Duck, Outwood

Supporters: Ian Lyons, Claire Mills-Skinner and Lorna Stewart.

Director of Football: Mick O’Flynn

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

Boot Room: Phil Anthony

Barely five minutes in, Waine Hetherington made an unnecessary twenty-yard back pass to Toby – bellowing “keeper” for the avoidance of doubt. Toby – who could not tell you when the rules governing back passes were changed, picked the ball up. The resulting direct free-kick was lashed into the top corner with most of the Farnborough players on the goal line. We could have put our five subs and Mick O’Flynn on the line as well but it would not have made a difference. Toby might have picked the ball up unintentionally – a sort of Priti Patel Manoeuvre, but on this occasion, there was a price to pay.

Things did not get better after that. Not long after, Sinisa Gracanin found himself unmarked at the far post near the Wellcome goal to connect with a Joe Skinner cross. In my mind I had started walking back for the re-start but the Wellcome keeper pulled off the first of many point-blank saves to thwart us. The ball rebounded back to Sinisa for a second bite but he put the ball over the bar from two yards out. Of all our players I would not have expected him, our most technical player, to miss from there.

Worse followed as Wellcome ran amok, aided and abetted by Farnborough ineptitude. There was no desire, no bite, no pride, no pace, no discipline, no tactical intelligence as we were torn apart by two new players we had not come across before. The Wellcome Manager later described them as “late thirties” and they had apparently just contacted his club to offer their

services. 1-0 became 4-0 in not much time. And we could have scored two own goals in that period as we sliced clearances the wrong way defending corners.

We pulled one back before half-time after Simon Thomas had found himself in the right place to tap home after a crowd scene in the Wellcome box. The referee rightly dismissed Wellcome claims of off-side. But they were to add a fifth goal before the half-time bell tolled. The rallying talk from Manager Mick O'Flynn was not easy. A Churchillian moment was called for but Ian Lyons was the one with the cigar, and a reference to that South American rodent – the chinchilla. Toby Manchip said he felt like going home. It could have been worse – his family could have been watching. It was hard for us to see a normally effervescent and sunny man reduced in this way.

It was 6-1 very early in the second half as the Wellcome Express in his “late thirties” in the distinctive tight shorts helped himself to his hat-trick. There were still forty minutes to play and I am glad that we could say at the end of these minutes that we won the second half. Kypros Michael made a meal of the penalty won by Peter Harvey. The Wellcome keeper, an excellent shot stopper, parried the first shot, straight at him, just the right height, but Kypros was able to get to the rebound for a ferocious drive to reduce the deficit. I will not tell you what Kypros' cousin, a Wellcome player, said about that as we watched together from the touchline.

Gordon Thompson then drew an unwelcome double save from the Wellcome keeper again from close range. Footballers know when it is not going to be their day and this brought it home very clearly. First Sinisa, now deadly Gordon had missed. Kypitis was catching. There was no denying Gordon fifteen minutes from the end when he beat Joe Skinner to the ball to prod home after the Wellcome keeper had made yet another stupendous block. At 6-3 we had hopes of getting even closer to the Wellcome score and they were the ones asking the referee how long was left as the game tailed off. There was time for Peter Harvey to be clattered and acquire another “love bite” on his ankle. I have said it before but it takes a particular courage to absorb that kind of punishment in your fifties after two serious fractures. We needed more of that kind of spirit across the whole team today.

As we ruminated in our marquee with some brought-in beer and Phil's home-made rolls there was a sense of disappointment but not despondency. We had rallied well and had been undone by two very good younger players. There were plenty of memories and anecdotes to lighten the mood as the drizzle enveloped the marquee and I faced up to the prospect of another half hour of Toby Manchip on the drive home. Talk about taking one for the team.

It was not the result we wanted but it is some relief from the stress of Brexit. Am I the only one to have been flummoxed by the report in *The Times* this week of a Senior Government lawyer who blamed the pressures of Brexit work for his conviction of “upskirting” on the London Underground? I don't recall this coming up in the Referendum Campaign.

Man-of-the-Match: It was a job to drag Man-of-the-Match votes out of the players today but in the end, after all President Trump's appeals were rejected, Santa's favourite elf today, and the winner of a Barbara Windsor autographed brassiere, was found to be Sinisa Gracanin.

The European Tours

Farnborough Old Boys Guild Senior Vets Tour to Tongeren, Belgium 25-28 May 2017

The venue was Zwembad De Zeemeeuw (Swimming Pool the Seagull), Tripelenweg 14, 37770 Millen. There were three full-size grass pitches in excellent condition and the requisite supporting facilities, changing rooms, showers, toilets, parking, first aid, a huge beer tent, BBQ, marquees, live musicians etc. The whole event was billed as an International Football Happening with dozens of Vets teams, including several from England. Matches were played over two days, from midday until 9 PM. The whole operation for this annual event was very well run.

Phil Anthony was Tour Organiser; Mick O'Flynn was Tour Manager and Peter Harvey was Tour Captain. The Tour Company was Phoenix Tours and the Coach Driver was Hitesh Patel.

Theme tune

It was fitting that the theme tune for this European adventure was the UEFA Champions League anthem – even if the whole point of it was to remind Arsenal fan Steve Blanchard that his European games will be on Thursday nights next season. I think, though, Steve had the last laugh on Saturday. This theme tune was written by English composer Tony Britten in 1992, as a serious classical piece, heavily influenced by Handel's Zadok the Priest. The recording used in the television transmissions was performed by the London Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and sung by the Academy of St Martin in the Fields Chorus. We used the version performed on the recorder by Nicholas Michael.

Accommodation

We stayed at the Eburon Hotel, an establishment which Trip Advisor rated the best hotel in Tongeren. The building had an airy, monastic feel. It had been originally the Sint-Jacob's guesthouse, established in the second half of the 12th Century as an inn for pilgrims on the road to Santiago de Compostella. Now it has Schindler's lifts. It also had an interesting way of promoting its bar with an invitation to "try to alternate our blackout times so we can piece together our nights". This was sound advice which a drinker of Red Bull and vodka should have heeded.

Tour Party



Back row, left to right:

Colin Brazier, Patrice Mongelard, Barry Summers, Ian Lyons, Ian Coles, Steve Palmer, Danny Mullins, Colin Mant, Peter Harvey

Front row, left to right:

Steve Blanchard, Phil Anthony, Mick O'Flynn, George Kleanthous, Ian Henderson, Kypros Michael, Sinisa Gracanin

The party of sixteen players was a combination of (mostly) FOBG Senior Vets, CENT YMCA Vets and players who have played for both teams this season. We all wore especially designed polo shirts with the Farnborough badge and (on the back) nicknames of our choice.

The room pairings (and player nicknames) were as follows:

- Phil Anthony (Sniper) – Ian Lyons (Lionel)
- Colin Brazier (Biggles) – Steve Palmer (Palmer)
- Ian Coles (Male Model) – Steve Blanchard (Shaggy)
- Mick O'Flynn (The Filth) – Patrice Mongelard (Intellectual)
- Sinisa Gracanin (Sidney) – Ian Henderson (Hendo)
- George Kleanthous (Zorba) – Danny Mullins (Mullins)
- Kypros Michael (Kyp) – Peter Harvey (Great Big Hampton)
- Barry Summers (Bazza) – Colin Mant (Aardvark)

Getting there (25 May)

There was a serious danger of running out of beer on the coach, on our way to the Eurotunnel terminal such was the traffic on the M20. But we made it to the bar in the terminal where more refreshments were available. One of us, who will remain nameless, had six beers on only three peanuts. I blanched at the idea. There was greater danger of death by Phil Anthony's jokes – sample "How does the rabbi make coffee? Answer: He brews it". As often happens, getting there seemed to take longer – the train delay did not help, it was dark for much of the time, there were two pit stops and the satnavs on our phones did not always agree with the one our driver Hitesh was using. But we got there safely.

The matches – three in two days, with games 1 and 2 played consecutively on 26 May, and game 3 on 27 May, in 30° C+ temperatures

I "They don't like it up them"

We were up against the Union Sportive Fontoy from France. We were fired up for this one – must have been the French team singing in the changing rooms. We were all over them and really should have been 2-0 or 3-0 up by half-time. Kypros Michael and Peter Harvey had good chances which they could not finish whilst Kypros did his bit for the Paphos Taxi Drivers Betting Syndicate by rounding the keeper and hitting the post from a yard out. George Kleanthous gave us the lead we deserved towards the end of the first half. He intercepted a pass on the edge of the box, advanced towards a French defence that surrendered and parted like the Red Sea before curling a low shoot into the bottom corner. We needed to defend well for the rest of the game to keep our clean sheet. Barry Summers' scything actions could have been punished more severely but the referee made Mick Gearing look like a spring chicken. We held on, sacrificing finesse for muscle, to win 1-0.

II "Merci Monsieur Blanchard"

There was hardly any time before our second game was upon us. There was enough time though for four or five of our opponents in our earlier game to join another French team, F.C. Mirebellois Vétérans, to have another crack at us. Those of you who follow our games will know we have some own goal specialists in our midst. The Blanchard-Palmer combination did not disappoint. Steve Palmer called for an incoming cross did not get to it before Steve Blanchard applied his head with purpose and guided the ball expertly beyond our out of position keeper. We thought we broke through twice from within our half but were harshly called back for dubious off-sides by the Portuguese referee. After half-time we equalised with a trademark Paphos Express run from Kypros Michael driving deep into the box and finishing low into the bottom corner. We fell behind in the last quarter of the game after Steve Blanchard was deemed to have brought a French attacker down in the box. The penalty was scuffed, almost saved by Steve Palmer, but went in to give the French a 2-1 lead that they held to the end.

