

TT No.104: Andrew Gallon - Sat November 3rd 2007; **Easington Utd** v LSS Lucarly's; Humber Premier League Premier Division; Res: 0-2; Att: 38 (h/c); Admission: Free; Prog: £1 (28pp); FGIF Match Rating: ***.

The Holderness area of lowland East Yorkshire has a haunting beauty. This appeal has something to do with remoteness, solitude and tranquility - but much of its magic stems from a lush, fertile landscape, vast, moody skies and the sharp, glittering quality of light borne only of a proximity to the sea. The isolated village of Easington is the last settlement of note on the long, winding road from Hull to Spurn Head, a four-mile sliver of sand and stones jutting out into the majestic Humber estuary like a beckoning finger. Unique is an oft-misused adjective but there are few places in these islands with the appearance and atmosphere of Spurn which, in places, is less than 50 yards wide. On this day, silhouetted black against the silvery water and backlit by a dying and yet dazzling autumn sun, it can seldom have looked more beguiling. A 19th century lighthouse near the southern tip provides a welcome element of height in flat surroundings and helps provide safe navigation for the 25,000 ships which pass this way every 12 months.

Holderness has the fastest eroding coastline in Europe, with its soft boulder clay surrendering 2.1 metres of territory each year. Some 22 communities have slipped silently beneath the waves - and Spurn itself is under serious threat. Currents should wash the promontory imperceptibly westward but man has - mistakenly - arrested this process for 140 years. Now Spurn is in the wrong place and at risk from dramatic erosion by the unforgiving sea. Conservationists plan to work with, rather than against, nature in a frantic attempt to make good the damage. Only time will tell if the battle can be won.

Easington, a couple of miles inland from the glories of Spurn, is a place at peace; a spot where doors can be left unlocked and children allowed the freedom to roam. There is a timelessness of the sort depicted in the paintings of Constable and Gainsborough; the air of an England long vanished and largely forgotten. Quaint red-brick cottages slumber in the bright sunlight, the squat tower of All Saints Church hunkers down out of a stiff breeze and golden windfall leaves rustle around the thatched grandeur of the 14th Century Tithe Barn. It's hard to avoid the sensation that here the day will last for ever.

But storm clouds glower above the village's football club. General manager Richard Lusmore, in the splendid programme he has edited with unwavering dedication since 1996, tells of players leaving rather than fighting for places in the first team, of unpaid subscriptions and fines, of poor attendance at training and, worse still, of an alleged incident of theft involving a squad member after last week's match. All this in United's diamond jubilee year and during a season which began with an unbeaten run of 10 games - a sequence kicked off with victory over Hornsea Town in the wonderfully titled Holderness Cup Winners' Cup. The last month has been a disaster. Five matches, including today's, have produced just one win and four

defeats. In his programme notes, a disconsolate Lusmore offered this gloomy synopsis: "It would suggest that we are wasting our time, money and effort in trying to take this club forward."

It's a shame because Easington, founder members of the Humber Premier League and an FA Charter Standard club, provide a welcome as warm as you'll get anywhere and, clearly, have a lot going for them. They run three open-age teams and are in the process of developing facilities which, at this level, are impressive already. A second pitch (the 'pitch across the ditch', as the programme describes it whimsically) is now open for business and use by the Casuals side. The Low Farm ground is reached down a succession of narrow lanes off the comatose village square. A sharp left turn takes you into a small aggregate car park behind the near goal. Alongside the left touchline, beyond a tiny electricity sub-station, is a flat-roofed, portable-building, housing toilets, dressing rooms and a hospitality area. The latter has an interesting collection of newspaper cuttings and photographs on the walls. In front are a collection of benches and plastic seats, some of which were carted round behind the near goal for use by rug-clad spectators looking, for all the world, like residents of an old people's home on an outing. Another portable building, smaller and with a pitched roof, dispenses refreshments and, on my visit, last-minute massage to the home players. Further down the touchline are two slender dugouts fashioned from metal sheeting. The slightly undulating - but carefully tended - pitch is surrounded by a rope barrier on each side. There is neither cover nor floodlights. Best place to stand is on the right-hand touchline. From here, the church tower and red-tiled rooftops are visible above the trees and shrubs which fringe the ground on three sides. Only the towers and fences of the incongruous North Sea gas terminal on the north edge of Easington scar the scene. Low Farm shelters behind thickets at the near end, with the pitch of the White Horse Cricket Club extending beyond the right-hand touchline. Sadly, cricket hasn't been played here for a couple of years. There aren't the players - or even a league to play in.

United, as befits their present misfortunes, were out of luck in this game. They did not, according to their fans, play at all well against Cleethorpes-based opposition at the other end of the Premier Division table. Jake Lamming put Lincolnshire Soccer School, whose circuitous journey to Low Farm would have been considerably shorter had they come by boat, ahead in the 33rd minute. He got the last touch at the back post to an in-swinging corner which led to a real melee of flailing limbs. Team-mate Louis Volley was then inches-wide with an angled shot when through on keeper Kevin Appleyard. Four minutes before the break, Easington's Mike Nicholson saw a 20-yard strike rebound to safety off a post in what proved to be the fixture's turning point. Volley outwitted Appleyard to tap in LSS's second in the 53rd minute before co-striker Murray Sangster, stretching to reach a penetrating cross, sliced a great chance wide. With seven minutes left, Jamie Cousins had a go from outside the box and the ball struck defender Tommy Watson, the driving force behind the LSS club, on the head before looping on to the top of the crossbar with keeper Leigh Graves beaten. That, along with two

decent penalty appeals for handball turned down, summed up the day for the Eastenders, the nickname for both club and folk born in this part of the world.

On the final whistle, the Easington lads had to take down the nets before heading to the showers. That's the sort of reality check the overpaid, pampered professionals of the Barclays Premier League could do with every so often. There was no discussion of England and Chelsea defender John Terry's "obscene" £130,000-a-week salary (one of the sports stories of the week) at Low Farm. It's simply irrelevant. The programme, described as a "labour of love" by stalwart Lusmore, brings in £1,000 each season in advertising revenue alone. And that makes a big difference to clubs such as Easington. They're worlds apart from the likes of Terry and Chelsea. And, frankly, that's the way I like it.

06/20