

**TT No.150: *Dean McClean*** - Saturday 17th February 2007. Southern League Premier: **Corby Town** v Team Bath; Res: 1-3; Admission: £7; 48pp programme: £1.20; FGIF Match Rating: 4\*.

Athletics stadiums, love them or hate them? If I was going to categorise that answer to either of those questions, I would have to say I hate them! It's just not a football ground: 50 yards from play, a large uninspiring, typically modern grandstand, a soulless expanse of land. An Athletics Stadium doubling up as a football ground makes for an often, uninspiring trip.

Allot has been said about Arsenal's new ground, and other mega-rich Premier League clubs as they scoop up every last penny and put nothing back into the national game, so the likes of Corby have to share a soulless, Lottery funded Stadium with Athletics as they do not have the funds to build their own. The Football League too is now beginning to be made up of dreary, identical Stadiums in monstrous Industrial Estates 5 miles out of town. It is filtering down to lower levels too as clubs have no option but sell up at their traditional homes and move to a "modern" ground for half as much as they sold it. The only way the future fan will know he's in say, Derby or Stoke, is by double checking the colour of the seats to the home team's colours.

The insipid looking Trackside Bar (clubhouse) did little to enhance the mood, but once inside I was offered a friendly welcome by the helpful tea-lady, as she was only too happy to leave her comfortable looking seat at the bar and serve this famished and dehydrated traveller. A large cup of tea was good value at 50p, while a tasty cheeseburger kept me sane. I sat down scoffing away and soaked up the atmosphere, while reading my matchday programme, which was a reasonable price of £1.20. Plenty of news, stats and facts, etc. to keep me entertained. A pen pic of each home player was a very welcome insert too, but must be very repetitive to the home fans.

To be fair to Corby's home I should point out that it one of the better Athletics Stadiums I have had the misfortune to visit. Extensively lined with trees and set in a remote location it has a rather countrified feel to it.

Team Bath have had a meteoric rise to some degree over the last few years, as 3 promotions in 4 years propelled them the to the Southern Premier League. They may have just found their level at that point as they finished in the lower half of the table for the first two seasons. This season is proving to be far more productive as the students sit in second place, hoping for promotion to the Conference (South). In 2002 Team Bath shot to national prominence when they reached the FA Cup 1st Round (proper)-the first time the club had entered the FA Cup-and hosted Mansfield Town in front of live TV from SKY Sports. A remarkable feat for a Western League club.

The home side are having a rather less successful season than their visitors and place a lowly 21st. After years of battling relegation to the UCL, Corby had an upturn in fortunes and were promoted to the Premier Division last season. Unfortunately, it looks as though an immediate return is in prospect.

Today was the very first time Corby have hosted Team Bath. On a sticky and bouncy pitch both teams showed superb attitude in trying to play constructive football and this game was a cracker. It was helped by a faultless refereeing performance from Mr. S Castle, who did what all good refs do-keep out of the spotlight. Team Bath opened the scoring after 18 minutes with a wonderful 25-yard free kick that hit one of the top corner stations. In fact, I hadn't realised it was a goal at first as I thought the ball had hit the post! After an even 75 minutes and the score nicely poised at 1-1, the visitors scored their 2nd goal that they probably just about deserved on the balance of play. A 3rd Team Bath goal was added 10 minutes later but the match was more closely fought than the score-line may suggest.

06/20