# A MOST UNUSUAL DAY.

## South Yorkshire 2 Northumberland 14

We got to Sheffield United’s training ground exactly on time, 11.00am 22nd November 2003, after having had a very early start, and knowing that a good win was essential to qualify for the Northern Counties competition semi final stage. With three of our strongest player not available, Craig Bryson Graeme Owens and Damon Gray, we faced a stern test, which became harder as we got off the coach, when we were told the game had to be brought forward to 11.30am as the referees had  other important games in the afternoon.

Was this a cunning plan by our South Yorkshire adversaries?  With time being of the essence, while we were in the dressing room, a most unusual thing happened. when the Chairman of South Yorkshire entered the dressing room and asked to have a few words with our players. How could I refuse? He welcomed our players hoped we would enjoy the game but virtually told us, we were coming up against a team confident of gaining one of the two play-off places which were up for grabs. Our team talk that day would have made my fellow Scot Bill Shankly proud. "We have to win, get out there and do it".

 To say we had little time was an understatement. By the time I had recovered from the walk up the hill  to the pitches, the referee was calling the captains together. None of the usual twenty minutes of sprints and exercises for our lads. Just jog up a hill and get lined up, ready.

Within three minutes…disaster. 1-0 down, the mountain we had to climb to the playoffs had just got bigger. Perhaps we should have warmed up. I was thinking about a resignation letter… when a most unusual thing happened. North scored, then scored again  and then again…and again.. In fact every time we seemed to mount an attack we scored. Centre forward James Sinclair, who we knew was quick, led the line brilliantly with speed and composure, and caused chaos. Half time ? 10-1. Incredible.

10-1, away from home at half time, what do you say to your players? “Well done lads, keep it going….oh and four of you are coming off including the captain and goalkeeper".

But Sinclair who was scoring goals for fun, we did keep on. No point in giving them every advantage. Let’s just say this was going to be his day.

The second half mirrored the first. Yorkshire scored again from the restart, which seemed to annoy our players who responded by planting yet another four goals past their hapless keeper. Final Score 14-2 with Sinclair scoring 9 (nine). Scoring a hat trick for your county is always an outstanding achievement. But to score three hat tricks,  in one match,  at this standard is unbelievable.

What happened after that? Qualifying for the Northern Counties Final gave us entry to the ESFA national Inter County competition and at the semifinal stage, we went on to play Nottinghamshire. What a cruel game. 2-0 up with ten minutes to go, we somehow lost 4-2 in extra time on a bare pitch in fading light. The disappointment was so palpable. Highs and lows.

We played Durham in the Northern Counties final just after that. James Sinclair once again scoring a hat trick, and we led 4-0  with quarter of an hour to play. Almost home and dry… so I decided to bring on all the subs. We just managed to win 4-3. Some manager I am.

Of the players who played that memorable day in Yorkshire,  Fraser Forster is now with Celtic. James Sinclair was soon on the bench for Bolton Wanderers against Inter Milan. Jamie Mole was playing for Hearts at 18 in Europeam competition. Ben Pringle is playing for Derby County and Chris Fawcett  has played twice for Whitley Bay at Wembley.

Team . Forster, Gates, Davidson, Knox, Gillespie, Cairns, G Hall, Fawcett, Pringle, Mole, Sinclair.

Subs.  Peters, M.Hall, Tinsley, York, Dodgson.

**Malcolm Denham Team manager . Northumberland SFA 1995-2010**