**Eight is enough.**

 **Wanderers v Waitakere 6th April**

Another season and almost a year to the day we also hosted Waitakere for the first Lotto NRFL game of the season. We won that day 3-1. This time the venue was to be at their place but they requested a switcheroo for some reason or another. It turned out to be like putting an Indian cricket side into bat first on a flat track. And by the end of the game the boys Waitakere were almost hoping for a declaration from a rampant Wanderers side.

Perhaps it was the lucky new blue kit supplied by Lotto (thanks) or the flashy new dugouts that some of the lads (lead by new assistant coach Shane Comber) had spent the morning erecting? The omens were good when the rain let off to give us a dry game. New players Gurjeet (Sunny) Singh, Eder Franchini, Alexis Varela and Wade Molony all possess speed in spades adding to a nimble Wanderers side who already had fast guys Jordy Shaw, Mark Jones and David Samson.

Coached from Allwhite Colin Tua a young Waitakere side initially gave no indication of a capitulation. In fact one or two defensive mistakes could have lead to them scoring first. It was not to be. We forced their keeper into a number of desperate saves, mainly from speedy debutant Sunny Singh. There was also a reasonable penalty shout after the keeper clipped Alexi Varela. The ref studiously ignored it. Anyway the first goal came after the keeper dropped a cross for Ray How to knock in. (I missed it attending to a managerial duty but it sounds like a nervous mistake by the lanky keeper).

Anyway we started to have fun. Ricky Broderson knocked in a smart free kick and How scored a glancing header be within a shout of hat-trick... and less than half an hour gone! Then in the 30th minute another fine Broderson through ball, this time bisecting the defence to give Singh an easy run and slot past the keeper to make it 3.

Then another Broderson free kick was headed on by Adam Luque to Molony who knocked it in from about 6 inches out. David Samson, in his welcome return to the team showed a ton of pace down the right and knocked the ball across for Varela to head home for a 5-0 halftime lead.

At halftime Mark Cossey asked the lads to keep pushing. Comber pointed out that goal difference might count for something at the end of the season so keep the pressure on guys!

As expected, Waitakere attempted to force the pace early on in the 2nd half and Vlad Frank in goal had to smartly palm away a menacing cross before normal order was returned with Molony giving their defence a few worries with mazy running but not the thunderbolt shot to test the keeper. Then Tom Crawford’s excellent curving shot was denied by a fingertip save, the resulting corner saw Broderson hit a deceptive corner that beat everyone and snuck into the near corner. 6-0.

We threw a few subs on. Eder Francini gave no respite to the now shell shattered Waitakere team. He looked sharp and composed. Fellow substitute Graham Kay then tried a tricky shot which was saved but gave him a chance to square the ball across to fellow substitute Dominic Edwards who scored clinically. For a young guy scoring his first goal for Wanderers his celebration was a little muted. Perhaps he felt sorry for the opposition? But no. After another tidy Frank save the ball again came to Kay who passed again to Edwards who duly knocked in the 8th goal.

So a tremendous start to the season and perhaps a record score for our lads in this division. Captain Ricky Broderson had a fine game and can be extremely happy with progress. Being a recent arrival I am not sure if or when a Wanderers Northern league team have had such a decent start but hey, still 17 games to go so the new lucky blue kit still has plenty of work to get though.

**Champs cut down to size.**

 **Wanderers v Bay Olympic 13th April**

After the first two matches of the year we sit proudly at the top of the table. It was a little tighter this week than last however. But a win is a win ain’t it? Shankly told me back in the 70’s after a game that the mark of a great team is to play badly and win anyway. Clough tried to butt in and argue the point but I said sod off Clough what have you ever won?

The David Samson hoodoo hit again as the midfielder was ruled out after a training injury. However along came Jones as Mark returned from a suspension to fill the high octane wide spot. The reigning champs had a team that looked fairly changed from last year with a few of their big names missing. “The money’s dried up” someone said.

However the Bay team competed from the start and gave no quarter. The game quickly degenerated into a scrappy affair with the ball in the air mostly rather than on the deck. This nullified our quick passing style to some extent. Our central midfielders were barely getting a look-in. Jarrod Young gave a warning shot early on with a smartly taken free kick that their keeper tipped to safety. After a narrow offside against Jones Bay pushed forward and won a corner. The resulting cross was ping-ponged round a bit before it sat up invitingly for Yoji Tanable to hook in. 0-1.

We struck back fairly smartly. A long Adam Luque throw caused consternation and eventually Wade Molony was cut down while teeing up a shot. Young whacked in the pen to bring us back to level terms. The untidy play continued. Vladimir Frank, our erstwhile Russian keeper, got down smartly to a sharp cross and on our part Young cut inside and from the wing and tried a speculative shot, then Sonny Singh burst through to score only to be ruled offside. This was to be the pattern all day. (The line-o’s complained after the game that we were so often offside they suffered arm cramps)

Early in the second half a pin-point Jones through-ball gave Tom Crawford a chance to give Wanderers the lead. However his shot blazed into the underside of the cross bar and back into play. Then from a Bay Olympic corner we broke, Singh burst forward and with only the keeper to beat sent the ball into the side netting. He had a further chance but chipped just wide then substitute Eder Franchini blasted one over the top.

 Fate didn’t seem to be smiling, until the very last minute when Raymond How was taken out at a corner. The Australian ref pointed to the spot and suddenly we had a chance to win it. Mark Cossey looked away - “I can’t watch penalties”- as Jarrod Young , who later admitted that he’d been forced to head so many long balls that his vision was a tad blurry, stepped up and calmly slotted the winner. Young , still ..err young , is starting to justify his early promise and capped a fine game. Jordy Shaw, the other outside back also had a good afternoon as usual with his strong and determined tackling.

After losing in similar circumstances to Bay Olympic last year it was great to even the ledger. I tend to agree with Bay coach that a draw may have been a fairer outcome but we’ll take the win I reckon and I’m sure Shankly would have agreed.

