

01/01/06 TT No.151: Mike Latham - Halesowen Town (Southern League Prem Division) and Rushall Olympic (Southern League Division 1 West)

Sat 31 Dec 2005, Southern League Division One West: **Rushall Olympic 2-0**
Stourport Swifts Attendance: 103; Admission: £5; 84pp programme: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

Situated within just a few minutes from J10 of the M6 motorway close to Walsall, Rushall Olympic entered the Southern League this season after a championship winning campaign in the Travel Factory Alliance League.

Only a few years ago a semi-rural village Rushall has seen great changes, not only to its football team, but also with a vast amount of modern redevelopment as the Black Country conurbation encroaches even further.

After going over the canal bridge the Dales Lane ground looms into sight on the right. First impressions are favourable with two brightly painted welcoming signs, a good car park and a friendly welcome at the gate. The programme is simply outstanding- 84 pages in a superb glossy colour cover for only £1. Packed with interesting articles and statistics with good pen pictures of both teams, a good historical section and much more it must be the pride and joy of the club's press officer Darren Stockall. The publication gets ten out of ten for sheer quality.

Once inside the ground, the club's home since 1977, the pride of the club's supporters and officials in their home is evident. Neatly painted and in good order throughout the ground has a homely and friendly feel. The main facilities are at the entrance, behind the nearside goal where the club house and tea bar are located. Alongside the side to the left is a small seated stand with shallow covered terracing alongside. The rest of the ground is uncovered standing behind a black and white post and rail fence. Behind the far end goal, a giant painted sign, black letters on an orange background, is a prominent sign for a local-bookmakers.

With both clubs too close for comfort to the relegation zone this was a vital game and Rushall won it thanks to two second half goals. But the visitors wasted several clear-cut openings in the last quarter in a free-flowing game that always held the interest on a cold but dry afternoon. Kicking off at 1pm was great for the small number of travellers present but the attendance was one down on the club's average for the season. Recommended.

Sat 31 Dec 2005, Southern League Premier Division. **Halesowen Town 2-1 Bath City.** Attendance: 403; Admission: £8; 52pp programme: £1.50; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

With very little traffic on the roads the journey to Halesowen was a straightforward one and a few minutes after leaving J3 of the M5 a parking spot just outside The Grove ground was easily attained.

Halesowen's home since the club's formation in 1873, The Grove is clearly a ground of some standing and has a great atmospheric feel. With a neat small cantilevered stand running along the far side and a banked covered terracing behind the nearside goal the facilities for spectators are good. The other two sides are uncovered terracing and wherever you stand you get a good close-up view of the game.

The programme was excellent with reports of the Christmas games and a particularly good section on the visitors who brought with them a healthy following of cheerful fans.

The standard of the game was clearly a notch or two higher than that at Rushall. Bath, after falling behind to a second minute goal, deservedly equalised ten minutes from time after dominating much of the second half only for the home side to snatch all three points three minutes from time.

With a good standard tea bar (the cheese pasties are recommended) and club shop inside the ground the facilities are above the norm and the nearby club house, the Yeltz Bar, is also well worth a visit. I had been looking forward to my first visit to The Grove and I wasn't disappointed. Recommended.

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