

**TT No.34: *Stephen Harris*** - Sat 25 August 2007; Wales Premier League; **Port Talbot Town** v Newtown. Result: 5-1; Att: 224; Admission: £6; Programme: yes; FGIF Match rating: 4\*.

Last Saturday saw me in a very hot and sunny South Wales making my first ever visit to a club in the top tier of Welsh non-league football. I have to say that I was pleasantly surprised both by the quality of the football on display and the standard of the stadium. Port Talbot retains the look of a town which has grown on a base of heavy industry, but the smart Victoria Road ground is in a sedate seafront location about 15 minutes-walk from the railway station away from the town centre.

Turnstiles open in the midst of the west side, which is centred by a low stand offering four rows of blue plastic seating. Alongside this is a small club shop and the club offices. The two ends feature hard standing behind a rail and some stretches of grass banking. Above the bank on the north end is the busy clubhouse and kitchen area. The main feature however is the east side which has a new and large and very blue cantilevered stand, built into the former grass banking in front of a dusty carpark. This stand smacks of a higher level of football and is part of the club's determination to develop a ground suitable for European and Representative football. Unusually there are no dugouts and the trainers and substitutes took seats at the front of this stand, unsegregated from the crowd. It was odd to see fans sitting around them and to be able to walk in front of them during the game.

Port Talbot were supported from the south end by a small, but noisy, group of fans boasting a couple of drums, a bugle and a selection of colourful flags. All good stuff, but this gave a slightly surreal edge to a game where most other spectators were concentrating on sipping cold drinks, topping up their sun cream and finding the best patch of grass to lie on. The new stand was largely shunned, especially when a cool sea breeze suddenly blew a fine mist across that corner of the stadium.

There was no doubt who were the better team, although Newtown held the homesters to 0-0 for quite a while. Once the first goal went in however a second followed almost immediately and Port Talbot showed little mercy in what ended up as something of a thrashing for Newtown.

A well-printed match programme sold at the gate for £2.50 and updated team-sheets were handed out before the kick-off. We enjoyed the pies on sale from the club shop and one of my friends bought a sort of corned beef pasty, a local delicacy which we had not encountered before.