

TT No.32: *Dean McClean* - Thurs 28th Sept 2006. UEFA Cup 1st Round, 2nd Leg: **Blackburn Rovers v SV Red Bull Salzburg**. Att: 18888; Admission: £15; Programme 48pp; £3; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

After agonising for days over the choice between European Football at Ewood Park, or total football at West View - home of Bacup Borough - I finally decided upon Ewood Park. It certainly was a tough choice. Let's hope Blackburn re-schedule further Thursday games so as not to clash with Bacup again...

Blackburn Rovers have a strong and rich heritage. Founded in 1875 by a seventeen-man meeting at The Leger Hotel, Blackburn. The club played their first match in Church, Lancashire on 18 December 1875. The first venue used by the club was a piece of farmland on the west side of town which was little more than a meadow with a pool in the middle that had to be covered during matches. After subsequently making a home at Alexandra Meadows, home of East Lancashire CC, and Leamington Street they moved to Ewood Park in 1890. The first match being a 0-0 draw against Accrington. Along with twelve other teams they were founder members of the Football League in 1888. The club has won the FA Cup on six occasions, 1884-1886, 1890, 1891 and 1928.

After almost 70 years of yo-yoing in the lower leagues Blackburn Rovers and Ewood Park were transformed by local businessman Jack Walker. The stadium was completely re-built. With a new manager in Kenny Dalglish and striker Alan Shearer, the club achieved the pinnacle in winning the Premier League in 1995. As a result, the club entered the prestigious Champions' League, where they gained their only prior win in a European Cup. Although the club has dipped its head in and out of Europe since, they still only had a solitary win to their name.

After a 2-2 draw in the away leg two weeks prior, a tough game was expected by the locals. Salzburg, who are managed by respected Italian Giovanni Trapatoni and assisted by German World Cup winner Lothar Mattheius, were relatively easily brushed a-side by a bullish Blackburn side guided by the superbly gifted Turkish mid-fielder Tugay. A goal in each half by Benny McCarthy and David Bentley were enough to give the home side a comfortable passage to the group stage.

Ewood Park is easily reached from the M65 J4, taking the A666 Bolton Road in to Blackburn the ground is on the left-hand side. Ample, secure parking is available around the ground at typical PL prices. Street parking is not advised as officious looking parking attendants patrol the area during matches.

An excellent evening was had by (almost) all!