

**15/01/06 TT No.160: *Mike Latham* - Blyth Spartans (Unibond Premier League) in the FAT2**

Sat 14 Jan 2006: FA Trophy 2nd Round. Blyth Spartans 1-3 Welling United.  
Attendance: 784. Admission: £6; 48pp programme: £1.20. FGIF Match Rating: 3\*.

As one of the most famous names in non-league football, particularly for their cup giant-killing exploits, Blyth Spartans have had an eventful and interesting history and, named as an FA Charter club, are clearly planning a successful future.

Their Croft Park home, where they have played since 1909, has undergone considerable renovation in recent years and is an authentic football ground. The main cantilevered stand, with a paddock in front, was built in 1972 and, sponsored by the Port of Blyth, is neatly painted in green and home to Spartans' most vociferous fans. The stand straddles the half-way line. On the opposite side of the ground is a covered deep terrace and though both ends are open there have been renovated with concrete terracing and have excellent stanchions.

With a well-appointed club house just outside the gates, a good souvenir shop, a good value programme with distinctive front cover and a pinned team sheet on the wall by the main stand giving both line-ups Spartans tick a lot of the essential boxes. Sadly, though, the only catering on the ground is a mobile van and though the quality of food and drink on offer looks good value with plenty of choice huge queues built up especially during the half-time interval.

The pitch is flat and well grassed, though muddy in places after heavy recent rain, and the floodlights were excellent. Before the game an official of the supporters' club made a donation to the football club that took the total donations for the season past the £10,000 mark. Clearly Blyth are fortunate to have such an active and committed group of fans. The journey to Blyth, situated on the coast north of Newcastle-upon-Tyne is relatively straightforward and certainly nowhere near as bad as might be thought. The 167-mile journey up the M6 to Penrith and then across the Pennines via Alston from deepest Lancashire was easily achieved in four hours even allowing for a detour to Ryton to drop off a fellow traveller.

Welling United, well organised and impressive with their build-up play took a firm hold on a tightly contested cup-tie with two goals just before half-time after a Blyth defender had missed a clear-cut opening right in front of a gaping goal. Though Welling secured their passage into the last 16 with a third goal soon after the interval Blyth never gave up and were rewarded with the goal of the game- a superb 35-yard shot by their former Premier League player Graham Fenton.