

**TT No.62: Paul Roth** - Sat 22nd September 2007; Middlesex County League Prem Division; **Indian Gymkhana v Brazilian**; Res: 5-2; Att: 23; Programme: 24 pages, £2 including entry; Weather: Sunny and warm.

Until a few years ago, I used to regularly on a Sunday lunchtime pop over to Polo Farm on the outskirts of the city, and watch Canterbury Men's Hockey club, who played, and indeed still do, in the top division of the English Hockey League. Their water based, floodlit pitch, superb facilities and clubhouse, along with a programme at each game made for pleasant alternative to football. Canterbury were very successful at this time, due in no small part to the number of internationals they had playing for them, and in particular David Matthews, a goal machine to rival the pedigree of legendary Pele.

Hockey and Pele lead me nicely into my chosen football fixture today. I had certainly heard of the famous Indian Gymkhana Hockey club, but didn't know they had a football team until I saw their fixtures appear in this season's Middlesex County League. Their opponents today are Brazilian, whom I had seen last Saturday at Crystal Palace, and hence the reference to Pele.

IG are the longest standing Asian sports club in Britain, having been founded in 1916, and their HQ, which hosts the famous Hockey club, cricket and football teams can be found at the end of Thornbury Avenue, almost opposite Osterley tube station.

Entering the gates, resplendent with tiger's head crest that is the club's emblem, there is an unmade, but huge car park. Along an arbour, directly in front as you enter, one comes to the impressive clubhouse, which I will return to later. Walk across the cricket ground and to the side of the hockey pitch and you arrive at the football field, which is very basic, but was roped-off for this afternoon's match. Dugouts are stationed on the far side of the pitch, and there is NO cover. Here I bought my programme, 24 pages and a good effort this one I thought, for £2, which was also the entry fee.

The game was another cracker; I've been lucky so far this term. Brazilian stroked the ball around confidently early doors and after half an hour were cruising at 2 nil. Against the run of play IG snatched a goal back with a fortuitous deflection, and went in level with a well taken goal on the stroke of half time. The second period was much like the first with the South Americans having nearly all the play, but again it was the hosts who snatched the lead with a breakaway goal, and who then went on to undeservedly win by a flattering three goal margin. Brazilian must still be wondering this morning how they lost, and by so many.

A distraction, if the game is awful, is that the club is right underneath the flightpath into Heathrow airport, and the aeroplanes are flying very low here. A spotter's paradise?

At the final whistle, I popped into the magnificent club for a beer. The place boasts a smart restaurant, massive bar with seating for over 100, and suites of rooms for all manner of functions. All the club's electricity needs is gained via solar panels which festoon the front of the building, and at the side of the bar is a panel showing the present power generation. High quality Indian food is served, and I stayed for a curry supper, which was authentic and excellent value. By 5pm the place was packed to the rafters and everyone was there to watch the India/Australia Twenty20 cricket World championship semi-final, and as luck would have it, India batted first and as their innings built so did the crescendo of noise and atmosphere within the club. By 6.25pm the place was literally rocking with excitement...who said cricket's boring! I was the only non-Asian present in a crowd that had now built to around 200, but was made most welcome by everyone I spoke to. Glad I don't have an Aussie accent though!

All in all, a fascinating day out, and a super football match to boot.

FGIF Rating 5\*; Train Day = 14283 steps.  $14283 \text{ divided by } 1770 \text{ (One Mile)} = 8.06$  miles walked today.

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