

TT No.71: Mike Latham - Fri 17 Nov 2006: Northern League Division 2: **Brandon United 3-1 Prudhoe Town**. Attendance: 70 (est.). Admission: £4; 16pp programme: 50pence; FGIF Match Rating: 3.

Brandon United's Welfare Ground is located high on the hills situated to the west of Durham and is a cold and bleak spot on a winter's evening.

The ground takes some finding, too, even though the outward journey east from J38 of the M6 motorway from Tebay via Kikby Stephen and Barnard Castle was relatively easy. Barnard Castle is an ideal stopping-off point with a good second-hand bookshop, authentic coffee bar and decent Morrisons' supermarket providing sustenance for the traveller. There are no signs or sense of a ground being in the vicinity as you approach on the easterly road from Crook.

The Welfare Ground is surrounded by housing and allotments and after locating the small approach to the ground the car park is big enough to accommodate the players, officials and spectators that follow Northern League football at this level

On a sunny, summer's day the views across from the Welfare Ground are spectacular as I discovered on a chance visit to the ground earlier in the year. On a cold November evening the bright lights in the distance do stand out against the sky-line but the ground is bleak and rather forlorn.

There is a basic club house and a lit entrance welcoming the spectator to Brandon United FC. The playing pitch is well grassed but heavy and the floodlights adequate. The changing rooms are located in the far corner with a viewing balcony in front. There is a small cover alongside the side where a tea bar, frequented by friendly staff, provides welcome respite from the elements. There are basic covers behind both goals and the other side is open standing.

The programme is an informative 16-page effort, good value for 50pence and the team line-ups are pinned up on the tea-room wall- a good effort and always welcomed by me.

Northern League devotees and ground-hoppers helped swell the crowd to a respectable total and the home side established control with a brace from their leading scorer, Andy Johnson, and a rather fluke third, but the visitors never stopped trying to play constructively and not only pulled back a goal but threatened a late revival.

Brandon were division one champions as recently as 2002/03 but are now re-grouping after a disastrous season in 2005/06 when they were relegated with a tally of only 15 points.

The friendly souls freezing on the Welfare Ground terraces warned of a treacherous journey home and they were proved correct. After Barnard Castle the road to Tebay was a nightmare with snow blizzards making travelling conditions

hazardous and the journey south from J38 of the M6 at Tebay towards Lancaster was far from easy. But the Welfare Ground visit had been a rewarding one- a competitive match played in convivial surroundings in an atmospheric ground with a decent programme and good social facilities on a Friday evening with no obvious counter-attractions. As a ground-hopper, especially considering the ground's elevated location, it was as near to heaven as it gets. And I certainly wasn't complaining.

06/20