Rod de Lisle

**Third time unlucky**

 **Wanderers V East Coast Bays 20th April**

Our third successive home game and this time a win eluded us after our previous 2 victories. Our reserves played in a torrential downpour and preserved their winning streak with a solid 2-0 win. However the main match, although played mainly without rain, was on a surface that resembled a paddling pool and turned the game into a (insert cliché here about lottery or farce etc). We got in the ear of local MP David Bennett who was in attendance, how about a nice all weather pitch David? After all we play in blue..

After 5 minutes where players stumbled and hacked the ball out of puddles, both coaches were urging the ref to reconsider his decision to go ahead with the game. (as an aside his pre-match check was done without a football - a quick boot-about on this surface would have shown how unsavoury the conditions were- ).

Anyway the game went on. It was a partly comical and partly tragic, like watching another sport entirely. The main highlight of the first half was a speculative long range effort from halfway from Eder Franchini which hit the bar. Franchini was making his first start after 2 impressive substitute appearances. East Coast Bays had a couple of chances, one when Jarrod Young skewed a clearance but Vladislav Frank in goal managed to get his hands to. They also had a header from a corner that that flew wide.

In the second half Bays took an early lead with a dubious free kick awarded to Bays that was knocked wide then crossed into the box for an unmarked player to knock home. By now the ref was in a booking frenzy and his pen was busier than a Wanderers barman on a Thursday night. Wanderers had a chance or two with Alexis Varela and Franchini firing shots over the top. Then a game defining moment when, despite a couple e of calls for offside and fouls the ref gaily waved play on and the East Coast Bays guys broke though into the box where Raymond How tripped an attacker and was shown a red. The resulting spot kick was hammered home.

 We got back into to the game when substitute Graham Kay’s deflected shot from the right hit the target. Another second yellow to one of the Bays substitutes saw both sides end the game on 10 men. We had a very late chance that soared over, the ref blew for full time and that was that, a first loss but it probably could have gone either way.

Frank in goal was impressive all day and Jordy Shaw at the back was like a duck enjoying the lake-like conditions. But generally our team thrives on pace and passing and on this day there was no option for either. Perhaps flippers and snorkel may have brought a better result.

**Central hoodoo removed.**

**Central v Wanderers - 28th April**

Phil Rice, our statistics man and font of all football wisdom, told me that, according to his big red statistics book, Wanderers had never won at Kiwitea St. So to come away with three points in this latest encounter is an occasion worth noting. Also of note was the manner of the win. So superior were Wanderers it could, and should, have been 3 or 4 at least.

It was a bit strange to begin with, just prior to the teams walking out there was a stoush between the Central back-room boys and the ref, apparently the Central boys were holding up proceedings and there was lots of yelling and fist shaking but no actual fisticuffs, sadly. The result was a kick off that was 4 mins late. I thought that can’t be good for their player’s focus. It wasn’t. Right from the onset we were on the front foot and bossing the game Sunny Singh in particular was scything through a rather shaky defence and only needed the odd once of luck to put us one up. But he missed a chance or two and the best opportunity was when he hassled one of their defenders into nearly conceding an OG. Then Eder Franchini, showing the vision that is the hall-mark of his game, surprised their keeper with a long shot that was only just tipped over. Then Van Ewert, making his first start of the year cut in a curled a long shot that was agonisingly just wide.

82% of the game to Wanderers said Rice at half time. Be patient implored Asst Coach, Shane Combers, it will come. He was right. It did take most of the second half though.

 Although Central gained a little more impetus we still had most of the play. Adam Luque at the back was having an imperious game winning everything in the air and reading the game superbly. In Raymond How’s absence, young Johnny Konings, Luque’s central partner, fitted in nicely and had a steady game. We kept pushing for a goal. Jordy Shaw surged through from the back and hit a shot at the keeper. David Samson making a strong run down the right passed to Singh who crossed early for Ewert to attempt a volley that if it had come off would have been a contender for goal of the year. However it didn’t. Jarrod Young knocked one through to Singh who attempted a header, Mark Jones a second half sub cut in an smashed a shot wide then Singh had another shot saved.

Eventually the goal came, rather innocuously. In the 87th minute, Jones crossed from the left, it seemed to bobble round a bit then into Ricky Broderson’s chest then somehow just sit up, begging for him to knock in it his foot, so he did. That’s how you do it lads said captain Broderson. The bench erupted and the points were ours.

So second place in the premiership is still ours and 3 out of 4 represents a good start to the season., Although Singh didn’t score he caused lots of problems for Central, our defence were excellent and our midfield and front guys worked a lot harder than Central. Even their coach conceded the win was a deserved one and Luque took the bubbly for MoTM.. After losing 7-4 here last year it was a nice turn around and Phil Rice has a nice new statistic for his big red book.

Rod de Lisle

**May the Forth be with you.**

**Wanderers v Ellerslie - 4th May**

Do you know May 4 is International Star Wars day? As in “May the Forth be with you”. Ok there is a match report in here somewhere. On May 4th we tried but didn’t win; the Force was not with us that day?

No game in the Lotto Premiership is easy, that is Cossey’s mantra. It serves us well. But we expect to win every game we play. A 1-1 draw in Saturday somehow felt like a loss. It’s probably in the way we’ve been playing. We are dominating matches and restricting goal chances. It seems like we are forgetting how to score goals.

 This game was no exception. Early on we had a cross-cum-shot that grazed Ellerslie’s cross hit bar. Then a fiery Alexis Varela shot was tipped over by their keeper. From the corner Ricky Broderson crossed for Raymond How. How is a master of the header, this time his headed flick-on sweetly dissected the defence and soared into the net. 1-0. What a great start. We started to show some slices of tikka- takka football, neat and tidy, without managing too many goal chances. Our quick game is great to watch. However scoring another goal was proving difficult. Jordy Shaw on the left, found Jarrod Young on the right with the best pass of the match. Young sliced goal-ward and hit a shot that their keeper fumbled but kept out. Mark Jones, all action, burst through as well and had a shot blocked. We need another goal Cossey muttered.

In defence we didn’t have too many worries. Goalie, Vladislav Frank, the Velcro man, held every ball that was struck at him. He is remarkable for a 60 year old. The quality of play declined somewhat toward the end of the half. And it seemed any stray-pass or deflection was landing at the feet of their players, not ours. Luck plays a part in most games and we didn’t seem to be getting the rub of green. But we didn’t capitalise on our dominance either and at half time it was only 1-0.

