

TT No.60: Andrew Gallon - Sat 4th November 2006 **Nostell MW** v Dinnington Tn; Northern Counties (East) League 1; Res: 2-1; Att: 80; Admission: £3; Programme: £1 (32pp). FGIF rating: Four stars (very good).

If the thought of making a trip into an area decimated by colliery closures (as the media usually has it) fills you with dread, then think again. I usually find these communities to be fighting fit rather than listless and running to fat. And Crofton, where Nostell play their games, is no exception.

The football club is based at Crofton Community Centre, which £1.25m from various sources (including, inevitably, the National Lottery) has transformed from the former Nostell Miners' Welfare into a smart, modern facility open to everyone. Amateur rugby league, crown green bowls, men's and women's football and floodlit five-a-side all find a home in a complex also featuring a fascinating museum about the local pit, which closed in 1987. Mining began here, with primitive bell pits, in the ninth century, so there's a rich (ahem) seam of artefacts and information boards to mull over. There's a restaurant, a function room, a bar - and all extremely well patronised. At the heart of the community (are you listening, Chelsea?) is the football club. They are enjoying an impressive debut season in the NCEL having stepped up from the West Yorkshire League and this hard-earned win kept them on course for promotion.

The ground is beautifully kept. The sole stand, roofed in corrugated plastic, stands on top of a grass bank above the halfway line and provides a great vantage point. Trees, in lovely autumn colours at this time of year, fringe the other three sides, with undulating fields spreading beyond the far touchline. Hard standing and a post-and-rail fence surround the pitch. Plastic garden chairs and picnic tables constitute the seats. But, hey, this is grassroots football.

Today's visitors are Dinnington - also new to the NCEL this season - and they give Nostell a real run for their money. Indeed, with steadier finishing as they pressed in the last 20 minutes, they could have had a point. Nostell, never shy to pass the ball around on the floor, go ahead when Ben Gilbert is given the time and space to pick his spot with a header from a corner. Dinnington equalise before half-time through Simon Mirfin, who volleys in at the back post after a clever overhead kick cross from Liam Cartledge. Nostell, who are appealing to the FA against the deduction of three points, clinch victory, and stay third in the table, on the hour when Dinnington fail to clear a free-kick and Craig Stephens stabs in the loose ball. The home team hang on amid mounting pressure, much to the relief of their fans, whose barbed humour is directed mostly at the visitors' bench.

Some nice touches at this club: No PA system but the line-ups are thoughtfully written up on a board, lapel badges are on sale at the turnstile (clearly signposted through a labyrinth of corridors from the centre entrance), the refreshments are

spot-on and the clubhouse, handy for those half and full-time scores, warm and welcoming. And, for better or worse, not a pit head in sight!

To find the ground, take the Crofton turn off the A638 Wakefield-Doncaster road, go straight through the village and, just before the rather forlorn Slipper pub, bear left and then immediately right down Middle Lane. The community centre is at the end of the road after it bends sharp left. There's plenty of free parking.

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