**Hamilton Wanderers match reports 2014**

**Glenfield blues for the Blues.**

**Glenfield Rovers v Wanderers 5th April**

Wanderers turned up at McFetridge Park, Glenfield to find that a lack of pre-match training areas had forced a late 3pm kick-off. I spoke to a local who explained that, in Auckland, any spare land grabbed and turned into a 3 story block of leaky flats. This results in a huge windfall for the developers and no space for anyone to swing a cat. This story could explain the apparent cash-fest on display at Glenfield as the home team unveiled a costly line-up of national league stars captained by ex-Hamiltonian Steve Holloway.    
  
Wanderers, on the other hand have the income level of a third world pensioner. Nevertheless the Blue machine took to the field determined not to be overrun by the money machine. The game was fairly desultory in the first 25 minutes perhaps early season jitters affecting skill levels. Glenfield had the best early chance when they hit the bar after a Vladislav Frank clearance. .   
  
Some rashness then entered the game with both sides committing a series of clumsy tackles. Ricky Broderson and Jordan Shaw were each booked for rash challenges before Broderson made amends with a fierce drive that was turned away by the Rovers keeper. That seemed to give Wanderers some heart and they took the lead when the clever Santiago Hassan jinked to the by-line and crossed to the far post where Mark Jones coolly steered it in. The defining point of the game was in the early part of the second half when Wanderers Sunni Singh was set free but his one-on-one ended with a tame shot straight at the keeper. The resultant counter attack ended with ref blowing for a Glenfield penalty kick for a apparent shirt pull and finding reason to red card Thomas Crawford, despite him being nowhere near the affray.   
  
This effectively killed off the contest. Glenfield’s Michael Gwyther converted the penalty then bundled in a second goal to give Rovers the lead. Wanderers battled manfully and Hassan actually scored against the tide only to have the goal disallowed for offside. But it was hit and hope for Wanderers generally and the home side were not overly troubled. Vladislav Frank , 101, belied his age by pulling off a couple of outstanding saves in succession to keep Wanderers in the game.   
  
The game deteriorated into a referee dominated  card-fest and eventually a total of 8 yellows were proffered to add to the red. An assessor watching the game commented that the fines for this game had effectively paid for this season's ref’s function. Curiously the ref failed to spot a clear handball by a Glenfield player in his penalty box that could, and should have, given Wanderers a lifeline. Cue a tirade of astonished abuse from Wanderers fans.

For Wanderers Frank was superb, Konning at the back looked composed, Jones and Shaw ran on high octane, as usual, and the new Argentinian imports, Hassan and Javier Gonzalez, looked like they will compete well at this level once they settle in. Alexi Varela, is a great player but needs to tune his passing radar better. There are a few youngsters knocking at the door this term, too young to shave but they will add zest and skill to the team once they adapt to the higher paced intensity. Playing in the NRFL premiership is like fighting your way to the bar at the Outback on a Thursday night; it’s dog eat dog, you need elbows, knees and animal cunning.

So the game petered out to a tame end, Glenfield victorious, but Cossey, the Wanderers coach, was far from down-beat. He praised the battling qualities of his charges and the resolve they showed especially when reduced to 10 men. It's a long season and Wanderers can surely expect some better results based on this performance

**A Royal Flush.**

**Hamilton Wanderers v Onehunga Sports. 　12 April 2014**

First home match at Porritt stadium and the centre pitch sporting a lush head of grass: too lush really and somewhat surprising, given the recent drought. The local council were caught out and sent their mowers on holiday. We wondered briefly whether to whiz home and grab our Masports. But the rain stayed away, the sun dried the grass and some of the royal family popped briefly in for a pre-match chinwag. Princess Kate remarked to me how nice our new Nike kits looked. She also wondered if one of our locks might do a try for her. Yep I promised hastily.

Less than 30 seconds into the game we contrived to do a goal rather than a try. Sunni Singh and Javier Gonzalez linked well and the latter had a shot deflected off keeper and defender for an own goal.

Our version of Shane Cameron, defender Adam Luque, bravely puts his head on the line most matches, but like Cameron he's a bleeder. Early on he ended up sideline for a spell with a badly cut head, after a rugged and barely legal Onehunga challenge. Makeshift bandages stemmed the claret but the sideline resembled The Somme Trenches, blood soaked kit everywhere.

Back on the pitch, now looking like Basil Fawlty, Luque got his revenge with a nice though ball to Gonzalez who fired home. 2-0. Wanderers could have made it 3 as a cross eluded all while at the other end, defender Jordy Shaw was called in to make a goal-saving tackle. Onehunga pulled a goal back when their striker turned well in the box and was fouled. "Dive" bayed the crowd but Stuart Holthusen slotted the penalty to make it 2-1.

Wanderers responded well. They wound up their intensity dial to 11 and the two goal margin was restored when captain Ricky Broderson, surprisingly curved the ball in off a post direct from a corner kick. 3-1.

After the crowd had enjoyed a halftime ANZ sponsored sausage the entertainment continued. Mark Jones was cutting them up like Sweeney Todd down the right, two of his whipped-in crosses failed to find strikers but Wanderers were enjoying increasing domination: from a corner the improved Alexi Varela sent a thunderbolt narrowly over the bar.

And finally a Jones cross found its mark as sub Wade Molony used his height well to knock in a header: 4-1. Luque by now had succumbed to his injury and Alfie Rogers took his spot in the centre of defence.

But with dangerous Argentinians, Santiago Hassan and Gonzalez, also off the field the blue domination lost its momentum somewhat. The 　 Onehunga showed some bite at last when Wanderers midfield lost possession. Holthusen rolled through the defence and slid a nice shot into the bottom corner past the flailing hand of keeper Vlad Frank. Was a comeback on the cards?

No. In truth Frank was barely troubled in the second half and had time to complete the Waikato Times crossword and polish his boots before full time. Wanderers rubber-stamped the win with a 5th goal. Molony cleverly flicked the ball over the defence for Singh to shin over the keeper and in. 5-2 the final score.

With the first 3 pointer of the season in the bag, I had promised to ring her Highness with the score. She wasn't that impressed. "Five eh? Jolly good, just an unconverted try then?"

Rod de Lisle.

**Easter Bunnies.**

**Ngaruawahia v Wanderers 19th April 2014**

It was a long weekend so naturally the weather was dicey. However Waikato farmers have been waiting for a drought-breaker so we had to be pleased for them. For Wanderers, an away game at Ngaruawahia was attractive - no long bus ride over the Bombay’s- and the crowd was a good one as befitted a local derby. The sporadic rain meant the Narrers main arena was touch 'n go but eventually some sun appeared and the number one pitch approved for play by the refs.

Like the weather, and my old Cortina, the game was slow to get into gear. For the first 15 minutes it was the proverbial cat and mouse affair. Both sides created little until the Wanderers midfield won a tussle, the ball breaking free to Mark Jones whose surging run and cross found Sunni Singh on the far post. A crisp header made it 1-0. The Wanderers bench were silent for a tick as they processed the fact that Singh had actually headed a ball, and then erupted in delight.

Like all local derbies the intensity led to errors, not helped by the decision of some players not to screw in their long studs. There was more slipping and sliding than a kids game of rugby in the mud. The ref wasn't slow to dole out free kicks, his Acme Thunderer peeping away madly. With both sides battling hard it could have been 2-0 to Wanderers when Jones slipped Singh through but the keeper saved well.

Then from a Ngaruawahia corner normally reliable defender, Johnny Konings, couldn't clear and their Matt Williams got a noggin to the ball to make it 1-1. That perked up the green machine and it could have 2-1 to them soon after, if not for a Vlad Frank superb save, proving again he is the best keeper in the league, despite his octogenarian status. A couple more Wanderers chances before halftime: a Javier Gonzalez free kick tipped over and an Alfie Rogers header just wide but the scoring was over for this match.

In the second half Singh wasted a couple of chances and Santiago Hassan cracked a shot just over but the best chance fell to the Ngaruawahia left back who, blinded by sun strike, unwittingly smashed a clearance that was 4 inches away from being the best own goal since Vincent Kompany's great effort for Man City last year.

Late in the match, Wanderers left back Jordy Shaw received a second yellow after a rash challenge and was sent packing for an early shower. Down to 10 for the second time in three matches Wanderers were obliged to hang out for a draw although, to their credit, they didn't 'park the bus' but instead searched for a breakaway winner.

After the game the Ngaruawahia's Roddy Rojas was clearly the happier of the coaches as the Wanderers lads had their ears blistered by a disappointed Mark Cossey. This disappointment reflects the ambition of our team who are looking to a top 3 finish this season. On this occasion it was 2 points dropped rather than a valuable away point.

So back to Hamilton, back to the drawing board, and, as if on cue, the heavens opened on the homeward drive.

Rod de Lisle

**Singh double sins Central**

**Wanderers v Central 26th April 2014**

As Anzac Weekend brought a nice prospect of a long weekend, the Wanderers brains trust were ensconced in their war room. They pencilled in names, then crossed them out, rubbed their brows, then pencilled in some others. The result? 3 changes to the Wanderers first team for the battle with the current Chatham cup champions. After failing to win the local derby last week there was a tiny bit of pressure to snag 3 points this weekend. But the coaches message to the troops was, "enjoy your football guys, after all that's what it is all about."

