

**18/09/05 TT No.47: Mike Latham - Runcorn FC Halton (Unibond Premier)**

Sat 17 Sep 2005, Unibond Premier, Runcorn FC Halton 2-1 Wakefield-Emley (att. - 101)

Runcorn enjoyed considerable success in the Conference and FA Trophy during the last twenty years but currently play in the Unibond Premier Division following their relegation from Conference North last season.

After selling their atmospheric Canal Street home for property development the Linnets moved into the luxurious surroundings of the Halton Stadium in Widnes, co-sharing with Widnes Vikings Rugby League team. They changed their name to Runcorn FC Halton to reflect their relocation across the River Mersey.

But with attendances declining the club was unable to afford the match rental charges and moved out of the council-owned stadium late last season to begin a ground-share with Prescott Cables FC, about three miles from St Helens.

Cables' Valerie Park ground is situated on Hope Street just off the A57 road at the top part of the town. In a quiet, residential area there is plenty of street parking, especially with the crowds that Runcorn currently attract.

Just 101 saw the Linnets achieve their first league win of the season thanks to two free-kicks by fullback Flood. The visitors wasted three golden opportunities in the opening ten minutes and Runcorn noticeably grew in confidence thereafter, despite losing one of their players to a broken arm.

The Hope Street ground, which will celebrate its centenary in 2006, is a good non-league venue and the welcome is a warm one. Runcorn produce an impressive 28-page programme for £1.50 and admission was £7 adults which also qualified for admission to the imposing main stand. The rest of the ground is standing, with a small cover at the Hope Street end. On the far side, opposite the main stand, is a large grassed banked area that gives an excellent view of the action.

A club-house and tea-bar are situated under the seating area of the main stand and both were well worthy of custom. The tea-bar sold a variety of hot drinks and snacks at reasonable prices and the social club also offered a good selection of drinks in a good degree of comfort.

Realistically Runcorn need to return to the town, and quickly, in order to re-establish themselves as a force in the non-league world. They are being kept going by a dedicated band of supporters and officials but their support has waned to a small level since Canal Street was sold. Happily, there are plans to build a new stadium in the town in the next two years. For the Linnets faithful the return home cannot come quickly enough.

One of Rugby League's perennial strugglers, Prescott Panthers finally folded in 1997 after playing out their days at Hope Street. The club initially earned senior status

as Wigan Highfield in 1922 and later played under the names of London Highfield, Liverpool Stanley, Liverpool City, Huyton, Runcorn Highfield (when they ground-shared at Canal Street in the 1980s) and Highfield before making their umpteenth, and final move, to Prescot. The ground had changed little in appearance in the intervening years but still has plenty to commend it.

Runcorn's win put them in good heart for their derby clash with Prescot Cables 'at home' four days later.

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