

TT No. 115: Mike Latham - Tuesday 13 November 2007: Northern Counties East League First Division. **Rainworth MW FC 1-2 Bottesford Town**. Att: 88; Admission: £4 (including 52pp programme); FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

To Rainworth on a cold November evening requires fortitude and determination if you are coming from over the big hill from Lancashire- snarling traffic jams on the M62 and down the M1 in the clawing darkness and the negotiation of the A617 through Mansfield from Junction 29.

At last the destination is in sight with the floodlights burning brightly on Kirklington Road in the old mining village of Rainworth (pronounced 'Wren-earth') by the locals.

The last pit (Rufford Colliery) closed in 1993 and had understandably devastating consequences in the local community, almost as bad as the opening of a 24-hour supermarket in nearby Mansfield which has ripped the small, independently owned shops out of the village- no butchers, bakers or candlestick makers left here.

But where there might be despair or lingering death instead is a vibrant soccer club, located across the road from a miners' welfare building that still thrives. And a couple of hours in their company lifts the spirits no end.

Rainworth MW entered the NCEL this season after finishing third in the CML Supreme Division behind tonight's visitors Bottesford and Barton Town Old Boys. They are clearly an ambitious club and have the support of the local community.

Proof of that is an outstanding pavilion constructed at the entrance behind the nearside goal, costing £160,000 and constructed during the closed season. Housing the dressing rooms, treatment room and a fine tea-bar with adjoining sitting room accommodation it is an outstanding facility. And look around the ground and there is not a hint of vandalism. The ground looks a picture.

Opposite one another on the halfway line are two small seated stands and the rest of the ground is open standing behind a neat perimeter fence. The floodlights are excellent, the playing pitch immaculate and the banking at the entrance side a reminder of back to 1982 when Rainworth attracted a gate of 5,071 for their FA Vase semi-final against Barton Rovers, still a competition record outside the final.

Just 88 gather for this game on an evening when many will not want to leave their firesides, but the sacrifice is worthwhile. The welcome is warm at the entrance and the programme a work of art, one of the best around, chock-full of relevant, up-to-date information and historical articles about both teams. The tea bar is well frequented and deservedly so- manned by two pleasant ladies the fare on offer is well above average and of good quality.

And the action on the pitch shows that the NCEL is a rapidly developing league where good, expansive football brings its rewards. Bottesford, warmly welcomed in

the programme and by the clear and concise PA announcer, deservedly leave 2-1 winners despite having a clear goal chalked off late in the first half.

A miscued header by the home no.3 sails over the 'keeper's head, under the bar, hits the stanchion and bounces out. After much deliberation the referee rules out claims for a goal and, confusingly, awards a goal-kick. The visiting manager is not pleased as you can imagine. The solitary steward behind the nets later confirms the validity of the Bottesford claims- and adds: 'our' keeper said it was a goal.'

The referee is listed as coming from Preston, near to my home town. Fortunately for home officials, paying a mileage claim out of the gate receipts, he is currently based in Sheffield and so there might be a bit more money left in the kitty.

A visit to Rainworth comes highly recommended- it is a rapidly developing ground with excellent facilities, the club has roots deep in the local community and runs many junior teams that play on adjoining pitches, the welcome is friendly, the programme an outstanding mix of articles and photographs and the tea bar as good as anywhere. What more could one ask for on a Tuesday evening in mid-November?

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