

**31/10/05 TT No.91: Mike Latham - Newi Cefn Druids (Welsh Premier League); Barnet (FC2) and West Bromwich Albion (The Premiership)**

Fri 28 Oct 2005, Welsh Premier League, Newi Cefn Druids 0-6 TNS (att.- 439).

TNS are well worth watching if you get the chance. On another mild autumnal evening they demolished the home side with an awesome display of finishing and might have won by more. Marc Lloyd-Williams continued his prolific spell with a hat-trick and Michael Wilde, who is an exemplary target man, added two more.

What particularly impressed was the positive manner of the TNS bench- instead of moaning endlessly at referee's decisions as many do the manager and his assistant constantly encouraged their players to play constructive football and praised their efforts throughout the evening.

Llanelli, the other full-time side in the WPL, were at Rhyl the day after and their players were in the stand to watch the game. A good-sized crowd created a great atmosphere at the ground and the floodlights were excellent. Sadly, though, programmes sold out before kick-off but the £4 admission price was great value for a display of total football by TNS. Match rating: 4\*.

Sat 29 Oct 2005, League 2, Barnet 2-1 Rushden & Diamonds (att.- 2,564)

Barnet's Underhill Stadium is well worth a visit and though the Bees are back in the league it still retains a 'non-league type' atmosphere for its friendliness and charm.

Though the pitch was levelled considerably when Barnet first entered the league the slope (that runs north to south) is still an amazing sight for the uninitiated. Situated at the bottom of Barnet Hill, close to the tube station (High Barnet) the ground is in a pleasant residential location and an excellent pub, the Old Red Lion with McMullens cask ales is conveniently located nearby.

The east terrace of the ground is covered and part allocated to away fans. The main stand on the west side straddles the halfway line with a family stand and uncovered terrace either side. There is a temporary seated uncovered stand at the south end, backing onto Barnet CC grounds with a large club house in the south-west corner and the north end has a small uncovered terrace.

Winning in the league for the first time since August, Barnet sent their fans home happy and though the game was lacking in quality it never lacked for incident. The visitors, making their first league visit to Underhill and backed by around 500 fans who were very good humoured, lost their goalkeeper who was carried off on a stretcher with a leg injury and later taken to hospital and later had their striker sent off for an off-the-ball incident.

The game looked destined for a stalemate until the visitors' substitute goal-keeper failed to notice the loitering Barnet striker as he dribbled the ball to edge of his

area, Lee robbing him of the ball to notch a fluke goal just before half-time. This prompted cries of "He's behind you!" every time the hapless goal-keeper touched the ball thereafter. Though the visitors equalised during a brief purple patch a headed goal from a deep cross gave Barnet victory.

Admission prices ranged from £11 to £18 for adults and a good 56-page programme was sold for £2.50. With a wide range of shops, pubs and eating establishments on Barnet High Street about ten minutes' walk away and close to the M25 Barnet is a recommended place for the traveller to enjoy the experience of League Two football.

There is also an excellent local taxi service that was called into service to convey the writer the 13 miles to Loftus Road for the Tri-Nations rugby league international between Great Britain and New Zealand starting at 6-15. Thanks to the expertise of the driver the potentially hazardous journey was negotiated with aplomb in double-quick time. Match rating: 3\*.

Sun 30 Oct 2005, Premier League, **West Bromwich Albion 0-3 Newcastle United** (att.- 26,216)

'Always have a Plan B' was a tip told to me long ago and that dictum certainly came in useful on a Sunday when the M6 southbound resembled a car-park.

The planned trip to Burton Albion (k-o 2pm) was abandoned and fortunately the 4pm kick-off at the Hawthorns was more attainable.

Easily reached off J1 of the M5 there is plenty of car-parking close to the ground off the A41 Birmingham Road that runs past the ground, albeit at a £5 charge. But then this is the Premier League.

A £35 ticket for the impressively redeveloped east stand was easily attained from the ticket office and this gave a superb view of what was an interesting game. The 100-page programme, though a costly £3 was a quite outstanding effort.

Michael Owen's opportunist goal, 24 seconds after the re-start, set up Newcastle for a dominant second half display, Owen later adding another before Alan Shearer, on as substitute, went within three goals of Jackie Milburn's club record goals tally. West Brom rued a number of missed half chances though as the game went on the more Newcastle grew in stature with their precise passing game.

A pleasant, if costly, environment to watch Premier League football the Hawthorns is recommended for a trouble-free and enjoyable taste of the big time. But for value for money I'd prefer to watch TNS any time. Match rating: 3\*.

04/20