

TT No. 188: Mike Latham - Sat 9 February; Pentraeth Welsh Alliance. **Glan Conwy** 3-1 CPD Llanberis. Att: 50 (h/c); Admission: £1 (incl. 28pp programme); FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

For the first Saturday in a long time the weather is glorious and after a few days without rain there are no fears of postponements. With a wide choice of games to go to I eventually plumped for a Welsh Alliance fixture at level three of the Welsh Pyramid and what an inspired choice it turned out to be.

Llansanffraid Glan Conwy is a small village just one mile or so from the A55 at the Llandudno Junction turn-off, on the A570 road that leads towards Betws-y-coed. The village had a truly breath-taking location on the east bank of the River Conwy with stunning views across the estuary towards the castle at Conwy.

The Cae Ffwrt ground of the village football club is on the right-hand side just 200 yards or so Conwy side of the railway station on the line that links Llandudno Junction to Blaneau Ffestiniog.

The ground is hemmed in on all four sides with no apparent space for re-building. The near side goal is separated from the A570 by a small patch of hilly land deep in foliage and the far goal backs on to the railway line and then the river estuary. The nearside touchline borders a small industrial estate, the far side backs onto a garden centre.

The pitch, one of the few pieces of flat land for miles around is tiny with just a few paces between the edge of the penalty area and the corner flag. If one was being picky, or maybe it is just an optical illusion, the markings don't appear to give the impression that the pitch is completely perpendicular.

Club chairman Keith Edwards greets friends, foes and newcomers alike with great bonhomie and dispenses a superb 28-page programme for only £1, which also covers the admission price. Surprisingly, no raffle is taken to boost club coffers. Glan Conwy are a totally amateur club, he tells me, not easy in a league which includes Rhyl Reserves and another reputedly having a playing budget of £650 per week. The costs of running the club are around £3,500 per year and so plenty of fund-raising work is needed to compete at this level of football.

Mr Edwards tells me that football was played in the village between the wars but that the club only reformed after the second world war, by the 1970s, originally playing on a number of borrowed grounds in the Conwy and Llandudno areas. The present ground was only secured about seven years ago, giving the club a permanent home in the village.

He explains that the club has a thriving youth set-up and that the bulk of today's side have risen together through the ranks. They are all local lads and several have rejected offers of cash from neighbouring clubs to stay with Glan Conwy while

others who have 'chanced their arm', in the Cymru Alliance have since returned to play alongside their mates.

However, with Cymru Alliance requirements of 50 seats and a further 60 spaces under cover, it would be virtually impossible to renovate Cae Ffwyt and so a ground-sharing arrangement would have to be pursued to meet the club's ambitions of progressing up the Welsh pyramid.

The bulk of the 50-strong crowd watch from the road way that leads down from the A570 towards the industrial estate where there is a fine elevated view. The best vantage point, though, is on the grassed bank behind the near-side goal as not only does this give a superb view of play it also affords simply stunning views across the river towards the distant castle. On a beautifully sunny and warm afternoon such as this there are few better places to watch football than this.

A new changing room pavilion with a well-designed sloping roof is the ground's only spectator comfort. As well as providing the dressing room accommodation it also has an excellent tea bar serving delicious hot dogs and hot drinks served in mugs. A hot dog and onions together with hot mug of steaming coffee costs only £1.20. The pleasant lady manning the operation must have a sense of humour as the programme says: "For the brave amongst you with a cast iron stomach lining, why not take advantage of the refreshments available from the canteen? Our catering team have yet to be prosecuted by the Food Standards Agency and may provide you with a hot and "healthy" distraction from the game."

Post-match hospitality is laid on at the neighbouring Cross Keys Inn and though I am invited to partake I sadly have to decline due to other commitments. The chairman will be there, though. Asked by a player at the end if he will be indulging in a post-match pint, he replies: 'Does the tide come in and out?'

No distractions are needed as the game, played generally in a good spirit is open and entertaining. Glan Conwy's 3-1 victory, sealed with a breakaway goal in injury time, takes them up to second place in the league above Rhyl and behind runaway leaders Bethesda. A visit to this immensely friendly club, situated amidst such stunning scenery, comes with my highest recommendation.

06/20