

**TT No.29: *Dean McClean*** - Tues 21st August 2007. West Lancs League Premier Division: **Eagley** v Fulwood Amateurs; Res: 4-2; Att: 70ish; Admission: Programme: no; Raffle: £1-a-strip; FGIF Match Rating: 4\*.

As Kirkham & Wesham have now departed from the West Lancs League to the North West Counties League, the competition for this season's championship crown will be a very open one. It will certainly be nice to see another club's name on the trophy at the end of the season.

On a humid, overcast evening, I made the short trip south to the outskirts of northern Bolton, along the A666, to see Eagley entertain the early league leaders, Fulwood. On a nice day/ evening, Eagley is a pleasant and enjoyable place to watch one's regular fix of football. The complex boasts not only football, but cricket and tennis too. The lack of cover on the ground makes a summer visit the most desirable option, so if you do come make sure you bring a brolly.

The ground is just off the A666, on the right-hand side (from Bolton), and it can be a little tricky to find. Look out for the Duns-car Industrial Estate-there are three entrances here, take the one nearest the road, so you are almost coming back on yourself and the ground is about 500 yards away, along the cobbled lane. For those of us who use public transport, the 225 from Bolton-Clitheroe stops outside the ground, but during mid-week it's impossible to get back to Bolton, so a Saturday is probably the best time to visit by public transport.

Like their near neighbours Turton, and others in Lancashire, Eagley are a club with a proud history. The original club, founded in 1874, being one of the first to compete under association rules, whilst they were founder members of the Lancashire FA in 1878 and one of the first competitors in the Lancashire Cup. With the rise of professionalism, Eagley found it impossible to compete and the club was disbanded and did not return until the early 1960s, when Eagley Mills entered the Manchester League.

Eagley may share the complex with their cricketing neighbours (of the same name), though you need not worry about the two clashing as they are completely separate and both regularly play simultaneously. The pitch is enclosed behind both goals and along the side of the cricket field by a white metal rail, whilst the near side is taped off. Behind the far goal is the social club, which was open at half-time but unfortunately there was no tea or coffee to be had, as "the football person hasn't turned up tonight". There is no cover at all on the ground to shelter from the elements, apart from an over-hang above the social club.

The pitch at Eagley is immaculate and the enthusiastic groundsman takes great pride in his work, so much so that he gives players an earful if they happen to make a divot, as well as actually forking the ground when the play is up at the other end!

The proverbial "game of two halves" this one, as the visitors from Preston cruised into a 2-0 lead by half-time, only to be blasted away by a bullish home side after the break. Eagley's 'keeper had obviously caught something from watching some Premier League stoppers, as he was at fault with the opener. Rushing a long kick, he inadvertently kicked the ball onto his own defenders' back, allowing the ball to fall kindly to the waiting striker, who rounded the 'keeper, only to be fouled in the process. He duly picked himself up and scored the resulting penalty. A wonderful second half comeback by Eagley made this game one to remember, as they completely dominated, scoring some superb goals along the way. Non-league football at its best.

06/20