

Friday, August 21st, 2009 (Issue 3)

The *Manny Road Sport*

NO NEWS NO GOSSIP NO PHOTOS SOME SPORT

Free inside – a dull match report with no photos, diagrams, or statistics!

BRITAIN'S WORST TABLOID!

Rover Cowley fail Manny Road test-drive!



Indomitable Manny Road notch-up an impressive and hard-fought pre-season win against Premier opponents!

"The season starts here! The season starts Today!" was the battle cry of Mansfield Road manager Gordon Sanghera on Saturday as he sent out his team for the first time in season 2009-10! It was a hot August afternoon and the Manny Road all-

stars were keen to load up on isotonic sports drinks as they, somewhat nervously, prepared for what was expected to be a tough match. And tough it was. So tough in fact that by the end, one player was hunched over coughing as a trail of

phlegm and saliva hung delicately from his mouth, whilst another 'passed blood' and another decided to hang upside down. These heroes will of course remain nameless. The Manny Roaders were forced to work hard and to concentrate hard from the first to the last minute of this engrossing tie. Do not be mistaken though. This was not the game to be showing to your visiting American friend who you hoped to convert to the joys of 'soccer', far too few goals or goalmouth chances for that, but it was perhaps the game to show to your nerdy, pale, chess playing, housemate, or to your honest, hard-working, industrious, friend from 'down-pit'. For not only would they both benefit from a rare foray into the great outdoors on another gloriously sunny day in Oxford, but it was also a game that would have fascinated them equally. Your cerebral,

chess playing, 'friend' would no doubt have appreciated that this was a tactical game of cat and mouse that required supreme concentration: and your hard-working, down-to-earth miner 'friend' would surely see the virtue in a game that required, no, demanded, each and every player to put in a hard shift, to graft for the cause, to graft for their teammates, to graft for their love of the game!

Manager Gordon Sanghera chose to change his formation, presumably in reaction to scraping a 9v3 win against the Manny Road Reserves ten days ago. Gone was the 3-0-4-1-2 'polygon' and in was the blocky, lego-cubist, 4-4-2. The extra cover on the flanks was wise considering the greater than average width of the Rover Cowley pitch. In goal was an emergency loan signing, from...Rover Cowley! In front of 'Brian' was a back four of O'Connor, Dickie, Burton, and

'Adam', and a little bit further in front of them were the midfield quarter of 'Erie', Kaiser Kay, Potty Potter, and Palti. Up front a somewhat downbeat Lazarus was paired with a somewhat upbeat Jones, leaving 'Sean2' and 'Sparky Mark' on the bench, literally, because Rover Cowley actually have benches, with proper dugouts, also a perimeter barrier and a stand for the fans, oh and great showers, with variable heads and hot water. They also had the ball, and lots of it, for most of the game.

This was a long, hot, game for the Manny Roaders, and they had to chase and harass continually as Rover's 4-1-4-1 formation allowed them to keep possession with relative ease, especially when combined with the, albeit mild, slope and wind in their favour in the first half. However a 4-1-4-1 formation

requires runners to go beyond the front man when he holds up the play, and Cowley failed to do this, partly due to the expert sweeping of Dickie and the excellent tracking back of O'Connor and 'Adam'. In fact, despite probably having 70% of the possession in the first half, or 70% of the play in the Manny Road half to be more accurate, Rover Cowley rarely threatened 'Brian's' goal, managing only three shots in 45 minutes! And all of these were from outside the box as the frustrated wingers cut inside and skewed rather desperate shots high and /or wide.

Manny Road's problem was that they struggled to maintain possession for long enough to get their players high up the park, and they were failing to switch the play from flank to flank sufficiently, although 'Brian's' distribution was excellent, both from his hands and his feet.