III “Next time bring your dads and granddads”

Our third match was the most eventful. After Steve Palmer refereed a game, we took on a team of local lads, FC Wrakken – and I mean lads, in their early twenties who had replaced a Dutch team in the programme. But this was no mismatch. We took the lead in the second minute when Kypros Michael finished emphatically with a close-range volley after Danny Mullins had flicked on an Ian Lyons throw-in. We held our own for most of the half until the introduction of substitutes. A not fully fit Phil Anthony had sliced a clearance in the wrong direction, and Barry Summers took out his own keeper to set up a tap-in for the opposition. We then had a moment of confusion when Sinisa Gracanin went missing in action – he had to go off to the big tent to do a massive one as he had not been for three days. Early in the second half the youngsters took the lead. One of their big lads got his head to the ball from a corner which Steve Palmer palmed on to the post, and onto Colin Brazier’s head and we had scored our second own goal in two games. We were not out of it – we earned a penalty which Kypros undercooked but a surprisingly awake Lee Henderson was on the scene to convert the rebound from close range. Kypros tried to claim that his boot hit the ball too at exactly the same time as Lee’s did – an interesting one for the bookies I thought. After yet another Barry Summers foul the Belgians edged ahead from the resulting free-kick. And that was it.

Remembrance

On the way back to England Mick O’Flynn – who knows his military cemeteries, led the tour party to pay tribute to the fallen in the Adinkerke Military Cemetery. The ages of the soldiers recorded on the headstones were not much older than those of the Belgian team we played.

Gifts (apart from the own goals)

We took club pennants for our opposition, to be handed over by a smiling Peter Harvey. The first French team we played gave us a bottle of Mirabelle de Lorraine – a 45% yellow plum liqueur which they insisted we sipped before the start of the game in the centre circle. The Belgian team gave us a bottle of something called Lummense Kastelenborrel (if I recall correctly) – a sort of local liqueur made from heather, pine cones and blueberries.

On the way back Mick O’Flynn presented Phil Anthony with a little something as a thank you for organising the tour. There was also a well-deserved collection for our driver, Hitesh.

Tour Awards

In the bar where we watched the FA Cup Final, we held our tour award ceremony. The winners were:

Players’ Player of the Tour – Danny Mullins
European Golden Boot – Kypros Michael
Managers’ Player of the Tour – Steve Palmer

No man left behind

This was not strictly true because not everyone came back. We paused at Brussels Airport to deposit Barry Summers there as he was catching a flight to Barcelona for a family half term holiday. I will not reveal what was said after he left the coach, but the idea that he would manage to catch his flight to Barcelona, or have his passport with him, seemed fanciful.

Symmetry

The tour started with a pint in the Woodman in Farnborough Village and ended the same way. Similarly, we had a bit of bother when we got to the hotel through no fault of ours, when one of our nine allocated rooms was found to be occupied. Belgian hospitality came under strain as we were leaving too.

Things could have turned ugly when Barry Summers and Colin Mant found someone sleeping in their room (Room 241) at 2 AM but the hotel management commended us for the way we dealt with the situation. Barry used a camp bed in Peter Harvey and Kypros Michael's room – after heavy use of the toilet a couple of feet from Peter's head. Mant slept on the floor in Ian Coles' and Steve Blanchard's room. After a rough night he was not quite himself the next morning, as he rolled off a pouffe in the hotel lobby. It was all sorted though and we got a free round of beers and a bottle of bubbly from the hotel for the inconvenience.

Things could have turned even uglier when we found our coach boxed in by two vehicles with churlish owners refusing to move so we could leave. In their view we had encroached on space designated for them to set out their stall of second-hand furniture for the Sunday morning Antiques market – which is a huge event in Tongeren. They did not want us there, thought we should not be there, but were quite happy to keep us there until 8:30 PM, until the end of the market. Thankfully, Steve Blanchard and our "Goodwill Ambassador" Peter Harvey smoothed things over and our driver Hitesh extricated us skilfully with only the depth of a Belgian peasant's cupboard to play with. With all the Nazi memorabilia on sale in the market, I felt these Belgians could have been better disposed toward a coachload of Brits.

Other Tour highlights

We shared cold showers with our French opponents, an experience which was much appreciated by Mick O'Flynn.

Steve Palmer's 49th birthday – and he bought a round, and got an own goal as a present from Steve Blanchard.

Colin Brazier joined the WhatsApp generation. In fact, WhatsApp came in very useful to keep the tour party informed and reasonably synchronised (except Barry) and post pictures – even if some players were not always clear who was running things and whose team it was. Colin Mant was not on WhatsApp but it did not matter on the first night, at least, as he did not have a room.

By George, we saw what happens when a lot of Red Bull and vodka overwhelm a West Ham fan with decades of frustration against London sides, all sides in fact.

In the main town square, we saw what the 80s pop group Bananarama will look like in fifty years in time, on a night out. Some of the lads were very kind to the elderly, until 4:30 AM allegedly.

Discovering the Cafe au Phare in the main town square – with over 130 Belgian beers, colour and flavour-coded and strength-rated. Not many tried the Rochefort 10 at 11.3%.

Tour Quotes

There is a beer for the reader who can attribute the highest number of the following quotes correctly:

"We are all characters"

"Lads, I have found the Irish pasta bar"

"Did it take long to rebuild Tongeren after the war?"

"Would you like to see a picture of my Porsche?"

"Actually, he drives an Austin Allegro"

"I don't like vodka"

"At what point does that man stop being a liability?"

"Manty, say hello to the family"

"Where is my passport?"

"Where is Barry?"

"Who is Barry?"

"That man is polishing his helmet"

"What was the West Ham/Spurs score in their last match? What was it? What waaaaaaaaaas it" (insert gagging and frothing sound effects)

(Editor's note, for a broader historical perspective - Spurs and West Ham have played each other 205 times, with 92 Spurs wins, 62 West Ham wins and 51 draws)

Getting back (28 May)

We came through the tunnel at about 3:45 (local time) with "The boys are back in town" playing. It was raining cats and dogs on the motorway but the journey seemed to take much less time than we expected. Peter Harvey knew he was back in England when he lost his broadband connection.

What goes on tour stays on tour

I wish I could tell you more. If I did, I would be banned from next year's tour. Mrs M already thinks that as a pensioner I am going to have to cut-back, and picking up bad habits from others on tour, like eating and drinking too much, will not help my case.

Farnborough Old Boys Guild Senior Vets Tour to Lille, France - 25-28 May 2018

Phil Anthony was Tour Organiser, Mick O'Flynn Tour Manager and Peter Harvey Tour Captain. The Tour Company was Burleigh Travel Limited (Sports Tour Specialists). The Coach Driver was Eddie the Baggie, after we discarded the feeder driver just before boarding the train at the Eurotunnel.

Theme tune

For the second year running the theme tune for this European adventure was the UEFA Champions League anthem. This theme tune was written by English composer Tony Britten in 1992, as a serious classical piece, heavily influenced by Handel's Zadok the Priest. The recording used in the television transmissions was performed by the London Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and sung by the Academy of St Martin in the Fields Chorus. The version we used was a version played on a recorder, with the special property of getting under one's skin. I thought it was funny last year, the point being to remind Arsenal fan Steve Blanchard that his European games would be on Thursday nights in the coming season. This year it was less funny, to me at least, as it was played by a sadist (who will remain nameless and who supports the best team in London) on and on, and on, to remind me of Liverpool's defeat to Real Madrid.

Accommodation

We stayed at the Hotel Ibis Styles, in the heart of Lille, on a bed and continental breakfast basis. I am pleased to report that this year there was a bed for everyone – including for the two players who made their own way to the hotel. The big lobby/breakfast room afforded a good view of the street. This gave passers-by a good view of our tour shirts and in Phil Anthony's case it was on view for all four days. There was an Indian restaurant and a small supermarket across the road. The hotel cocktail bar was on the bijou side and ran out of beer on the first night. There was a table football table in the lobby which I was advised to study closely as an example of a back four playing in unison and keeping a good line.

Tour Party



Back row, left to right:

Steve Blanchard, Ian Lyons, Jim Grimley, Colin Mant, Gary Fentiman, Peter Harvey, Ian Coles, Paul Zanelli, Pete Milcoy, Jason Yardley

Front row, left to right:

Andy White, Kypros Michael, Phil Anthony, Patrice Mongelard, George Kleanthous, Sinisa Gracanin, Mick O'Flynn, Vijay Patel, Colin Brazier

The party of nineteen players was a combination of thirteen FOBG Senior Vets, four CENT YMCA Vets and two Bird in Hand Vets (and no they were not two birds who played Vets football). Most of us wore especially designed polo shirts with the Farnborough badge and (on the back) nicknames of our choice. The only thing that was understated about the shirts was the white embroidery on a yellow background.

The room pairings (and player nicknames where applicable) were as follows:

- Phil Anthony (Sniper) – Gary Fentiman (Photoshoot)
- Colin Brazier (Biggles) – Colin Mant (Sausage Boy)
- Ian Coles (Male Model) – Steve Blanchard (Shaggy)
- Sinisa Gracanin (Sidney) – George Kleanthous (Zorba)
- Ian Lyons (Lionel) – Jim Grimley (Lamarr)
- Kypros Michael (Kyp) – Peter Harvey (G.B.H)
- Mick O'Flynn (Saleté) – Patrice Mongelard (Intellectuel)
- Andy White (Blanco) – Pete Milcoy (Milcoy)
- Paul Zanelli – Jason Yardley
- Vijay Patel (McRaoji)

Getting there (25 May)

We set off early, and surprisingly only 15 minutes late, at 6:15 am. George Kleanthous caused the delay by having to go back for his wallet. There was no time to open the Farnborough club bar and, of course, at that time of day the adjacent Woodman pub was shut. We had been warned not to attempt to drink alcohol on the coach. The toilet on the coach was needed only

once, by Mick O'Flynn who experienced difficulty getting out of it. A female Border Police Officer with latex gloves checked us out before we slipped into the tunnel.

The matches

There were three matches in three days, in generally hot and humid conditions, in contrasting venues and against three very different teams. We played the US Lesquin at 19:30 on the 25th, Spartak Lillois at 10:45 on the 26th and J.S Lille Wazemmes at 18:00 on the 27th.