Jordy Shaw was suspended so Alfie Rogers slotted in at left back and, in another change, youngster Xavier Pratt was given a chance at right back. Wade Molony and Jarrod Young also started with Hussan, Gonzalez and Crawford relegated to the bench.

The changes seen to spark the team up and Wanderers dominated the game from the start. Sunni Singh butchered a fairly easy chance when Ricky Broderson threaded a needle pass to him

However another Broderson offload sent Molony away, scampering into the penalty area where he was upended unceremoniously and the ref didn't hesitate in theatrically pointing to the white dot in the FIFA-approved pointing manner. Jarrod Young doesn't normally miss spot kicks and he clinically fired home for a 1-0 lead.

While Wanderers were bossing the game, with neat crisp passing, Shane Comber and I could see a potential problem. "They could catch us on the break if we don't watch it" he mused. I agreed "Yep their right channel is a threat." 30 seconds later we were caught in possession; a Central midfielder broke swiftly down the right channel, crossed and found a teammate in the centre. A neat incision executed with military precision. 1-1.

Then it was all on, as both sides bombarded the enemy. In the crowd 78 year old Agnes Anderson commented that it was "a jolly good spectacle for the spectators." Singh had a handful of misses at one end and our keeper Vlad Frank pulled off two saves, one an absolute stunner from a close-in header when we were already mentally picking the ball out of the back of the net.

Broderson was nobbled by a calf strain and replaced before halftime by Santiago Hussan. Luque taking over the captain’s armband.

The second stanza was also an entertaining affair. In the first minute Singh comically missed the ball completely while attempting to shoot. Hassan went close then Mark Jones made two incursions into enemy territory. The first run and cross ended in another Singh miss but the world’s fastest Indian atoned for his previous misdemeanours when he received another Jones cross. He turned well and slammed a shot into the Central net. 2-1.

Centre back Adam Luque had a good header bang off the crossbar and Central threatened with a couple of free kicks before Wanderers sealed the victory with a third goal, also to Singh.

"The guys have their mojo back" Comber grinned. Agnes Anderson rattled her walking frame in approval and this writer won the meat raffle at the club after-match function. A good day.

Rod de Lisle.

**Bay smash n grab.**

**Wanderers v Bay Olympic. 3rd May 2914**

Referees assessor and studious observer of the beautiful game, John Cameron, told me before this match he prefers to sit away from the crowd to avoid the ill informed comments some make. (Actually John's words were more colourful than that but my editor baulked at their use). On this day he was wise to be a distant from the frustrated crowd as Wanderers succumbed rather meekly to a fired up Bay Olympic side who had been thrashed the previous week.

Wanderers kicked off well and had Bay Olympic back peddling for a spell. They seemed nervous and if it wasn't for some poorly hit Wanderers corners and free kicks they may conceded early. It wasn't to be and after concerted Wanderers pressure suddenly Bay went ahead. A ball given away at the back (does that sound familiar?) and a floated far post cross gleefully headed home by the Bay’s Manko.

Soon after this the blue and whites were further hit when Jarrod Young limped off with a suspected fractured ankle, a cruel blow to the young fella. Javier Gonzalez came on Wanderers pressed for an equaliser. Santiago Hassan went close but Bay pressed back and hit the Wanderers woodwork before a corner lead to another headed goal, this time to Kitano and suddenly it was 2-0.

The second half featured a more fired up Wanderers team, as they looked for a way back into the game. This duly came when Gonzalez cleverly worked an opening and crossed for Sunni Singh to flick a header into the net to make it 5 goals for the season. Things were tighter now at 2-1 and this gave some impetus to the proceedings. For a spell Wanderers enjoyed a period of better play with more movement and threatened to equalise.

That is until Bay attacked and a loose ball popped out for Daniel Jones to pounce with a stunning volley to make it three for Olympic. It could have been four as a Bay break led to a 1-on-1 with keeper Vlad Frank. Luckily (for Wanderers) he pulled off a stunning save, and then kept out a follow-up with a brave dive at the feet of a Bay predator.

Wanderers it must be said looked fairly sluggish all game. Apart from Mark Jones that is. Jones is an interesting player. He is built like a racing sardine, swift and skilful with a huge work rate. As a wise coach once said, if he could unload the ball at the exact moment he should, he wouldn't be playing in a Wanderers shirt; he'd be turning out at the Westpac stadium for the Phoenix. However, Wanderers benefit, week in and week out, from the Jones presence. In this game he was one of the few shining lights and worth the price of admission, if Wanderers actually charged one. The home team fought on to no avail. A couple of Jones runs threatened but the ball lost too early. From a corner Singh shot over and other chances went begging.

Then Jones on the left unleashed a real special. A jinking, swerving, surging run leaving all in his wake Jones cut through like a laser guided missile. He eventually arrived at the business end of the pitch and played back to Gonzalez who ..... shot over. The crowd cursed this undeserved end to a superb move.

Substitute Jordy Shaw was next to try his luck with a nice run that just failed to end in a goal bound shot but the contest eventually limped to an uneventful close after Wanderer’s Adam Luque was forced from the field with a knee injury. Having used the allotted subs already, the home team were reduced to 10 men and lacked the energy to press for the two goals needed.

The crowd meandered disconsolately to the bar and Cameron folded up his deck chair. Next week is another week and this loss will vanish from the memory hopefully by, say, Wednesday.

Rod de Lisle

**Built bullet shoots down City.**

Waitakere City v Wanderers

10th May 2014.

The longest trip in the Premier league has to be the annual Wanderers v Waitakere affair, a 2 hour journey from the Waikato to the West of Auckland. Though a lengthy drive, it has borne fruit for the away side in the last two seasons with a couple of close wins, so the visiting fans wondered, was the run to continue?

From the outset Wanderers, coming from a loss the week before, made their intentions clear. They looked the more dominant, menacing at the front and tight at the back. Wade Molony on the left soon sent Sunni Singh free but the latter shot wide. Then Jones handed Singh an even better chance and he bore down on goal with typical pace. Sadly the one-on-one ended typically with the keeper the victor. But Wanderers were in the mood and kept pressing. Loose balls were gobbled up by the blues midfield and defence.

A nice Wanderers move ended with the first goal of the contest. Santiago Hassan and Molony combined well on the left before Mark Jones finished from the right. 1-0 and thoroughly deserved. The remainder of the half featured a plethora of Wanderers shots, Jones, Singh, Konings, Alexi Varela and Hassan all guilty of failing to trouble the scoreboard bloke.

Shane Comber reminded us that last year Waitakere came out of the sheds and scored early in the second half. History does repeat. One minute into the half a Waitakere player, Khan, got wide on the right and his tame cross suddenly took off like an errant skyrocket and swerved into the top of the net. Suddenly it's 1-1. What th'?

Nevertheless Wanderers shrugged off this setback and soon afterwards the busy Molony shot over from a corner. Then Michael Built, our annual visitor from his UK club, was unleashed by coach Cossey. Built is no stranger to the westies. He'd previously scored a hatful of goals in his visits to Fred Taylor Park. Was this run to continue?

Jones, Molony, Built and Singh started to give the defence some real headaches. A typical Jones surge lead to a through ball to Built who fired over. Singh had two chances, as gilt edged as the crown jewels but were squandered like my weekly report writers cheque. One from an excellent Built cross, as he reminded us of his quality. But it has to be said that Singh enjoyed a good game despite the chances missed. His lightening pace was difficult for the opposition to deal with and if he was a natural finisher the Wanderers goal tally would be way higher.

When Konings was shown yellow for sending a Waitakere player sprawling, there was a danger that frustration might creep into the blues game. But another forceful attack eventually bore fruit. A Singh thunderbolt rebounded from the keeper and fell to Built who swivelled then rifled a bullet-like shot into the heart of the Waitakere net and the centre of the Waitakere hearts.

At 2-1 Wanderers continued the onslaught, another goal always looked likely, but the Waitakere custodian performed heroics tipping shots from Malony and Singh past his post. Their composure was not helped an unseemly altercation between a couple of defenders.

The full time whistle probably came as a relief to all, Wanderers grateful for 3 points and Waitakere grateful it wasn't 6 goals.

All in all, a much better performance from the Wanderers lads. The defence has to be mentioned in particular. Apart from the fluky Waitakere goal, Adam Luque and Johnny Konings in the centre of defence were imposing and rarely troubled. And if left-back Jordy Shaw was a dog, he'd be a terrier, nimble, fast and ferocious. No-one gets past Shaw without a bite to the ankles. Xavier Pratt is a good discovery. Although new, to both the team and to the right back position, he has composure and skill and played well in this game.

As the sun set in the west, the Wanderers bus trundled back to the Waikato, the annual three points tucked away and the season back on course.

Rod de Lisle

**Who's next?**

Wanderers v Birkenhead.

17th May 2014.

Birkenhead have proved a bit of a bogey side for Wanderers over the last season or two. We all know that they have a few more resources than us but Wanderers have always competed well against other monied-up teams. Anyway the latest episode in our rivalry was an absorbing affair and it wasn't for the lack of effort on the part of both that eventually each side walked away with a point each, rather than the desired three.

