

TT No. 16: *Mike Latham* - Wed 15 August 2007; Northern Alliance Division 1; **Penrith United** v Haydon Bridge Utd; Result: 4-0; Attendance: 20; No admission or programme; FGIF Match Rating: 2*.

Penrith United play in the first division of the Northern Alliance and the midweek home game against Haydon Bridge United was the nearest they get to a derby game now that Gillford Park have joined fellow Carlisle-based sides Northbank and Carlisle City in the Premier Division.

Even so it was a bit of a rush for everyone to assemble in time for a 6-30pm kick-off at Frenchfield, a huge sporting complex on the Alston road out of Penrith. With magnificently manicured sports fields stretching virtually as far as the eye can see it is a terrific asset for the locals though facilities for groundhoppers are rather more Spartan.

Frenchfield isn't that easy to find and for a rail or bus traveller is relatively inaccessible from the town centre. Exiting J40 of the M6 if travelling by car, take the second roundabout into Penrith from the A66 and then follow the Alston signs. There is a small white sign that then points the way to Frenchfield, just after Penrith rugby union club on the left.

Several games were taking place on the complex on a bright and breezy evening with Penrith Rangers playing Ibis in a friendly encounter ahead of the start of the Westmorland League season in the last week in August. But the main action was on the roped-off pitch further along where the Northern Alliance game provided the main focus.

Club officials are friendly and readily provide team line-ups but there are no programmes on sale and little in the way of spectator comforts. This is football in the raw, standing by the side of a playing field while the remnants of a British summer throws everything at you- strong sun, blustery winds and the occasional shower. There are no dug-outs, seats or even a refreshment point. The changing pavilion as part of the complex may look elegant but provides very little other than a dressing room and showers, not even a vending machine for hot drinks or chocolate.

So, it is a case of button up the jacket and try to concentrate on the football, difficult without the enclosed atmosphere of a ground with substitutes warming up alongside the pitch and the shouts and whistles of the other game the attention drifts away at times. And don't make the mistake, as I did, of wandering over to the far side of the field, otherwise you will end up as ball-boy for the evening.

The busy A66 trunk road to Brough and beyond passes close by with the trucks and lorries providing a constant noise but that aside the ambience is pleasing with magnificent views across to distant hills. Penrith FC, the town's senior team who play in the Northern League, still intend, I was informed, to relocate to a new

ground here in the not-too-distant future and sell their town centre base. Asking about the location of the new ground I was directed to a farmer's field beyond a distant hedge. It won't be this season, then.

The referee, a pleasant man of friendly disposition is also by chance the groundsman for the complex. Before the game he organises his lines-man, a substitute from each club, and directs play with a masterful eye. After a frenetic start play settles down into a pattern and it is obvious that the home side look the stronger. This view is confirmed by the opening goal and in the second half the visitors fade in the last half-hour and concede another three goals. The standard of football is pretty good- keenly but sportingly contested and with a fair degree of skill and played in a good spirit.

The market town of Penrith has much to commend it- a couple of decent pubs, an excellent fish and chip shop and beautiful scenery. One junction south down the M6 the Greyhound Inn at Shap is one of the country's outstanding public houses with an excellent array of real ales and top-notch food. As new grounds a visit to Frenchfield, in all honesty, is a bit of a disappointment but the friendliness of the home officials and the scenery make up for the lack of a programme and the basic requirements of a traveller in terms of an enclosed ground and refreshment facilities.

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