I Is your name Zidane? (2-4)



The Union Sportive Lesquin club had without any shadow of a doubt the best natural grass pitch any of us had ever played on. They were watering it as we arrived. I was told this was done in order to suit their 'technical players'. The stadium had changing rooms under the main stand, it had railings all round and an electronic scoreboard. The club had teams in every age group between six and nineteen, two senior sides and two Veterans teams. I was informed that the Brighton player Anthony Knockaert came from their academy. The Vets team we came up against not only had younger Vets but it had an ex professional player who had played over 200 games for Lens in the top tier of French football. He could pass for Zinedine Zidane's brother, and played like him.

We lost 4-2 with Kypros Michael scoring our goals, both assisted by Peter Harvey. It was only 2-0 at half-time. We were 2-0 down after a quarter of an hour and could even have taken the lead had Peter Harvey's first attempt on goal not drifted narrowly wide. We got back to 2-1, then the gap increased to 3-1 before we got another. We even had a great chance to draw level but were undone by a lightning break from a Farnborough corner. We used all nineteen players. Steve Blanchard came off injured after a quarter of an hour and did not play again. Our keeper Gary Fentiman sustained a small cut under his eye after diving at a striker's feet in the 85th minute, and was replaced by Colin Mant who could claim, and did, ad nauseam, to have kept the only clean sheet of the tour.

The après-match hospitality was great – cold beers, French bread, barbecued sausages. We even had a burly French Traffic Police Officer in our midst who threatened, jokingly, to breathalise the lot of us. I say jokingly because he revealed he was a director of the club and had finished his shift and had dropped by on the way home. Under the influence of drink Phil Anthony revealed that on the form for the tour company he had described the Farnborough Old Boys Guild Senior Vets as a high-quality Vets team that had won many tournaments. He is not filling the form on his own next year.

II Are you going to tackle? (3-1)

This was a different experience – artificial pitch, more modest facilities, barely any of our opponents over thirty years of age and it appears unused to playing 11-a-side. We had been informed that that they did not play with a referee as all their games were played in the spirit of football. However, for their protection from football à l’Anglaise we insisted that Jim Grimley – a qualified referee, did the first half. Phil Anthony – an unqualified comedian, did the second in sunglasses. We are used to tantric refereeing for our games but Jim took it to a higher level by not having the use of a whistle. A whistle was found for Phil for the second half which he used only once, I seem to recall, to give a foul throw against Ian Lyons. As we were about to kick off I was asked by one of the Spartak Lillois players if we were going to tackle. It was unfortunate that the same player ran into my studs later in the game. To my chagrin he was unconvinced that it was accidental.

We took the lead quite early on through a Kypros Michael special, assisted by George Kleanthous. We thought we would extend our lead when Jim Grimley awarded a penalty against a Spartak defender for taking away Andy White’s leg from under him. He then changed his mind having been persuaded that Andy’s studs got caught in the laces of the defender or it might have been his laces in the defender’s studs. Barely five minutes later Andy took a Spartak attacker roughly from behind and the Spartak equaliser followed from the spot.

The insertion of Peter Harvey gave us more thrust. Peter went on to score two splendid goals and was denied what would have been a vintage hat-trick by a finger tip save from the keeper who diverted the shot onto the angle of bar and post. Other players came close to scoring including a marauding Mick O’Flynn who was inches away from a happy outcome, and Kypros Michael who beat three players late on before stumbling into his shot against the post. We used eighteen players, while injured Steve Blanchard worked on his cruise holiday perma-tan. Cold beers went down a treat in the midday sun.

III Algeria versus geriatrics (7-8)

Many of the locals were Real Madrid fans and Mick O’Flynn helpfully tipped them off about the team I support. I was greeted with chants of “Madrid! Madrid!” To one of our players this sounded a bit like “Patrice! Patrice!”, and he was momentarily impressed by my global appeal. Still, the locals appreciated my quip that Sergio Ramos would not be visiting the Pyramids anytime soon, unless the Egyptians built one with him in it. The scoring was frantic – we were a goal down after two minutes. This is how it went: 0-1, 1-1, 1-2, 1-3, 2-3, 3-3, 3-4, 3-5, half-time, 4-5, 4-6, 5-6, 6-6, 6-7, 6-8, 7-8.

This was our third game in three days and it showed. The artificial pitch was enormous. We were down to 15 players and we under-estimated our canny opponents. Steve Blanchard and Ian Lyons were injured, whilst midfield dynamos Andy White and Pete Milcoy had gone home. Kypros Michael scored five goals including three headers (could have had ten) and Peter Harvey helped himself to a brace including a penalty. Cold beers and French baguettes with cheese were made available.

Remembrance

On our tour last year, we visited Adinkerke Military Cemetery. This year too we remembered the fallen. Like last year I was struck by the thought that here we were in Europe to play football while others had gone there to fight wars and lose their lives. Many were not older than the players we came up against. I know what I prefer, and you could argue that others fought wars so that those who came after them could play football. So, it felt right to remember them.

At the Canadian National Vimy Memorial a keen-eyed Ian Lyons took some moving pictures of the Memorial designed by Canadian sculptor and architect Walter Seymour Allward, including of some young Canadians who were paying their respects to their fallen countrymen.

"Sniper" Anthony went into the trenches. The young Canadian students who staff the Visitor Centre will have been struck by the uncanny resemblance between Phil Anthony and a Canadian Inuit. Many Indigenous Canadian soldiers served with distinction, and from their ranks came the best elite snipers.

We also visited the Arras Memorial to lay a wreath to remember the 34,785 British, and Commonwealth soldiers who died in the Arras sector between the spring of 1917 and the summer of 1918. The wreath was laid by Farnborough Old Boys Guild Veterans in the form of Ian Coles and Colin Brazier. In Arras we also made time to go underground into the Wellington tunnels, built largely by New Zealanders and used by thousands of British soldiers to get behind German lines in 1917.

Gifts (no own goals this time)

We took club pennants and FOBG scarves for our opponents. These were handed over by a smiling Peter Harvey. In addition, we handed over three of our match balls to the club who hosted us on the Sunday. We could not help notice that some local youngsters were playing with football that had seen better days.

On the coach back Mick O'Flynn presented Phil Anthony with a little something as a thank you for organising the tour. The present which Mick had in mind for Phil could not be purchased by Kypros Michael. Kypros had one job to do (apart from scoring eight goals). I suspect Kyp would have been deemed under-age to purchase the item. Mick will get it when he goes back to the area in a fortnight.

There was also a well-deserved collection for our driver, Eddie the Baggie, and a Farnborough scarf to inject a bit of football chic in the Midlands. As a West Brom fan, Eddie would have been happier driving Aston Villa fans back after the Play-Off final on Saturday, but he enjoyed our company and the games. He thought we were angels compared with some of the tour parties he had taken over to Europe. For example, we did not all emerge from the coach naked (only some did – joke!).

Tour Awards

In the lobby/bar we held our tour award ceremony on our final evening.

The winners were:

Players' Player of the Tour – Gary Fentiman, who got fewer votes than the number of goals he conceded (but still more votes than anyone else).

European Golden Boot – Kypros Michael, who was on fire, and not for the first time this week.

Managers' Player of the Tour – Jim Grimley, who rescinded a penalty decision in our favour, and awarded a penalty against us in a space of five minutes.

There was one further award. I do not recall what it was for but I won it. It had the silhouette of "Big Ears" on it – another bitter pill to swallow.

No man left behind

This was not strictly true because not everyone came back together. Four left early. Andy White and Peter Milcoy travelled back on Sunday morning. Paul Zanelli and Jason Yardley drove back on Monday.

Cultural differences /Language barriers

You always get moments on tour when cultural differences or language barriers create mildly amusing situations. Last year we had Kypros Michael ordering a quickie instead of a quiche in a Belgian restaurant. This year it happened underground, in the Wellington quarry/tunnel and involved the word 'helmet', guaranteed to induce tittering in schoolboys and footballers. This is how it went:

Female French tour guide: *"Look up and hold on to your helmets"*

Steve Blanchard (three seconds later): *"Oops, wrong helmet"*

Other Tour highlights

I cannot say it was the Champions League Final. But on the same day we were able to witness a socio-political event which is rare under our system. I refer of course to a political march/demonstration so common in France. Saturday was a big day for anti-Macron protests. Trades unionists, SNCF workers, public sector workers, refugees and asylum seekers, the unwashed all seemed to be in it.

Phil Anthony's jokes were as expected. Here is a sample:

- What do you call a fat psychic? Answer: A four-chin teller.
- Patient: Doctor I think I am going deaf. Doctor: Which ear is it? Patient: 2018

Tour Quotes

There is a beer for the reader who can attribute the highest number of the following quotes correctly:

I have plenty of lube

I was expecting something bigger

They are marching for better showers

Pat, look there is a saga coach over there

We should go on Segway football tour next year

Why haven't India won the football World Cup?

Who dropped their guts in the tunnel?

No melted cheese on my burger please. I don't like the word melt.

Don't put your head in your hands (Karius) you'll drop it

Getting back (28 May)

We took the opportunity of an earlier crossing than planned. There was no time to visit the tunnel terminal for a bit of shopping. Peter Harvey knew he was back in England when he lost his broadband connection. There was time for a swift half in the club.

What goes on tour stays on tour

I wish I could tell you more. If I did, I would be banned from next year's tour. Mrs M has already queried two crafty references I made to next year's tour within half an hour of getting home, whilst noting that I did not bring back the big box of chocolates I had promised.

Farnborough Old Boys Guild Senior Vets Tour to Rotterdam:

24-27 May 2019

Phil Anthony was Tour Organiser, Mick O'Flynn Tour Manager and Peter Harvey Tour Captain. The Tour Company was once again Burleigh Travel Limited (Sports Tour Specialists). The Coach Driver was Bill Houston, ex-Army – all order and efficiency and a very helpful presence who kept us well drilled.

Theme tune – only briefly

The UEFA Champions League tune (written by English composer Tony Britten in 1992, as a serious classical piece, heavily influenced by Handel's Zadok the Priest) was played only once for those set to enjoy Thursday night football next season. The recording used in the television transmissions is performed by the London Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and sung by the Academy of St Martin in the Fields Chorus. The version we use on tour is played on a recorder, with the special property of getting under the skins of Arsenal, and especially Man Utd fans.