There was nearly an early opener when Sunni Singh shot, at the keeper, rather than past him in intended fashion. But he was flagged for offside anyway. Next Adam Luque actually did nod the ball into the net from a Ricky Broderson free kick, but guess what? Another offside flag. "Dubious as heck" said Who drummer Keith Moon who had popped down to watch the game. Except he didn't say heck.

After this bright opening by the home side only one thing could happen. Yep Birko scored a goal. A catalogue of defensive errors and the gleeful Birkenhead winger, Webb knocked the ball home. But the best move of the match was about to unfold. Michael Built was seemingly boxed in on the touch line but managed to magically extricate himself, flick the ball through to Wade Molony who sent a fine first-time cross into the box where a flying Mark Jones demonstrated how a dive header should be executed as he flung his 40 kilo frame sideways and powered the ball into the net. Sublime.

A minute later Wanderers snuck ahead when Broderson found Wade Molony who stabbed home. "Who are you?" sang Moon. Wanderers turned up the heat and played some great football. The only pity was that chances to Broderson, Singh, Built, Jones and Konings were saved or narrowly wide.

The second half was equally as bright. For the first 3 minutes anyway. Until Sunni Singh got free in the box and was scythed down, injuring his knee in the process. Instead of the expected penalty and card the referee blithely waved play on, perhaps fooled by the Birko boys who protested innocence. Singh was carried off and is likely to be out for some weeks. Moon offered to do a drum solo on the refs car with spanners."You won't get fooled again" he promised.

On such moments football matches hinge. Birkenhead grew in confidence and with the sun at their backs pushed back into the game. Wanderers sustained another wounded soldier with Molony off joining Broderson,(strained calf) and Singh on the sideline. But it was the blues who nearly scored again when a tame Alexi Varela shot was fumbled comically by the Birkenhead keeper and trickled close to the line but agonisingly not over it. However it was apparent that Birkenhead had a sniff at a point as Wanderers tired, but they didn't score until late in the day when a corner was not adequately cleared and Davis stroked home the equaliser.

There was nearly another twist in the tail when substitute Santiago Hassan charged the keeper whose clearance rebounded off some body part of Hassan and luckily (for him) straight back into his arms. We've all seen those ricochets end up nestled in the back of the net. Not today. So a 2-2 draw for the second year in succession in this fixture. A compelling game for spectators and although not a win, surely a sign of good results to come for Wanderers? We asked Keith Moon. "You better you bet".

Rod de Lisle

**Three's company.**

3 Kings v Wanderers

24th May 2014.

The omens weren't all that good for Hamilton Wanderers. The weather was dicey. Our leading scorer and our captain were both out injured. We were sporting a potentially unlucky black away kit. The bus driver took the wrong turn and ran over 5 black cats. And we hardly ever win at 3 Kings. But despite these portents of doom we actually felt in with a good chance, as the lads had been playing well and 3 Kings were lacking some top players too.

Early into the match the Wanderers set out their stall and attacked with purpose, but mostly failed to get shots on target. A keeper clearance rebounding off Mark Jones and a Michael Built flick from a Jones cross being the only real attempts.

Winger Wade Molony has come on in leaps and bounds this season and he was firing on all 4 cylinders (he's not a big lad) with lots of pace and some mazy runs to the touch line finished with nice crosses. To no avail though. New boy Logan Rogerson had suffered a knock and this reduced our firepower up front. 3 Kings probably ended the half more strongly and gave Vlad Frank in goal a couple of worrying moments

A half time team talk from coaches Mark Cossey and Shane Comber encouraged the lads to be more direct and "goals will come" but also urged the team try to preserve a clean sheet, something not yet done this season With Javier Gonzalez on for Rogerson, Wanderers started to look the more potent team. Argentinean Gonzalez, 3rd cousin of Maradona's wife, has a nice touch, is useful in the air and can belt a football with venom.

Grey clouds appeared, rain threatened and goals looked unlikely. But in a moment of sunshine Jones spilt the defence with a pin point pass to Built who showed calmness and a smooth shot to make it 1-0. This galvanised the men in black who started to apply the heat. Master tactician Cossey made another sub: Thomas Crawford was injected into midfield and he added composure and assurance.

Shortly after, right back Xavier Pratt took the ball from virtually his own goalmouth dribbling through the 3 Kings defence and into their box. A run reminiscent of a young John Kirwan at the '87 rugby World Cup. Sadly he just failed to get past his last tackler and the chance was lost. Adam Luque also made a good defence-piercing run followed by a flurry of Wanderers corners that failed to be converted.

But the visitors were not to be denied and the best move of the game unfolded beautifully. Built got his head to a Wanderers clearance and knocked onto Molony who flicked it to Gonzalez. He in turn showed strength to hold off his opponent and slotted the ball home nicely for 2-0. The game wasn't quite yet safe; 3 Kings pushed forward to try to reduce the deficit but the black clad defence mopped up their efforts like Sadie the cleaning lady. It see-sawed back Wanderers way toward the end. Konings had a header well saved, as was a rasper from Built but the contest was settled when Alexi Varela squared the ball to Built to make it 3.

So three goals, three points and perhaps a lucky black kit to thank? Post-game celebrations were amplified when news came in of other results fortuitously going our way and leaving Wanderers perched nicely at the top of the table. Luck it seems is catching.

Rod de Lisle

**New pitch and tanties.**

Wanderers v East Coast Bays

31st May 2014.

The last day of autumn and a nice sunny one too. A new pitch too, the council having spent a far bit on digging up and re-laying the number 2 field with all the latest fandangled sand-based pitch technology. Wanderers were sitting atop the league and facing the current champions. So we all expected a goal fest and lots of action.

15 minutes before the game there were still no goals or nets on the pitch. But eventually the reserve team, huffing and puffing after their game, carried them over from the old pitch. Yep we have two pitches but only one set of goals at present. FIFA have a team of master goal builders in Zurich working on some new ones for us so no panic.

Pre-game a bit of good natured bantering between the respective coaches set the scene for a ding dong stoush on the field. The crowd sauntered in and the ball boys took up their positions in keen anticipation.

As it turned it the goals were not actually needed as neither team managed to christen the new pitch with a goal. As far as goalless draws go it wasn't too bad. Both sets of players worked extremely hard and ran their socks off but with the effect of cancelling each other out.

In the first half the local team dominated early and chances to Wade Molony and Santiago Hassan came to nought, then a Molony cross found the head of Javier Gonzalez who couldn't convert. Goalkeeper Vlad Frank didn't have too much to deal with but successfully punched a couple of threatening crosses away from danger. Overall, the quality of the football from Wanderers was good with neat feet and quick passing but too often the final pass was careless and the chance wasted.

The second half wasn't quite as good. Perhaps the new pitch, a wee bit damp from a rainy week, combined with the efforts of the first half caused legs to tire? Whatever the cause, the sprints were slower, the passing was not as crisp and both keepers rarely threatened. There were some explosive moments and players tried to throw the odd tantrum but the ref to his credit, kept the game under control well. He “wasn't gonna have any tanties on his watch”.

For Wanderers, Xavier Pratt made a decent run, Ricky Broderson had a shot blocked, Mark Jones miscued a difficult volley, Gonzalez had a header saved and toward the end one or two free kicks were wasted by both teams.

The final action was a Pratt chance, slightly miss-hit, that whistled past the post.

We had the pleasure of Mark Hamill, Luke Skywalker from Starwars, who is an avid Wanderers fan at the game and I told him the boys tried hard today. Mark retorted. "Yoda once told me, Do or do not... there is no try.” I wasn't sure what he was on about but could only agree; after all we weren't playing rugby today. However Hamill added "No goals conceded for two games in a row, against good teams. Yoda would be at one with the universe about that."

**Kava’ed up by the Bula boys.**

Mangere Utd v Wanderers

Chatham Cup 2nd June 2014.

Ah, the colourful culture of the Chatham cup. Where minnows dream big, the big guys expect to win and every year every team, bar one, is disappointed at the conclusion of this knock-out competition. And speaking of culture is it great to see the injection of various ethnicities into the once ex-pat Brit-only sport in New Zealand. Mangere is a great example. Nice clubrooms and grandstand. A mainly Fijian Indian based club, we turned up to find a full Kava bowl in the lounge area and the air redolent with the aroma of cooking spices. I like that.

My Chatham cup reports are normally short and sweet but this was a thriller so I have added a few extra paragraphs.

Wanderers once again missed top scorer, Sunni Singh and also without Michael Built looked a little light on attacking options. It showed in this match. Despite some early pressure and half-chances to Johnny Konings and Javier Gonzalez Mangere went ahead with a breakaway goal after Wanderers lost possession. 1 nil to the home team. They celebrated accordingly. It settled down after that, both defences alert to most threats and few scoring opportunities up to the half time whistle.

Soon after the break Gonzalez curled in a lovely free kick with typical South American panache to make it 1-1. His registered official fan club were ecstatic. Mangere hit back with another as the game trundled towards the 90 minute mark but again Wanderers equalised when a fierce drive from substitute Jordy Shaw was knocked onto Wade Molony who turned and belted the ball into the net.

