

**TT No.91: *Paul Roth*** - Saturday 9th December 2006; **Bly Spartans vs. Halls FC**; Kent County League Division 1 West; Res: 3-1; Att: 22; Programme: 12 pages (free).

Has my football season just reached its zenith and have I been to anywhere this season, so far, as unexpectedly as good as this? Rottingdean Village and Loxwood football clubs may be more aesthetically pleasing to the eye and Holmsedale a real revelation, but for the sheer wow factor and I suppose because it was so unexpected, Bly Spartans FC is up there at the top.

So, Bly Spartans.....where's that then? A mile west of Strood on the A2 and situated on the corner of Rede Court Road and Watling Street, to be precise. If using public transport, the best bet would be to train - to Strood and then either walk or bus it up to the ground (any bus heading towards Gravesend or Dartford will pass by). It is uphill all the way though.

The ground entrance is 30 yards along Rede Court Road; you cannot miss it as there is a big sign announcing 'Bly Spartans' FC. Follow the driveway around past the training pitch, a quagmire today after all the heavy rain of this last week, taking care to avoid those vicious 'Sleeping Policemen' that have been placed strategically along the way in order to slow you up and so you arrive at a small car park. In front of you on the side of the club pavilion is a huge sign welcoming you. A huge Spartan in fact!

The place is remarkable as it is fully railed off, except for the far end; permanent dugouts are in situ; there are 20 or seats under the overhang of the clubhouse; a refreshment hatch is in constant operation, selling everything the hungry traveller could ever need and indeed more; a licenced bar is also open once inside the building and FREE of charge, the club issue a 12 page programme. All this in the KCL Division 1 West! Am I dreaming?! Picking up a couple of extra copies of the matchday magazine off a table in the tea area, it's producer, a self-effacing gentleman commented "it's not very good". I beg to differ sir! Okay, there are a lot of adverts but it is professionally produced; there is all you need information-wise inside and the shell is magnificent. Well done that man. Red and white striped goal nets set off the arena to a tee.

Now for the only downside I can think of. The town of Strood itself, once voted the most boring town in Britain and lucky to be judged that good in my opinion, really is not a wonderful place to arrive. I can't think of one thing to commend it to you. I Had had a pint (off Dartford Wobbler -SIC- from the Mellis brewery) in the Stone Horse pub on Dillywood Lane which comes under Higham in the GBG but is at least two miles from the ground before my arrival and this is a more than pleasant place to linger and has a fascinating history as well.

The game was a real cracker. Bly and Halls are at opposite ends of the league spectrum but you wouldn't have known as the visitors from Bexley had much the

better of the early exchanges. However, as half time approached Bly got more into it, but it was not until 15 minutes into the second period that they finally took the lead. That soon became 3-0, before Halls got a late consolation. On-loan striker Lee Sperring, from Maidstone United, made a big impact and was very sharp in setting up a lot of excellent chances and by full time the homesters could have won by more.

My praise for this little club stems from dedication, determination, hard work and real love for the job in hand by those involved and has brought them to where they are today. All these qualities are evident in bucketful's at Rede Court Road. Tony Wheeler, their secretary, had been most helpful and hospitable during my short visit.

A question to end with. Why the name, 'Bly Spartans'? Apparently, their chairman, David Archer, came from Blyth in Northumbria and took part of that clubs' name when forming the team here, back in 1982.

Yes, my zenith was reached today but life and football are, as they say, funny old games. Maybe next week it will be my nadir. Hope not though.

FGIF Rating: for what has been achieved at Bly Spartans and what may still be - 5\*.

06/20