Rotterdam

Rotterdam is the second largest city in the Netherlands. It is Europe's largest port, enjoying extensive rail, road and waterway links with the rest of Europe. It has a population of about 650,000, and so it seemed to us, as many bicycles, but only three cash points. The city was nearly completely destroyed in WWII. Its rebuilding produced fairly unique architecture for a Dutch City, namely the presence of many sky-scrapers. Some of us thought that it was not always evident with this bold, modern architecture whether buildings had been finished, or put up straight.

For footballers Rotterdam is primarily known as the home of Feyenoord. They were the first Dutch club to win the European Cup (now Champions League) in 1970.

Accommodation

We stayed at the Hotel Milano in Rotterdam <https://www.hotelmilano.nl/en/> We feel sure the name of the hotel has a football connection because Milan is where Feyenoord won the 1970 European Cup final beating Celtic 2-1 after extra time.

I was in the geriatric ward with Colin Brazier and Mick O'Flynn. For reasons that are best left unexplained Peter Harvey was in what he called the maternity ward. Joe Skinner was in the ward for those with very serious undiagnosed digestive disorders.

Split level floors caused Colin Brazier to stub his right toe on the first morning. He must have wished he was Roberto Brazier, because his toe woes were not over.

Tour Party



Back row, left to right:

Ian Lyons, Mick O'Flynn, Peter Harvey, Jay Hardy, Michael Daniels, Gary Fentiman, Joe Skinner, Ian Coles

Front row, left to right:

Jim Grimley, Steve Blanchard, Colin Brazier, Vijay Patel, Phil Anthony, Patrice Mongelard

The party of fourteen players shared rooms thus:

- Michael Daniels / Gary Fentiman / Joe Skinner
- Phil Anthony / Steve Blanchard / Ian Coles / Vijay Patel
- Jim Grimley / Jay Hardy / Peter Harvey / Ian Lyons
- Colin Brazier / Mick O'Flynn / Patrice Mongelard

We missed a trick this year by not having tour shirts. The colour orange would have been stunning. Some of us had shirts from our 2017 and 2018 tours.

Getting there (24 May)

This was largely uneventful. We noted the presence of many teenagers of babysitting age on the ferry, going away with schools for half term trips. We barely noticed the smooth EU transition through France, Belgium and then Holland. The wisdom of beer consumption was challenged by the time between available stops. A particularly long gap allied with speed bumps and the sight of full Dutch irrigation channels demanded a supreme mind over matter effort. When relief eventually came the future impact on nearby trees will not surprise dendrologists.

Game 1 – We had them worried, briefly

Farnborough Old Boys Guild Senior Vets 3 – FC's Gravenzande 5

Our first opposition at 12:45 on Saturday 25 May were FC'S Gravenzande
<https://www.fcsgravenzande.nl/>



This was a very impressive operation. The eye was met by sizeable terraces, electronic scoreboards, more advertising hoardings than tulip varieties, a huge offer to the local community, teams in several age groups, women's teams, artificial pitches, grass pitches, five-a-side pitches, vast car parks. A £6 million grant from the state, had made this possible ten years ago. The immaculate playing surface would suit our technical players, I thought, except we did not have any. A Junior team (under 13s) were playing as we got there. The writing was huge on the wall – 'sekshy' football, one touch, pass and move, feints, flicks, two-footed players, cultured left feet, care of the ball. The left-back was not having a good day, noted Colin Brazier in a prophetic voice. I heard later that the referee was an undertaker, very apt I thought as they must bury a lot of teams there.

We had the temerity to take a 2-0 lead with two beauties, both left foot strikes from Peter Harvey. We had our left-footed wizard too. The first after ten minutes was a sweetly struck free-kick in the postage stamp. Five minutes later we doubled our lead. Ian Lyons was adamant that he made a 40-yard dash to link up with Jim Grimley and set up Peter Harvey for the second goal and that Peter had given the assist the finish it deserved – a caress of a left foot that floated the ball to the other top corner above and beyond a static keeper. Then tragedy struck. Colin Brazier stubbed his other toe on an aggressive divot, his foot got stuck, he held the pose, the ball left him and was recycled quickly to make it 2-1.

Changes made on the half-hour disturbed our rhythm a little but we were still able to restore our two-goal lead with a crisp Jay Hardy strike, another for the top corner, after a penetrating run from Peter Harvey. Before half-time, however, we were undone by that traditional English weapon, a long ball over the top and 3-2 it became. The Dutch equaliser was not long in coming in the second half. Two more goals for the home side left us much aggrieved by their manner, balls behind our defence to profit from poor positional play and concentration. We did not really create a chance of note in the second half. Yet we did not feel, despite initial fears, that we had been outclassed (well not as much as we would be in our second game).

Game 2 – “Dutch score 9”

Farnborough Old Boys Guild Senior Vets 3 – SV Slikkerveer 7

Our second opposition at 11:00 on Sunday 26 May were SV Slikkerveer <http://www.svslikkerveer.nl/> Here too we encountered superb facilities on a similarly impressive scale with huge community support.

In years to come there will be a Farnborough pub quiz question about how the Dutch could score nine of the goals in this ten-goal game without own goals. The answer, of course, is that we had a Dutch player and he scored twice. Ken Bahadoer – a Dutchman encountered in a bar the day before had turned up, as he promised. After a few drinks, and in dim lighting, he must have looked like Ruud Gullit. He had the build, the pigmentation, the swagger, the smile and easy manner. But he did not have the hair. With hair he would surely have scored three headers all from a yard out - two crosses on a plate from Peter Harvey and Joe Skinner in the first half, and a corner in the game’s dying moments from Peter Harvey.

We were like the Walking Dead. We were 4-0 down fifteen minutes after the team photo – all the goals scored from inside the six-yard box. It looked like they could walk the ball into our net. Yet, we put a finger in the dyke. Peter Harvey and Jay Hardy set Ken up for two close-range goals (and he could have had more). Peter Harvey got our third to give us hope at half-time. Gary Fentiman was immense, producing some stupendous reflex saves to keep us in touch with our opponents as we nibbled at their lead. They say that in football it is hope that hurts most. I would be lying if I said we hoped to win the game. We had seen enough quality already to rule that out and whilst another English miracle against a Dutch side over there was not on, we hoped to compete.

The second half was tough. Dutch football intelligence came up with a plan to neutralise our best players. We had trouble getting out of our half. More goals followed, inevitably for them, but not until the last quarter of the game. At times we were going down like skittles. Midfield domino Jim Grimley inexplicably went horizontal with no one within ten yards of him. Dehydration took its toll – at one point a bottle of water meant for Jay Hardy to soothe his bruised ankle was intercepted and drained by Colin Brazier (overheating in his David Bellamy beard). Joe Skinner drew two great saves from the opposition keeper with long range shots. Their keeper was no mug as Peter Harvey found out when his penalty (a dubious award) was saved with about five minutes left. Perhaps Peter’s mind was troubled by his exchange with the referee immediately before which went like this: Peter: *“We don’t want a penalty”*/ Ref: *“We are giving you one”*/ Peter: *“What about a penalty?”*. The referee blew the final whistle thirty seconds after Phil Anthony came on for the second time. It was an act of mercy. I had left the pitch way before then with injury.

Remembrance

Sadly, this year our itinerary precluded a visit to a military cemetery, unlike our previous two tours. But in a spirit of remembrance, we should reflect on what went wrong on our campaign. The main lesson to draw is that we cannot go on tours with fewer than 15 fit players. The teams we played this time could not be said to be younger than us. Yes, they were technically superior, quicker, sharper, took better care of the ball, had many substitutes, were on home turf etc. But what really made the difference was that they had had a good night’s sleep and were fully hydrated.

Gifts (no own goals this time)

We took club pennants for our opponents. These were handed over by a smiling Peter Harvey. On the coach back Mick O'Flynn presented Phil Anthony with a little something as a thank you for organising the tour, and for not telling any jokes this time round. There was also a well-deserved collection for our driver, our Director of Logistics, and he got a Farnborough pennant too.

Tour Awards

Players' Player of the Tour – Peter Harvey, who emerged above some voting anomalies to add to his trophy cabinet (something he wishes the team he supports would do).

European Golden Boot – Peter Harvey – with three goals in two matches, so worried at one point that the trophy might have to stay in Holland that he used his right foot to score his third goal.

Managers' Player of the Tour – Joe Skinner – a dead ringer for the bearded protagonist in a well-thumbed 1972 seminal book by Dr Alex Comfort.

No man left behind

This was not strictly true because not everyone came back together. Vijay Patel left us on Sunday morning, after a memorable appearance in our Saturday game. Barry Summers (a mythical character from our 2017 Tour) left us in the lurch for our second game despite being only ten minutes away. And he was supposed to bring two more players with him. It was worse than Dutch leave.

Cultural differences

You always get moments on tour when cultural differences or language barriers create mildly amusing or awkward situations. One of our party went into a Rotterdam Coffee Shop (one of those with the flowering herb logo) to ask for a cappuccino, allegedly. More seriously, Mick O'Flynn was tipped off that in Dutch the letters MoF on his tour shirt were an insulting term for a German person (and in Afrikaans it meant homosexual). He wore something else on Day 2. A Dutch road trip with his personalised number plate would be brave. I do not think the gay Nazi look would suit Mick but others might disagree.

Comedy moments of the Tour

We had many of those. There was great mirth when Phil Anthony revealed that he obtained his UEFA B coaching badge about eighteen years ago. But this was nothing compared with watching a tired and emotional Phil grapple with a sliding door, for what seemed an eternity, in slow motion, looking for a handle to turn, twist, push or pull, despite a large arrow on the door. It was a Jiminy Cricket does Frank Spencer moment. Phil was also unlucky in the beauty contest that was hastily arranged to determine if the waitress in the restaurant we had dinner on our last evening had taken a shine to him. She chose a large brown pepper mill over him. Nor could she choose Ian Lyons because she said he looked like her uncle.

The award of the prestigious Wanker Hat – always a high point, was decided in the changing room just before our first game. Gary Fentiman was bouncing the ball with force and speed against the wall, and catching it to show his superb hand to eye co-ordination. The ball hit one of the metal coat hooks and rebounded in his face.