So at 2-2 the game headed to extra time. Mangere again took the lead with a swift breakaway to it has to be said, a very offside looking forward, who retained his composure to knock the ball past Vlad Frank in goal. But not to be outdone the visitors fought back again. Adam Luque who had had a good game knocked an excellent ball down the sideline and substitute Le Bon Balamba whipped it across to Mark Jones who smashed the ball past the keeper to tie things up at 3-3.

So to penalties and these were all taken clinically by both teams with Mangere scoring their five and Wanderers four before Alexi Varela stepped to take his. Sadly, the keeper guessed the right way and gratefully deflected the goal bound shot away. The Mangere boys had killed a giant and were ecstatic; the Wanderers lads shattered.

To the neutral, an excellent game of football and plenty of action and goals. For Wanderers , the old cliché; we can concentrate on the league now boys. And the Mangere team probably won’t win the cup but live to fight another day.

Rod de Lisle

Post script: after a Wanderers protest about an ineligible player, and various sub-committee meetings and counter-protests, Wanderers were handed the win and a place in the next round of the cup.

**Slow start proves costly.**

Wanderers v Glenfield.

7th June 2014

After experiencing a new pitch last week it was back to the old pitch this week. The council deemed the surface on the new one to be too fragile for vigorous sporting pursuits at present. However the old (centre) pitch was in decent shape and some punters were overheard to express a preference for the more comfortable setting, “with a grandstand an’ that”. No Johnny Konings this week after he was suspended following a red card in the cup. He is not a good man to have out; after his debut last season he has cemented his place at the heart of our defence with granite- like presence. Some say he is, in fact, carved out of rock or maybe a lump of kauri, although we haven’t had him tested yet.

The Very-Expensive-Glenfield side were formidable opponents and favourites for the title this season. For the first thirty minutes it seemed Wanderers had read the press and were in danger of capitulating like a politician offered a paper bag full of cash from a wanted criminal. After 5 minutes Glenfield opened the scoring with a soft goal after a scrabble in the box was pounced on by Steve Holloway and poked into the net. It seemed that the Wanderers boys were still mentally in the changing room or maybe on the other pitch. This view was strengthened when a second goal arrived for Rovers. It was basically a repeat of the first. The home defence guilty of not clearing their lines again and paying the price.

Wanderers seemed to awaken from their slumber. Sunni Singh looked sharp and threatened once or twice then Wade Molony was slipped through after a nice pass from Alexi Varela only to be halted by a fine tackle from Glenfield's Milne. Varela has been somewhat inconsistent this campaign but was playing well, winning a fair share of 50/50 balls and making some telling passes.

But then came an innocuous foul in the home team penalty box and the ref pointed straight to the spot. Luckily Glenfield marksman Gwyther blasted over the top and the home fans breathed a sigh of relief. The sighs quickly became groans when Edwards was allowed too much space out on the right and his cross like a tracer found the unmarked Holloway who, with an imperious flick of the head, nodded the ball past custodian Vlad Frank. Now Glenfield had a seemingly unassailable 3-0 lead and Wanderers were in danger of an old fashioned drubbing. The home coaches leafed urgently through their Manual of Football Tactics (Chapter 15; Retreat from Dunkirk section) to find a solution before it became embarrassing.

The halftime break was a relief- like a bell at the end of a boxing round- for the home team. Time to take stock and re-arrange the team. The coaches’ speeches can be summed up in one sentence after removing the sweary bits. To wit: The honour of playing for the famous Blue, Blue and Blue of the Hamilton Wanderers is a estimable privilege and when on the hallowed turf of Porritt one must pull ones finger out of one’s date and play like your life depends on it... or depart to pastures anew. (That was my take on it anyway).

The second spell saw a more determined Wanderers side. Defender Jordan Shaw and Captain Frank had extolled the lads to give it their all and Shaw, especially, led the way with a high tempo approach. Substitutes Javier Gonzalez and Henry Han injected some urgency and the home side clawed their way back into it. The lads showed some grit and character like the heroes in a Commando comic but couldn’t score.

Eventually Varela hit a fine long ball that was controlled well by Mark Jones and he knocked it past Allwhites keeper Tamati Williams. Was this the start of a legendary fight back? More Wanderers pressure nearly led to an own goal from a desperate Glenfield attacker. Next came a concerted appeal for a Glenfield handball in the penalty area but, in a repeat of the first game at Glenfield , the referee studiously chose to ignore the local rabble, much to their chagrin.

Varela, probably Wanderers best player on the day, tried a long range shot that was well held by the keeper but this and the remaining chances came to nought and Glenfield hung on for a 3-1 victory. It could have been worse: the first half effort was dire and we may have succumbed to 6 goal belting. It could have been better: a much improved second half may have been a brilliant one if the several half-chances had fallen our way. Cest La Vie and all that jazz.

[Postscript: A strange cameo after the final whistle saw an assistant ref throw down his flag and threaten to knock the block off an abusive Glenfield player. Sadly we were denied the pleasure of a fist-fight when the ref restrained him.}

**A day in the life.**

Onehunga v Wanderers.

21st June 2014

Match day for Wanderers’ away trips always run along similar lines. The sun shines (it always shines on Wanderers), the lads rock up to the assigned meeting place, stack their gear and board the bus. Once settled they turn their iPod Galaxies up to 'full noise' and settle back into the sumptuous comfort of the luxury coach for the trip over the Bombays. (When I say sumptuous, I mean a cracked vinyl seat and when I say luxury coach, I mean a school bus). A Subway stop at the top of the hill and then onto East Coast Bays or Bay Olympic or wherever we happen to be playing that day.

This game was at Waikaraka Park, home of Onehunga Sports, nice facilities plus true to form the sun was out, and the pitch green and verdant. The lads filed off the bus, raring to go after a week off. It promised to be a good afternoon.

The sun stopped shining for Wanderers shortly after kick off when an Onehunga player materialised, so offside that he was actually behind the Wanderers keeper , obstructing the goalies view of a soft back pass-like shot that trickled into the goal; suddenly Onehunga were 1-0 up. The ref did consult at length with both assistants, but the goal stood. A moment later and a reasonably tame tackle in the box, the ref blows, Onehunga convert a pen and the score becomes 2-0.

Like the previous league game Wanderers had found themselves in a bit of hole, the coaches having a coronary on the sideline and the travelling fans idly wondering if they should have stayed home to do the gardening. However the team regrouped and were actually playing quite well despite being a little outgunned in central midfield at times. There were some nice passing moves, long searching passes from the back and Wade Molony made a darting run or two out on the left. Shane Comber said confidently and gallantly that the 'guys will still win this'. I thought yeah, but we need to score next.

Sure enough, from a Sunni Singh corner Mark Jones was quickest to react and dispatched the ball smartly with his left foot to reduce the arrears. Then Wade Molony was upended in the area, a penalty ensured, admittedly a bit soft like the first decision, but Jones knocked it in to make it 2-2.

That made Comber’s prediction suddenly a bit more likely and the half time team talk, a whole lot less blistering. At half time the boys were exhorted to give it their all, the game can be won.

Shortly after halftime, man of the match, Jones turned well in the area and slid the ball across to Sunni Singh who tapped it in to give Wanderers a lead that had seemed unlikely 30 minutes previously.

In a game of ebbs and flows, the tide turned again when Adam Luque was hung out to dry by a loose pass from an unnamed teammate and had to scythe down the Onehunga attacker who otherwise would have been clear on goal. As the last man the ref had no qualms about flourishing a red card and Wanderers were down to 10 men. This was followed shortly after by the loss of Jones who retired from the combat after being knocked into the middle of next week by the goal keeper. An ambulance was summoned and would eventually arrive 90 minutes, a whole football match, later. Nice one St John’s.

With this shift in balance the Wanderers lads battled bravely and indeed, still endeavoured to attack sporadically. Singh was taken out when clear on goal but this time the ref kept the red card in his pocket to the annoyance of the travelling fans. Veteran Vlad Frank, between the sticks, had earned his keep with two excellent saves in the second half, but was eventually being undone by an Onehunga equaliser that I didn't see (out front awaiting the non-arrival of the ambulance).

The final score was 3-3, which probably didn't satisfy either coach but, like the World cup so far, goals galore for the crowd to savour.

The teams trooped upstairs for a plate of hot food, a beer and after-match speeches. Then back downstairs onto the bus. Stephan the driver firing up the diesel as the boys fired up their iPods for the long trip back down State Highway 1 to the foggy Waikato, thus ending another typical Wanderers Saturday.

**The ghost of future past.**

ASB Chatham cup 3rd round.

North Shore Utd v Wanderers

29th June 2014

I've been to the home of New Zealand's oldest football club three times and in three capacities in my life. Once as a young fella I went to watch and cheer on North Shore play in the home leg of a Chatham cup final v Mount Maunganui. They lost that game but won the away leg to clinch the cup on aggregate. I then played there some years later, on my 30th birthday, against Adrian Elrick and a few other ex All whites as they spanked our University team 3-0. And this week returned as manager (read dogsbody) of Hamilton Wanderers in another Chatham cup game.

