

TT No.20: *Stephen Harris* - Saturday 2 September 2006; FA Cup; **Cowes Sports** 1-0 Sandhurst Town; Attendance: 135; Admission: £5.00; Programme issued; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

I think it would be fair to say that Cowes is a tad, 'yachty'. So much so that I felt a little out of place strolling around the waterside and the high street wearing my jeans, trainers and hoody - the dress of choice here being heavy-duty waterproof deck-wear and rubber boots. I thought that might all change fifteen minutes-walk inland at Cowes Sports but discovered that the home fans have the same dress sense and even the (very smart) home club leisurewear looks more suited to a mid-winter rounding of the Needles than a, admittedly blustery, September afternoon at Westwood Park.

Not having been here before I was pleasantly surprised at the facilities on offer. Three sides of the ground have a simple rail or wall and hard standing, but the south-west side is very well appointed. The first third as you enter has a large single-storey dressing room and clubhouse block, shielded from the pitch by high netting. This is eighteen months old and an impressive development. The furthest third of this side has a very new-looking, raised, covered standing area. But most striking is the old, central, wooden stand. This was bodged-up overnight back in the late 1930s for a big game and, although much patched-up, somehow still survives. It is predominately made of chipboard, wooden planking and metal poles, with steep rows of bench seating providing a good, if mildly eccentric, view of the action. The club name is proudly displayed along the back in white paint.

I think some of the locals were expecting Sandhurst Town to be a bunch of chinless wonders from the military academy, especially when several of their supporters appeared in suit and tie. But the muscular approach of their team and the foul-mouthed instructions from the away bench soon convinced everyone that the Sandhurst team was 'town' rather than 'gown'. The more lightweight home players took a more skilful approach to the game, but it took a long while for them to become dominant in an entertaining encounter. In the end, Sandhurst were only saved from a more comprehensive defeat by a fine goalkeeping display. Overall, a good afternoon's football at a very pleasant venue. Cowes have made a good start to the season and are definitely a club which is on the up.

The match programme had plenty to read and was good value at 60p.