Finally, I suppose I ought to mention the moment when the lads spotted a photo of a man on the wall in the club house at SVS Slikkerveer that looked very much like me. Mrs M found the photo spooky, not least as it had been taken in the 1960s.

Tour Quotes

It's just like West Croydon here.

Did you know that Holland has the tallest dentists in the world per capita?

Pat, look there is a saga coach over there (same as last year, and same source)

Jay – You're not looking too clever mate.

The best footballers are left-footed.

My face needs a drink.

Phil is a victim of the palm oil industry.

It looks a bit Hollandy outside.

Driver, thank you for making a lot of men very happy.

Be normal.

Does anyone know how much I drank last night? Nor do I.

Other Tour highlights

On our first night a Millwall fan outside a bar invited us to “Come in if you think you are hard enough”. It had to be one of them and of all the bars in Rotterdam Mick O’Flynn had to walk past that one. Their duet of Millwall terrace ditties was excruciating. Like most Dutch people he spoke such good English that we were unsure if he was an expat or not. He claimed to have visited 92 football grounds in England, and described Upton Park as a shithole.

Getting back (27 May)

We took the opportunity of an earlier crossing than planned. This meant an 8:30 start but we were back at the club in Farnborough just after 4 pm. We even had time to visit a duty-free emporium not far from the port of Calais for those all-important goodies for loved ones (please let us tour again next year). Dog lover Jay Hardy took a particular interest in the movements of a sniffer dog while we waited to embark – and with reason, we saw two illegal immigrants processed out of the back of a lorry. There was also time for some to have a traditional swift end of tour half in the club.

What goes on tour stays on tour

I wish I could tell you more about what went on, but not here and not now. Catch me at the next Farnborough Old Boys Guild Quiz Night and I will probably reveal more.

Bonus Features

Farnborough Old Boys Guild Veterans XI: the Originals (1989-90)

(This article was written in 2014, and first published in the match programme for the FOBG First XI match against Bredhurst Juniors on Saturday 19 April 2014 (Issue No 14, 2013-14)). FOBG published match programmes for three seasons – 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14.



Back row, left to right:

Steve Diamond, Glyn Farrell, Colin Baldwin, John Lincoln, Dick Barton, Phil Monk

Middle row, left to right:

Graeme Moir, Kevin Wolstencroft, Clive Tarling, Mick Gearing

Front row, left to right:

Ray Tanton, Roger Lee

Today the Guild's Vets scene is vibrant, with two Vets teams each playing around thirty-five matches every season. We are into our fifth consecutive season with two Vets sides, and we have played Vets friendlies for twenty-four consecutive seasons. Patrice Mongelard, holder of the club record for appearances as a Vet, 430, since November 1996 and still counting, takes a close look back at the original FOBG Vets side in its inaugural season, through the club Newsletters of the 1989-90 season, and the match reports written by Vic Farrow, whose voice we can hear again.

Newsletter No1 for 1989-90 recorded that the newly formed Vets Team, managed by John Lincoln who had been 'persuaded' to do the job, had 16 fixtures for the coming season. It said "All games are on private grounds with Bar for socialising after the game (an important part of Vets football). Games are all on Sunday morning, kick off 10:30 am, usually 40 minutes each way, foul play is rare, no over the top tackles, no bad language, no earache through the match."

Stories of the season

Start with a bang

The FOBG Vets first match against Addington Manor was a 3-1 win, with all three Guild goals scored by Glyn Farrell. The squad for this historic fixture consisted of: John Cattigan, Roger Crouch, Paul Dabner, Alan Donnelly, Dave Edwards, Glyn Farrell, Mick Gearing, Mick Haywood, Roger Lee, John Lincoln, Tony Loveridge, Steve Mann, Steve Melbourne, Graeme Moir and John Pereira. (Cattigan, Crouch, Dabner and Donnelly did not feature again that season)

Trouble at the buffet

Newsletter No 7, in early October, reminded playing and social members that "The buffet on Sunday lunchtimes is for the Veterans Eleven and their opponents only" and regretted "some social members feel it is their right to take sandwiches without even asking".

An early pasting

The third fixture, against Avery Hill Casuals, a 7-1 defeat (the heaviest for the season), was a tough awakening. Newsletter No 8 reported that: "The Vets played an exceptionally skilful team from Avery Hill College, with a number of former semi-professionals previously playing in more senior football. Although the Guild Vets were well beaten 7-1, much good football played by both sides – a joy to watch, our opponents would have given our First Eleven a good game."

Mick Haywood brings Vic Farrow out of retirement

Fixture No 4, against Ex Blues, a 4-0 defeat, saw Vic Farrow come out of retirement. The brief report of the match in Newsletter No 9, said: "A much depleted Vets eleven met a very classy Ex Blues Vets side on Sunday, with five of the previous week's team out: Glyn Farrell, Dave Edwards, Steve Melbourne, Ken England and Mick Haywood. Mick provided a replacement in Frank Gunner, while "forgetting" to inform the Hon. Sec. that he had once again changed his mind and he was off to watch the Suntory Golf, or was it all a con! Have a nice holiday Mick – your ears will be red raw when I've finished! Only ten men for the Vets, so yours truly decided after a five year lapse it was time to come out of retirement and once again wear the Guild shirt."

Back to winning ways

The next game against R.A.C.S on 30 October was reported thus: "The Vets travelled to R.A.C.S at New Eltham and another excellent win. Two good goals from Glyn Farrell, one a left footed shot from an oblique angle. Phil Monk got our third after Roger Lee had "stepped over" the ball two yards out. Many thanks for Frank Gunner for coming along at short notice – after we found out that Mick Haywood was still on holiday. It was good to see Dave Haddaway playing again. Much merriment in the bar after the game."

14-goal thriller

Fixture No 6 against Charter Diamond was a classic. Vic Farrow produced a one-page report on the game in Newsletter No 13. Here are some nuggets from it: "Mick Haywood unavailable because he was "repairing his dad's ceiling". Ian Clarkson "nearing" his 35th birthday came to the rescue. Ray Tanton was injured in the warm up. Vic Farrow pulled his hamstring as he "tried

to find that extra speed of long ago” . Farnborough were 7-1 down at half-time but “won” the second half 4-2. Our scorers were Roger Lee, John Pereira, Ian Clarkson and Tony Loveridge (2). Glyn Farrell earned a penalty in that game but his opportunity to get on the score sheet was pinched by “Professor” Loveridge who nipped in to double his tally.

New players

A narrow defeat followed on 26 November against Red Barrel. Newsletter No 15 reported that Steve Diamond made his debut for the Vets in that game and that our ace move of the game was to put Brian Thompson on for the last thirty minutes (replacing Ray Tanton).

Goalkeeping masterclass

The team returned to winning ways on 3 December with a 1-0 win over Baltic Exchange, courtesy of a Tony Loveridge strike, despite a bit of a crisis with a number of players dropping out for various reasons - Dick Barton, Ray Tanton, John Pereira, Steve Diamond, Brian Thompson. The match was memorable for a great goal keeping performance by Colin Baldwin: “how he put over a couple of scorching shots going towards the top corner I just do not know, and our younger keepers could learn from his handling of the ball, all the shots he had to withstand cleanly held”.

A feast to remember

The other abiding memory of the match against Baltic Exchange on 3 December was the après-match hospitality. In the middle of furious digestion, no doubt Vic Farrow wrote - “After the game the four players who made a swift exit to get back to the bar at Farnborough do not know what they missed. We were treated royally with chicken legs, scampi, sausages, Welsh rarebit and steak and kidney pie coming round not once but thrice on the silver platter. We all dug in contentedly.”

Winter break and winter blues

The next game was not until 21 January. An extra fixture had been arranged for 17 December against Brimore but this was not played because “Dave Osborn’s team was suffering from the flu epidemic”. Matches scheduled for 28 January against Charter Diamond Vets, and 11 February against Ex Blues were casualties of the British winter.

An old favourite turns the clock back

The only match played in February saw the return of Dave Edwards, out since October, against Old Tamponians. Although the Guild lost there was a memorable moment created by Dave Edwards. The match report said: “At 1-3 down, probably the brightest spot of the game, Dave Edwards breaking through down the right, a tremendous shot from 25 yards which flashed into the top corner with their keeper flaying air. This goal brought many a memory back of goals decades ago.”

A great weekend for the club

On 4 March 1990 the Vets won their match against R.A.C.S Vets 1-0. On that first weekend of March all four Saturday sides and the Vets on Sunday won their games. This had not been done since 25 October 1986. The club newsletter gave special thanks to Andy Harrold whose Sunday side did not play that weekend.

We were robbed

There are games which you just cannot win and you feel hard done by at the end. One such game was experienced by the Vets that season, playing away against Addington Manor Vets on 11 March. The game ended 1-1 but that was not quite how Vic Farrow saw it: The newsletter noted ruefully - "Officially 1-1 with a goal from Dick Barton, Glynn Farrell having put in two excellent shots which were disallowed by their linesman and a very Veteran referee".

Extra time

On 21 January 1990 the Vets played Wellcome at their ground. Although we led twice in that game and were only 3-2 down at half-time – the final score was 6-2 to Wellcome. The newsletter noted that not only that "Wellcome had one very fast forward who looked much younger than his years conveyed" but the ref played 50 minutes in the second half. Vic Farrow wrote "My stop watch does not deceive – I make the Saturday afternoon tea by it right on the dot every week. During these added extra few minutes, they managed to score twice more."

The lesser-spotted clean sheet

On 1 April 1990 Dick Barton scored for the second consecutive match, to give us a 1-0 win over Red Barrel. This was only our third and final clean sheet of the season.

Hospitality returned and Russian visitors

On 8 April the Guild hosted Baltic Exchange Vets and remembered the splendid hospitality that had been enjoyed at their place in December. The newsletter reported "An excellent game ending in a 3-3 draw with Baltic Exchange Vets (who included two Ruskiies) the high scoring part due to referee Andy Harrold's ability to let the game flow. Last of all, our final thanks to Graeme Moir for providing an excellent shellfish buffet."