With the second half still young it didn’t take long for Wanderers to fashion another chance. Eder Francini sent a long ball to Young who flicked on to Varela who was adjudged offside. Then Broderson whipped in a cross to Jarrod who attempted a overhead. Sunny Singh spun and shot wide. Then Singh was put through as both Ellerslie defenders collided with each other. Seemingly easier to score than miss Singh somehow contrived to put the ball wide. Singh should have had a couple of goals this day and will be unhappy with himself.

These wasted chances proved our undoing. When Ellerslie received a dubious free kick they took it quickly, surged down the right the ball was centred to Nathan Palmer who smashed it past Frank. This equaliser put their tails up and the game eventually petered out to a tame draw. They were as happy as K2 sellers on dole day and we were disconsolate.

However we maintained second place on the table and know the next game or two will be vital in our quest for honours this season. Points are all. As the bloke from Star Wars, Yoda once said “Try not. Do or do not, there is no try."

Rod de Lisle

**Three Kings. Free for all for three all.**

**3 Kings v Wanderers. 11th May**

It’s a wide pitch that 3 Kings one so we need a fit team said Mark Cossey. So we turned up at Keith Hay and noticed that the pitch wasn’t as wide as usual with the sidelines drawn closer in. A sign they haven’t got a decent winger this year I thought. Our reserves kicked off first and continued their great start to the season with a 2-0 defeat of the 3 Kings seconds.

Most of the action in the main event happened fairly on. Late comers to the game will have found a hefty score line after only 20 minutes or so. Wanderers kicked it off with Sunni Singh bursting through, his shot attempt was blocked by the keeper but the rebound fell nicely to young Dominick Edwards who coolly side footed it on from a fair old distance. Like a London bus another goal came along two minutes later. Centre-back Ray How sent a delightful long ball to Mark Jones who swooshed in from the right and hit a decent shot that the keeper parried up and over? No, it dropped nicely into the net.

Shane Comber said ‘boys we could be on for a big margin here’ but before anyone had a chance to get too cocky 3 Kings hit back with three successive goals. Two from breakaways that utilised their speedy forward, the other from a corner. What just happened we wondered? It was like passing through Taupiri, blink and you would have missed it.

Our heads collectively dropped a smidgen. However their somewhat dodgy goalie contrived to let a long range effort from Jarrod Young trickle between his legs and so it became 3-3, a proverbial goal-fest. The game was proving a thriller for spectators if not quite so for the respective coaches. 3 Kings had also shipped 3 goals in the first 15 the previous week, one can assume their team tactics next week will be to delay the kick-off till their defence awakens from their Saturday siesta.

Like most of our previous matches we were enjoying most of the play. Another Young long shot was just held by the keeper and Into the second half Singh had a mishit shot after being put through clear. Eder Franchini tried his customary long range shot with unerring accuracy which was held by the keeper. He was also winning lots of ball in midfield a fine contributor to the cause. Substitute David Smith looked dangerous. He started and finished a slick passing move down the right that was crowned with a decent cross that Wade Molony didn’t quite manage to get to. Ricky Broderson also had a chance out front but was denied time to control and shoot.

 3 Kings then had a couple of goes at a fourth goal, one a free kick that Vladislav Frank, the Wanderers, custodian tipped over, then their number 7 cut inside superbly before his long range shot deflected off the post.

Frank was then taken out by a 3 Kings forward late in the match and laid prone on the pitch. Reserve keeper, Adam Luque, nervously laced up his boots in readiness. But Frank is a tough guy, -some say he is half Russian, half depleted-uranium shielded tank- he soon bounced back to his feet.

So the final outcome was shared points, certainly better than our 2-0 reversal last season, but one can’t help feeling the game was there for our taking. For Wanderers Young was the man of the match and Franchini a close second. Centre-backs How and Johnny Konings also had good games despite the three conceded.

**Onehunga no Sports.**

**Onehunga Sports v Wanderers. 25th May**

A plague on the sides that sneak a goal against us in the last minute! Birkenhead did it last week and Onehunga, in a most unsporting way, hit a last gasp equaliser after Wanderers looked set to take the three points.

With Mark Cossey consigned to the naughty chair after being ‘sent off’ last week we had no coach on the bench with Shane Comber also not available. However the elder statesman of the team Graham Kay took the reins admirably and showed that he has the right ingredients to consider a coaching role when he hits 40 (so that’s in 12 months time GK?). Peter Davies, the reserve team coach, also stepped up after their curtain-raiser game. (*As an aside the Reserves won again to continue their fine run and remain top of the table after a close 4-3 victory over Onehunga’s reserve team).*

On a slippery pitch, veiled in a curtain of rain, once again we started well and pressed forward. Mark Jones nipped in for the ball and was up-ended so we had an early crack at goal. Jarrod Young hit it well but it went wide. That set up a pattern of Wanderers attacks and we had one or two chances before eventually David Smith held the ball up then poked it into the path of ex-Onehunga player Alexis Varela who cracked the ball home via a slight deflection.

We dominated the half from there on with the exception of two worrying Onehunga attacks. One resulted in the ball striking the bar and there was also a shout for a penalty when the Onehunga striker was up-ended. Sunny Singh and our wide midfielders all endeavoured to unlock the defence again but with no luck. Ricky Brodersn tried a long-ranger that was, like his dress sense, a bit over the top.

We started the second half ok but the second goal just wouldn’t bleedin’ come. It was as annoying as the Linesbloke who for some reason kept telling the guys on the bench to sit down (crikey mate, just worry about the game, don’t be so officious – our chairs are soaking wet!) A stunning run by classy Michael Built through the heart of the Onehunga team merely resulted in Singh losing possession and the chance for a shot. Singh then had a fairly good chance but elected to use his foot rather than the more obvious head. His shot looped up and for a microsecond it seemed he was going to break his 7 game drought. However the ball hit the bar and out.

The flow of the game changed toward the latter stages and Onehunga became more assertive. I thought Vladislav Frank , valiant keeper of the goal , had made a stunning save last week. This time out he nearly matched it with a desperate hand to flick a goal-bound shot over the bar. With Adam Luque back in the team and fellow defenders Konings, Young and Shaw on song we looked to be headed for a clean sheet.