Allan Hill stadium doesn't look too flash nowadays. The stands are rusty and falling down, there are piles of timber and rubbish around the changing rooms and the place generally has a Dickensian feel to it. The pitch has also seen better days: as threadbare in places as the spot in the office where I grovel to my boss about pay-rises.

But despite the ravages of time, North Shore United had be respected in the cup, not only for their tremendous history but, as we know at Wanderers, teams from lower divisions are capable of upsets on any given day.

A coach from the third tier, Mark O'Donnell, was there to scope the game and offered his prescient view of the likely outcome. 3-1 he said, with the confidence of Paul the octopus, before the kickoff.

The first decent chance fell to Jarrod Young who forced the home keeper into a fine save. The blue machine pushed forward and another attack saw a Shore defender dive-header the ball away from the goal line. But in a moment of uncertainty for Wanderers, Shore broke through the middle and a fine shot gave them a 1-0 lead and sent the home fans into delirium as they savoured the prospect of an upset. The cheers and yelps in the ancient stand threatened to topple it in the excitement of the moment.

The home balloon of confidence popped soon after when Sunni Singh outstripped the defence and was bundled over in the penalty box. Despite the protestation of the Shore faithful the young ref astutely pointed to the spot and Mark Jones sent the keeper the wrong way to level the scores.

Early in the second half Wanderers turned the screws and Young was unlucky not to score when he chased down a loose ball; his shot hit post and keeper but just about managed to stay out. Then Xavier Pratt effort soared over the bar to the dismay of the blue bench. Pratt made amends soon after when he knocked a long ball from the left to Jones on the right who smartly volleyed it home. Wanderers into the lead for the first time in 180 minutes of cup competition this season.

North Shore battled back and scored a goal but the assistant ref had already spotted the offside, waggling his colourful flag vigorously.

Then Singh escaped his marker and shot narrowly wide. The locals breathed a sigh of relief. Not for long. Wanderers sealed the win when Jones, as fast as a fully charged electric eel, intercepted a Shore pass and sped toward goal. Singh was also on hand but Jones slashed the shot into the onion bag to seal his hat trick and make it 10 goals for the season.

"Who doesn't enjoy a threesome?" Jones said (or words that effect) later. He added modestly "Not quite sure how it happened. I had less involvement than normal in this game."

The Wanderers boys had enjoyed a far better second half and in midfield, as well as Jones, Ricky Broderson and Alexi Varela all had strong games. There could have been another goal if the ref had not resisted the strong appeal for a penalty in the latter stages. But in the cup, the final score doesn't really matter as long as the result goes your way.

In the clubrooms, amid dusty furniture and faded sepia memories of the grand past, the hosts were genially gracious in defeat. A gentle reminder of the days when our sport was a whole lot less about winning and more about the beautiful game. O'Donnell the octopus accepted a free beer and proffered his prediction for our next cup encounter. I'd tell you, but who needs to hear the ramblings of a deluded person?

Rod de Lisle.

**The Long Run.**

ASB Chatham cup 4th round

Bay Olympic v Wanderers

5th July 2014

if Wanderers manage to win the Chatham cup this season it will be after chalking up more travel than a touring rock band. This was the third Auckland away cup tie in a row and another, to Central, was the prize for the victor of this game. With 7 trips to the city of the Jafa in the league as well, it seems that the big bloke upstairs -yep the NZFA fixtures guy- was out to make things unbearably tough for the Blue army. Our fans, ok our fan, was threatening to cease travelling with us due to home pressures and these Auckland club always seem to have an army of home support.

But talking of touring bands, as I ranted about the unfairness of it, a friendly voice reassured me. "Take it easy mate.” Legendary Joe Walsh from the Eagles had turned up with his boots and although he was named in the programme he said -like Jeff Sole- he'd only play if hell froze over. However he wouldn't miss a Wanderers/Bay Olympic clash as they reminded him of the friendly rivalry (read fist fights) in the old days of the Eagles. He added. "No worries today about Bay, they are already gone".

But Bay Olympic were odds on favourites, being the home team an' all. They were sitting second in the league at this point and had defeated Wanderers a month or two ago. Early signs didn't assuage this favouritism as they had a shot deflected off a post then, from a charge down of a Wanderers clearance, Manko, in a seemingly offside position, tapped in to make it 1-0 as the Wanderers defenders beseeched the lines-bloke to raise his flag, but to no avail.

However Wanderers rallied the troops and bombarded the Bay goal. Free kicks and Adam Luque throws unerringly found the head of Johnny Konings. And presently a Ricky Broderson cross was nodded in by the Konings to level the scores. And within a minute or two a long Adam Luque throw was cleverly flicked on by Broderson to give the blue team the lead.

Konings has a strange haircut with a top-notch thing going on. It seems to give him the extra inch or two in the air though and when another excellent Broderson cross whistled in it was given the merest of touches by the centre back to leave the keeper stranded. At 3-1 the locals scratched their heads and pondered, this wasn't in the script?

Konings said later on. "I'm rapt, my first goals for Wanderers". Like waiting for a Hamilton bus, nothing for ages then two come along together.

Ten minutes later Bay header, Manko again, from a free kick made it 3-2. A cup epic and not even half time yet! At half time the coaches urged the defence to be tighter and the team to work harder.

As it turned out, the second spell didn't produce any more goals, although the football was frantic in a cup tie kind of way. A Sunni Singh cross just eluded Mark Jones and then Jones slipped a nice pass to Jarrod Young who shot over. Singh had a header wide and then Jones cut left and his decent shot palmed away by the home keeper. Singh had one of his days where he worked hard but wasn’t in the right place at the right time, in other games it could have cost us dearly. Javier Gonzalez, on a sub contributed deft touches and combined well with the midfield.

The rain that had threatened duly arrived and goal chances fizzled out although Wanderers Jordy Shaw did well to clear a goal bound shot from the line and Vlad Frank in goal, when called into action, showed a safe pair hands despite the wet ball. The dismissal of Bay's Darren White for a second yellow card made things a little easier for Wanderers in the last few minutes. The Wanderers support staff and players on the bench huddled under their sponsored Nike jackets and willed the ref to blow the final whistle which he eventually did, to the relief of Cossey and his crew.

So more travel beckons for the gypsies of Wanderers. July games now strangely read: Bay Olympic-cup-away, Central -league- away, Bay Olympic-league-away and Central cup-away in that order. Joe Walsh air-guitared his trademark riff as he sauntered out. "It's life in the fast lane kids. Enjoy the long run while you can". An epic cup tussle.

Rod de Lisle

**Daylight robbery.**

Bay Olympic v Wanderers.

19th August 2014

I was hoping to cut and paste the report from two week ago, you know, the one where we tonked Bay Olympic 3-2 in the cup ... at their place.

But this time we failed to get the 3 goals, in fact not even one, although they got their usual 2. Ok now you're expecting a piece about the dodgy ref and the bad luck Wanderers endured in some gusty and wet conditions but ultimately failing to play as well as two weeks ago.

In fact the boys in blue actually played well, in fact so well In the first half that it seemed only a matter of time that a deluge of goals would flood the home net in a manner that Brazil capitulated to the Germans a week or two ago. The way that Wanderers attacked this match from get-go it seems the lads must have viewed that game for inspiration.

Sunni Singh up front was busy as a blue bee as the ball found him constantly. He, annoyingly, just didn't quite get the microsecond of opportunity to get something resembling a shot on target. The team threw all manner of tactics into the fray. Free kicks, long throws and corners all bombarded the Bay penalty area like an allied air attack in WW2.

But the strange thing is that for the goals just didn't come. Not one. In a goalmouth melee the ball bounced invitingly for Adan Luque but he just failed to poke the pill over the line. Singh then did, for once, get free but was chopped down while steaming goal-ward bound. Jarrod Young's resultant free kick was tipped away by the Bay keeper who, it has to be said, looked shaky.

But things suddenly changed for the worst. A header from Luque then went straight to the keeper then the Bay team charged up the field and forced an attempted clearance from defender Jordy Shaw. But the ball rebounded at Wade Molony's feet and his hurried right boot sent the ball into his own net. The Bay team looked as surprised as their fans. By some odd fortune they actually had the lead?

Not a great moment for young Molony, akin to running over your own grandmother Roger Ramjet said, but in his defence, he battled back and for the rest of the half he constantly got down the line, beat his marker and knocked in crosses that mostly escaped our strikers.

It would be nice to see an old fashioned centre forward on the end of such crosses but the Hamilton team lacks in this area. Famous English coach Alf Ramsey once told me that every team needs a Jimmy Greaves type to polish off chances, not fancy, just effective. Why you didn’t pick him for the '66 final then? I replied.

Despite Bay actually leading, the game pattern didn't change and further chances to Johnny Konings, Singh (a tricky volley) and Ricky Broderson (header) all failed to get Wanderers off the mark. The rain set in and the subs jogged up and down the sideline to keep warm.

In the second half the game was a tad more even and Bay eventually notched another goal, a nice header by Jack Caunter from a corner.

On late for Wanderers, newcomer Federico Marquez and youngster Logan Rogerson gave Bay plenty of problems and Marquez had a couple of headers and a shot go very close. Shaw also had a shot bounce away off the crossbar but the lineschap had his flag up anyway.