End with a whimper but a small reward for the manager

The last two matches of the season were comprehensive defeats at the hands of Segas Vets and Wellcome Vets but it was fitting that the last goal of the campaign was scored by manager John Lincoln, his only goal that season.

Summary of results

<u>P16</u>	<u>W5</u>	<u>D2</u>	<u>L9</u>	<u>GF24</u>	<u>GA47</u>	
17/9/89		H	Addington Manor	W	3-1	Glynn Farrell (3)
24/9/89		H	Wickham Park	L	1-0	
8/10/89		H	Avery Hill Casuals	L	7-1	**
15/10/89		H	Ex Blues	L	4-0	
29/10/89		A	R.A.C.S	W	3-1	Glynn Farrell (2), Phil Monk
12/11/89		A	Charter Diamond	L	9-5	Tony Loveridge (2), Ian Clarkson, Roger Lee, John Pereira
26/11/89		A	Red Barrel	L	1-0	
3/12/89		A	Baltic Exchange	W	1-0	Tony Loveridge
21/1/90		A	Wellcome Vets	L	6-2	Tony Loveridge (2)
18/2/90		H	Old Tamponians	L	5-2	Glyn Farrell, Dave Edwards
4/3/90		H	R.A.C.S	W	1-0	Phil Monk
11/3/90		A	Addington Manor	D	1-1	Dick Barton
1/4/90		H	Red Barrel	W	1-0	Dick Barton
8/4/90		H	Baltic Exchange	D	3-3	Tony Loveridge (2) Paul Eddleston
22/4/90		H	Segas Vets	L	5-0	
29/4/90		H	Wellcome Vets	L	4-1	John Lincoln

** Goalscorer not named in newsletter but Dave Edwards has claimed the goal.

Player selections

The figures below are for players listed in newsletters before the games. Post-match team sheets were not available. Match reports point to last minute adjustments as players became unavailable for various reasons. For example, Mick Haywood's availability seems to have been a complete mystery and it is not clear how many games he actually played. A number of other players stepped in to help out – these "ringers and extras" are mentioned below.

16 selections:	Tony Loveridge
15 selections:	Mick Gearing, John Pereira
14 selections:	Glyn Farrell, Roger Lee, Graeme Moir
13 selections:	Dick Barton, John Lincoln
11 selections:	Ray Tanton, Phil Monk
10 selections:	Steve Diamond, Dave Edwards, Mick Haywood,
9 selections:	Steve Mann
8 selections:	Colin Baldwin, Steve Melbourne,
4 selections:	Kevin Woolstencroft
3 selections:	Ken England
1 selection	John Cattigan, Roger Crouch, Paul Dabner, Alan Donnelly, Frank Gunner, Dave Haddaway, G Scott, Eric Shoebridge, Pete Skinner, Brian Thompson, Rick Walton

Ringers and extras

15 October against Ex Blues: Frank Gunner stood in for Mick Haywood. Vic Farrow came out of retirement. (Frank was also selected for the 12 November game against Charter Diamond).

12 November against Charter Diamond: Ian Clarkson “nearing” his 35th birthday was cajoled into playing.

3 December against Baltic Exchange Vets: “Steve Johnson, newly signed on Saturdays to play with the 4ths, was persuaded to play for the Vets as soon as Vic Farrow noted Steve’s birth date.” Chris Alston also agreed to play even though he was “a few years off the Veterans age group”.

11 March against Addington Manor Vets: “Chris Alston played in goal as a very late replacement for a sick John Pereira.”

8 April against Baltic Exchange Vets: the newsletter noted “While talking about the Vets XI perhaps we should mention our “ringers” Paul Eddleston and John Steel who helped us out at the last moment on Sunday”.

Then and now

There are many parallels with today’s Vets experience, twenty-five years on, qualitatively rather than quantitatively as we now play twice as many games (and have two pitches). There is still a strong social element to the games; hospitality matters; players’ reliability/availability issues surface from time to time; referees are home-grown (Des Fallon refereed all the home games then except for one game which Andy Harrold did – today we have Mick Gearing (a Vet original) to do our home games); ringers appear in games; some of the club’s legends inevitably end up with the Vets; General winter still claims a few games; currently FOBG Vets are winning more games than they are drawing and losing but it has not always been so but that has never stopped us playing – because in the end the Vets of yesterday and the Vets of today share a love of the game and the club.

Don Fabio's Words

17 April 2011: Avery Hill Vets (H, 2-2)

Senior Vets come through searching examination by youthful Avery Hill Vets, to record first draw of the season

In 2011 the England Manager at the time, the Italian Fabio Capello, was criticised in the media for his poor grasp of English despite being in the job for three years. He claimed he required "maximum 100 words" to communicate effectively with the England footballers. Cambridge Dictionaries Online at Cambridge University Press came up with the 100 words which Fabio Capello would, according to their linguistic analysis, need to aim for.

<https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/which-100-words-of-english-should-fabio-learn>

On marathon day we bring you news of a great draw, our first in 25 **friendlies**, against a **team** of teachers that had failed to learn their lines (*I must not field young players against Senior Vets*).

Before the **match** the school photograph for the FOBG Senior Vets class of 2010-2011 was taken by Colin Brazier, with some truants sadly. The Farnborough register read like this: Toby Manchip in goal; Steve Blanchard, Ian Coles, Danny Winter and Nick Kinnear in **defence**; Patrice Mongelard, Ian Shoebridge, Mehmet Bozyigit and Mark Perry in **midfield**; John Tallis and Leo Maccioni as **forwards**. Roger French and Eric Johnson sat at the back of the class. Eric was our **international** **player**, who had **scored** in every **game** he had **played** for Farnborough this season.

Avery Hill started with ten players until they were joined after twenty minutes by Yaya Toure. But I am not sure they missed him – given their **formation** and **tactics**, quality of their **play** and **technical** ability of several of their players – due in no small part to the presence of a few players, including two whippets in **attack**, that ought to have been on the adjoining **pitch** where our young Vets were playing.

The early exchanges of the **first half** were even, with not many chances created. Avery Hill were quick on the break whilst we built our play more slowly. The first clear chance fell to Avery Hill when a 25-yard **strike** was tipped onto the **crossbar** acrobatically by Toby Manchip, and Patrice Mongelard was just able to prevent the nippy Avery Hill **winger** from putting the ball into an empty net. Avery Hill was to hit the **woodwork** again in that half. At the other end we were making chances of our own. John Tallis was winning **headers**, and Leo Maccioni was chasing down **defenders** whilst Mehmet Bozyigit applied **pressure** on the **right** with his **crosses**, **dribbles**, ably supported by full-back Danny Winters.

The first goal was scored by Avery Hill after 25 minutes as defenders Ian Coles and Steve Blanchard were not quite able to clear the danger from the muscular presence of an Avery Hill midfielder who had barrelled his way onto a through **ball** in the centre of our defence, and the loose ball fell kindly to the young Avery Hill winger who rolled it past Toby. Such is our resilience these days, however, that we went on to create the best two chances of the half. First Mehmet Bozyigit was played in behind the defence by Mark Perry, and drew an incredible reflex save from the Avery Hill keeper from three yards out. Then Leo Maccioni charged down a **defensive** clearance, broke into the **box**, and had a clear view of goal only to roll his low shot a foot wide. Saves from Toby, poor finishing by Avery Hill in one clear instance, and the strength of Steve Blanchard and Ian Coles' mobility to **defend**, and **mark** the quick Avery Hill **attacking** kept us only one goal behind at **half-time**.

Roger French came on at left-back for Nick Kinnear who went on the touchline as linesman (or assistant referee). Eric Johnson replaced John Tallis to add pace and skill to our attack as a striker. Roger's defensive intensity and the early second goal scored by Avery Hill changed the mood of the game and the referee, Mick Gearing, had a job keeping the class under control and his yellow or red cards in his pocket. Yet the first ten minutes of the first-half were ours as we put the Avery Hill goal under pressure, and a betting man would at that point have backed Farnborough to equalise. But as often happens in football possession and pressure do not mean much – as Danny Winter, normally so sure of touch, rolled back a pass towards our box which should have travelled fast on the hard pitch, but an even faster traveller was the young Avery Hill forward who got there just before Toby Manchip could kick the ball, to tuck it into the net for a 2-0 lead to Avery Hill. For a while headmaster Gearing had a job to keep things calm, amid angry calls for off-side or hand-ball, and not dispense cautions or suspensions. There were plenty of afters and mutterings about cheats, and talented youngsters who should be playing others their same age, instead of 50-year-olds. Roger French was probably not far from being expelled, but what concentrated minds was that we got back into the game midway through the second half when Patrice Mongelard picked up the ball outside the Farnborough box, and advanced into the midfield, to slip a clever ball that put Eric Johnson through, only for him to turn his marker and roll the ball into the path of Mehmet Bozyigit to shoot, with a precise low finish into the Avery Hill net (just like a training ground move). By then Avery Hill had swapped keeper and another large physical presence had joined the front line.

The goal gave us renewed resolve. Roger French made a fantastic clearance under our goalposts from an Avery Hill corner. John Tallis came back on (for Steve Blanchard) and Patrice Mongelard dropped into the centre of defence to add his tackles to Roger's. With fifteen minutes left we won a free-kick as Mehmet Bozyigit was up-ended outside the box. Ian Shoebridge resisted Patrice Mongelard's excitement to let him have a shot, and floated a free-kick onto the head of our tallest Player - John Tallis, to get our equaliser (and his first goal-of-the-season – much overdue and well-deserved). The last ten minutes were a little frantic – almost like a quarter-final or semi-final of a cup competition, in the final stages of a tournament (after qualifiers and group matches), though without extra-time, and I think not much injury time in spite of Roger's fouls, as both sides pressed for a winner, as if to avoid a shootout. Eric Johnson hit a powerful shot from the edge of the box that would have been a fitting winner, had it travelled horizontally rather than vertically.

Our spirit was positive after the game. We did not win, but we did not lose either and the end of term report should talk of much progress made – there had been no defeat, disappointment or humiliation for the management who would not be getting the sack. We had won the second half, and had not been beaten by a good team with younger players, of superior fitness in key positions. We were missing Sinisa Gracanin and Chris Webb, the mainstay of our midfield this season, but had coped thanks to a good all round team performance, sound tactics, patience, passion, pride and the presence of many supporters and fans, including from overseas.

