

TT No. 190: *Stephen Harris* - Tuesday 27 March 2007; Isthmian Prem; **Leyton 2-5** AFC Wimbledon; Att: 510; Admission: £8; Programme issued; FGIF Match rating: 3*.

Leyton are my local non-league side and I have been there many times over the past fifteen years, seeing the club through several different guises; but I realise that I have not yet included them amongst my 'Travelers Tales' offerings. Last night was actually my first visit for quite a while and it was nice to see a decent crowd there for a change and to view the ground developments that are taking place.

The sizeable crowd were of course mostly followers of the away team - in whom I do also have a passing interest myself - rather than Leyton residents getting behind one of their local teams. This had led the club to have a rather half-hearted segregation system in place, in which 'home' fans had possession of one stand and a short strip of rail and 'away' fans had nominal possession of all the rest. This system rather broke down when spectators discovered that the toilets were in the 'home' area and the tea bar was in the 'away' area. Having friends present in both camps, I sort of flitted between the two areas.

Leyton Stadium is a characterful ground, currently undergoing quite a bit of investment in facilities. The north side has two small and mildly eccentric stands of low capacity. To one side of these until recently were two small areas of covered standing. These have now been demolished and a new dressing room block is under construction here. Historically there was a sizeable bank of terracing to the other side of the stands, but this is long gone with a car park and tea bar now there. The east end has a narrow strip of hard standing, usually populated by a handful of stalwarts, but two or even three-deep, in places last night. The south side of the ground is now covered along its full length, providing mostly standing space, but also with some seats at one end (ex-Wembley Stadium seats no less). Unfortunately, this side provides poor sightlines throughout, with supporting poles and dugouts spoiling the view in places and the seats being set too low to be of any use. The west end of the ground has a new stand nearing completion. This will provide three rows of blue seats (rumoured to be ex-Lords seats no less) along its full length and looks pretty smart.

Wimbledon arrived freshly back in the promotion race with 15 points reinstated after their administrative muck-up was sensibly resolved. I'd have expected them to be massively up for the game in the circumstances; but they had a very measured, almost laid-back, approach to the game. Leyton scored first, direct from a free-kick where the away goalkeeper failed to line up his defensive wall. This finally spurred Wimbledon into action and they scored three goals in quick succession before half time. The second half was altogether more competitive, with Leyton pulling the score back to 2-3 at one point before losing two players to red cards (an all too familiar problem here) and conceding two more. Overall, the greater class and better discipline of Wimbledon proved decisive.

A smart-looking, but rather insubstantial, match programme was issued for £1.50. This had a 12-page update to the issue originally produced a month ago for the postponed fixture. Unfortunately, it was in very short supply - rumoured to be just 100 copies - and many were disappointed not to obtain one. As small consolation, lots of team-sheets were made available and posted around the ground.

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