

TT No.210: *Mike Latham* - Thurs 6 April 2006: West Midlands League Prem Division: **Pelsall Villa 2-1 Shawbury United**. Attendance: 40; Admission: £3.50; 44pp programme: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

With scheduled matches nearer home at Buxton, Bacup and Warrington all falling foul of the weather the decision to go further a-field into the un-chartered waters (for me anyway) of the West Midlands League paid off handsomely.

Gareth Evans, the Pelsall match secretary, could not have been more helpful on the telephone, assuring me the fixture was going ahead and offering to put aside a programme. With the M6 south delayed between J's 14-12 this was most valuable- a nightmare three-hour journey ending just as the teams stepped out onto the well-manicured pitch, at The Bush ground.

Pelsall is a most pleasant village with lots of decent looking shops and pubs and a variety of good residential housing, situated just a few miles from Walsall and close to Rushall, who play in the Southern League. The ground is easily reached, usually, about ten minutes from J12 of the M6 and is situated at the far end (Walsall side) of the village. A bright sign denotes the Pelsall Sports Club with the cricket ground adjoining the football ground. The latter, though, use the Bush public house next to the ground for after-match hospitality where a good pint of Wells Bombardier can be obtained.

Mr Evans was on hand to proffer the saved programme and dispense team information on arrival- a thoroughly charming man, the type of whom clubs like this depend, he explained that the pitch was in good nick despite it being used by four teams- the seniors, juniors and a Sunday League side as well as the Villa. The Bush ground is pleasant and well-appointed with a covered seating area behind the nearside goal stretching almost the full width of the pitch and containing five rows of seats. There is also a small cover, and I mean small, at the halfway line near the dressing rooms. The rest of the tree-lined ground is open standing with a vast netting constructed behind the far goal. The pitch slopes from the stand side, falling away towards the far goal and was in superb condition, with a good covering of grass, courtesy of Mr Evans' ground-keeping skills.

There is a small refreshment hut situated by the turnstiles manned by very pleasant staff and a small hospitality area and the administrative area is also to be found here. The programme was a simply stunning affair- amazing value for £1. The stats on Villa's season so far were presented in a thorough and interesting fashion and the statistics in the programme were fascinating. Left-back Neil Coles, for example, was making a staggering 698th appearance for Villa with Adrian Horne a comparative novice, starting his 385th game for the club. The history of the club, details of how the local community can become involved (from donating unwanted office equipment to walking around Pelsall publicising the game) were

all detailed. It is a fantastic publication and clearly a labour of love- and had been fully updated for Villa's 2-0 defeat at Ludlow two days earlier.

Fellow travellers had commented favourably of the standard of football to be found in this league after recent visits to Market Drayton and Wryley Rangers and these were certainly borne out. Both teams played good football throughout an interesting encounter, superbly refereed by Mr NJ Slym of Tipton. With a good manner and a readiness to communicate with the players and not over-complicate matters he produced a superb performance, getting through the game without issuing a card. It was noticeable that virtually every player shook his hand at the end. The best referee I have seen this season, by far.

This was a good evening spent in pleasant surroundings and Pelsall Villa, up to two years ago in the MFA, are clearly working hard to re-build the club. Crammed with local players their team spirit was excellent though the visitors also impressed in this regard. A visit to the Bush ground comes highly recommended.

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