

TT No. 19: *Mike Latham* - West Lancs League Premier Division: **Haslingden St Mary's** 0-2 Euxton Villa. Att: 50; Admission: n/c but £1 raffle ticket purchased; 28pp programme: £1.50; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

Sometimes you can be misled by the advice of fellow travellers - 'Haslingden-nothing more than a playing field' was the summary of one visit. But how wrong can you be? On a day when rain again wiped out all but one games in the three local cricket leagues, a trip to Haslingden St Mary's proved very worthwhile.

First problem is finding the ground, located just a few hundred yards from the town centre but devilishly difficult to locate. I thought I had cracked it, following the directions of one earnest local only to find the road coming to an abrupt end just a few hundred yards from the target. The best advice is to turn down by the Roebuck Inn and follow your nose, but allow at least another half-hour to your journey to negotiate the winding streets and cul-de-sacs of this atmospheric Lancashire town.

Once found, the South Shore Playing Fields, located at the lowest point of town with magnificent views of distant hills and rows of Victorian terraced housing are simply outstanding. Despite the torrential rain the playing area, flat, beautifully grassed and lush provided a superb playing surface. A post-and-rail fence surrounds the pitch and a newly renovated club house provides the focal point. Another pitch, used for junior games, adjoins the complex.

'With so many joiners, painters, roofers, builders and so on associated with the club, it was no trouble to build an extension,' a friendly club official explained. The result is a quite superb facility, with flat screen televisions, a spacious bar area and a tea bar serving some of the finest pie and peas in the County Palatine.

Play was keenly fought but the visitors, resplendent in Holland-type orange shirts, established control with a headed goal from a corner and a second before half-time. Despite their best efforts St Mary's were never going to score and their frustrations grew when their best player was sent off for a stamping offence late in the game.

Another noteworthy feature was the outstanding display of a young referee, chaperoned as he was by two assistants of mature years. The threesome worked together excellently and demonstrated a degree of teamwork so often lacking in match officials these days.

A superb 28-page programme, selling for £1.50 complimented an entertaining afternoon despite the constant rain and the friendly home officials made visitors extremely welcome and rightly reflected great pride in their facilities.

With the promotion of Kirkham & Wesham into the North West Counties League this season the West Lancashire League title chase is wide open. St Mary's, second last season, are clearly in the hunt but this was just not their day. The visitors,

despite being ravaged by injury after a fixture-packed start to the season, deserved their win and may yet emerge as title challengers.

A visit to the South Shore Playing Fields, Haslingen's home since 1990 when a motorway was constructed through their former home, comes highly recommended. The welcome is warm, the facilities excellent (though bring a brolly on a wet day) and the pies mouth-watering. As a friend watching football on the Isle of Wight texted: 'Who needs the Premiership?' Who indeed?

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