

**14/01/06 TT No.159: Mike Latham - Rhyl (Welsh Premier League)**

Fri 13 Jan 2006: Welsh Premier League. Rhyl 1-1 Airbus UK. Attendance: 536. Admission: £7; 76pp programme: £1.50. FGIF Match Rating: 2\*

Although several clubs in the Welsh Premier can be criticised for languishing in their own mediocrity and lack of ambition Rhyl are certainly not among them. Infrequent visitors to Belle Vue are always aware of changes to the ground since they last ventured through the turnstiles and on and off the field the Lilywhites consistently set the standards for others to follow. Their website, for instance, is excellent; several clubs in the WPL don't even have a web presence.

Though in second place in the table, albeit a long way behind runaway leaders TNS, Rhyl had to settle for a draw in this game played on a mild evening on the north Wales coast, despite taking an early lead courtesy of their prolific striker Andy Moran. Airbus looked a well organised and cohesive side and, capitalising on a defensive error to equalise before half-time, were well worthy of a point as the game petered out disappointingly in the second half. On this occasion Rhyl's passing was often poor and the delivery from free-kicks and corners left a lot to be desired.

Despite the below-par on-field performance there was much to admire about the Belle Vue ground, situated in a residential area inland from the town centre and sea front. Rhyl's go-ahead board have done magnificently to attract a great support from local businesses and the superbly maintained stadium is awash with colourful advertising boards while the flags that fly from the main stand and the one opposite add to the sense of occasion under the bright floodlights.

Belle Vue is virtually an all-seater ground with seats on all four sides, three of them covered. The main stand has a small tea bar just to the right of the players' tunnel and there is a temporary stand running along the final third of the pitch alongside that gives the best elevated view on the ground. Behind the far goal and along the far sides are shallow covered seating areas, only of three rows back, with some standing areas in-between and behind the seats. There are also seats behind the uncovered end at the main entrance where the turnstiles are located. Here, there is also a club shop and another tea bar purveying a wide variety of drinks and snacks at reasonable prices.

The Rhyl programme is a magnificent effort- 76 pages, though 41 of them are devoted to advertising. A grand total of 68 different advertisers spread their message through the programme, which is superbly designed- an indication of the support that the Lilywhites have attracted from the local community. It is easily one of the best programmes anywhere in the country with a wide range of articles, an excellent piece on the visiting team, lots of photographs and relevant and interesting statistics.

The only downside to watching football at Belle Vue, certainly on this occasion, was that groups of youngsters continually roamed around the ground, taking little apparent interest in the action on the field and continually diverting the attention of spectators. It is one thing to attract youngsters- they are, after all the supporters of tomorrow but it can backfire and alienate genuine football followers if they fail to behave properly. This quibble apart the visit to Belle Vue was enjoyable despite the disappointing game and it is to be hoped that other WPL clubs follow Rhyl's lead in attempting to boost the profile of the competition.

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