

**TT No.242: Mike Latham** - Wed 30 April 2008: North Lancashire & District League Premier Division; **Ingleton** 0-3 Morecambe Royals; No admission or programme; Attendance: 31 (h/c).

The North Lancashire & District League offers plenty of late season groundhopping opportunities with early evening kick-offs appearing on the excellent league website as soon as the clocks change at the end of March. After such a wet winter most of the clubs had rearranged games to complete and as Ingleton had suffered as much as any other team their season was still very much alive.

So, on the last day of April, I ventured up to J34 of the M6, through Caton and Hornby and in no time at all was entering the pretty village of Ingleton in the Yorkshire Dales, about 20 miles or so east of Lancaster. It's a well-known tourist area famous for its limestone scenery, the towering peak of Ingleborough which is one of the Three Peaks, waterfalls and caves.

Ingleton is less famous for its football team but I had been informed that their ground, known simply as the Sports Field, was one of the best in a league that I have grown accustomed to this season. The words of wisdom were spot-on as Ingleton FC's home is indeed an authentic football ground.

Located behind the community centre, close to the centre of the village, it has two sloping sides, one at the entrance and the other behind the goal to the right. Shared with the village cricket team it looks like a natural amphitheatre and amidst such spectacular scenery is an ideal location to while away a Wednesday evening.

I had been nervous that the game might be postponed as a cloudburst en route to the game had left huge puddles over the roads and surrounding fields but Ingleton was bathed in late evening sunshine as I arrived and the teams were warming up on the undulating field.

Though this was a mid-table game with little to play for, the commitment of both teams was admirable and an enthralling game unfolded, expertly controlled by a veteran referee. He spoke firmly to any miscreants and so avoided the needless cards that are often handed out by less experienced referees, getting through the game without having to issue a yellow card.

Morecambe Royals took a firm hold on the game with a goal after only 41 seconds and went on to win the game comfortably with further goals after 25 and 79 minutes. But Ingleton never gave up the ghost and the Royals goalkeeper produced some outstanding saves, notably in a sustained spell of first-half pressure.

Some stone terraced steps have been carved into the nearside hillside with rails to lean upon and give the appearance of a proper football ground. Most of the spectators, though, chose to watch the game from the top of the banking by the community centre which also doubles as the dressing rooms.

This league, in my experience, provides a decent level of football and is well administered and refereed. And the website is first-class, regularly updating results, tables and fixtures and even giving goal-scorers as well as directions to grounds.

The final game in the Premier Division is on Saturday when Ingleton entertain Storeys. The visitors need to win to pip Marsh United for the title and so bring to a close another fine season in this highly competitive league.

Though there are no programmes at any of the clubs the contrasting scenery of many of the grounds more than compensates and though the football can be a touch agricultural at times the commitment and effort of the participants more than makes up for that. A visit to Ingleton comes recommended.

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