

**TT No.261: *Richard Panter*** - Mon 14th May 2007; Hinckley United v Farsley Celtic; Conference North Play-off Final (at Burton Albion FC); Result: 3-4; Attendance: 2495; Entry: £13; Programme: 32pp, £3; Match rating: 4\*.

£2 to park my car (there is no other option around the Pirelli Stadium), £3 for a programme and £13 to get into the ground, total £18, an expensive evening. Quite why it was £13 is a mystery, as this was a Conference North fixture after all given that it costs £8 to enter the Throstle Nest, £9 to see the Knitters at home and £12 to watch Burton Albion in the Conference National. The only concessional offer was for under 16s at £8, no reduction was forthcoming for OAPs. The pursuit of Mammon seems the only likely answer to such greed, someone somewhere should question this pricing policy, this will doubtless be a person who gets into the match for nothing of course. So, given the expense to be there the match had to be a cracker to offer value for money, fortunately it was, and did.

Leeds based Farsley Celtic were the dark horses of the play-off contenders, having disposed of much fancied Kettering Town in the semi-finals on penalties after just edging into fifth place on the final day of the regular season. Fourth placed Hinckley United triumphed over a physical Workington outfit in the semis. This match was hard to call and looked to be a tight affair.

On a sunny evening after two days of heavy rain the pitch was in superb condition, the only sign of wear being in the goal mouths; it looked better after a season of wear and tear than it did last October. Hinckley started the better and the impressive Sam Shilton saw his volley agonisingly bounce across the goal line from the corner of the upright and bar as early as the fourth minute. Gareth Grant, described in the programme as 'a knowledgeable, centre forward', was booked for a dive but was later to equalise after he controlled a long ball in the box and fire home. United redoubled their efforts and were rewarded when Shilton netted with a superb low drive through a mass of bodies, thus equalling his father's total goal scoring exploits in his whole illustrious career! A minute later Neil Cartwright bundled home to put Hinckley in front on twenty minutes. Marrison saw his powerful shot well saved by Celtic custodian and Grant missed a sitter before the whistle went for the break.

For much of the second half Hinckley were in control and Farsley looked bereft of ideas. Significantly the Yorkshire men changed things from the subs bench and Hinckley didn't. Consequently, Celtic saw more of the ball as Hinckley played more and more deeply and stopped going forward with any conviction, mainly because their forwards were understandably showing signs of exhaustion. Eleven minutes from time Damien Reeves sprung the Knitters offside trap to equalise forcing a resolute Hinckley response. Once again Cartwright obliged and scored after an almighty scramble in the Celts' box. Surely Hinckley United would now be able to see out the final seven minutes? Farsley to their credit and immense strength of character came back at the Leicestershire lads with renewed venom and

enthusiasm and equalised once more as 'forceful attacking centre forward' Ryan Crossley, was one of a trio of players who found themselves five yards in front of the United rear-guard. A woefully ineffective offside trap left Crossley with plenty of time to head home three minutes from time. Extra time was looming large for most there, apart from Farsley Celtic that is. Another sweeping move ended with the rangy Grant being floored in the Hinckley penalty area handing Simeon Bambrook the opportunity to add to his tally of 'important goals' in a one-man penalty shoot-out. He hit it straight at the keeper with sufficient force to elude the despairing Sean Bowles. With just four minutes time added on Farsley coped easily as Hinckley were now entirely deflated.

Farsley Celtic now proudly take their place in the Conference National alongside their southern counterparts Salisbury City, both clubs were promoted from level three last season. With this spirit, belief and commitment they have a good chance of survival. Hinckley must be scratching their heads in wonder asking how they lost a match which they really should not have done. Thank you Hinckley United and Farsley Celtic for both providing such good entertainment, you both provided excellent value for money, no easy task at thirteen quid a pop!

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