

20/12/05 TT No.139: Mike Latham - Great Harwood Town (NWCL2) at Accrington

Mon 19 Dec 2005, NWCL Division 2, Great Harwood Town 3-0 Chadderton (at the Interlink Express Stadium, Accrington); Attendance: 100est; Admission: £5; 52pp programme: £1; FGIF Rating: 4*

Accrington Stanley may be flying high at the top of the Conference but they are a terrific example of a club that looks after their neighbours in the non-league scene. When Great Harwood lost use of their ground due to an arson attack on the club house, Stanley Chairman Eric Whalley readily came up with the offer of his club's ground while Colne and Nelson have used or will use the ground for games against FC United this season. Accrington have never forgotten the desolation of losing their league status over 40 years ago and when Bury were in financial difficulties a few years ago were the first club to arrange a fund-raising friendly game.

Great Harwood produce a fantastic programme for each and every home game. This issue, clearly a labour of love for its compiler, John Fenton, was a 52-pager for only £1 which included the tables and results updated for results in the NWCL two days previously. Entertaining pen pictures on the home players, a three-page account of their trip to Norton & Stockton Ancients and a superb round-up of recent happenings in the non-league scene were among the other highlights. With admission at £5 adults and the clubhouse (situated inside the ground) open for refreshments and drinks, it was a good Monday evening out.

With the pitch in superb condition the two sides showed that the NWCLD2 can produce a good quality passing game given a decent surface. Great Harwood boast a Cyprus U21 international in their ranks and looked a far better side than their league position indicates. Chadderton stayed in contention thanks to some fine saves by their goalkeeper but showed that they too could play some good football.

Referee Stephen Foster had controlled the game superbly, with a good rapport with the players but the Chadderton number seven was hard work. The referee did his best and was told by one visiting player: "Don't worry, he'd start an argument with himself." With 15 minutes to go the number 7 gave away a free-kick just outside his own area with a wild tackle and compounded his error with a show of dissent that earned the game's first yellow card. Harwood promptly scored from the free-kick and when the Chadderton player then ironically applauded the referee he was shown his second yellow.

Down to ten men, Chadderton completely lost their discipline in the closing stages and incurred some more yellow cards while one player engaged in an unedifying heated exchange with home supporters behind the goal. The 'home' team rubbed salt in the wound with two more goals to earn their sixth win in their last seven games. It was convincing by the end.

There was plenty of good entertainment to be had on a clear and fairly mild evening and the splendid surroundings of the IES (formerly Crown Ground) complimented the occasion. Situated up the Whalley Road leading out of Accrington town centre, behind the Crown public house, the ground may well be staging Football League games if Stanley continue their stunning recent form. If they do then Stanley are sure to continue to support their neighbours, especially those in distress.

After the experience of Barrow on Saturday it was refreshing to go back to grass roots football without a mobile police surveillance van waiting outside and there was no one around to photograph the crowd. Great Harwood Town are clearly facing a battle for survival as they continue to play away from home but they have a dedicated band of supporters and volunteer helpers determined to keep the flag flying and this was a splendid evening's entertainment.

04/20