That is until the 95th minute (where that extra time come from ref?) when Onehunga broke down the right, neatly passed it round their forwards and eventually to an unmarked player who slid it in for 1-1.

So another heartbreaker for the lads. They strove mightily all game lead by the tireless captain Broderson but with meagre reward. 4 draws in a row, already double the number we had in the whole of last season. Broderson summed it up well. “We need to be converting these numerous chances that we are creating to ensure the wins, it is most frustrating.”

With other top teams dropping points, Wanderers remain only 4 points from the lead but this division is shaping up to be a tight one. But as Mark Cossey says: “It’s great , no one can take any other side too easy, we should be happy when we win and gutted when we lose. That’s how foot ball should be!”

**Rugby Score at Beetham.**

**Wanderers v Manurewa. 1st June.**

Sodden Porritt Stadium was ruled out on the Friday before this game. So Brendon Coker, sought and got permission to use Beetham Park, a field mainly used for rugger training. Goals, nets, flags and dugouts were trucked over in an operation reminiscent of the D-day landings and a football stadium was cobbled together. The main challenge was letting everyone know where we were playing. ‘Where is the ground?” asked Sunny Singh?” Right next to the rugby stadium” I replied, “you can’t miss it”, then immediately regretted my choice of words. However Sunny, who had a meagre return of only 1 goal in 8 matches, did find the ground, and what’s more, he seemed to like it.

We walked off the pitch a couple of hours later with a 6-0 win under our belts and Sunny with three goals to add to his previous one.

The rugby guys had marked out our pitch but left the rugby goals in place behind the football ones. So it shortened the pitch somewhat, but the surface was excellent. And there was the possibility of a drop goal or conversion if we got bored with hitting regulation football shots.

Manurewa are languishing somewhat in the league and were unhappy after being docked points for fielding an ineligible player. They didn’t enjoy the long walk from their changing rooms either (approx half a km). We got into them early on: Mark Jones burst through and tried a long shot. Then he whizzed down the right like a anorexic greyhound and his neat cross grazed the crossbar. We were doing everything but score. Eventually though a Wade Molony cross from the left was neatly deflected by Jordan Shaw off his eyebrow into the goal. We continued to press. A Jones cross was narrowly missed by both Singh and Molony. Then Singh received a pass from midfield turned, what I thought was the wrong way. But he muscled though and showed determination to shrug off defenders and slot the ball home.

Everyone tried to get in on the act, even Adam Luque pushed forward for a crack at ‘doing a goal’ but his shot was a more like a pass-back. A Shaw free kick was pushed away and Singh also had a chance or two. Manurewa put up some resistance, a free kick deflected off our cross bar, but Vladislav Frank in goal was largely untroubled. We turned around with a 2-0 lead. The weather was holding off so both team opted to have team talks on the field rather than face the long route march back to the changing rooms.

At the start of the second half Singh threaded a good ball to Michael Built but he blasted his shot over (for a conversion?). Then the ball was looped out to Jarrod whose first time cross-cum-shot was met by Singh who tapped it in. Wanderers were showing their class and one or two sweet passing moves, usually involving Built could have easily resulted in further additions to the score board. It came along finally when Jones found some space on the right and elected to shoot, successfully from a tight angle to give us a fourth one.

David Smith who had come on as a sub was showing a few party tricks and eluded tackles at will. He eventually received the ball in the penalty box with two defenders breathing down his neck. In a trice he executed a little Maradona-pull-back turn and then curled a shot round the keeper to make it 5. Best goal of the match? Nope, even that was eclipsed a few minutes later when Singh received the ball about 40 metres from goal, looked up and blasted a right footer into the top of the net. Confidence eh? It only takes a goal or two…

So six-of-the-best at a makeshift ground, local spectators went away happy and our run of draws ended in a conclusive fashion. So expect to see us back at Beetham before long?

**Superstars up-ended by upstarts.**

**Waitakere v Wanderers . 8th June.**

We knew Waitakere haven’t won a game all season. So on the betting sites we were favourites. But we also knew they had injected a bunch of O-league superstars into their team and it’s a long journey out west to their park. A hard task in other words.

We had a couple of key players out but a tight combination was fashioned with Michael Built taking the strikers role for the injured Sunny Singh. We didn’t really know about their team of aforementioned superstars as they had neglected to produce a programme. They also didn’t have ball-boys, or a covered dugout. Just saying.

Waitakere threatened early, with some discomfort to our defenders, the ball seemed to dip and dive like a drunken magpie (cheap balls said Combers). One hopeful shot spilled from Vladislav’s Frank’s hand and had to be hacked away. There was very little noise on and off the pitch; it had all the atmosphere of a library. Maybe the locals are a wee bit disillusioned at their low ranking on the table.

Eventually they scored though. A wayward cross eluded everyone except Rory Turner who controlled and toe-poked it home. But Wanderers are a resolute bunch, none so much as Mark Jones whose combinations with Jarrod Young have worked well on the right this season. He made a bit of space in the 35th minute and hared up the pitch in his typical fashion. He shaped to cross. Low and hard I yelled at him (*says Rod taking half the glory*) and he duly obliged. In slid Alexi Varela and suddenly it was 1-1.

At the halftime interval Cossey and Combers urged the lads on. “We can win this, we need to win this, a draw is no good”. The lads trooped out all fired up and duly conceded a goal straight away. Jordan Shaw, who otherwise had a fine game, got caught in possession and they swiftly burst up the field , passed to Turner who slotted his second.

However our guys, shrugged their shoulders, and got straight back onto the attack. We pressured the hesitant Waitakere defence for a period. Then from a corner the ball bobbled around , Adam Luque rather spastically threw a left leg, then a right leg at the ball, then it rebounded kindly for Jones to poke in. 2-2.

It seemed only another minute or two later that Ricky Broderson received the ball in midfield and lobbed a perfect pass over the top for Built to run onto and flick past the keeper. 3-2!

