

## Who's got Tiny Cox?

Phil Mellows

If anybody asks me whether I'm a football fan I say 'no – I support Leyton Orient'. Living in Brighton, self-disparagement seems a sensible tactic. Brighton & Hove Albion followers don't seem to like us. Although since moving here I've developed a soft spot for our arch-rivals. There's a certain spirit about the club and, like the Orient, they've tended to bump along amiably in the lower divisions.

Until last season that is, when the Albion, inspired by a determination to fill their beautiful new stadium, stormed away with the League One title (Division Three in old money).

The fans are justifiably excited about the prospects. But I've noticed some are hoping success doesn't change the club too much. This is perhaps like the recent lottery winner saying she didn't want all those millions to change her life. In that case she better give the money to people who could jolly well do with having their life changed. Honestly.

Football is different, though. Many thousands of people loyally follow little clubs through thin and thinner. A few give up and reveal they've always supported Man United. But that's generally frowned upon. Take my own beloved Os. The official Orient song at one time included the line 'We don't care if we win or lose or draw'. I'm not sure I ever heard it sung at a game. It might have encouraged the opposition. But there was one occasion when Orient swiftly fell two-nil down and the fans behind the goal on the South Bank at Brisbane Road were gripped by a miserable silence. A frustrated supporter down the front turned round and yelled 'Sing! sing!', and without missing a beat a bloke at the back launched into 'I left my heart in San Francisco . . .'

You need a sense of humour to be an Os fan. Our manager now is Russell Slade, who used to manage Brighton. He's a jolly sort of chap and one of the first things he did was sign a former Albion player, a speedy winger called Dean Cox. He's 5' 4" and, as he did at Brighton, he's inspired the chant 'We've got Tiny Cox, oh we've got Tiny Cox!'.

It would be a shame if Brighton's new elevated status means they're above that kind of inverted pride.

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