

19/11/05 TT No.113: Mike Latham - Accrington Stanley (Nationwide Conference)

Fri 18 Nov 2005, Nationwide Conference: Accrington Stanley 2-0 Forest Green Rovers (att.: 1,506)

Accrington Stanley's remarkable rise through the non-league ranks shows no sign of abating. On a freezing night in East Lancashire they moved into the weekend by going top of the Conference with this 2-0 win and are on target to bring back league football to the town after a gap of over 40 years since the original Stanley's sad demise.

Stanley's ground, now known as the Interlink Express Stadium, was formerly known as the Crown Ground. Located behind the Crown public house on the Whalley Road leading out of the town centre it is a well-used venue, also hosting NWCL neighbours Great Harwood and last weekend staging Colne's game against FC United that attracted a crowd of nearly 3,000. Despite the use, the playing area was flat and superbly kept, though a coating of white frost virtually obscured the pitch markings come full-time.

An easy walk from the town centre, the ground is located in a residential area with some magnificent, imposing stone-built properties nearby and there is plenty of street parking to be found. Though the entrance fee is £12 adults this also gives entry to the main stand if desired and a 52-page programme was £2.

There is a social club just through the main turnstile that, though crowded, offered a warm pre-match refuge on one of the coldest nights of the winter so far and a number of temporary catering outlets sold the local delicacy- Hollands pies.

The IES has one main stand that runs all the way down one side of the ground. With only eight rows of seats the view is inevitably affected and hampered by the constant throng of fans that walk along the gangway in front of the seats on their way to the terraces, toilet, snack bars or club house. The two ends are both terraced but uncovered and the far side is an uncovered shallow terrace.

With no segregation in place due to the negligible number of travelling fans from Gloucestershire the home fans were able to change ends at half-time and roar their team to victory achieved with two well taken goals- the first a sharp strike by in-form winger Roberts, the second a smart shot by Jagielka just after half-time.

On a frost covered surface the visitors tried to play constructive football and had plenty of the play but their finishing lacked the quality of their approach play. The match was played in excellent spirit with no cautions and was superbly refereed.

With neighbours Blackburn Rovers and Burnley competing for the local leisure pound Stanley, beginning a run of four successive home games, switched this game to a Friday evening and must have been pleased to have achieved a crowd of 1,500

on such a bitterly cold night. Their fans behind the goal kept up a constant encouragement and the array of draped and colourful flags was impressive.

Though not the best ground to visit on a wet day the IES is a friendly and hassle-free place to watch Conference football and, if you choose your spot carefully, you can get a good close-up view of the action. Match rating: 3*.

04/20