There was still 30 minutes to play but no further addition to the scoreboard eventuated. Built terrorised them with another shot or two and sub Dominick Edwards also had a shot blocked. The win was happily confirmed after some extra time that seemed to stretch on forever. So, the double over Waitakere for the season and 11 goals in the process (they must love us!). Superstars? They better look to the Waikato for their next recruitment drive.

**Mangere Mangled.**

**Wanderers v Mangere Utd . 15th June.**

With Porritt looking to be gone for most of the season we had to hire Beetham Park again. We do like playing there, despite no facilities for spectators and bugger all for the players. We’d spanked Manurewa there a couple of weeks ago.

 After last round, another Div 2 side but these guys were sitting high in the table and had only conceded 6 goals all season. I was speaking to Don Revie once and he said you gotta watch those underdogs Rod , they’ll sneak one in and hold on for grim death.

Mangere started badly by turning up late and trying to delay the match. They ran out eventually with no apparent warm-up and the match kicked off about 7 mins late in the end.

The first half ended scoreless. A bit of a fist fight ending in a flurry of yellow cards, and some good attempts on our part, were all there was in terms of action. Vladislav Frank pulled out his customary excellent save when one on one, as expected and Mark Jones had got down the right flank well. He hit some good crosses but our headers were generally wide. It was a tiny worry for the coaching team. However the Mangere boys looked a bit tired by the 45 minute mark. They all had hands on hips like a Time-warp dance. We knew they had put a hefty defensive workload and smelt blood.

Apart from a goal-line stop by Jordy Shaw the Mangere threat fizzled out after we knocked in a couple of goals. We scored, firstly when the ref played a good advantage and Jones coolly slotted from the right and secondly when Michael Built, who had enjoyed an excellent game, timed a run at a corner superbly and headed powerfully into the corner.

Jones added two more for his hat trick and Built another one for a five-zip end result. Our defence stood firm again and our midfield were kept busy all game marshalled by Cap’n Ricky Broderson.

Late news: Because we love travelling to Auckland so much, our 4th round game will be Birkenhead or Glenfield away. Book the bus, or start walking guys.

**Franks for the memories.**

**Bay Olympic v Wanderers. 22nd June.**

When out fishing with goalkeeping legend Banksie I asked his about THAT miracle save. His answer surprised me. There was a similar miracle on in this match when the ball appeared destined for the net. But I get ahead of myself. It is a sign of how far this Wanderers team has come, that to only get a point at Bay Olympic, is seen as a bit gutting.

We'd beaten them at home but they had dragged in some super National league players and had been winning easily. This game ended in a thrilling draw. We ended up hanging on a bit in the end with tired legs and no subs left on the bench. But Wanderers played well for large tracts of this game and certainly outplayed Bay in the first half.

In the early minutes the lads sprayed the ball around and showed plenty of pizzazz. David Smith was back in the side and made an early run before being up-ended illegally. Graham Kay also burst through with a great run and fired over. Then Michael Built had a decent shot saved. Eventually we took the lead. Jarrod Young hit the touch line with an adroit little run, beat a couple of defenders then laid back for Smith who controlled, dummied, then hit a crisp shot through the phalanx of defenders. 1-0

Our lead only lasted a short time. Their main play-actor, Coombes, contrived to fall over after the merest whisper of a nudge. His theatrically-earned free kick was nicely hit into the box where a header made it 1-1. Although we dominated the half the Bay boys had a couple of thunderbolts valiantly stopped by our keeper Vladislav Frank.

Right on half time Cuneen up-ended Mark Jones and Jarrod Young dispatched the penalty and Wanderers had a deserved 2-1 lead.

The heavy pitch wore us down in the second half. There were few highlights. One was a weird sequence where Smith was ordered off to get a bloodied knee dealt to. We decided to sub him off and he was yellowed for leaving the pitch early! But sanity prevailed and the yellow was rescinded. The game trundled on, with few chances but lots of whistles.

 Eder Francini, Alexi Varela and man of the match Michael Built all eventually ran out of puff after putting in enormous workloads. We also lost Johnny Konings -injured- and the game became a battle for survival. When we lost a ball they raced down the right, crossed and scored another header 2 - 2.

Then came a moment of magic

In 1970 England's Gordon Banks pulled off an amazing save from Pele at the Mexico World Cup. Well in the 85th minute Frank pulled off a similar block from a close range attempt, a desperate hand tipping the ball up and over the bar: the parochial crowd could not believe that the ball stayed out. Banks told me he has no idea how he managed his save and Frank told me the same thing about his effort after this game. It must be pure goalie reflex, hard wired into a natural shot-stopper.

So that's how it ended, 2-2, somewhat disappointing, especially for coach Cossey who is as competitive as a rabid X-Factor contestant. But in hindsight it was a hard fought effort and the point might prove vital.

**Groundhog Day.**

**Birkenhead v Wanderers. 29nd June.**

The same round and same game for us in the Chatham cup. It started ok. A hot sunny day beckoned and we got music in the bus finally.

As always Birkenhead did it well, face painted kids and all. And a typical hot reception for us out-of -towners The banks were thronged with people enjoying the unseasonal warmth. It was a bit like an 80’s rock festival, and there was even a waft of electric herb in the air: for a footie game?

Ultimately the game ended with the same result as last year’s with our cup dreams also up in smoke

Captain Ricky Broderson was still away but rang from LAX to wish us well. Vladislav Frank donned the armband and led the troops into the fray

 The first half was a little sluggish, especially for our guys, Frank pulled off a good save early on and we tried a couple of runs that went no-where. But a pattern of conceding free kicks emerged early on and from one of these, at a tight angle, their hopeful shot eluded everyone and nestled in the net.

The only other moment of note in this half was when Mark Jones wriggled away out of defence and set off on a promising run before the ref pulled him and gave a free kick to Birkenhead due to a stupid remark from one of our defenders. Hmm.. loose lips etc eh?

The second half was a much better effort for Wanderers and we eventually drew level. Cossey changed the team and pushed Jones up front. It worked well. He received the ball in a tight spot but dodged and weaved like a eel on speed, leaving 4 or 5 defenders in his wake then shot low and hard into the far corner. A lovely goal.

