

**TT No.126: Mike Latham** - Sat 27 Jan 2007: Welsh Premier League: **Connah's Quay Nomads 0-0 The New Saints** (at **Flint Town United FC**). Attendance: 380. Admission: £5; Programmes sold out; FGIF Match Rating: 1\*

On the face of it Flint Town United FC's ground, named Cae-y-Castell sounds in an idyllic location- next to the ruins of the castle that dates back to the 13th century and on the banks of the River Dee overlooking the Wirral.

The reality is somewhat different as the castle ruins on a bitterly cold winter's afternoon appeared to have been overtaken by a bunch of local youths who were rolling an old tyre down the grassy moat and mouthing insults at passers-by, making the walk from the castle car park somewhat intimidating. Quite what it would be like at night is another question. The local canine population had also been active relieving themselves on the approach and you have a five-minute walk to test the nervous traveller.

This was billed as the match of the day in the WPL, especially as the Rhyl-Llanelli game was an early postponement due to structural damage at the Belle Vue ground. The S4C cameras were in attendance hoping for a memorable encounter between the reigning champions and the 'home' side chasing a European spot after a decent season so far.

Connah's Quay Nomads are ground-sharing at their Cymru Alliance neighbours this season while the pitch at their own Deeside Stadium is undergoing renovation. They have suffered a string of postponements and despite dry weather leading up to the game the pitch was very heavy and uneven in parts. It would not have taken much rain to leave the game in doubt.

Having suffered a late postponement at CQN's previous home game it was a relief to get this underway on a dry but blustery afternoon with a chilling wind off the Dee. Moreover, the usually straightforward journey to Deeside had been a frustrating one with roadworks at the end of the M56 motorway near Queensferry severely hampering progress. As a result, the kick-off was made but only just and, annoyingly, programmes had long since sold out. "We could have sold at least one hundred more," informed a steward. "We haven't printed nearly enough."

The ground is rather featureless despite the potentially idyllic location. With the car parks at the neighbouring social club full, the castle car park was used, requiring running the gauntlet of those local youths as well as dodging the dog turds and so the mood was hardly great as a £5 note was proffered at the turnstile.

With a small cantilevered stand straddling the half way line, resplendent with flagpoles and a small seated stand by one corner flag, covered accommodation is limited. The rest of the ground is open standing behind a post and rail fence. The ground's other main features are a television tower on the opposite side and a large netting behind the goal at the Dee end. The ground is enclosed by a

featureless eight-foot tall concrete block fence. There is a small refreshment facility but the queues were such that many potential customers gave up the unequal struggle.

On a heavy pitch the game was as uninspiring as the surroundings, TNS rarely settling into their normal free-flowing style and coming out second best in many of the physical challenges. Three home players were booked, two for fouls that would surely have warranted a straight red in other leagues. One left a TNS player writhing in agony- he was subsequently carried off on a stretcher and even one home player admitted the referee should have shown a red card as he came to the side-lines to take a throw-in.

It was a game of few chances. The movement and flair of CQN's veteran striker Tommy Mutton threatened to break the deadlock but the best chance fell to the TNS substitute Carl Lamb, who sliced wide after racing through one-on-one with the home 'keeper in the last act of the first half. CQN enjoyed the better of the second half, striking the bar in their best spell of pressure. The steadfast defending and classy passing of TNS right back Duane Courtney caught the eye

The crowd of 380 watched attentively and patiently but long before the end the stalemate appeared unlikely to be broken. In truth the so-called 'Match of the Day' was far from being the best advertisement for the WPL and must have left the S4C producer with an almighty headache as to how he was going to fill his allotted space.

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