For Wanderers only the 4th time in the last three seasons they had been held scoreless. A pointer was Mark Jones, who was off his game suffering a head cold, manflu or some other vile lurgy. When top scorer Jones isn't firing, generally Wanderers aren't either.

The result may not be seen a good rehearsal for the cup match next week, but in truth it may mask the real threat that Central will face. As coach Mark Cossey summed up "Vlad Frank in goal only had two moments of action, both involving picking the ball out of the bleeding net." So will the much travelled Hamilton team prevail next Sunday? Only time will tell. You better be there.

**Another cuppa on the road.**

**ASB Chatham Cup. Quarter final.**

**Central v Wanderers.**

**28th July 2014.**

Love them or hate them you've got to admit Central do it well. Occasions like this cup quarter-final saw balloons, zorbs and even a singer belting out 70's stuff pre-match. There was the shiny Chatham Cup itself plus the league trophy, the Oceania Trophy and even the 2015 under 20 World Cup all on display. Everything , apart from the idiot who bangs a plastic bin in his backyard next door, is done professionally.

Of course Wanderers don't get intimidated by such malarkey and had brought some quality fans, the Blue Army, to cheer them on. Not wearing blue this week, the Wanderers boys in their away kit of black-on-black stormed onto the pitch -like skinny and paler versions of Allblacks- and into the game with vim, vigour and purpose. The Wanderers coaches had urged the boys to give their all and woe betide anyone who didn't. And Central had actually lost the last three games in a row against The Hamilton team.

Both teams possess speedy players and it was a speedy sort of game. Early in the match one point their man Tade was neeeaaarrrly through, but Adam Luque was quick too, stopping him with a great covering tackle. In the next moment Mark Jones took off up field passed to sprinting Sunni Singh who was unceremoniously upended. It was all action. Alexi Varela, normally not a player to attempt to do a goal, found space and hit a long range drive past the post to show perhaps why he doesn't attempt many shots eh? Central featuring a team crammed full of national league stars and the like were dangerous at corners and set pieces. They came close to scoring when Vlad Frank was caught out of goal and Jarrod Young, alert to danger, scampered back to clear off the line.

Young and fellow midfielder, Javier Gonzalez, were showing some deft touches and Jones and Jordan Shaw raced around the park, as they do, looking for the incisive break. Central on the other hand were adept at pressurising the Wanderers boys into wasteful passes and although Singh has speed, most balls fired into him seemed to bounce off one or other of his many muscles at weird angles usually back to the opposing players, to the despair of away fans.

The best chances of the half did fall to the home team but Luque, Johnny Konings at the back and Frank in goal made timely interceptions. The turnaround showed a 0-0 score-line, with both teams still hopeful of the winning break.

The second half followed a similar pattern as the first, Central a wee bit sharper and likely to score, but Wanderers dogged and determined. There were moments of good play from both teams but at times the contest became a little fractious as nerves set in. The defining moment came when Tade nudged Luque off the ball quite illegally and surged forward where a return pass found him and, like Gerry Brownlee at a buffet, he tucked it away with glee. Tade showing both sides to his game, his miscreant move going unpunished while his skilfulness was rewarded.

The team in black tried to keep their fading hopes alive. Frank in goal was outstanding with two saves. Johnny Konings and Luque looked to push the ball forward at every opportunity. Wade Molony on for Wanderers made a great run, the ball ending at the feet of Young who turned and shot well but to Central's Spoonley the number 2 (or is it 3?) NZ keeper. Another sub, Logan Rogerson, and Young tried more shots but either straight to keeper or off-target.

The Tade one-man-show continued when, in succession, he hit the post at one end then fouled Jones at the other then (after Wanderers gifted the ball to him) snaked past 3 players before Frank took him out conceding a penalty kick and a canary at the same time. Tade converted and the contest was more or less settled with only 5 minutes to play. So the cup dream endeth here - and the league hopes seem faded- but given the difficult draw of 4 away cup matches interspersed with 4 away league matches, the travelling band of Hamiltonians can take some comfort in a strong contribution to the 2014 season. Captain Ricky Broderson felt his lads had given their all. "A chance or two that we had on goal should have been converted and the result could have been way different". I agree. Visiting Brazilian goalkeeper, Daniel Zaire was impressed by the game. "Wow It is a lot faster here compared with the slower (more skilful- he didn't say) game at home" he said. "I really enjoyed it".

Looking ahead there is another away match next week for Wanderers, can you believe it? Pity we don't get some kind of mileage points from NZFA.

Rod de Lisle

**Revenge , the sweetest dish.**

**Birkenhead v Wanderers.**

2nd August 2014

Birkenhead United nearly took the title last year but are struggling to repeat that form this season. In our home game we dominated, should have won easily, but all we got was a 2-2 draw and several bunches of bananas they strangely left in the changing sheds.

When you finally get one over the rich kid you hate, the one who has splashed mud in your face a few times, it does feel good. Especially when you tonk him on the nose 4 times. We don't really hate Birkenhead but at times they have seemed like a bogey team for Wanderers. This time, after two losses on the trot without a goal, the 2 Wanderers coaches, Cossey and Comber, extolled their charges to strike early and hard. It reminded me of when I played a round of golf with famous author Lee Child once. He told me his hero Jack Reacher has a golden rule. "Get your retribution in first."

Breaking his own record for diving , cheaty Jack Hobson-McVeigh bit the ground in the very first minute. But Wanderers shrugged off this with distain and wheeled onto the attack like a squadron of Spitfires. Jarrod Young signalled his intentions with a decent early shot then nippy Wade Molony burst through on goal only to bumble his one-on-one with the gigantic Birkenhead goal stopper.

Then new boy Federico Marquez turned on the style with feet more nimble than Michael Jackson and a touch this author hasn't seen since the 80's heyday of Alf Stamp (Google him). His run down the left bamboozled Birko and he drifted a lazy cross over to Young who right-footed a first time volley that smacked loudly off the post and out. It was sublime footie and really deserved better than that. But soon after this another deft pass from Marquez put Molony away again and this time he made no mistake, slotting the ball home for a well deserved Wanderers lead.

Startled into action, the home side had a pot shot hit the post but Wanderers turned up the heat when Javier Gonzalez -he of the best first touch this side of the Camp Nou- controlled sweetly to stroked the ball to Mark Jones who hit a firm strike past the keeper for 2-0. By now Marquez was conducting proceedings like a head surgeon, and the travelling blue road show were clinically dishing out the medicine to Birko whose fans were unusually quiet. Just on half time a hand-ball in the box gave Jones the chance to score again and he steered home the penalty for a seemingly unbeatable half time 3-0 score line. A note to away teams; when you score at Birkenhead, bang loudly on the iron roof of their dugouts. They hate that.

As one would expect, Birkenhead came out in the second half determined to redress the score line. A defensive mis-kick gave the home team a chance but they hit only the side net. Another attempt was cleared off the line and then a header went flying over. But generally Vlad Frank in goal was untroubled as his defence of Luque, Konings, Shaw and Pratt gave him an armchair ride. Captain for the day, Frank was fulsome in his praise. "The boys made it easy for me. A great defensive performance." A Birkenhead bloke was moved to ask me after the game. "Does your man Shaw eat razor blades for breakfast and why doesn't that tall guy with the funny hair (Konings) ever lose a ball?"

Wanderers exerted more pressure as the match wore on and sub Sunny Singh turned well but his shot radar was off and he failed to convert.

Then it was the turn of Young to hit the woodwork again with a fierce shot and Jones went within inches of a hat trick when he cannoned the follow-up off the bar as well.

But a Alexi Varela contribution sealed the deal when he hit a superb long ball to Singh who this time controlled well and slid his shot in for the final score if 4-0. Singh's first goal for some time and maybe proof that his best contribution to the team might be as a speedy substitute.

Lee Child himself couldn't have scripted a better story as far as the Wanderers boys were concerned. And next week, the first home game for 10 weeks, will hopefully see a sequel for the Blue Army.

**Tangled up in Blue**

**Wanderers v Three Kings Utd**

9th August 2014

Our first home game for 9 weeks. When handing the out the maps to our players to show them how to get to Porritt Stadium I got a call from Bob Dylan. "I'm in the 'Tron and all I really want to do is see the Wanderers play." So we saved him a comfy seat on the sideline.

On the new pitch, the blue-clad home team won the toss and elected to play toward the club-room end. The new pitch hadn't seen a goal yet and early action didn't seem to signal an end to that drought. The away team, bedecked in all white, showed early menace. But Wanderers hosted a plethora of fast and tricky players, all anxious to knock some goals in. The trickiest feet on display belonged to Federico Marquez and he was at his wriggly best. Wanderers seemed certain to grab a lead.

The referee bemused most of the crowd when Marquez was taken out in the penalty area and it seemed a clear cut PK. But the official blithely waved a casual hand to indicate play-on. He was wrong and sadly he was to get worse in the second half.

Five minutes later Marquez passed neatly to Alexi Varela who belted the ball over. Then followed a great move where Varela won the ball and slid it to Wade Molony who in turn fed Federico who cut inside well but his shot was also -just tantalisingly so- over.