Then, when we appeared to be getting on top to our surprise Birkenhead contrived to head up-field and score two quick goals. It must be said that the Wanderers defence were caught napping both times. And our defence is normally one of the best in the land.

The referee then started to meet his card target with a series of bookings. He eventually sent off Jones for an incident that that saw some play-acting by the Birkenhead player milking the red nicely. It did seem to be a tactic on their part, not withstanding that some of our tackles were a tad late at times. (*hang on while I clamber onto my bandwagon*) The theatrics that some teams employ are not great adverts for the game. A typical incident was when their number 8 went down like a shot sparrow and laid prone in an apparent paroxysm of pain until the booking of the Wanderers player was completed then he bounded to his feet fully restored. Hallelujah, a miracle at Sheppard’s Park folks!

Anyway down to 10 the game was effectively over, although sub, Dom Edwards did blast a hopeful long shot over the top toward the end. In the end despite some good games from the likes of Michael Built, Adam Luque and Alexi Varela , Wanderers came up a wee bit short.

So the Birkenhead faithful went home happy and Wanderers boys a disconsolate bunch headed south. But to coin the old cliché, we can now focus on the league eh chaps?

**Late goals heartbreak.**

**East Coast Bays v Wanderers. 6th July**

It’s a long road to success Andy Murray once told me and he should know. Wanderer’s football club, too, know all about long roads. With 6 away games in Auckland out of the last 8 the bus trip up from Hamilton is done virtually blindfold now and as we hit the Waikato Expressway again last Saturday we pondered, should Wanderers buy shares in a bus company perhaps? But I digress. For this game there was a slight reshuffling of deckchairs with David Smith transferring out and new-boy, Daniel Finlay, in from Glenfield. Wanderers were also hit by the absence of Mark Jones and Sunni Singh. East Coast Bays had just signed ex-Waikato man, Jason Hicks, a nippy customer.

Our reserves continued their fine form with a 4-1 trouncing of the ECB development team, was this good omen for us? The early signs in the main match were quite good. A fierce shot by Michael Built was deflected onto the post and the follow-up didn’t quite fall our way. The game flowed back and forth but it seemed that we had a slight edge, Built, the English pro that he is, especially looked menacing.

But the referee, as referees are intent on doing do nowadays, started flourishing cards willy-nilly like Willy Wonka dishing out sweets. Not just to us, to both sides. Built and Adam Luque both booked for Wanderers for vigorous (as opposed to dirty) tackles, along with 3 of the ECB boys.

East Coast Bays were not without chances, they had a rasping free kick saved well by Vladislav Frank and looked for penetrating passes constantly. We stood firm and at the other end could have had a penalty when captain, Ricky Broderson, was fouled in the box. Well we thought so but honest Broderson said afterwards it was outside the penalty area. We fluffed the free kick and the stalemate continued.

In the second half we had a chance so gilt-edged that it could have been owned by an Arab Sheikh. Their keeper couldn’t handle a pass back and knocked it gently out to Built who uncharacteristically failed to capitalize, hitting it straight back to the grateful goalie

Built and Alexi Varela had a couple of more attempts at doing a goal before ECB had a movement that resulted in Frank, the proverbial Berlin wall blocking them out with fine save. Then Wanderers Jarrod Young, in turn, struck a fierce free-kick that their keeper kept out well.

Nil- all with only 10 minutes to play and it was anyone’s match. But we lost the ball when hot on attack they swooped up-field like a troop of flying monkeys and dispatched the ball past Frank. At 1-0 down Wanderers pressed hard for an equaliser, backs ‘n all: Luque even tried a bicycle kick but to no avail. In a repeat move, right on the whistle, the Bays guys counter-attacked, knocked the ball around and eventually it sat up for the alert Hicks to score their second from close range. And that’s how it finished, only our second league defeat of the year and despite a reasonable effort on our part.

So back on the bus boys, a long disconsolate drive home but the promise of a long awaited home game next week.

**Jerseys for goalposts?**

**Wanderers v Central. 14th July**

The problems with the main pitch at Porritt stadium are well documented and Beetham Park was unavailable. So this match was a homeless orphan till the back pitch at Porritt was roped off and roped into action for the “game of the round” as 3rd place took on 4th. It had a pre-emptive feeling of “jerseys for goalposts” and a good old fashioned mud-slog beckoned. As it turned out it wasn’t too muddy at all and some proper goals were found in the shed.

The much vaunted Central juggernaut rolled into town on the back of several wins and no losses since round 5. But this is the year that we had finally beaten them in the away game and our reserves dealt to theirs 4-0 in the curtain raiser, could the first team snare some points as well?

As well as an unfamiliar pitch, there was a slightly unusual look to the team line-up as coaches Cossey and Comber sent solid centre back Raymond How up front to lead the attack. Amid the usual banter about providing How with “a map for the area beyond the halfway line” and “nose bleeds” he made a pretty good fist of it. Despite lacking the speed of a Singh or Kay he provided strength and height as well as a decent touch.

How was sent free early in the second half and got to the goal-line before looking up and assessing his options. With the aplomb of a seasoned front-man he coolly laid the ball back to Alexis Varela who smashed a first time shot at the Central custodian who conveniently spilled the ball. Michal Built did what all good forwards do and was on the spot like a predatory cat to lap up the scraps. The ball was sweetly swept into the net and it proved to the winner.

It had seemed a bit unlikely early on. From their first attack Central crashed the ball against the bar and it seemed Wanderers were in for a torrid afternoon. But the home team gained their composure and soon had the measure of their opponents. Even the best teams can only play as well as they are allowed and our boys hustled and harried like rabid terriers and show huge commitment. The Wanderers coaches had worked hard all week to pick up the team after last week’s loss. And a fine pre-season speech by captain Ricky Broderson seemed to have given the team a sense of togetherness. Although the game on a rough pitch was never going to be a smooth skilful classic, it was a cracker as the intensity of the home team never wavered.

In the first half Wanderers had a few shots wildly off-target before Mark Jones showed more finesse with a shot that grazed the post and out. Goalkeeper Vladislav Frank pulled off a couple of sharp saves but chances were fairly sparse: at half time there was a feeling that one goal might decide it.