We did not mind too much that the school canteen was closed – and there was no food after the game. The beer was cold, the sun was out and the tempers raised during the game had passed like a storm in a tea cup. Talking of tea, Vic Farrow kindly brought us some Earl Grey after the game.

Farnborough teacher's pet today was Toby Manchip with top marks for his PE lesson in the Farnborough goal, with excellent goal-kicks, dives and had there been a penalty he would probably have saved it.

Lastly a bit of homework successfully completed by your match reporter – who managed to get into this report the 100 words that an Italian native speaker would need to manage FOBG Senior Vets. There is one extra word, already mastered by Thomas French, that would be needed but I would get a detention if I put that in here.

On the Buses

25 May 2014: Brixton Bus Garage Vets (H, 7-3)

Ten-goal thriller closes Senior Vets season

Brixton Bus garage is not in Brixton, and Farnborough is a long way from Streatham Hill but we were pleased to host **the visit** of Brixton Bus Garage Vets for **the football match** – but we were no Basildon Bashers – more like the Farrow Fields Finishers. Our usual match fixer, Roger French, had arranged this novel fixture for us and then gone on **the kids' outing** to Centre Parc. We wondered if Roger knew something we did not as our opponents gathered. There was a smattering of Vets in their midst, but some did not look old enough to be driving buses, let alone **the 'L' bus**. We looked forward to testing our experience and team work against the exuberance of youth. To allow time for our visitors to travel to Farnborough, we decided **the early shift** of 10:30 would not do so we opted for an 11:00 kick-off. That way we thought too none of our players would be **late again**.

Injury, the school half term, possibly **the other woman**, had reduced our numbers to 12 again. The 12 were Steve Palmer in goal; Patrice Mongelard, Steve Blanchard, Waine Hetherington, Jim St John in defence; Colin Mant, Robin Lipscomb and Sinisa Gračanin in midfield; **the used combination** of George Kleanthous, Barry Grainger and Andy Faulks provided our attacking threat once again. Mick O'Flynn ran the line ready to flag the bus down, as did Young Farnborough Vet Rich Davies on the other side. Referee Mick Gearing had given up his **gardening time**, to combine the roles of the not **new inspector and conductor** for our last game of the season.

And so, we kicked off in glorious sunshine, not really knowing what to expect. As the initial minutes ticked away, we realised, as most footballers would, that if we played a measured passing game **the strain** would tell on our opponents. They had energy, pace in abundance of course, but by going **steady** and applying **the squeeze** in the right places we thought we would show that organisation and experience count for much in Vets football at least, and so it proved. To their credit, our opponents did not park the omnibuses in front of goal but opted for an expansive attacking game. This yielded quite a spectacle and even Lord Lucan, aka Toby Harlow ex-Farnborough Vets Manager permanently on the comeback trail, was tempted to watch some of the first-half with his golden retriever. He waited a bit to see a goal but then like buses, two came along for us. First Robin Lipscomb produced a crisp finish from five yards out after being teed up by Andy Faulks. Then Andy himself showed there was **no smoke without fire** as he fired a low shot to give us a deserved two-goal lead. This was a fair reflection of the game, given the amount of possession we had. Whatever threat Brixton Bus garage had was dealt with by the defence with Jim St John in particular prominent in his pursuit of **safety first** – almost to the point of causing **the injury** of the season, in his thirty-second game, to ever-present Colin Mant. A dazed and confused Colin, yes - we can tell the difference, got up gingerly after getting in Jim's way - a bit like stepping in front of a double-decker, not a good idea, but there was no need for **first aid**. On balance, the Brixton Bus garage forwards had **a thin time** in front of our goal and we found that they had **nowhere to go** if we defended in numbers with the midfield in support. We could have had more than two goals in the bank at half-time - Jim was a threat at set-pieces, George and Andy could have added to our score and there was a scorching free-kick from Barry that was very easy on the eye. The Brixton Bus Garage keeper, under **strain**, had some dodgy moments with his kicks but we could not quite capitalise on these.

The only change we made at half-time was Mick O'Flynn coming on for Patrice Mongelard who went off looking for some **lost property** – our valuables, thankfully locked away in our dressing room by Vicky Tanner who provided excellent support to the Senior Vets, not least by taking delivery of the pizzas!

The second half was a goal fest – eight goals, almost an **epidemic**. Five of these were scored by Farnborough and three by our visitors. I am not sure I can remember all of them but the score evolved like this: 2-0 became 2-1, then 3-1 and 3-2, followed by 4-2, 5-2, 6-2, 6-3 and finally 7-3. Numbers cannot tell the full story. Our opponents scored early in the second half after a defensive mix-up. But the Barry Grainger – Andy Faulks axis combined to climax in a crisp top corner finish by Andy. Steve Blanchard went off injured and Patrice Mongelard came back on midway through the second half to see Brixton get a very good goal with a shot from the edge of the box nestling in the top corner. Any anxieties we might have had at that point were eased away in spectacular fashion as Rob Lipscomb embarked on a run straight from the kick-off taking out three defending players and setting Andy Faulks up for a trademark finish barely a minute after the deficit had narrowed. The wheels then came off the Brixton bus as Andy Faulks again, he could get used to the excellent service provided by Barry Grainger, drove us further ahead before a Brazilian solo run from Barry gave him a well-deserved notch on the score sheet. At 6-2 we probably got complacent and were rightly punished by speedy opponents, despite a smart initial save from Steve Palmer. At 6-3 we, and our opponents, were ready to enquire of the referee how long was left but we were not done. Barry Grainger, again, provided the service from the left with his cultured left foot, Mick O'Flynn appeared mysteriously in the Brixton six-yard box, dummied the exquisite cross, so he says, and Andy Faulks finished emphatically to register his thirty-sixth goal of the campaign. The sense of a journey's end, a bit like the loop on a bus route, was complete, as Andy had scored our first goal-of-the-season on 1 September.

Reluctant left-back Wayne Hetherington was quick to point out that most of our goals today had their origin on the left. This was not only a fair point but also a well-made one. This will have been of some comfort to him, after a difficult week in May in Bournemouth.

I have rarely seen opponents take a heavy defeat so well. The game was played in excellent spirit, perhaps showing that playing the game with the right attitude is more important than winning or losing. In a way, you could say there had been no **dangerous driving** at all. The canteen was not in service today as **canteen girl** Pam Shoebridge was away but we had seven super 15" pizzas plus garlic bread and chips on order from Ollie's kebab and Pizza in Farnborough Village (we support local businesses) and with both Roger French and buffet monster Nick Waller away we were unlikely to go hungry.

All in all, this was an excellent way to end the season. We did not even mind that there was no **hot water** in the **cistern** today owing to a problem with our boiler. We wished our visitors **bon voyage** on the way back and look forward to another fixture next year. So, for now the Senior Vets go back to the depot before training starts at the end of July, with the matter of world cup duty in between. The **prize** of today's victory gave us figures for the season of P32, W17, D5, L10 GF 87, GA 65 – **going steady**, perhaps more than that, you might say.

Man-of-the-Match or **the best man** - Andy Faulks with 50% of all the goals scored today, to bring his tally to 36 goals in 30 games, his usual **allowance** that we have got used to. Some attribute Andy's sharpness today to the benefit of his intellectual exchanges with Mehmet Bozyigit on social media this week. I prefer to think it was more due to the service from his team mates, a bit like having **friends in high places**.

A final word from your match reporter: to mark the occasion of our first ever match against Brixton Bus Garage Vets, and the last match report for this season, I have inserted about thirty titles of episodes of On the Buses in this match report. There is beer waiting for the first person who identifies these references.

Dad's Army

7 February 2016: Sanco Super Vets (N, 0-5)

*Farnborough Home Guard do not **know their onions***



Left to right:

Sergeant "Do you really think that's wise?" Mongelard,
Private "I'll tell mum!" Thomas,
Private "We're doomed!" O'Flynn,
Lance Corporal "Don't panic!" Blanchard,
Chief Warden "You ruddy hooligans!" Washington,
Captain "Don't be absurd!" French,
Private "May I be excused?" Gearing,
Private "It fell off the back of a lorry!" Faulks.

We were looking forward to playing on the beaches of Farnborough-on-Sea but made a tactical retreat to Catford Heights to get this game played. The "success" of this flanking manoeuvre earned a **stripe** for R. French (Co-Manager) making his return, after a lot of time on his hands, following a brush with the laws of the game. It also meant that it was thirteen weeks since our club bar had **seen our money**. We had been worried that things would go **bump in the night** again with the heavy rains, but after an anxious wait you could say it was a case of **ring dem bells** in the Sunday morning sunlight. We had a few **absent friends**, including our latest **recruit** but lined up for our **big parade** with a platoon of fifteen to **resist our aggressors** from Dulwich. We welcomed back **big gun** and **man of action**, George Kleanthous, we hoped, to cure our **shooting pains**. Alas it was not to be as we were thoroughly thrashed, failed to score, and had many **fallen idols** in our midst today.

Starting XI:

Gary Fentiman

Colin Mant, Ian Coles, Patrice Mongelard, Phil Anthony

Nick Waller, Colin Brazier, Michael Ugwumba, Simon Thomas

Waine Hetherington, Andy Faulks

Substitutes: Steve Blanchard, Roger French, Rob Lipscomb, George Kleanthous

Supporter: Michael Ugwumba Jr

Referee 'Commander' Mick Gearing who would be a natural in the Dad's Army film currently showing on the big screen, showed you are **never too old** and had brought his **museum piece** of a whistle along. Mick is seventy-eight next weekend and we wish him many happy returns. After today he might even be tempted to resume playing, so woeful was our display.

Things were not looking good early doors. We could not establish a presence in the Sanco half. They took hold of the midfield, looked dangerous up front and were a fortress at the back with quite a few big units sprinkled across the side. This was not the team we had played before – they had reinforcements, **schooled** in the art of **battle**, ready for their **war dance**, not a **floral dance** like we were. They had the ball in our net after about fifteen minutes but it was ruled out for a brave off-side decision. Five minutes later their **menace from the deep** paid off and a through ball and smart finish found our net from inside our box despite a **desperate dive** from Gary Fentiman.

