

TT No. 108: Mike Latham - Tuesday 6 November 2007: Northern Counties East League Premier Division. **Long Eaton United** 0-6 Glapwell. Attend: 62; Admission: £4; 32pp programme: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

The Northern Counties East League, in my experience, is a league of contrasts. There are those clubs where you can smell the decay and despair and wonder if they will be around next season while there are others full of life and vitality with facilities far better than you might imagine.

Long Eaton United, rather like my recent visits to Winterton Rangers and Barton Town Old Boys, definitely fall in the latter category and a visit here, on a mild November evening, was an uplifting experience.

The journey along the A50 from Stoke-on-Trent was relatively straightforward and had the added bonus of the opportunity to call in at the wonderful Salt Box Café at Hatton, just off the A50 on the road to Burton-on-Trent. It's no wonder that this café regularly wins awards for the quality of its food. The roast beef dinner, lemon sponge and custard and two mugs of tea cost less than two pies at most Premier League grounds and were of top quality while the service is efficient and friendly.

So, to the Grange Park ground of Long Eaton United- hardly the easiest to locate in a sprawling town situated close to both Derby and Nottingham. Eventually the narrow entrance off Station Road was found and the floodlights of the two all-weather pitches, being used by the club's junior players came into view.

Long Eaton United are clearly a community club in the fullest sense of the word with a large number of junior and women's teams. There is a spacious club house and the playing area of the main ground is excellent and boasts a smart blue-seated stand on the club-house side and another, smaller seated stand on the far side behind the dug-outs together with a small covered standing area. There is plenty of parking and a warm welcome at the gate, where an excellent 32-page programme with a full colour cover represents good value.

Well maintained, neat, spic and span, the Grange Park ground would, one feels readily meet the criteria for Unibond League football should Long Eaton match their fine facilities with a team on the field. Sadly, it appears they will have to wait a little longer.

Glapwell, coming into the game on the back of a 100% league record after eight games, were simply outstanding. It was clear from the warm-ups, where Glapwell's was hugely competitive with a compelling contest of one-touch football between two groups of seven players that they meant business and by half-time they had moved effortlessly into a 4-0 lead.

The movement of their front two players, one a former Long Eaton striker, was too much for the home defence and two of the goals- one a 35-yard screamer from the left-back- were of the highest quality. Still shell-shocked the home side conceded

two more goals in the second half, both credited as own goals to their hapless central defender as he stretched in attempting to clear crosses but it could have been many more. But despite it all Long Eaton never stopped trying to play football and the game was played in an excellent spirit.

A decent tea bar sells hot drinks and burgers and the bar area of the club house is a pleasant way to while away a few minutes if you have succeeded in locating the ground. And, by way of another tip, the GBG listed Black Cock in Blythe Bridge between Uttoxeter and Stoke-on-Trent is the best pub for miles around if journeying back westwards and makes an ideal stopping-off destination for a good, well-kept pint. The food here comes recommended too and on a Tuesday night there was a large and varied clientele enjoying an evening of folk music.

So, it was not Long Eaton's night but a visit there was very enjoyable. And if you get the chance to watch Glapwell then take it- they look an exceptional side at this level.

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