

TT No.181: Richard Panter - Tuesday 20th March 2007; **Wisbech Town v Wroxham; Eastern Counties Premier; Result: 0 - 2; Attendance: 119; Entry: £5; Programme: £1; Match rating: * * *.**

I made an early call to Fenland Park to check if the match was going ahead and received a friendly assurance that a local referee had been in to inspect, and was happy with the pitch and confirmed it was all good to go. The journey to Wisbech was fraught for two reasons. Firstly, it took me as long to traverse the fifteen mile through Leicester to the A47 as it did to get to Wisbech, some sixty odd miles. En route I went through the heaviest blizzard I have seen in well over a decade as I crossed the A1. At this point I was considering turning back, being unsure how far the Arctic blast stretched to the east. Happily, it stopped as I approached the mystical eastern metropolis of Peterborough. A low watery, sun, high clouds and a brisk wind filled the big Fenland sky the rest of the way to Wisbech.

I paid my money in what were snow flurries but by the time I took shelter under the Dutch barn it was very heavy although it died out rapidly to show no evidence of its existence. Fenland Park has seen better days, which is doubtless due to its being sold for housing in order for the club to relocate to a new home within the next few years. Faded glory seems an appropriate couplet to best describe the venue. There are two long generous covered terraces behind each goal, both are painted in the club's scarlet red. The main stand is of modern construction and has plenty of yellow seats; there were no punters in this structure during the evening as it was facing the worst of the increasingly heavy snow showers. Most of those in attendance huddled under the Dutch barn.

The Dutch barn is, as the name implies, a huge barn like structure, although I sincerely doubt it came from Holland! It has two terraced steps to the front but the bulk of the area is out of bounds to the punter. The dug-outs sit in front of it. Spencer Larham (editor of the excellent programme) told me that a local farmer ordered two barns, but decided he only needed one, an easy mistake to make, especially given the farming community's fiscal profligacy. Anyway, he donated the spare barn to the club who erected it at the ground and used it as a spectator cover and a place for the players to train during inclement weather. Wood cladding on the roof makes it look a little less of a barn, incidentally, this is similar to the structure at Worcester City. A warm and welcoming social club, well stocked club shop, burger bar and tea bar complete Fenland Park.

Wroxham arrived as league leaders, although they are being hotly pursued by Mildenhall Town, they have not lost away from home yet this season. After eight minutes an unmarked player nodded home their first goal from a corner and it was evident that they would retain and extend this proud record. Amid intermittent snow showers the men from the Norfolk Broads stretched this lead in the 26th minute when Gary Gilmore hit a shocker of a free kick into the top corner. The second half was notable for three things. One, Wisbech's propensity to give the ball

to Wroxham at every practical opportunity. Two, Wroxham decided not to increase their goal difference by spurning these gifts. Thirdly, it was cold, cold, cold, the snow was of blizzard proportions by close of play the pitch was white over and the air was bone- chillingly freezing. Everyone still there was glad to hear the piercing trill of the referee's whistle and scurry off home, or at least to a warm car.

06/20