

08/11/05 TT No.102: *Stephen Harris* - Barkingside (Essex Senior League)

Monday 7 November 2005; Barkingside 2-1 Waltham Abbey; Essex Senior Cup; attendance c.70, programme issued, admission £4.

Monday evenings usually present my best chance of seeing a midweek football game and Barkingside are kind to me by often playing on that night of the week. It is also an extremely easy ground to get to, lying adjacent to Barkingside station. These two factors combined mean that I am quite a frequent visitor to the Oakside Stadium.

Both of tonight's clubs have had a difficult recent history, disappearing from the Spartan League into intermediate football, before reappearing in the Essex Senior League. Both have made good starts this season in the league and Barkingside in particular have made it clear that they are focussed on promotion.

Some people will say that Oakside has been bodged-up on the cheap and barely complies with the ground grading necessary for former tenants, now landlords, Redbridge FC to play at a higher level. I'm not one of them, and I like the place. The fact that everything is homemade and individual gives the place a character lacking at plenty of other recently developed non-league grounds. The stand is a haphazard mix of wooden boards, scaffold poles and plastic seats in a variety of colours. Either side of the stand and at the near end are unique raised, open terraces which give a great view of the game. The remaining side has a couple of terrace steps, covered along its full length, with uncovered standing at the far end. All of this is more than adequate for the meagre attendances attracted by both clubs who play here and paradise compared to the bleak facilities which existed here ten years ago.

There is also a relatively smart clubhouse and a busy refreshment hut, although you really have to be over seven-foot-tall to see what is on offer at the latter. A new feature this season is a small shop offering a selection of old programmes and badges, operating from a table in the clubhouse.

This game was not played to an enormously high standard, but it was very competitive - as befits this prestigious competition. 'Side scored from a well-taken, long-range shot in the second minute and then withstood an hour of Abbey pressure. The equaliser eventually came from a penalty, but 'Side soon went back ahead and hung on for a just-about deserved win.

A match programme sold for £1 and was thin but informative, based around the Essex Senior League Bulletin. Match rating: 3*.