

TT No.202: *Dean McClean* - Tues 3rd April 2007. North West Counties League Division Two: **Darwen** v Cheadle Town; Result: 0-2; Admission: £4; Programme: 32pp, £1; Attendance: 55; FGIF Match Rating: 2*.

Although Darwen are now a flickering light in the distance of the North West Counties Football league, the club have a history of which it can be rightly proud. Not many clubs in this league can boast: four former England Internationals, one of whom, Thurston Rostron is the 4th youngest player ever to be capped by England, and only pushed that far down by the recent emergence of Wayne Rooney and Theo Walcott; an FA Cup Semi-Final appearance, along with three Quarter-Final appearances and a stint in the Football League.

After declining to seek re-election to the Football League in 1899, after a dreadful season that saw Darwen lose 18 consecutive league matches (still a FL record to this date), they joined the Lancashire League and proceeded to compete in this, and various other local leagues, until this day.

Although successes were achieved as the Lancashire League was won four times, a town the size of Darwen surely has the potential to support a football club at a much higher level. Big plans have been promised by two investors, with over £3m pledged to transform the ground into a community-based venue, with a members' gym, a leisure centre, restaurant and conference centre, along with improvements to the ground. They aim to turn Darwen FC into the hub of the town and attempt to bring back the glory days.

With former glories at Barley Bank now but a distant memory, the present Anchor Ground certainly falls into the category of atmospheric, with its large slate roofed stand dominating most of the ground. The other three sides of the ground are open terracing and only a handful of brave or silly, souls dared venture on to these exposed parts of the ground on a bitter evening. It's hard to imagine that the cricket season is only a matter of days away!

On a bitterly cold evening, added to by a strong cross wind, a sparse crowd had to endure this contest rather than enjoy it. On an undulating pitch, this match was blighted by a litany of profligate finishing, while skill levels were at premium. In a contest of which neither side deserved to win, it was the visitors who stole the game with two late goals, the second of which was of a far higher quality than this game had deserved.

Darwen made a promising start to the season and looked on course for a promotion push but results have been poor of late and the season unfortunately looks to be petering out in to mid-table mediocrity.

Improvements have been promised and let us hope that these plans come to fruition. Despite the result, I could see improvements off the pitch from the last time I visited The Anchor around eleven months ago. The catering has certainly

improved beyond the unsightly burger van that was in operation the last time I visited! The programme too assumes unrecognisable status. It has a great design, plenty of info to keep one occupied during half-time and is economically priced at only £1.

The Salmoners are on the up...

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