And that’s how it turned out. The home defence was in fine form with centres Adam Luque and Johnny Konings as solid as the rock of Gibraltar. Players like Jordy Shaw, Jones, Varela and Broderson were sharp and clever with their passes. Central seemed almost lethargic at times, perhaps their multitude of highly paid stars were weighed down by heavy wallets? In their frustration they conceded 7 (or was it 8?) yellow cards, maybe some kind of record? To be fair, it did seem that the ref was a tad on our side and I often lament the opposite.

Near the end, substitute Dan Finlay nearly doubled the score when his cross-cum shot tantalizingly crept across the goal and just past the post. Central hit the bar again and that was the end of their challenge.

So a fine win and probably the first ever season double over Central. We’d like to be higher but 3rd place is a decent spot to be for an unheralded team like ours: there is even still a sniff at the title should results go Wanderers way over the next few weeks.

Rod de Lisle

Plastic fantastic

Ellerslie v Wanderers 20th July

Some firsts and lasts for the Wanderers team. Our first ever league match on an artificial turf and last league match for Michael Built (for this season anyway). Our little Matchbox bus chugged over the Bombay Hills for the 9th time this season and steered a course for the plastic pitch near Penrose and their army of red Lego players.

A famous Leicester manager once spoke to me about the time he replaced their legendary goalie Gordon Banks. “Everyone wrote us off when we pulled a youngster into the team, we’d never replace such a legend. “ The replacement? A young Peter Shilton: he turned out ok. With our ‘Banks,’ Vladislav Frank, taking the Wanderers under 15’s on a Euro adventure we turned to Ruben Parker the callow St Peters school kid. Would he be our Shilton or was it a step too far?

More: <http://hamiltonwanderers.co.nz/?tb_match=1115>

Wanderers started as bookies favorites -at $1.50 on the betting website- and we swiftly got into the game. An early Built snap-shot whistled over the crossbar like an Exocet missile and the lads put some tidy moves together in the tippy- tap style that works so well for us. Ellerslie, outsiders at $5, weren’t lying down for anyone and Parker had to come off his line sharpish to block a challenge.

Then Built flicked a header over to the far post, Raymond How, the defender-turned attacker timed his run well but his header lacked power and the grateful Ellerslie custodian knocked it away for a corner.

Alexi Varela and Eder Franchini, the Chilean duo, have complemented Ricky Broderson and Mark Jones to give Wanderers a dynamic midfield this term. However Varela, as South American as they came, rarely passes more than 10 metres and shoots at goal as rarely as Cossey buying a round of drinks. He had a chance or two but elected to pass instead.

Just before half time Wanderers hit the lead when Built for the 3rd time found How on the right had side of the goal. Ray, somehow contrived to chest the ball across the line .. at ground level (?) in a move that has already been dubbed by commentators the ‘snake’: no arms or legs required.

In the second half Wanderers preserved the lead for a time, resisting a spot of Ellerslie pressure, with Parker coming out well to deny a one-on-one chance that could have tied up the game. But like a well-oiled Tour-de-France team, Wanderers slowly turned up the heat and looked to double the advantage. This duly arrived when Built, showing his extra class, surged past two Ellerslie defenders then slipped the ball to How who couldn’t miss, but nearly did. 2-0.

The final quarter saw more attacks from the home side as they endeavored in vain to get back into the match. Parker kept things tight with a nice tip over save and our defenders, Messrs Shaw, Luque, Konings and Young looked a great deal tidier than their Ellerslie counterparts. We brought Built off a few minutes early so we could give him a deserved farewell ovation, as man of the match.

A 2-0 win, a predictable score-line perhaps, but points that had to be worked for and for young Parker, a well-deserved clean sheet. So the Wanderers team keeps chugging away like the faithful team bus, still in the top 3. And that probably a surprise to many people north of the Bombays.

Rod de Lisle

SMART VIEWS

The best laid plans...

Birkenhead v Wanderers 3rd August

Sometimes the best laid plans do not work out quite as expected. We expected it to rain during this game because the weather app on the iPhone said so. It didn’t, in fact it was as balmy as spring. We wanted the Chiefs to win the Sooper 15 easily. They did win but not easily. We planned to beat Birko ‘cos we plan to beat every side we face. It just was not to be our day. Football is a fickle mistress as David Pleat the ex-Spurs manager told me when we shared a cab in London once.

Franndo Molina made his debut for the Wanderers team and we had a strong bench with Young, Malony and Finlay rested from the starting line-up. Raymond How and Mark Jones were nursing niggly injuries but both a key players so we would see how they went.

The game started a busy manner, both teams play high octane football and do not lack for pace. The spectators settled back for a goal-filled treat. It didn’t really eventuate in the first half. We fired a couple of fiery free-kicks over the top and Birko looked dangerous on the break. Molina got through on goal and his shot went close. Graham Kay up front looked dangerous and in his trademark miserly way refused to give the ball away cheaply. The Chilean midfielders Varela and Franchini were as quick and nibbler as usual and both tried long range shots that were pleasing to the eye but not quite hitting the target as required. Our best chance was from a superb Kay run to the bye-line and a cross that found Molina whose header found the goalpost rather than the net.

Michael Kim came on in the second half. He looked dangerous with his tidy feet and good reading of the game. Ruben Parker, again in goal for the absent Vladislav Frank, made an excellent feet-first save and shortly after, Adam Luque fired a long ball that floated over the defence on onto the chest of Kim. Kim kept his head and toed the ball past the flailing keeper and into the empty net. Could this be the game where we beat the Birkenhead hoodoo?

Sadly our lead only lasted a minute or two before they equalised. Then with about 10 to go a pesky Birkenhead substitute managed to evade our scrambling defenders and someone somehow managed to bundle the ball into the net. Not a great way to win a game but a worse way to lose it. Our best chance after that was when Kay nodded the ball to Finlay on the far post who headed over the bar. Given another inch or two of height, the diminutive midfielder may have fared better but he did out-jump the taller defence.

A second loss on the trot but, overall it wasn’t a bad team effort. The excellent Kay up front, and our midfielders all toiled well and didn’t do much wrong. We hate losing but Wanderers were certainly not second best and even the Birkenhead graciously conceded that either side could have really won the game. Pity it wasn’t the blue machine. However it took the Chiefs many years to finally win a rugger championship and now they have two. Give us another season or two and it might soon be our year.

