Pikey's Progress: The day history was made

The man of the moment miraculously appeared from a wheelie bin to discover a guard of honor had been formed by the OW Super Vets and Arts Network as they prepared to do battle for the Kirk Benjamin Memorial trophy.

Wife Kim started the video rolling, enthusiastically supported by other members of the family.

So what was the occasion?

This was Bruce Graham's 1080th appearance for the OWS, thereby making him the highest capped player in its 136 year history.

Quite early in the game Bruce found himself just inside/outside the penalty area and a left volley saw the ball scorch the back of the net to make it 2-1 to the Super Vets soon after Arts Network had scored a neat equaliser to cancel out the OW's opener.

The latter then established a 4-2 lead but there was less than five minutes left for play when the (other) momentous moment arrived. Not only had Bruce broken a club record by playing more games than anyone else, he was also on 98 goals before kick-off which had become 99 with that left-foot volley, and a perfect cross saw Bruce with the simple task of heading the ball into the back of the net – even Doug Smart would have scored; and apologies for the exaggeration!

The crowd went wild – they had been pretty angry for some time – and a beaming Bruce was mobbed by his equally delighted team mates.

The final whistle prevented Bruce from the possibility of scoring a hat-trick – before the game it had been agreed that if the OWs were awarded a penalty then he would take it – but this did not prove to be necessary.

Bruce played for 11 OW sides, the nine league teams and the Vets and Super Vets, but played mostly for the 1st Xl, 447 times, scoring 26 goals - strangely we were rarely team mates!

Bruce had played the day before for the 6th Xl - two games in two days is (more than) enough for an extremely fit 20 year old, let alone a man of 68, and when asked after the game how long he would like to continue playing for he said:

"I would like to be playing at 70" , by which time he will have played well over 1,100 and have done so for 49 years; better play at least one more year, Bruce, to make it a round 50!

It was appropriate that this magnificent achievement was achieved as we remembered Kirk, and it was so good to see Sophie and the children, although the former's initial reaction when I claimed to be 97 was a little disturbing, and thanks to Arts Network for providing the opposition

They are regular visitors to Hayes – we have played them twice a season for a number of years – and thanks to Matthew Couper in particular, who organises their team, despite the fact that he no longer works for the project.

All of the match fees were donated to said project, which helps those with severe and enduring mental health issues, and the game raised £235 to add to the enormous amount of money we have given them over the years, thanks to the generosity of the Super Vets, who are sponsored by 'Men of the Hill' - as in Hayes Hill – who also do great work in helping those with mental health problems and whose mantra is "It's okay to not be okay" - please speak to them if you need to.

You can find a profile of Bruce, most of the material for which was provided by the man himself, in the latest football newsletter, and a word of thanks and praise here for Mark Pope, who has produced this essential reading throughout the season.The profile is also on the home page of the OW's website, but here are a few highlights explaining why Bruce has been an outstanding member of the Club both on and off the field:

He was Chairman of Ways and Mean Committee for seven years and OWFC President for two

He became a regular member of the 1st Xl in his second season and went on to make 447 appearances and was their player of the season in the 1986/87 season

Was part of the 4th Xl's double winning team of 2004/05 when he was also voted their player of the season

Thanks to Phil Gilmore who refereed and awarded a penalty to Arts Network, and such is his shrewd reading of the game of football that he knew that Bruce would score the two goals he needed for his 100 without such assistance - not that Phil would have manufactured such a situation.

This was the penultimate weekend of the season for the OWFC - we are staging Cup Finals on both Saturday and Sunday next week – so let us all take the opportunity of thanking Jasper and his magnificent bar staff for quenching our thirst and to Sally and her equally magnificent team for providing such splendid food throughout the season for us to enjoy after games.

After this game Bruce was presented with the match ball, signed by the participants, to mark his magnificent achievement and we look forward to seeing him in OW colours for many games, and years, to come, including this particular encounter when Arts Network return in October in a game that means so much to the Benjamin family and to the Old Wilsonians' family, i.e. ***all of us*** as well