

22/09/05 TT No.53: Mike Latham - Norton United (NWCL)

Wed 21 Sep 2005, FA Vase 1Q replay, Norton United 1-0 Teversal (att-130)

Norton United's ground is situated deep in the heart of the Potteries, about 10/15 minutes-drive from J16 of the M6 and a few miles from Port Vale FC at Burslem.

The soccer ground is part of a large welfare complex, originally built to service the miners of Norton Colliery (closed 1977) in their leisure time.

The land around the ground is very hilly and the welfare ground is reached about 200 yards up Community Drive by the side of the community centre in Smallthorne.

The complex is on two levels with a cricket ground and pavilion/ club house on the top level and the football ground on a lower level. With a small all-weather soccer pitch in use there is a real community feel to this small but extremely friendly organisation.

The well-stocked tea bar was well frequented throughout a mild evening and the cricket pavilion bar served a wide variety of refreshments.

Entry to the football club was only £3 and a 32-page programme with several good and informative pieces of editorial and photographs was £1. Only 30 had been produced and these were soon snapped up.

The only cover on the ground is a 30-foot covered standing and seated area to the left of the halfway line at the cricket pavilion side of the ground. On the far side behind the dugouts were some mature trees which served as an excellent shield to stop balls being deposited into neighbouring gardens and also gave a rural feel in the floodlights.

The rest of the ground was hard standing behind a post and rail fence though there are some excellent viewpoints, particularly from the banking at the cricket ground side. The view from here to the right is a spectacular one over the Ford Green valley.

The playing area, re-laid over two years ago, was in excellent condition.

The club was only formed in 1989 and entered the NWCL in 2001 after competing successfully in the Staffordshire Senior League. With considerable ground improvements in the last five years- the £35000 re-laid pitch, excellent floodlights, new changing rooms and redeveloped clubhouse- Norton are clearly an ambitious and well-run club. They also now run a second team and Sunday team as well as several junior sides and are hopeful of developing a second pitch behind the goals on the far side opposite the club house.

Having shared a 1-1 draw with their NCEL opponents Teversal on the Saturday the replay also looked like going to extra time until Norton's skipper John Powell headed home a corner in the second minute of injury-time to decide a hard-fought game.

All the club officials were very friendly and welcoming and there were several travellers in attendance. A visit to Norton United FC is highly recommended.

Game rating: 3*.

03/20