

TT No.248: *Richard Panter* - Sat 5th May 2007; **Cammell Laird v Eastwood T**; Unibond League Division One Play Off Final; Result: 1-2; Attendance: 327; Entry: £6; Programme: 32pp, £1.50; FGIF Match rating: 3*.

I called the club in the morning to see what time kick-off was and was informed that it was at fifteen hundred hours, ridiculous I thought, fifteen hundred hours wasn't until the middle of July by my reckoning. Slightly bemused, I looked on the official Unibond site to see that it was actually scheduled to start at three o'clock that afternoon so I set off on the A50 towards Stoke-on-Trent. The journey, of a little over one hundred miles, took around ninety stress free minutes which gave me ample time to walk around Port Sunlight before getting to the ground.

Port Sunlight was built around the turn of last century by soap magnate Lord Lever in order that his work force could live in comfort and moral decency, away from much of the squalor of the times. Was he a philanthropist, control freak or a man looking simply looking to his own best interests? I don't know. All I will say is that a walk around the 'village' is a pleasant experience on a verdant spring day such as this was. Port Sunlight is a couple of miles down the road from Lairds' Kirklands base, well signposted on the way to Birkenhead, and the detour provided a pleasant start to the day, one which I had high hopes for.

A club official willingly handed out a team sheet to anyone who wanted one, a very much appreciated gesture. Furthermore, the club issued a glossy full colour 32-page programme for the match, it was £1.50 and well worth the investment. Full of statistics, photos and the usual welcome - my eye was caught by 'A Slice of Spam...' a page 22 article written by Pete, no surname but so I assume it must be Spam! The soft fatty pink one commented that a Welsh visitor from Colwyn Bay wrote on a web forum of Cammell Laird's: 'Scouse scumbags with a crap ground'. Well the ground does leave a little to be desired; crikey blimey...it doesn't even have a 'phone mast but as to the people, they were warm and friendly, most welcoming. To add to the occasion there was no infantile name calling or arguing between the two sets of fans, no nastiness directed at the match officials and little, if any, swearing. Considering the rewards for the winners, it says much for the nature of both those 'Boys from the Mersey' and the travelling 'Badgers'. The supporters really played their part on the day.

Impressively, the home side were looking for their third successive promotion having previously shot through the North West Counties' leagues two divisions after transferring there from the lower Cheshire League in order to have the opportunity to rise up the non-league pyramid. Eastwood Town, a long established Unibond outfit have suffered but one relegation in their fifty -four years. Neither had reached this level before, history would be made to day in some small way. The ninety-two league matches featuring the two sides have yielded over three goals a game, the previous meeting between the two at Kirklands, three weeks earlier ended three all, and both teams hit three in the play-off semi-finals on Tuesday

last. Three seemed to be the magic number goals, goals, goals...therefore, my money was on a penalty shoot-out after two hours of scoreless stalemate.

At halftime my prediction looked to be on the money. The home side had much the better of the opening period, they carved the visitors defence open on numerous occasions and were it not for the heroics of custodian Ian Deakin, would have entered their dressing room a couple of goals to the good. Cammell Laird were a skilful pacey side going forward and in defence they looked capable, if none to rapid, Eastwood did not really test them out in the first half. In the second half initially, Town had a little more of the ball, but it was Lairds who found the net first. An Eastwood free kick was easily defended and was rapidly launched up field. After a couple of passes top scorer Ronnie Morgan was on hand to slot home, one nil and no more than they deserved. Lairds remained on the attack but simultaneously their 'keeper decided to waste time by leisurely taking his kicks and the outfield players seemed unable to catch or trap the ball when they had a throw-in or free kick. I feel that if they had maintained their attacking play fully, they would have scored a again but as is ever the case this is not what happened.

As the match went on Eastwood forward Lindon Meikle became more of a threat, this lad has phenomenal pace. Lindon's brother, Deon, had been introduced earlier in the half and between them the brothers set up leading net finder, Peter Knox who made no mistake to equalise in the eightieth minute. Rather than buckle under after this set back Laird's kept going forward and it was the cliched end-to-end affair. Victory was beckoning but for which side? Well as the header to this 'TT' indicates it was Nottinghamshire's finest who stole the final goal. Left full back (that does show my age!) Chris Shaw tried a speculative shot from outside the home box, he didn't inject much pace into the strike but somehow it found its way under the diving body of home goal keeper, Craig Bryan. A calamitous error and a bitter way for his side to lose a match which in all fairness they should have won, not that Eastwood cared! The remaining five minutes normal and four minutes added on time saw a frustrated Cammell Laird give away needless free kicks and offer little in the way of a threat. A sad way to end a magnificent season.

As for Eastwood Town, the 2007/08 season will see them pit their wits against the likes of local 'Town' clubs Ilkeston, Worksop, Matlock, Buxton and Leek plus a few a little more distant. Play-offs, you either love 'em, or hate 'em - I love 'em!

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