

No Performance = No Refund by Stuart Fuller, editor of The Ball is Round

There seems to be a growing trend of clubs, in some kind of misguided knee-jerk reactionary way, to offer fans a refund should their side fail to perform on the pitch away from home. The beauty of football, especially in the Non-Leagues is that sometimes anything can happen.

Gary Andrews, one of the best non-professional writers in the land, recently wrote a piece in *When Saturday Comes* about this growing trend. We've all been to away games where it seems it has only been the fans who have turned up, but that's what we sign up for as football fans - crushing disappointment and more than not, a great day out spoilt by 90 minutes of turgid football.

So why do clubs feel the need to offer such gestures? In some ways, the offer to refund the fans, such as the gesture made by the Sunderland players after they lost 8-0 to Southampton, rumoured to be in the region of £60k, highlights the huge gulf between the wages the players earn and the world the fan lives in. Assuming 20 people contributed, how many people could afford to simply donate £3k as a penance for doing their job poorly once? Likewise, what would have happened if that result would have occurred at The Stadium of Light in front of 40,000? Would the fans have been compensated then? I doubt it.

Daniel Taylor, the Guardian football writer, wrote in the aftermath of Millwall's defeat to Bradford, which resulted in the travelling Lions fans being offered a refund that buying a football ticket never comes with a guarantee of performance. Last season West Ham were humiliated away from home not once, but twice in a matter of days in front of the TV cameras and a global audience at Nottingham Forest and Manchester City. Perhaps it was because of the low expectations of the fans under Allardyce, Sullivan and Gold but there were no calls for refunds, nor were any forthcoming for the 5-0 and 6-0 drubbings.

In the same vein, perhaps teams who travel to the likes of Stamford Bridge, The Etihad or Old Trafford should refund their fans if they win against the odds? You won't find many Bradford City fans complaining that they humiliated Chelsea at Stamford Bridge, yet if they had lost 7 or 8 nil perhaps they would have been clamouring for their money back?

We've seen some poor away day displays in the last few years but even the wrath of Big Deaksy's Saturday night tweets haven't yet called for refunds for the Lewes Lunatic Fringe. A 5-0 half time score line a few years ago on a chilly Monday night at Wealdstone had Cynical Dave moaning more about the lack of dry roasted peanuts than the abject performance on the pitch, whilst the three goals in the first ten minutes scored by Oxford City in November's FA Trophy game saw the fans complaining about the lack of chips rather than the defending. Non-League fans travel more in hope than expectation, and that is why a call for refunds will fall on deaf ears.

As the famous strap line goes for financial products, past results are no guarantee of future performance.

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