

## THEY GOT AWAY WITH IT ONCE, BUT...

There's a little-remembered strange fact about Cray's Metropolitan League Cup Final win over Bletchley Town in 1971.

In the first leg of the Final, at Grassmeade, the referee had ruled that Bletchley's all-orange kit was too much of a colour-clash with the all-amber of Cray's kit. Bletchley, being the 'away' team, had to change attire.

Therein lay the problem. They had got away with wearing the all-orange strip a few weeks earlier, when they visited Grassmeade for a Metropolitan League match. I have to admit, it did look a bit ridiculous that afternoon. It was cold, wet and miserable - except for the scoreline. Cray inflicted a breathtaking 4-1 win over the visitors, with the tragic Keith Wellham scoring a hat-trick for the Wands. But the orange and amber clash did cause a few 'curious' moments.

Bletchley Town was a team that had enjoyed several seasons in the Southern League hierarchy, before registration problems led them into the bowels of non-league football known to the Isthmian, Athenian and Southern League member clubs as the Metropolitan League.

The previous couple of seasons Bletchley had proved to be a hard nut to crack. They had retained a large number of their former Southern League side, the idea being that they would win the Metropolitan League title and gain promotion back to the Southern League. It never happened for them but, ironically, they got re-elected to the Southern League when the Metropolitan League was 'watered down' by being amalgamated with the Greater London League to form the Metropolitan London League. This merger, and the effects it had on Cray Wanderers, is documented elsewhere, so I won't dwell on it here.

Anyway, the problem facing Bletchley in the cup final was that they had travelled all the way from Buckinghamshire without a change of kit. They came prepared to play in all-orange. Mick Slater was adamant Cray were playing in all-amber and the referee was facing a dilemma.

The upshot of it all was that Cray loaned Bletchley their away strip at the time, which was all red, in order that the game could proceed. I remember somebody remarking on the day that it was a bit like Wolves against Liverpool. Yes. A bit.

The kindly gesture by the Wanderers was all fine and dandy, until both sides took to the field. The two strips looked more of a colour-clash (a veritable eyesore) than when those of us witnessed the previous game! And, to cap it all off, the game was played with an orange ball!

Cray once again won by a worthy 4-1 margin and, the following week, a 1-1 draw at Bletchley ensured the Wands lifted the trophy. The Wanderers wore an all-white strip against Bletchley's all-orange number on that occasion and, by doing so, avoided any repetition of the colour-clash issues.

The referee, for the first Grassmeade game between the two sides earlier that season, had allowed the apparent colour-clash to continue unchecked. The referee for the second game, however, was having none of it, but may have inadvertently instigated a worse clash of colours.

Both times, Cray came out on top, so Bletchley couldn't complain either way.

A few seasons later, a new ruling came in that addressed the problem of any part of two kits colour-clashing, and that ruling still stands today.

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