

TT No. 165: *Dean McClean* - Sunday 6th January 2008. FA Cup 3rd Round: **Burnley** v Arsenal. Res: 0-2; Att: 16,709; Admission: £19; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

The fickle finger of fate in the guise of the FA Cup Third Round draw threw up a fascinating tie, as Burnley met Arsenal for the first time since 1975; the game finished scoreless and Burnley were relegated at the end of the season and haven't been in the top division since. The paths of the two clubs over the intervening 33 years could not have been different as the hosts have literally been to the abyss and back, as 1987 saw the club almost lose its league place and only a last day win over Leyton Orient saved one of the founder members of the Football League in 1888, dropping out if it almost a century later.

Arsenal meanwhile, have grown into one of the largest clubs (on and off the pitch) in the world as firstly George Graham and then Frenchman Arsene Wenger have guided the club to tremendous success over the past three decades. A much-maligned competition the FA Cup, kicked in to the gutter in 1999 as Man United decided they'd rather play in a circus competition on the other side of the world, than honour the tradition of the World's oldest knock-out competition, is still struggling to recover. A tie such as this one will surely help, but with the ever-increasing greed in the Premiership, the gravy train has become the main priority for clubs determined to keep the status quo. Dave Kitson summed up his and his club's ambitions for this season's FA Cup 'I don't give a shit about the FA Cup'. Truly, a sad statement.

In the first season of the Football League in 1888, 12 venues were used in that inaugural season-Turf Moor was one of those, and along with Deepdale (Preston) and Anfield (Everton), is one of only three grounds still in use for football to this day, whilst three more (Accrington, Trent Bridge and The Racecourse) are utilized for Cricket. This really gives one an idea of how historic this venue really is-a proper football ground, close to the town centre and its loyal following. Two of the four stands are clearly showing their age and facilities are poor when catering for large crowds. Although today's attendance of less than 17,000 was a disappointing one. Burnley fans I spoke to defended this, and cited the fact that to buy a ticket for today's game, you had to purchase a ticket for another home match too. Added to the television coverage and post-Christmas money shortcomings, a lower attendance was probably inevitable.

Despite this being the first meeting of the clubs since 1975, this was the 94th meeting between the clubs and a fairly even record reflects the standing the home team once had. Arriving in good time, I thought I would have a pre-match drink in the Cricket Club next door, a venue I usually frequent in the summer months, and a good mix of home and away fans made for a congenial atmosphere.

This is match Burnley should take great credit from, as they play football in the right way and always passes the ball at every opportunity. Compared to the cynical

ten men behind the ball attitude of many teams in the Premiership, this attitude was a breath of fresh air. The home side started the brighter against an under-strength Arsenal side, as promising Northern Ireland striker crashed a powerful header against the visitor's bar after only five minutes. This was possibly the turning point as minutes later Croatian striker Eduardo coolly finished off a one-on-one chance, to give Arsenal a lead they hardly deserved. Burnley always carried a threat, although you always felt Arsenal had a few more gears to go through and the game was eventually finished off by the impressive Bendtner, as he rounded the keeper after a precise through ball from Eduardo.

There must be far worse things to do on a Sunday afternoon.

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