

TT No.230: Mike Latham - Thurs 19 April 2007: Westmorland League Division 1. **Kendal County** 4-1 Windermere S C. Attendance: 70; No admission price or programme. FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

It's that glorious time of the season when the weather is fine, the postponed games from the depths of winter are being played and, even on a Thursday evening, there are half-a-dozen choices of destination to agonise over.

I make a telephone call to my ground-hopping consultant. He offers an impartial and, importantly, free service to fellow addicts having attended virtually any ground of note within 150 miles radius of his home.

For the first time ever, he comes up with a bit of dodgy advice.

'Kendal County?' he says. 'It's alright I suppose, but it's a bit of a nondescript pitch above the cricket ground. Not much there.'

Not much there? The ground is a traveller's delight. It's located on a huge grassed area above the beautiful Netherfield cricket ground on Parkside Road in Kendal. Kendal Town FC's ground, one of the most picturesque in the non-league, lies opposite. The complex also includes tennis courts and a bowling club and, on a sunlit evening, there are plenty of people taking advantage of the facilities. The facilities are respected as well as being well-used. There's not a hint of vandalism or litter.

Bowlers bowl, tennis players trade rallies and cricketers? Well, they play soccer- yes, soccer, on the beautifully manicured outfield of the cricket ground before finally getting down to some practice in the middle. No wonder our national cricket team is so pathetic- how can cricketers improve their skills playing football? Go to even a county game early and you'll see the same thing before play starts. It's said to improve hand-eye co-ordination. Not that trying to hit a cricket ball, bowl in a straight line or make a catch in the slips doesn't.

The footballers change in the cricket pavilion and then make their way up the slope to the football field. Another pitch, being used for a junior game, lies in the distance. As well as the elevated view across the cricket ground- home to Netherfield CC, one of the best teams in the Northern League and venue also to Cumberland CCC- to one side there are spectacular views on the other up the grassed slopes towards the ruins of Kendal Castle, whose origins date back to the 13th century. It's hard to imagine a better place to be watching football on a spring evening.

Kendal County are worth watching, too. Champions elect they have won all but one of their league games and are still unbeaten. But Windermere, boasting an Argentine-type light blue and white striped strip, are a decent side and provide a stern test.

The home side prevail 4-1 but for the most part play is fairly evenly contested and the home 'keeper distinguishes himself with some fine saves. The first three goals for the home side come from corners, all deriving from poor marking and after the visitors deservedly pull back a goal the home substitute seals victory with a clinically taken fourth.

By the start of play, five minutes before the advertised 6-45 pm kick-off time, around 20 people have lined the pitch. By half-time the number has grown to around the 70-mark. But no attempt is taken to collect money, sell raffle tickets and as for a programme or refreshments- then forget it.

Fortunately, the Castle Stores are close at hand and they do a roaring trade as spectators visit for soft drinks, pies and chocolate.

By the end of the game the darkness is closing in and the lights of the cricket pavilion are burning brightly. County have won again- and their deeds will be recorded in the excellent sports pages of the Westmorland Gazette, who give a good service to devotees of the league- as they close in on the title.

For once the consultant got it wrong- Kendal County FC is an idyllic location and a visit here comes highly recommended, though on a bitterly cold winter's afternoon it may be somewhat different.

06/20