

DECEMBER 1969: TRIP TO HIGHBURY

Arsenal 2-2 Southampton

ARSENAL
1 Geoff Barnett
2 Peter Storey
3 Sammy Nelson
4 David Court
5 Frank McLintock
6 Peter Simpson
7 Jimmy Robertson
8 Jon Sammels
9 John Radford
10 George Graham
11 George Armstrong
12 Eddie Kelly

Venue	Arsenal Stadium, Highbury, London
Date	Saturday, 6th December 1969
Competition	Football League Division 1
Referee	Mr R Matthewson (Near Manchester)
Attendance	24,509

SOUTHAMPTON
1 Gerry Gurr
2 Joe Kirkup
3 Tony Byrne
4 Hugh Fisher
5 John McGrath
6 Jimmy Gabriel
7 Terry Paine
8 Mike Channon
9 Ron Davies
10 David Walker
11 David Thompson
12 Bobby Stokes

Match Details			
07	1-0	Sammels	
28	1-1		Davies
72	2-1	Radford	
81	2-2		Gabriel

I was still a 'nipper' back in those days (probably didn't like being called one then, but wouldn't mind now I am in more older years!) and I went by coach with my Dad to watch my very first Southampton FC away game.

Forward a fair while further and to a film called *Fever Pitch* which was an autobiographical story about how writer Nick Hornby became associated with Arsenal FC. It came from the book of the same name. There was one scene in it when Hornby as a child, played by actor Luke Aikman, was taken to that very same ground by his Dad at an age that was probably not too distant from my own on this featured day. The film showed the young Hornby climbing the stairs on his very first visit to the ground and then gasped when he got to the top of the steps and could see the ground enveloped in front of him. That part of the film brings back a moment that I personally can remember experiencing at the same ground. My first thoughts and a football lesson at the time, were: **NOT ALL FOOTBALL GROUNDS WERE LIKE THE DELL!!** (Readers of a certain age may appreciate that comment with a bit of a chuckle!).

The game itself was a 2-2 draw with both sides scoring a goal in each half. I'd fully appreciated Jon Sammels scoring early in the match, a 'sweet' volley from outside the box (which Dad described as a 'rocket shot') but a Ron Davies header from a Terry Paine cross levelled things up. Arsenal went back in front with a John Radford header but it was a further header, this time by Saints' Jimmy Gabriel, that made it 2-2 with nine minutes remaining..

But there is another memorable occurrence from this game. It was half-time with the teams locked at 1-1 and Dad went back down to use the facilities. I was sat, still admiring the ground and surroundings. A lad was sat in front of me, who might have been a little older, whom I'd taken little notice of but he had obviously been aware of my own presence (not forgetting that segregation of crowds was not in place back then). He turned to me and asked: "Are you a Southampton supporter?"

"Yes" I replied.

About a minute passed, Dad had still to return to his seat and the yellow shirted Saints players took to the field for the second half to which that lad stood up and howled:

"Southampton, load of rubbish!"

I rather got the impression that his outburst was done for my benefit which seemed totally bizarre to me. There was no reply from me but on the day, 'my load of rubbish' more than justified a draw from this game meaning his team were clearly not much better. I let my team do the talking. I wonder what became of him. Judging by the film and how shy he appeared to be, I very much doubt whether it could possibly have been a young Nick Hornby!

Reference: In That Number—Duncan Holley and Gary Chalk