

TT No.163: *Richard Panter* - Saturday 5th January 2008; Hellenic League Premier Division; **Bicester Town** v Flackwell Heath; 4-2; Attendance 34; Entry £4; Programme 28pp £1; Match rating: 4*.

Earlier in the week I seriously doubted if I would be able to get my car off the drive due to the heavy snowfall and Arctic blast, which according to the Met office the country was supposed to be in the grip of. As it turned out, it was wet on Friday evening, but sunny and breezy on Saturday. Fine conditions for a football match. Having confirmed that the game was on with programme editor Phillip Allen, it was off down the M1 at 12.30pm. From the north Bicester's 'Sports Ground' is off the Oxford road in the town, a very easy place to find.

The ground is pretty basic in that it has one stand which includes a three-step terrace and three rows of wooden slat seats, there is hard standing on three sides. The southern goal line is out of bounds as it is very close to a rugby pitch. There are two substantial brick buildings at the northern entrance to the ground, these are the clubhouse and changing room block, the latter houses the snack bar. Coffee was 50p a cup, and was served in a mug, it was quite the nicest drink I have had at a football ground this season. Badges and a large selection of programmes were on sale just inside the ground. The excellent match programme was purchased at the turnstiles. By taking up a position to the left of the entrance I enjoyed the idyllic winter backdrop of Bicester church and school behind the clubhouse.

By kick-off the wind had risen substantially but there was some blue in the sky, indeed it was light right until the break, at which point the floodlights went on.

I was indebted to the programme for telling me that the team in green, Flackwell Heath, were from High Wycombe as I had no idea where they were from. They had a mixture of youth and experience in their line-up, they were in fourth position in the league having notched 59 goals in 23 matches, however, they have conceded 36. The 'Foxhunters' were in a modest 17th having scored 27 and given away 38, rather encouragingly they had not been involved in a scoreless match this season. Bicester were hammered 4 - 0 at Flackwell in their opening away fixture in August and were out for revenge. The pitch was in superb condition for the time of year so there was no excuse for anything other than a competitive match. The very young-looking home side, in red and black tops and white shorts, raced to a two-goal lead inside twenty-five minutes. Their third was a scrappy affair which was given by an observant linesman. This official indicated that the ball was over the line, a decision obviously hotly contested by the visitors, but the goal stood. Frankly, this score-line was unexpected. Heath scored with the last kick of the half to take the shine off it a little for Bicester.

It was evident that the first ten minutes of the second would be crucial to the outcome of the match. Flackwell needed to score and Town had to repel them. As

it turned out they did. Late on the visitors second was the goal of the game, with a twenty-yard volley. They then pressed forward looking for the vital third. Bicester took the opportunity to relieve the pressure and sprinted forward in some numbers. One of their men was downed and the referee indicated a free kick on the edge of the box, however, the linesman had his flag across his chest to indicate it was inside the area. The spot kick was successfully converted and that was it, 4 - 2 to Bicester Town. So ended a memorable afternoon. A thoroughly entertaining match, a well-produced programme, a nice friendly bunch of people and my faith in match officials has been restored. What a shame there were only thirty-four spectators there to see it. Incidentally, the two teams meet again at Flackwell on Tuesday in the Floodlight League Cup, who knows what the score will be, but I will lay long odds that it won't be scoreless!

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