

20/02/06 TT No.183: Mick Burt - Bartley Green (Midland Combination Football League Division 2)

Saturday 18 February 2006; Midland Combination Division 2; BARTLEY GREEN (1)1 DROITWICH SPA (0)1; Attendance: 45; Programme: 24-pages £1.

Situated just outside the hamlet of Illey in the borough of Halesowen, Bartley Green is, without a doubt, a club on the up. Previous members of the Mid Comb until the early 1970s, the club have enjoyed huge success as a Sunday club over the past 30 years or so but last summer they took the plunge to return to Saturday football. And what a welcome addition to the Saturday ranks they are!

The Illey Lane venue is, in my view, quite incredible. Located in the open countryside, a club name board is thankfully in place at the entrance so that visitors don't spend unnecessary time looking for it! A long track leads to the ground which is adjacent to a farm. Once inside the ground a training area is to the left and a car park straight ahead. To the right is a cluster of buildings used for storing ground equipment, the dressing rooms, and a superb tea bar that serves hot & cold drinks and a tasty array of hot sandwiches including bacon, sausage and black pudding. Almost adjacent to the tea bar is a building that houses a committee room and a lounge (the clubhouse is around two miles away in Bartley Green on the other side of the M5 motorway).

We received a conducted tour of the ground from chairman Dave Shepherd who is rightly proud of what has been achieved. The pitch is situated at the top of a grassed incline leading up from the car park and runs lengthways whilst being fully railed-off with some advert boards attached. Hard standing extends from the near corners to the halfway line on both sides of the ground with a seated stand for 70 spectators just beyond the midway mark on the right-hand side. A basic area of cover is positioned in the near left-hand corner, and an area of covered hard standing containing around thirty individual chairs is located between the edge of the near penalty area and the halfway line. Two long double-glazed dugouts are in place either side of the halfway line and a grassed bank spans the width of the pitch at the far end. At the near end a high steel mesh fence does likewise.

Bartley Green bossed the game for long spells and took the lead just before the break. Droitwich were certainly resolute in defence, and they snatched an equaliser from a 30-yard free kick midway through the second half. One half of the pitch was particularly heavy and this thwarted the homesters when Andy Cooper's header stuck in the mud on the goal-line in the closing stages, hence "The Owls" promotion bid was somewhat hindered.

We were fortunate to get the first copy of the club's revamped programme which is indeed an excellent effort in keeping with a super club. And to round things off I won a bottle of wine in the raffle! So, so enjoyable!

