

TT No.23: *Stephen Harris* - Wednesday 6 September 2006; FA Cup replay; Ilford 1-2 Arlesey Town. Attendance: c.90; Admission £7.00; Programme issued; FGIF Match Rating 3*

A quick dash from work saw me arrive at the Cricklefield Stadium with around fifteen minutes to spare before this (fairly) enticing cup replay, Ilford having scored two late goals on Saturday to give themselves a second chance. I have for the time being pretty much lost interest in the England national team following their too-much-ego, too-little-effort display in Germany and decided I'd rather see one of my local teams play live than gawp at Macedonia vs England on the telly. I am clearly not alone in this and heard the same view expressed by several others at the game.

This was Ilford's first home game this season, the ground having been unavailable to them up to now whilst a new athletics track was being laid. While this now looks very smart, it does nothing for the football spectator; although I don't find viewing here to be as bad as at other nearby grounds with tracks such as Mile End or Hornchurch stadiums. Nevertheless, the restricted viewing means that most of the crowd congregate in the stand, which gives a slightly raised position, or the little area of covered standing directly opposite. Better still is the raised view from the smart modern clubhouse whose upper floor windows were all open for this game.

The first-half was very poor with only one shot on target. I popped outside to take a photo of the fixture board which I had been told described the away team as 'Arsely' Town, and it crossed my mind not to bother to go back in for the second half - but the lure of the tea bar drew me back and I settled down for the rest of the game. This was much better, and full of interest. Ilford started very brightly and went 1-0 up; looking good. Then came quite a controversial incident as an Ilford defender brought down an Arlesey forward in the box but a split second after he had shot and missed. I was happy with the penalty award but cannot agree with the straight red card that was issued as I do not believe the foul prevented a goal-scoring chance. Anyway, the penalty was converted and we ended up with extra time. Arlesey's superior strength and superior numbers told and they wrapped up the game 2-1, perhaps slightly fortuitously.

The game was also notable for cups of tea being sold which were too hot to drink and had to be left to cool. The feeling amongst the punters in the stand was that the water had actually been allowed to boil some time shortly before the tea was made. It was widely thought that this was the first recorded instance of this happening on an Isthmian League ground. The usual above average quality Ilford match programme was included in the entry price.