

TT No.149: *Richard Panter* - Tuesday 13th February 2007; **Bishop's Stortford v Salisbury City**; Conference South; Result: 1 - 1; Att: 651; Entry: £9; Programme: 48 pages £2; FGIF Match Rating: * * * .

This was my first visit to Woodside Park and it proved to be an eye opener in numerous ways. Firstly, as we were sufficiently early, we went in search of a chippy in the town centre. If we had wanted to buy a BMW, Ranger Rover, Merc, Mazda, Mini, Toyota etc. we would have been sated but a bag of chips...not a hope. First impressions of Bishop's Stortford was one of affluence and an air of gentility, not a place one such as I felt at home in.

The ground is very simple to find, M11 junction 8, A1250 towards the town centre, turn right opposite the golf course onto an industrial site and follow signs. Easy. On arrival we were directed to the lower car park by an energetic young lad waving a magic light sabre, magic because he talked and sang into it. We shot into the ground and by this time were hungry enough that we would have eaten a B*****d M*****s turkey burger, but settled for sausage and chips. Once inside it was evident that there would be a sizeable crowd, a season's high in fact, and cover would be at a premium. Fortunately, Woodside has a decent sized cantilever main stand and has two deep terraced covers behind each goal, the whole ground is scrupulously maintained and has a good atmosphere, despite its location and age, it is around eight years old.

I am loath to attend National Conference fixtures because of cost, but mostly down to segregation. Were the ground segregated we would have been denied the treat of standing with both sets of fans. The first half saw us amid the home support. After our brief tour around the town we were expecting the home fans to be polite and quiet. Well, where this mob came from is anyone's guess! They had a drum and a wind section, which featured the 'Polish horn', and this would shame the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. They were extremely boisterous, good natured and most of all very, very funny. I have seldom heard such a diverse selection of songs, chants and well-practiced one-liners. The pick of the bunch being advice where the men from the west should put Stonehenge, excruciatingly painful if attempted I would imagine! A diatribe about crop circles followed but my personal favourite was the surrealist 'If you all hate Druids clap your hands'. None of this was malicious, it was sung with great enthusiasm and a smile on the singers' faces, wonderful entertainment. They were also most encouraging and supportive of their team, a top bunch.

Prior to kick off, and at half time both mobs changed ends with no hint of trouble. We were then treated to the sizeable travelling support. They were equally vocally noisy but lacked the instruments, bar one horn. It must be said that the Whites fans lacked the humour of the Stortford's and were quicker to criticise the match officials. That said, they were as vocally supportive as the home lot. To say that they were delighted with their late equaliser is an understatement.

As to the match, it was a keenly and fairly fought contest. Both sides played fast attacking football on an increasingly greasy surface which retained its integrity. Incidentally, the pitch looked magnificent before kick-off. The home side edged in front just after the break when Ashley Fuller artfully blasted in a rebound from Anton Innocent, substitutes both. The points seemed to be staying in Hertfordshire as Stortford's capable defence were able to thwart the visitors' best efforts until deep into time added on. A pointless handball gave Salisbury's captain, Aaron Cook, the opportunity to earn a point, no pressure there then! Home custodian Chrissy Wright, Wright, Wright, correctly guessed the direction of the spot kick, but Clark had sufficient pace and direction to hit the back of the net. A share of the spoils was just about right in the end, at least from a neutral perspective.

Two quid bought a copy of 'Park Life' the 48-page official matchday programme. Without a doubt this is the finest programme I have read for a couple of seasons, it is full of statistics, reports and visitors details along with a host of original articles' - take a bow Gareth Stephens for a job thoroughly well done.

This was my first Conference South match of the season and it was a real treat in many ways. I don't consider myself a professional northerner, I simply go north for convenience, but having been to Moor Green, Hinckley United, Kettering Town and Alfreton Town so far this year I will be tempted to head south again in the near future, apart from Friday at Hyde United that is. **THE STORTFORD!**

06/20