

## My first cup run

I started watching Blues courtesy of my uncle Ron who started taking me to matches when I was 9 or 10. I was also lucky enough to have a mate Roy Gilmore whose uncle Alec would take us to some away games.

In 1968 Blues drew Halifax Town away in the third round of the FA Cup away at The Shay, I desperately wanted to go but to my horror uncle Alec wasn't going so I decided to go on my own.

I went to Vernon's by the Gospel Oak and bought myself a ticket, told my mum was with Roy and duly went to the Gospel on the morning of the match day and boarded the coach.

You can imagine a few people were a little shocked to see a child travelling away on his own but they were brilliant with me, it was my first taste of Blues family.

We arrived in Halifax and I walked with a group that went straight to the Shay, I remember it being in a sunken bowl, sort of lower than ground level. We took our places in the stand on the side, it was brilliant for me being with the big boys and experiencing singing away from home for the first time.

The ground was packed with over 18000 inside and Blues duly won 4-2 with goals from Pickering, Vowden, Bridges and a Beard penalty. To be perfectly honest I can only remember the Beard penalty and that we wore all red.

The fourth round draw saw us playing Orient at St Andrews and I can't recollect a lot about this game but uncle Ron took me. Orient were in the lower leagues and it was pretty much a formality for Blues winning 3-0 with goals from Vowden(2) and Bridges in front of just under 30000 fans.

I was so excited when I heard that we had drawn Arsenal away in the fifth round away at Highbury and uncle Alec was going and got us tickets.

Arsenal had the likes of Radford, McIntock, Armstrong et al playing for them and I couldn't wait to see them up against our second division heroes.

We were at the clock end, one of many times over the coming years, it was packed with Blues who were singing the songs of the day(see which ones you can recall in the comments) but we were all silenced after 15 minutes when Radford scored into the goal in front of us. I can remember looking up at the clock and thinking if they score every 15 minutes we are going to lose 6-0.

It wasn't to be a 6 goal hammering as we hung on and lo and behold with minutes to go Geoff Vowden headed a looping ball from the edge of the box and Arsenal keeper Jim Furnell missed his punch and the ball bobbed into the net and stunned the Arsenal fans amongst the 49000 that attended. Replay on Tuesday night!

It was under the lights on a cold Tuesday, we got into the Kop and the atmosphere was incredible, smoke highlighted by the lights, the pitch bright green and the crowd lifting me off my feet and moving me back and forth along the terrace. Arsenal had replaced their keeper Jim Furnell who messed up in the first game and bought in a young Scottish keeper by the name of Bob Wilson.

Blues took the lead through Bridges but the Division One team equalised through Bobby Gould. I didn't realise that I was about to witness the best goal I've seen at St Andrews scored into the Railway End by my hero Barry Bridges with an overhead kick that left Wilson with no chance and sent the majority of the 51586 crowd into a frenzy. We were in the Quarter Finals!

The draw was another great one for me and most young Blues fans, we drew Chelsea at St Andrews and we would get to see the Chelsea stars like Tambling, Harris and Bonetti. I was in the Railway End after queuing for tickets with Roy from very early on the previous Sunday morning. The police sat us on the wall right behind the goal which did obscure our view a bit. I remember that both teams changed kits for the game with Chelsea wearing yellow and Blue and Blues wearing all white, we had an amazing strike force that season with Bridges scoring 29, Vowden 23, Pickering 19 and Vincent 17! It was a real battle of a game with Chelsea battering us at times but with that strike force you always have a chance and around the 65th minute Fred Pickering stooped to head home into the goal right in front of us! We hung on to that goal advantage and won 1-0, we were in the semi's!

The draw for the last 4 had us matched with Albion at Villa Park. It was one of those days, we wore red which I never liked then and still don't, we were playing at our old enemies ground in front of 60801 and I was wedged under the scoreboard. I can't remember too much of the game but know gave a good account of ourselves. Everything seemed to go against us that day and a chant from the Blues fans when Pickering's shot into the Holt end hit the post summed it all up "why don't you all \*\*\*\* off".

We lost 2-0 and Astle scored of course. I was heartbroken as I was sure we were going to win the Cup.

Little did I know at the time that this would be the first of many heart breaks to come over the next 50 years!

KRO