

02/08/05 TT No.6: Stephen Harris - Ilford FC (Isthmian League 1)

Monday 1 August 2005; Ilford 3-0 Dagenham & Redbridge; Friendly; Attendance: c. 70, programme issued, admission £6.

For me, the attractions of pre-season friendlies are beginning to wear thin and I'm looking forward to the real thing beginning in earnest at the weekend when I have a three-game trip to Berlin planned. But last night's fixture gave me the chance to visit one of my local clubs to see how they are shaping up and to view the ground developments that have occurred over the summer.

The Cricklefields Sports Ground is looking the best it has for many years as Ilford have completed the developments needed to back their promotion to the first division of the Isthmian League. Over the last couple of years, they have properly enclosed the ground, erected a turnstile block at the main entrance and built an impressive, two-storey sports hall and bar overlooking the main pitch (quite an improvement on the old portacabin tea hut). Towards the end of last season, the line of trees along the far side was cut back, revealing an ancient seven-step terrace along the full length of the pitch, the extent of which can have been suspected by few. On this, a small but sturdy covered shelter has been erected, slightly off-centre, with a claimed capacity of 150. This is rather grandly called the 'new stand'. Over the past summer, a further £55,000 has been invested in a second turnstile block at the back gate, further fencing and a sprucing up of the seated stand - which now sports a directors' area and a press box, all to comply with grading rules. Unfortunately, none of these welcome changes can get over the fact that spectators have to watch the football across a six-lane running track, the Cricklefields still being primarily an athletics venue.

And spectators there were rather few last night. The facts that Dagenham had made clear that they would field their under-19 squad, whilst the first team were in action at Boreham Wood, and that Ilford had publicised in advance that they would be charging £6 for the privilege, combined to keep the hoards away. A neat 12-page programme was included with admission for those who turned up.

The game was something of a contrast in styles. The young Daggers looked quicker and more skilled, but it was the home side who knew where the goal was and won quite comfortably. You should never read too much into these games, but on first impressions I would hope that Ilford will be able to consolidate this year on their new status.