On the half hour the first of the **command decisions** to make changes was executed as George Kleanthous, Steve Blanchard, Roger French and Rob Lipscomb came on for Colin Mant, Michael Ugwumba, Patrice Mongelard and Colin Brazier. We had a glorious opportunity to equalise when George Kleanthous slipped through the Sanco **man hunt** like an **uninvited guest** and found himself five yards out with only the keeper to beat. But his **bullet was not for firing** and the keeper saved smartly. That was to be our last real scoring opportunity of the game. Five minutes before half-time we were carved up like a turkey dinner at the back and we were 2-0 down.

At half-time the **love of oranges** took the edge off but it was hard to see how we could get back in the game despite cries of **Wake Up** Farnborough. We now had the slope and the wind against us and to add to our predicament Gary Fentiman had made his **soldier's farewell** after forty-five minutes and Waine Hetherington bit the bullet and went in goal. Michael Ugwumba returned to the heat of battle in the centre of our midfield. Simon Thomas, **asleep in the deep** to **keep young and beautiful**, was to see more of the ball in the second half but we struggled to get anything out of the **misers** in Sanco's defence **hoarding** their clean sheet.

We went 3-0 down not long into the second half, from, you guessed it, a corner. The ball pinged about a bit in our box but in the end a Sanco foot soldier was in the right place to poke the ball home. Soon after, in his first game back Roger French drew blood, his own, after inserting his head in a bush. It could have been worse. Roger's vision was blurred for a bit after some savoury exchanges with a Sanco supporter but the moment, and a **test** of character, passed.

With half an hour left there were new orders, and for Nick Waller, Phil Anthony and Ian Coles it was come in **your time is up**, and **you've got to go**. Patrice Mongelard, Colin Mant and Colin Brazier came back on to see Sanco **put** the Farnborough **lights out** with two further goals. I cannot say we came close to getting a consolation goal. The Sanco keeper, one of the new faces, was too good and never looked troubled, least of all by the wild shot from Michael

Ugwumba which cleared all available netting behind the pitch and left us a ball short – **the loneliness of the long-distance** shot, I thought. If I wanted to lower the tone, I would say we had collectively lost both balls in that game long ago.

The mood in the changing room afterwards was not great but Roger's adventure in the bush, and talk of Mick Gearing's birthday present, lightened the gloom. It was just like old times as Roger, like a bank manager, was **back in his counting house** making sure all monies were **safely gathered in**. It was not **high finance** but once again money drained away from the Farnborough coffers, unlike a home pitch that will not drain. The same could happen next Sunday.

Buffet **Gorilla** Nick Waller will have had a feast today as I was not there. I cannot tell you what would have been available for a spot of comfort eating but I am sure it was not wartime rations.

From time to time in Vets football a game is played where the losers are thoroughly **showed up**, branded in a way, and left wondering if it is time to give up because they have lost their hunger, desire, fitness, pace, everything in fact. This was D-day for us, **under fire** from the **enemy within the gates**, we failed the test. We cannot even pretend that it is a matter of brain over brawn – we have three Co-**Managers** in the boot room, a case of **boots, boots, boots**, if you like, but we still cannot get it right. We play without energy, technique, cohesion, movement, we have luxury players – they know who they are, **the cap fits**. We'll **get the bird** at every game we have left to play this season unless things change and we'll be heading for **room at the bottom**. I reckon that if Captain Mainwaring's platoon played a football game against German prisoners, the spectacle would not be too unlike what we served up today.

Man-of-the-Match: not many were mentioned in dispatches but the **man of the hour**, in this **broadcast to the empire**, was Steve Blanchard.

*Lastly – I have a **test**, and a bit of fun, for my readers. To celebrate the release of the new Dad's Army film – I have sprinkled through this report references to the titles of Dad's Army episodes. The person who identifies the highest number by close of play next Saturday evening and emails the answers to the Farnborough Old Boys Guild website gets a Spitfire from me.*

Brexit

2 February 2020: Greenwich Challenge (N, 3-2)

Farnborough open post-Brexit Golden Age by coming from behind with *panache*

Cognoscenti of our reports might recall previous editions have included titles of episodes of “On the Buses” and “Dad’s Army” as well as the 100 words Cambridge University deemed Fabio Capello needed to manage England. As a *jeu d’esprit*, today’s inaugural Brexit report includes many European words. The first reader who identifies as many of these words as possible gets a free *aperitif*.

This *souvenir* edition marks the first game played by the Senior Vets after our liberation from EU tyranny. It required a *tour de force* to get a game this week after our original opponents exited. We were able to strike a deal with a new team after twenty-one attempts. Greenwich Challenge were an unknown quantity but their Twitter Feed, and pre-match warm up routine, presaged a tough encounter for us, and so it turned out.

First though, a *zeitgeist detour* to reflect recent media froth which left some football fans choking on their breakfast *croissants*. Ann Francke, Chief Executive of the Chartered Management Institute, called for a ban on sports talk in the workplace because it could exclude women and lead to laddish behaviour. Well, I have news for *Madame* Francke. As a champion of neuro diversity, I have been looking for a woman that likes football but all the good ones appear to be taken. And, of course, laddish behaviour is not *de rigueur* among the Farnborough Senior Vets.

Late additions, one no-show and the *frisson* of having to find a new keeper moments before the game added to the challenge for today. With Matt Angelo’s withdrawal at 4.43 am, we had no guardian angel, no backstop, but Jordan Glen came to the rescue.

FOBG Ensemble: Jordan Glen, Matt Ellis, Sinisa Gracanin, Jay Hardy, Simon Harvey, Wayne Hetherington, Michael Hills, Ian Lyons, Colin Mant, Kypros Michael, Chisa Mkala, Joe Skinner, Simon Thomas, Gordon Thompson.

Referee: Paul Parsons

Impresario: Mick O’Flynn

Tifosi: Tony Harvey, Rob Mckie, Patrice Mongelard, Kayleigh Richards, Claire Skinner

Chief Football Correspondent: Patrice Mongelard

We now have control of our borders, money and laws but control of this game was harder particularly in the fierce wind. We ended up with a game of two halves and this is no *cliché*. The playing surface was the same for both sides, a bit heavy, lush, bobbly but the wind favoured one side over another in each half. This said even though we were playing into the wind the early chances fell to Farnborough. Kypros Michael, Gordon Thompson and Jay Hardy all had half decent opportunities in the first quarter hour to edge us ahead. The Greenwich tackling was not for the faint-hearted. A couple of their defenders and their central midfielder let it be known that *bonhomie* would be in short supply. Referee Paul Parsons was kept busy today (with more yellow cards flashed in this game than for the whole of last season).

Once they had weathered our initial thrusts Greenwich began to use the conditions to their advantage. Our passing got laboured. Wayne Hetherington was getting outnumbered in the difficult *milieu* that is midfield. We began to play some loose balls at the back. That is how we

gave away a penalty after twenty-five minutes with Jordan Glen bringing having come off his line to tidy up a defensive reverie, and overrunning the ball before barrelling into a Greenwich forward. The spot kick was converted with **aplomb**. Our **malaise** was not over. Ten minutes later, a vicious Greenwich free-kick was whipped in from the right, harvesting a gust of wind, skimming off the top of Joe Skinner's head and using the power imparted by his neck muscles to nestle into the top corner. It was not quite a **farce** but things were not great in the Farnborough camp. A substituted, semi-injured and tired Jay Hardy threatened to go home in a fit of pique but was persuaded to hang around for the second half after a herbal relaxant. Despite the adverse scoreline, snake oil salesman Mick O'Flynn was in no doubt that we would turn things round and the doomsters and moaners would be proved wrong as we unleashed our potential with a fair wind in the second half.

And what a half this proved to be. Matt Ellis and Chisa Mkala had been introduced towards the end of the first-half and together with midfielder **maestro** Sinisa Gracanin set about the task in hand. The half was barely five minutes old when the central tackle-happy Greenwich midfielder conceded a direct free-kick in a dangerous area. Up stepped Matt Ellis, to shake things up with a twenty-five yarder that swerved, dipped leaving the Greenwich keeper to grasp thin air as the net bulged. Ten minutes later a muscular run by Chisa Mkala took him past three defenders on the wing before he crossed the ball for Kypros Michael who produced a superb connection to guide the ball low into the bottom corner. It did not take long for the **coup de grâce**, administered by Matt Ellis after Jay Hardy had cut through the heart Greenwich defence with a Riverdance step. Matt still had work to do but was the **epitome** of **sangfroid** as he lifted the ball over the Greenwich keeper. The Farnborough crowd went wild. The **impasse** had been broken.

To their credit Greenwich then came back into the game and there was as much of a risk of an equaliser as of another Farnborough goal. The Greenwich keeper pulled off some great saves in ones on ones to frustrate Kypros and Chisa. At the other end Farnborough had to defend with spirit and players were booked on both sides after a **contretemps** or two. Ian Lyons made a muscular return after months of injury, **libero** Michael Hills, scrapper Simon Harvey, steady Manty and bearded wonder Joe Skinner were in the thick of it. In the end the **entente cordiale** between both teams just about survived. Simon Thomas had to use all his thespian skills to calm things down once or twice. Referee Paul Parsons likes to let the game flow but could not quite be his tantric self today as he asserted his authority with his whistle and his yellow card.

A rematch with these worthy opponents is a distinct possibility. There was no **schadenfreude** in the changing room, just a few sans culottes and **enfant terrible** Colin Mant's lucky panties held aloft. Ann Francke would take a dim view of Manty.

To our **chagrin** we had to move this game to Norman Park from our home in Farnborough and consequently there was no **après-match** hospitality, so no **canapés, hors d'oeuvres** and other **buffet mignons morceaux** to tell you **gourmands** about.

Man-of-the-Match: today's Man-of-the-Match making strides towards the Farnborough **Ballon d'Or** is Joe Skinner, whose **faux pas** was forgotten, forgiven and fortunately missed by daughter Claire.