It was O'Connor who benefited the most and he linked up well with Kay and 'Erie', although Manny Road's chances actually came when they sprung a quick switch out right to the tidy feet of Palti or the indefatigable legs of 'Adam', who made several lung busting runs down the right and round the back of Palti. Both Palti and 'Adam' managed to get a good cross in the first half, and Palti's very nearly resulted in a goal, as his cleverly dug out cross from near the corner was just missed by Jones, before falling at the feet of a surprised Lazarus, who failed to adjust his normally quick feet in time and saw his goalbound shot from all of 3 yards miraculously blocked by a great recovery tackle! **How did that not go in?!**

Manny Road did manage to put the ball in the net a couple of times though, but controversially both

times the goal was ruled out! The first, a cool, calm, and collected finish by Jones, placing Erie's through ball into the keeper's bottom left in a one-on-one was given as offside, it was marginal. The second was a clinical finish by Jones again, after he cleverly ran across his man from right to left, coinciding his run with Boorman's perfectly weighted through ball before slotting home in the keeper's bottom left again, and again suffering disappointment as the referee gave a foul for Jones' shoulder barge.

At the other end, the main problem for Burton and Dickie was the opposite number 2 (playing up front naturally), who was a diminutive fellow who liked to come short and offer for the ball from the midfield, which was being impressively orchestrated by the Rover anchor man 'Mo'. Manny Road's solution

was to mostly send Burton with number 2, which paid off because number 2 gave the ball away half the time, and on the times he played a quick and accurate pass, the through ball into the space vacated by Burton was invariably cleared by Dickie, but also, as mentioned above, there were insufficient runners of the ball to seriously trouble Manny Road. Half-time approached and a frustrated Cowley watched a tired, but satisfied, Manny Road team sip on their lucozade.

The second half started in much the same vain, and continued in much the same vain, despite Sanghera's instructions to *'push up! Squeeze the play and press the opposition!'* It's not clear if these instructions were misunderstood, ignored, or simply unachieved by a tiring team. 'Sean' replaced Palti and 'Adam' moved to right-wing, where he

successfully reversed some of the pressure on the defences, largely due to his method of knocking it past his man on one side and sneakily running round the other. However there were very, very, few goalmouth incidents in this second half. In fact the overall quality of the game decreased as Cowley began a series of rolling substitutions, crucially taking big 'Mo' off, and Manny Road changed their shape more than desired, as substitutions were forced by various niggling injuries. 'Sean' and 'Mark' who came on for O'Connor (who then came on for 'Erie') were both solid, and their introduction ultimately allowed for O'Connor to play further forward where he was potent down the left-wing, providing some much needed penetration into the Cowley defence. No goals came though and the game was drifting into a permanent nil-

nil, when, with just one minute remaining on the clock, when the debutant Cowley goalkeeper under hit his pass to his left-back, allowing Burton to intercept and put the ball into the empty, unguarded, net, **GOAL! 1v0 to Manny Road!**

Full-time: Rover Cowley 0 v 1 Mansfield Road.

After the game, Manager Gordon Sanghera was rumoured to have been seen pacing up and down the corridor, whilst

muttering to himself,

"Why didn't that lot do as I told them?! They were under the cosh for the whole game, and they all did very well, but don't they realise that in future they need to press higher or they will always be under the cosh? I better go and tell them that they were RUBBISH!"

Sanghera's Man of the Match went to Gregor Jones for four reasons. 1 his first 'goal', 2 his second 'goal', 3 his battling half at centre-back, and 4, because his wife was there to pick him up and thus he could not stay to enjoy a free Man of the Match pint from the ever generous Sanghera, not that Sanghera knew that of course. Burton was tempted to mention that surely 1 real goal trumps 2 fake 'goals', but thought better of it..

Rover Cowley 0 v 1 Mansfield Road (ht: 0v0)

Burton (n/a) 89

Referee: very communicative, and used the advantage rule well.

Crowd: 5 in the stand and a few wags around the dugout, none for Manny Road of course.

Mansfield Road line up and formation: 4-4-2

'Brian'; O'Connor ('Mark' 60), Dickie, Burton, 'Adam'; Erie, Kay, Potter, Palti ('Sean' 45); Jones, Lazarus.