

## Speaking out of turn by Stuart Fuller (@theballisround)

More through necessity than anything else, I still have the pleasure of holding the microphone at The Dripping Pan for every home game I attend. Whilst the job isn't that hard, you are forced to pay a little more attention than most fans to what is going on on the field, and such luxuries as having a pee, eating anything that requires two hands or even tweeting add an extra layer of complexity to the job. It is a thankless, mostly dull job really but one that is essential. In the three years that I've been doing the job I have had to deal with two lost children, five lost wallets, numerous cars blocking access in the car park and one request to "ring home". Alas, I am still waiting for my first marriage proposal or the nadir of a PA announcers career, "Mr x just to let you know you are the father of a new baby boy/girl".

When I agreed to take it on I wanted to do it my way. No sitting up in the stand, no cheesy announcements, no muffled voices. It had to be big and bold, whilst still standing on the terraces with a pint of Harveys. Of course, this leads to problems, especially when I can't get to the bar until we have kicked off and am scared to turn my back just for a second in case I miss a bit of action. I should do my research on pronunciation of player names but rarely do (apparently I'm still pronouncing Gus Sow's name wrong), breaking it down phonetically and hoping I've got it right. You can get too cocky though and announce something without referring to the team sheet such as the announcement of Tooting's fourth goal scorer yesterday, Adam Cunningham....for Adam read Alexander.

Standing on the terraces does have issues though – it's not that easy to see what's going on at the other end. I've lost count the number of times an opponent has scored and we have no idea who got the final touch. In games when the reliable Rookmeister isn't Tweeting in the stands I have to make a brave decision, knowing that the name I pick will be added to Football Web Pages and go down in history. Of course, we can try to find out from the opposing keeper, but they rarely know or even bother to respond.

And then there are times when you simply forget that you are doing the job as was the case last season when we conceded the comical second goal. We were all so confused as to what happened that it was a good five minutes later before I remembered that I hadn't announced it, although the handling of an own-goal is always a difficult one to decide what to do. Should I say, "own goal by Lewes number 4 Lloyd Harrington", adding fuel to the fire of an already fuming midfielder, or should I give it to the "supplier" of the final ball? In this case the Tooting player could hardly claim any credit for it. Perhaps simply not announcing it was the best option, although if it was the first goal, what should I have done then as the Golden Goal competition is resting on my announcement of the time. During the second half I bumped into an old friend, Gary Hancock, down from Tooting and started chatting to him, only realising a few minutes later than both sides had brought on substitutes unannounced.

Now that's one aspect where I have the power of life or death. Well, sort of. Yesterday we sold out of Golden Goal tickets meaning that two lucky punters would win £25. I'm a bit conflicted here as I always have two tickets although I never open them until the first goal

has been scored and I've announced the winner – I'm sure there would be a stewards enquiry if I did ever win, despite spending a King's ransom on it over the years.

Announcing the teams is a challenge in itself. They don't put pronunciation guides on team sheets these days - was Tooting's left-back "Ade-bow-ale", "Ad-ebo-wale" or "Ade-bowal-e"? The temptation to adopt Alan Partridge-style exclamations has so far been suppressed but it is only a matter of time before one or two slip out.

The rules keep on coming – Don't announce the man of the match or official attendance too early - my rule is during a stop in play once we get into the 89th minute. Three years ago versus Brighton & Hove Albion in the Sussex Senior Cup, Sam Crabb was chosen and I announced the award when we were 1-0 down but then two Tom Davis specials saw us win and would've had won him the award. Yesterday there was an audible groan when I announced Charlie Coppola as Man of the Match, with comments like "you sure?" and "what game are you watching?" but I don't choose the winner, I just announce it.

And finally, you need to thank the away fans for attending, even if they've smashed up half the ground and invaded the pitch, and wish them luck for rest of season and a safe journey home. Yesterday I made the "mistake" of suggesting we would see the Tooting & Mitcham United fans next season despite them sitting proudly on top of the table. Or was it a mistake?