Then a moment of pure magic when Xavier Pratt unleaded a screamer of a shot from near half-way that crashed into the cross-bar then down to the keeper who somehow kept it out. Holy moley! Was the new pitch gonna keep its virginity?

Thankfully not. The inevitable assist came from Marquez, an inviting cross that Mark Jones tried to bicycle-kick into the net but missed completely, but distracted defenders as it fell to Young who clinically volleyed with a rapier right foot into the heart of the net. Dylan waved his gold plated walking stick in the excitement and the small crowd cheered noisily.

Before half time there was another Wanderers opportunity to increase the lead as a neat Gonzalez-Marquez one-two move forced the Three Kings keeper into a smart save. As per normal I had rubbished the opposition keeper who, as usual, went on to have a decent game.

In the second stanza the home team couldn't increase the margin but had some jolly good tries at it. Jones fed Young with an early ball, Young jinked left and shot, but straight to the keeper. Marquez nearly opened his account with a glaringly open goal but, on his unfavoured right peg, only succeeded in firing high over the bar.

And the best chance was when substitute Sunni Singh mis-headed a corner to Johnny Konning who blasted the ball powerfully but somehow the Three Kings custodian tipped it over for a fine save. "Only because it luckily bounced off him" Shane Comber muttered darkly.

The away side did have a few chances. These increased after Wanderers Adam Luque was dismissed for some misdemeanour to do with sitting in the ground with the ball and refusing to get up, incurring the ref’s wrath and a second yellow card. We urged him to think twice about it: a more experienced official may have been able to diffuse a rather silly situation. However the lines-person quoted Dylan, don't think twice, it's all right, and Luque trudged off for an early shower.

With the numerical advantage, the Auckland side had a late chance to snatch a draw when under-used Wanderers keeper, Vlad Frank deflected a shot straight back to the away side but their striker managed only to shoot wide with an open goal beckoning. Then the Blue bullet, Singh was put free at the other end and had his left foot swept out - just before shooting -by a Three Kings defender. Both players hit the deck, white tangled up in blue. For the second time the ref refused to consider a penalty and the match ended rather acrimoniously as home fans, players and staff vented their frustration. Thank goodness the score line was on our side!

So, finally a home game, a first goal and a first win on the new pitch. Our guest departed after a beer. We exchanged mutual lies. I promised Bob Dylan that the lads would all troop along to his concert tonight. "I'll be sure to play all my hits" he replied. They didn't. He didn't.

Rod de Lisle

**Injuries cost points.**

**East Coast Bays v Wanderers**

16th August 2014

It was back to Auckland on the trusty Cambridge Buses coach this weekend. This time to East Coast Bay's, the reigning champs who were sitting a point behind us. The weather turned windy and their pitch though flat, had a dry sandy appearance reminiscent of the Kalahari Desert. We ended at the wrong end of a 2-3 score line in this game and in hindsight the conditions, although not the only factor, were not suitable to the type of quick passing game that the Blue machine favour.

Football is a frustrating game to follow sometimes. But it rewards you with the unexpected thrill occasionally. Ex-Wanderer Chris Wood's late equaliser for Leicester against Everton over the weekend was an example of this. As a lifetime foxes fan I had reluctantly accepted that Wood was off to the Wolves and may never have the chance to score a premiership goal. So it was a nice moment for me, and even nicer for Wood, I bet. I just wish I hadn’t transferred him out of my EPL fantasy team last week.

Wanderers could certainly do with a quality striker at present. With Mark Jones leading the scoring from midfield and Sunny Singh out injured it was hoped Federico Marquez, signed a few weeks ago from Ngaruawahia would add a few up front. Alas, about 30 minutes into this match, he suffered what seems to be a fairly serious knock to his ankle. Maybe out for the remainder of the season? Pity, as he had already set up the first Wanderers goal and looked as classy as he has done in every game to date.

North Shore football expert Dario Clapperton, on a scouting mission for Inter Milan, showed up for the game and commented that “Losing Marquez was the critical point- he looked dangerous every time he got the ball”

Wanderers had taken an early lead when, like last week, Marquez supplied a tempting cross this time to Wade Malony whose header found Mark Jones who duly converted for his 13th goal of the year. However the lead was tenuous and wasn’t to last. The away team were playing a little deep at times despite having the stuff breeze at their backs and inviting the home side to push forward. So when a faint touch on an attacker in the Wanderers box was deemed penalty-worthy by the ref it seemed East Coast would punish this laxness. However faithful Wanderers custodian, Vlad Frank used his 20,000 games of experience to guess correctly and dive gratefully onto the ball. Shortly after Bay's boys headed the ball onto the bar, though the flag was raised for offside already. Frank pulled off another good save but eventually a slip, literally, by a Wanderers defender lead to a cross and a tap in goal for Bay's Dan Peat.

By now Marquez was off injured and he was soon followed by centre back Alfie Rogers who’d rogered his knee in a tackle. The away side were clearly rattled and Bays were thundering through at will, a desert stampede. Jordan Shaw was rock solid as always and his jarring tackles would surely score highly on the Richter scale. Although Wanderers held out to half time, the onslaught continued after the break when Bays knocked a couple of early goals in to make it 3-1. It seemed a rout was on the cards.

But Wanderers found some character and composure and scampered back up-field to look for a goal to reduce the arrears. Jones was taken down and another penalty was awarded by the obliging ref. The Wanderers midfielder dusted himself off and stroked the penalty in his normal manner into the corner but again the goalie was the victor guessing correctly. Perhaps Jones was jinxed by scoring his 13th goal earlier?

The action was non-stop. Bays hit a shot onto the bar again then knocked another one wide. Subs Ricky Broderson and Logan Rogerson had attempts on goal then there came another incursion by Jones into the penalty area where again he was upended. This time Jarrod Young took to the spot kick and knocked it in to reduce the deficit to one. But time was running out. Despite a late run from Rogerson where he twinkle-toed past a defender or two and shot wide and a couple of free kicks into the danger area, the home team held on for a win, and on the balance of the game probably deserved it.

However this is where I roll out the “both teams are only playing for a mid-table spot at this juncture and looking to rebuild sides for next season, so it wasn’t the end of the world” official line from Wanderers staff. The Hamilton coaching team have to now count the injury toll, survey their attacking options and find a striker for 3 games. Any chance of enticing Wood back from Leicester?

Rod de Lisle

**Why-Wai-Waitakere?**

**Wanderers v Waitakere.**

30th August 2014

Wanderer's home at Porritt is a bit like one of those East European stadiums, a shabby reminder of the halcyon post-war years with faded running track and changing rooms decorated like fallout shelters. It does have a wonderful amphitheatre and a warm grandstand though. But when the rainy storms last year turned the venue into 'Porridge' Stadium, the council in their wisdom, spent oodles making the training pitch outside into the new number one pitch. Nice flat pitch but standing room only and no nice amphitheatre to frame the beautiful game. But we hadn't yet lost on this surface.

Until this one. The third game on the new pitch, was to prove third time unlucky. Waitakere sit low on the table and were not expected to win by most pundits, especially given their 0-5 record in the last 5 meetings against Wanderers. So why didn’t you follow the script Waitakere? Why? During the week I had consulted the Football Oracle 'Yoda' Crutchsmith in the bar of the local pub. He told me "The game of association football is full of uncertainty, and no match is ever won before the kick-off".

On a blustery day the lads kitted up and supported by 10 ball kids (well done Wanderers juniors!) headed out, fired up and raring to go, little knowing that the day would end on a losing note. From the start it seemed quite positive, like the start of the National party campaign. As in their last match, the Blue Army hit the front early. Federico Marquez had waltzed through the defence wonderfully but blasted his shot over but he said it was a ‘sighter’. He made amends a few minutes later when he got hold of a Jarrod Young cross correctly and volleyed home to open his Wanderers account.

Although on the back foot for much of the first 25 minutes, Waitakere boys looked sharp on the break, especially on the wings where their zippy pace was causing some concern. But Wanderers pushed for a second goal. Defender X-man Pratt showed his own pace with an excellent run to the goal-line and slipped the ball to Marquez whose shot was a tad tame, trickling to the keeper, ex-Wanderer Ruben Parker. More action followed when Alexi Varela won the ball well in midfield and fed Federico who crossed to Young whose attempted blast was charged down. Cossey reckoned he could have had a second touch but it's easy to say from the sideline eh? A Marquez header was also tipped onto the bar by the keeper.

After Jordy Shaw was booked for a misguided two footed tackle it seemed that the home side buttoned off a little, perhaps fearing more cards, thus allowing Waitakere back into the game. They equalised just before halftime when Khan on the left hit (or mishit?) a shot high into the home net. Bother I thought. That's like the goal they scored just AFTER halftime in the away fixture.

The weather was windier after the break and it made accurate footie a touch more difficult. Spectators huddled under their jackets, gloomily wondering if a few goals might warm them up. Wanderers dominated most of the half but their shooting was as wayward as the wind. Javier Gonzalez did hit the bar with a free kick but Parker was rarely troubled.

The game meandered onwards. For Wanderers substitute Logan Rogerson was showcasing his array of tricky skills, there were some nice Adam Luque touches, solid Johnny Konnings defending and a typical Sunny Singh break where the keeper typically blocked his goal bound shot. It was perhaps inevitable that the home team would again slacken off and that Waitakere might score again. Pratt cleared a chance off the goal-line and it seemed 1-1 was the final score, but a last minute goalmouth melee ended with the ball dropping at the feet of that man Khan again and he gratefully poked it into the net to seal the match.

