

23/01/06 TT No.164: Andy Molden - Recent Minor League Football Travels.

After having a very good holiday period ground-wise, I have in the past few weeks been to a few more local games at lower levels; though none of the ground visited are little more than fields I would like to recommend the following if travellers are looking for a reasonable visit at a lower level.

1. The West Glebe Corby, home to **Caledonian Strip Mills**, Corby Grampian and Corby Pegasus. I saw Caledonian lose a tight game against Wellingborough Town "2004" 2-0 in the Quarter Final of the Northants Junior Cup. Very basic three pitches in a line. The ground is being eaten up by the nearby Corby Village development. The only access is now via Cottingham Road (lane next to Con club). The pitch was at least roped. Saving grace on a wet day was a tea bar in the dressing block up and running well before kick-off and open throughout the game.

2. **Brackley Sports** (North Bucks Intermediate Division) who play at the Brackley Leisure Centre - well signed from the Town Centre. Said leisure centre is better than anything we have in Oxford, it is A1, tarmac car park and the dogs! Sports play behind the centre, the dressing room block is only a matter of yards from the pitch, it has an astroturf walkway to it! Grass banking down one side gives the pitch a more enclosed feel. The game I saw was against Abbey of MK, the homesters won 3-1, they have only failed to win one game in the league this season. The club's website shows that in pre-season they handed out sound thrashings to clubs in higher leagues. Next to the ground is a Tesco's Express and a very large modern pub.

At the time of writing I do not know the result of Brackley's game yesterday (21/01), they were away to PB (MK) who have an even better record, they have won every game they have played conceding only 1 (one) goal all season! Needless to say, last season PB (MK) and Brackley finished as champions and runners-up in the division below. I would expect Brackley Sports to appear in a lower division of the Hellenic, UCL or SML in the next few years. As a bonus I found eight golf balls in the long grass on the bank down the side of the pitch.

3. Ballard Ash Sports Ground, Wootton Bassett. If you are doing the Wilts League you have to go to the above at some stage as a couple of teams use it every season, in fact this term three teams are using it. I went to see **AFC Abbey Rodbourne** v Blunsdon United in the League Junior Cup. The ground has four football pitch's, a rugby pitch, a cricket spare and various other markings. From the M4 (Jun 16) take the A3102 towards Wootton Bassett, then instead of going into the town take the B1042 signed Malmesbury, the ground is half a mile on the left, it is very well signed.

You enter down a driveway with a car park on the right and a large dressing room block on the left. The playing fields are in front of you. The pitches were in very good condition, and this I ascertained was down to the groundsman who takes

pride in his work, I have seen pitch's at very much higher level not marked as well as his were! As a bonus said "Super-groundsmen" also runs a well-stocked tea bar which is open all day! Nice cup of Kenco Coffee 50p, with brown sugar! From talking to the grounds-man it would appear he is a long serving chap as he told me about previous seasons on the ground.

The game I saw took place on pitch three, which was next to a nature reserve, 1-0 to Blunsdon at half-time, 2-1 to the homesters going into injury time, Blunsdon equalise. Extra-time and Blunsdon are 3-2 at the break and add a 4th and 5th in the second period, with nine minutes to go the homesters get a third and with 3 minutes to go a 4th. 4-5 aet! One or two of the Blunsdon lads look like they could well play at a higher level while two of the Abbey Rodbourne players look like they could give the Eastleigh goalkeeper a run for his money in heavyweight stakes! Though number eight for Abbey who goes by the name of Bingo manages to score their 4th goal with a free kick anyone half his weight would have been proud off. The ABBEY in the name is the sponsor Abbey Scaffolding. I was tempted to ask the home sec Mr White (who does an awful lot of jobs, manager, linesmen, etc) if they lost the sponsorship they would become AFC Rodbourne, which they in theory could not as a team of that name are already in the league, and on the day of my visit were playing against Blueprint on pitch one!

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