

CITY BATTLE THROUGH THE MUD

Contributed by Paul Weston
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PLYMOUTH ARGYLE 1 CITY 1 I continued on my journey to the south-west like many City fans. It was snowing as I left my overnight stop at Exeter and I hoped that, after all this effort to get there, the match would not be called off! I need not have worried. It was a gloriously sunny day as I approached Home Park and there seemed to be as many fans wearing blue and white as those of the infamous Green Army. The stadium is a relic from the past and it is amazing that Plymouth was successful with its World Cup bid. The ground certainly needs a major rebuilding operation as does the pitch which was truly awful. No wonder Plymouth struggle to play a passing game on the equivalent of a ploughed field. I won't go into the details of the pies and burgers-only to say that they were on a par with Bristol City's for taste and price. Pearson started with the same team that played so well in the first half against Bristol and it took some time for players to get their measure of the pitch and to see how they could adapt. Plymouth played a long ball continually to Fallon upfront and this was meat and drink to Brown and Hobbs....

I sat in the Plymouth stand with some local fans and there was continual moaning about Argyle as Leicester snuffed out their attacks and played possession football, although without creating many clear chances. The best chance was when Dyer ploughed through the mud in a breakaway and cut inside for a shot that beat the keeper but came off the post, with Waghorn just failing to get to the rebound.

It still came as a great surprise when City scored with one of the most bizarre own goals I have ever seen. Argyle's left back turned the ball back towards his goalkeeper from quite a way out. The only problem was that the goalkeeper was standing in a totally different place and the ball flew past him into the net with unerring accuracy.

City were 1-0 up and, with Argyle jittery in defence, were there for the taking. Too often, though, Waghorn was caught offside when we tried to catch Argyle on the break. Dyer had the beating of his man on the wing but Gallagher struggled on the right where there was some grass visible (or was it green mould?).

Argyle's main weapon was a young left winger called Noone who gave Morrison a hard time throughout. He was very direct and the City defence started to look nervy. He burst through the middle and passed to the right. The cross was not closed down and he jumped well between our defenders to head a good goal from about their first half only chance. This lifted Argyle just before half time as it ended 1-1.

City started the second half strongly with Gallagher's volley blocked and Oakley shooting wide. Both were good chances and would have finished the game off. Then Plymouth started to control midfield more and, after taking off Fallon (their equivalent of Steve Howard), they played a better passing game in the mud and were winning the midfield battle. Kermorgant came on for Waghorn to try and win the ball more but it still get coming back too quickly to the City defence which was starting to wobble a bit.

Nevertheless in the last period Berner should have scored with a close in header. Solano came on and nearly scored with a clever lob. At the other end under great pressure Weale touched a volley onto the bar and, in a frantic ending, Hobbs cleared off the line as the Argyle fans stopped moaning and started to cheer on their team.

Four minutes of injury time did not this time deliver any more goals and it ended 1-1. If you weren't there you would say that City should have taken all three points from a bottom three side. However, given the journey and the state of the pitch I reckon 1-1 was a pretty good result, as Plymouth Argyle probably shaded it in the end.

Not surprisingly many of the City players looked knackered at the end and Pearson will surely have to change things around for the away match at Doncaster which is nearly here already.

As usual Brown and Hobbs were, for me, the men of the match. No-one else really stood out for the whole match, although it was a solid team effort. The good thing at the moment is that we are creating chances and looking mobile in attack with support from midfield breaking forward.

The worry over the last two games, though, is that we are missing about five good chances for every goal we score. Without Fryatt will we score enough to get three points instead of one? The Doncaster match will be the toughest of all the lot and you can be sure that Doncaster will play a very different game to the one at the Walkers.

The teams above us in the league are starting to stretch out a bit and we need three points to keep our momentum really going. It will be very interesting to see the team and formation that Pearson selects for Doncaster and then it's the one we have been waiting for-Forest and revenge!!

City: Weale; Morrison, Hobbs, Brown, Berner, Oakley, A King, Wellens, Gallagher, Waghorn, Dyer. Subs: Logan, Neilson, Bruce, Solano (82 for Gallagher), Howard, N'Guessan, Kermorgant (66 for Waghorn).

Booked: Brown, Gallagher.

Plymouth: Stockdale; Duguid, Fletcher, Clark, Johnson, Mackie, Arnason, Fallon, Barker, Noone, Johnson. Subs: Larrieu, Sawyer, Summerfield, Judge, Mason (60 for Fallon), Cooper (75 for Clark), Bolasie.

Referee: R East.

Attendance: 11,581.