The crowd dissipated quickly, heading for a beer or a warm fire. We shook hands with Colin Tua and his coaching team and trooped back to the Cold War bunker in the stadium to ponder the defeat. Not everyone was disconsolate. Paul, the Waitakere manager for one, was happy with our new pitch and also complimented Wanderers for great hospitality. Ta for that Paul, enjoy your three points. Don't despair Wanderers faithful, I've consulted guru 'Yoda' Crutchsmith again. The glorious Blue Army will rise again, hmmmm.. hopefully by next week!

Rod de Lisle

**Father’s day special**

**Wanderers v Ngaruawahia**

7th Sept 2014

A rather one sided season-ending contest at Porritt saw a half dozen goals, all to Wanderers and three red cards, all to Ngaruawahia. The relegated away side seemed determined to give outgoing Wanderers captain Ricky Broderson a decent send off. Broderson has starred for Wanderers for 5 seasons. He told us he committed to the club over a pint at the old Cobb n co at Chartwell. “It was my first night in Hamilton after moving back to New Zealand. Mark Cossey collared me and I committed to playing for this club by signing a paper napkin. I’d had a few beers and was a little hammered at the time but don’t regret a moment of it.”

After losing the previous week in front of a sparse crowd, the gang at Wanderers HQ had hatched a cunning - Baldrick-like- plan. Let's play our last home game of the season on Sunday rather than Saturday. Let's get all the kids and their dads down for a Father's Day outing and make it a special day. Chuck on a BBQ and hope the crowd is a good one.

As it turned out, even the weather gods agreed with the plan. Cold and grey on the Saturday but a cloudless spring day 24 hours later. And, yep, a fantastic crowd, the best of the season. The BBQ plate was sizzling like a snare and the old club stereogram was put on the deck and turned up to 11.

Now for the game. I remember David Gilmour of Pink Floyd telling me that you have to put on a decent show when you have a stadium full of knowledgeable punters. "They have given up their time, you have to perform, give them their money's worth." Goals and goals would be the perfect answer.

For the first 45 minutes the performance of both teams was at times as disjointed as a coalition of left (ok, or left) wing political parties. But there were some nice moments in between to ensure the patrons weren't short changed.

Wanderers generally were on the front foot but despite a Federico Marquez chance where he slashed unsuccessfully at goal from the left it took the first sending-off- a Latham two footed tackle- for the home side to turn the screws. A goalmouth melee where Adam Luque had a shot blocked at a gnats-whisker distance from the goal line was shortly followed by a Broderson corner where a long ball to the far left saw Wade Molony steer the ball home.

But instead of the flood gates opening for the home team, Ngaruawahia’s Jama Boss had a couple of decent attempts, one deflecting off the crossbar and a cross shot that sent goalie extraordinaire Vlad Frank soaring like a flying cat to pluck the ball out of the air. Despite more chances at the other end to Sunni Singh and Molony, the solitary Wanderers goal was the only tick on the score-sheet at half time.

Those floodgates did open after the break. The ball-kids had entertained the crowd with a 6 a-side during half time and showed everyone how to knock in the goals. Speedy Sunni Singh took note and when he was put through by Marquez in the 48th minute, he slipped a nicely angled shot in. 2-0! Then probably the best team movement of the match, stemming from the back, ended with Jones crossing for Marquez to nod one past his old team mates for 3-0. The boys in green then suffered a second red card-Kinney- and were consequentially on the back foot as Jones zipped in from the left, slipped the ball out to sub, Logan Rogerson who tapped it back to Jones who duly knocked in his tenth goal of an excellent season. 4-0.

Like a best man at a stag party Adam Luque got in on the action, winning a goal at the back, surging through and with a wall pass landing back at his feet hitting a long range shot past the weary Ngaruawahia custodian. 5-0. hen Rogerson shot from the left but only the right post preventing his maiden first team goal.

The 6th goal and 6th Wanderers scorer for the day came to Alexi Varela who drove a shot in-off the post to really twist the knife. It seemed the away team were anxious to get back to Ngaruawahia when their third dismissal - Holten- occurred with a minute or so to play.

The referee eventually ended their misery and, although not a good way to depart the top flight, Ngaruawahia seem too organised a club not to be knocking on the door next season. That is if their coffers can withstand the financial drain that all those red cards will impose on them.

But the day was a success for the home team, 3 points in the kitty, Broderson clapped off the field by his team mates and for the hundreds of spectators basking in the sun, a decent day out. I collared Jamie Oliver, loyal Wanderers supporter after the match. He said. "Hey blues fans, having savoured some tasty goals today hopefully you'll have an appetite for more next season. Lovely jubbly" Next week, the final game away to Central and the result will determine whether we finish 3rd, 5th or 6th.

Rod de Lisle

**Federico the Assassin.**

Central v Wanderers

13th Sept 2014

For the last time this year the Wanderers travelling roadshow headed north across the Bombay’s, this time to face Central who had lost the Chatham cup final the week before. The curtain was about to fall on the 2014 season and it was literally a curtain of rain. Initially fine during the Ressies game, black rainclouds turned to light rain which soon became a deluge and the Croatian Ground resembled the local swimming baths. We had watched a show of pure skill, artistry and speed during the warm-up game. Not the football itself, but the bloke who came on at half time in a small tractor and whizzed round the ground marking the faint lines with new white ones. He covered the pitch at speed and even his centre circle was perfectly round.

Sadly the torrential rain washed away most of his artwork and the referee and his lines-chaps pondered whether to play the main match. They opted to go ahead, the rain clouds eased and the game started in bright sunshine. Wanderers coach Mark Cossey stirred his troops up, to attack round the season out in style after their lengthy, at times gruelling, season

Wanderers were missing key players Broderson, Shaw and Crawford. Central had brought in one or two young guns but still featured 4 or 5 National league players, including their playmaker Tade. Their season was fairly shot though and Wanderers needed a win to finish third and on the peep of the whistle were straight onto the attack rather like the thousands of ants in the dugouts, who were doing the same to the substitutes and staff.

In only the fifth minute Wade Molony was taken out in the penalty area and, after hesitating for a tick, the ref pointed to the white dot. Mark Jones converted for his 11th league goal with a cool finish. Jones had missed his last spot kick and said "I was stoked to have another chance to take a PK. Was expecting to wait another 3 years".

Logan Rogerson, he of the tricky feet, was next to trouble the Central defence. He waltzed into the box like a will-o-wisp and flicked the ball to gentleman Federico Marquez who politely never declines a gift. 2-0! This was looking rather good.

A momentary lapse in concentration allowed Central to head home a corner but Wanderers were quickly back on the attack. The best bit of individual skill of the game saw Marquez duck and dive and turn the home defence inside out before delivering a deft flick over the keeper into the net. 3-1 and only 15 minutes into the game.

Wanderers were looking a class act. As assistant coach Shane Comber said later, "captain Adam Luque was a standout player and the midfield trio of Alexi Varela, Jonesy (Mark Jones) and Federico were electric with a chance created almost every attack. Central really struggled to string anything together limiting the influence of dangerous Tade."

Central did attack sporadically and hit the post twice but it got even better for Wanderers before half time. A clearance from Luque was headed on by Marquez to Malony who raced through. His first shot was blocked but he scored from the rebound. Malony told me he enjoyed the game. "It was a real open game, end to end stuff. In regards to my goal I don't have any comments really just that I was reaping the rewards of following up my shot."

The second half saw fewer goals but the boys in blue were in an ebullient party mood. Central did start with a penalty kick, Tade converting, but that was to be the last time they troubled the scorekeeper.

Molony was replaced by Javier Gonzalez who immediately made his presence known with cool control and passing. His contribution to the fifth goal was useful as he chested the ball down and slipped through to Sunni Singh on the right hand side who crossed to unmarked Marquez who knocked home for his hat trick. 5-2. "Federico the assassin" grinned Jones.

Jones then showed he can make, as well as score, goals with a sublime outside of the foot pass to Singh who belted through at his normal 100 mph, rounded the keeper then smashed home from a narrow angle.

Wanderers brought on Brock Radich and youngster Quinton Kipara who, like Rogerson is featuring in the under-17 national team. There were to be no more goals but the 6-2 score line had ensured Wanderers's third place, their highest, in the premier league. Typifying the Wanderers team was Keeper Vlad Frank, the oldest player in the Northern league and is said to be possibly carved out pure Kevlar. He played every minute of every game and enjoyed the 12 goals Wanderers have scored in the last two games. I asked him for an in-depth analysis of the game. “Brilliant, guys" he stated with typical Slavic brevity.

A satisfactory conclusion to the year and Comber summed things up succinctly. "The team performance really showed how far the lads have come, pleasing for me was the mental strength and determination they showed despite many carrying painful knocks and not letting them hinder or be an excuse for performance." Cossey beamed like a Cheshire cat and then typically signed off with an "Ok lads enjoy your summer but keep fit we have a league to win next year.

Rod de Lisle