Rod de Lisle

One-all-hunga

Wanderers v Onehunga Sports 10th August

We trooped over the Fairfield Bridge to Beetham Park for our final match of the season. The rugby park has been press-ganged into action for 4 games this year but this was the first time we’d turned up to find a bunch of Waikato rep egg-ball chasers practising on the turf. That was problem number 1. We told them to sod off, ok, with them being on average about 6 foot 10, we were a little more circumspect in our wording than that. Problem number 2 was the reluctance of the Onehunga coaching staff to play on a pitch that they deemed a little short of required size. The previous games on this park had seen no whisper of a protest from anyone. Like boasting schoolboys we talked up the length and the Onehunga coaches graciously agreed to play although the ref hinted that he would report the issue as part of his match report. The absence of an actual tape measure would seem to indicate that any problem was perceived rather than actual.

The match was another game of two halves. Wanderers clearly dominated the first half although Sports hit a long ranger off the bar at one stage. But we have a few good chances. Mark Jones got wide and hit a cross that eluded all. From a corner Wade Molony hit a one over the goal and in fact also over the cross bar of the rugby goalposts that were redundant sentinels behind our proper goal posts this day. Then Johnny Konings got onto the end of a long cross and headed back for someone, Gaham Kay I think, to narrowly miss a connection. Kay also just failed to get onto another excellent Jones cross. To their credit the Onehunga defenders looked solid and defended like demented Trojans.

Wanderers were not to be denied. Jones lost the ball up front but tackled back in a determined manner. Somehow the ball broke loose and in a trice Kay was on to it and slotted it past the keeper.

The second half wasn’t too flash. Although Jarrod Young showed a nice touch early on with an in-cutting run, a couple of body-swerves and then a shot that went wide. It fizzled out like an old firework after that. Like many games this season the ref was determined to get his card quota and a mixture of yellows combined with some offside’s saw the game drop a notch or two before Alexi Varela put in a rash tackle just outside the box. The Onehunga team licked their lips, this had goal written all over it. The resulting shot beat wall and keeper to fulfil that expectation and the Auckland players celebrated like they had won the frikkin FA cup. Sitting in a perilous spot of the league table even a draw would help them keep out of the relegation zone. It’s dog-eat-dog at the foot of the ladder and Sports were relieved to be back in the game.

Raymond How, who was not having a vintage day, slipped slightly going in for a tackle and the studs-up angle gave the ref the chance to brandish a red. Down to 10 men Wanderers hung on for a draw and may have even snatched it when Eder Frachini walloped a free kick over the bar. Franchini scored the winner for Onehunga last year, but as he is on our team this season, a winner would have been more welcomed by the local fans.

Too rub in the general dissatisfaction of being robbed of a win, our right-back Young also had his boots purloined at the end of the game as he helped the lads get the nets in. Not cricket that! Finally here’s a stat that Phil Rice no doubt has in his little book. In each of the last 4 game Onehunga have knocked in exactly ONE goal against Wanderers. Just as well they are not called TWOhunga eh?

One for the record books.

Manurewa v Wanderers 17th August

I asked Sir Mick Jagger, who was guesting for us, to specify the type of coach we needed for our trip to Auckland. "Just make it a big one son," he replied. "I like plenty of leg room and a bit of space for the roadies. And a fully stocked bar and a 60 inch Telly." So we splashed out a larger bus and squeezed some supporters plus the reserve team in as well.

Like Arsenal or Scunthorpe, Manurewa have the unfortunate distinction of a team name you can make fun of by deleting some of the characters. And a word like ‘manure’ could best sum up their season as they languish at the base of the table. But having never won at their ground the Wanderers boys were never gonna take this fixture lightly

 However there was a small matter of the Ressies team having to win their game to snare the Reserve league trophy. And duly, after letting a lead lapse, the young fellas knocked in a late winner to round off an incredible season. Their coach, Peter Davies nearly missed the err.. coach this day but luckily he was there to guide them home.

Wanderers kicked the main match off in a determined fashion but the stiff South Auckland breeze made things a little tricky. However after Jarrod Young and Eder Francini went close, the first goal came from a curling Ricky Broderson that Graham Kay nodded in. The next goal came immediately afterwards. From a melee the ball broke to Mark Jones who chested down and hit a volley so sweet it had M ‘n Ms all over it.

The second produced only one more goal, and secured the win, but it was even better than the Jones one. Starting from the back, Wanderers strung together more than a dozen passes beforehand centre back Adam Luque imperiously swept into the opposition half and found Kay on the left. Kay controlled and bashed the ball in a rocket-like way into the 'Rewa net.

A classy way to end the season. Kay did go close a couple of times after that and could have easily had a hat trick. It seems like this was to be his final game for the Wanderers team, and perhaps final senior game. His contribution was a nice way to end a sterling career.

It seems to have been a long season but the coaching staff Cossey and Comber, ably assisted by physios Zhen and Vicky, fitness coach Josh and Phil Rice on stats, have guided the team well. President Brendon Coker summed it up well. “We run on the smell of an oily rag but this season many in the club felt, for the first time, that we could win this league”. It was not to be. Maybe next year?

Ricky Broderson, the captain, is an unsung hero who guides the team tirelessly and with a stout defensive quintet of Young, Konings, How, Luque and Shaw in front of the ageless Vladi Frank in goal the team was only ever beaten by the odd goal in our handful of losses. In midfield, as well as Broderson, Mark Jones and Chilean imports, Varela and Franchini were a class above most oppositions and it was only in attack where a high scoring striker could have added spice to the mix that we were less potent. A fine mid season spell by Michael Built showed how we could benefit. Surprisingly only 13 of our 50 goals came from strikers.

Anyway, barring a rogue result or two, the Wanderers blue machine looks like finishing at an un-paralleled 3rd place. And that for one of the less financial clubs in the Premier league is, like the Rolling Stones ability to survive decades of depravity, is most impressive. Sir Mick had the last word, "%#@! brilliant lads!

 Rod de Lisle