

TT No. 199: Mike Latham - Sat 23 February 2008; Midland Combination Football League Premier Division: **Continental Star** 0-1 Highgate Utd. Att: 23; Admission: £3; Prog: 16pp, £1; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

Highgate United's seemingly inexorable march towards the Midland Combination title continued with this narrow victory. Like all championship-elect sides they seem to have got the knack of edging tight games and, going into the game with a 12-point lead over second-placed Southam United, they moved closer to promotion.

Highgate are well organised, give very little away and take their chances even when not playing particularly well- qualities that stood them in good stead for this league encounter against Continental Star.

For a change Saturday dawned dry and bright and most fixtures were guaranteed to go ahead. I decided to venture once again into this league and, with the M6 southbound strangely quiet, was soon coming off J2 off the M5 and heading towards Wolverhampton. After taking the left turn at the first set of traffic lights into Newbury Road it was a swift right into Oldbury Leisure Centre, behind which lies the ground of Continental Star.

There is plenty of car parking and entry to the ground is through the leisure centre. Two club officials gave me the warmest of welcomes and I had the honour of securing the first of the programmes, hot off the press and just stapled neatly down the middle.

Star were formed in 1975, initially as Villa Star, and entered the Midland Combination in 1993, progressing through the divisions to the top flight. After previous ground-shares at Coleshill and Paget Rangers they became the senior team at Oldbury Sports Centre upon the unfortunate demise of the former Midland Alliance side, Sandwell Borough.

The venue is vast- a huge oval surrounding a flat and well-maintained pitch. The surrounds consist of a white railed fence and there is a small covered stand along one side with black-pained dug-outs on the opposite side. The rest of the ground is flat standing though there is some banking behind the far goal, behind which are some houses and then some heath land. The leisure centre is situated behind the near-side goal.

Just 23 spectators paid for admission to this game- the headcount came to 32. But it was a decent game, well contested and played in a sporting spirit with the impressive referee managing to get through the game without giving a yellow card.

Highgate won it with a smartly taken goal just two minutes after the re-start, Liam O'Shea turning quickly to fire in a low shot.

Star had two of the league's leading scorers in their ranks in 26-goal Andre Robinson and 17-goal Kirk Maragh but the Highgate defence held firm and helped secure another three points.

The floodlights of the Hawthorns shone out brightly on a dull afternoon from a mile or so away but I was sure that I had chosen the best way to spend a relatively mild winter's afternoon. A good game of grassroots football, played in great spirit on an atmospheric ground and with friendly club officials. A visit to this friendly club and impressive ground comes highly recommended.

06/20