

TT No.71: Dean McClean - Sat 29th September 2007. Cymru Alliance: **Holyhead Hotspurs** v Queen's Park; Res: 4-4; Att: 142; Admission: £3; 44pp Programme: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 5*.

No doubt many thousands of people, including some reading this, have passed through the unremarkable North Wales town of Holyhead en-route to EIRE, via the ferry terminal. Little, if any, of those travellers would have realised the home of Cymru Alliance League club Holyhead Hotspurs, is a mere, stone's throw from the main A5 road into town. Indeed, you wonder if even the locals realise that they have a gem in their midst.

The club as it is today, was formed as late as 1990, though football in the town can be traced back as far as 1880, when it was represented in various guises. After formation, the club enjoyed huge local success, when in three consecutive years (1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98) the club carried off the Anglesey League, the Gwynedd League and the Welsh Alliance League. This golden period, prompted the numerous other junior teams in the town to join in for the ride and they were duly amalgamated into Holyhead Hotspurs.

Wales can offer some breath-taking and varied scenery and today was no exception as the A55 snakes through the hills of Denbighshire, Conwy and eventually onto the Island of Anglesey. Passing by Colwyn Bay and Conwy, the road and the parallel running London-Holyhead rail line is forced out to towards the sea by the imposing mountains. This is always an enjoyable vista and enhanced on a lovely late summer's day like today.

This season the club has moved next door (literally) to the refurbished Holyhead Stadium. The previous ground is still in use by the club and is utilised by its youth and junior teams. With improved facilities, including the club house and floodlights, the club hope to push onto to the Welsh Premier League, as their neighbours Llangefni have done. Keeping up with the Jones's you might say. Finding the ground is simple, from the main A5, take the first left on the roundabout (flanked grimly by not only a Netto, but the unpalatable McDonald's-globalization spares nobody, it seems) and after about 1/4 of a mile turn right onto Holyhead Sports Centre car park and the ground is there on your right hand side. There is ample parking behind the impressive main stand along with an overflow (if needs be) at the sports centre. Although we are less than half a mile outside town, it feels as though we are out in the sticks, such is the openness of the ground together with the lack of housing and the hilled setting. The large cantilever stand is the focal point of the ground, with around five hundred blue seats, and a number of white ones to spell out HOLYHEAD, along with unobstructed views, it is certainly impressive. The remainder of the ground is uncovered and very open to the elements and a visit here in winter could be an arduous experience indeed. All in all, though, a spic and span little venue.

One pound, sterling, purchased the excellent programme. Flanked by a lovely colour shell, with today's match and teams, this is clearly a well-produced effort. Inside the editor, secretary and manger have their say on recent events regarding the club. Whilst the rest is packed with: A history of Holyhead Hotspurs; pen-pics of both teams; fixtures and results; league table; pen pics of all the league's referees (very unusual) and two interesting articles on the Welsh national teams and match officials-regarding the tough job they do and how we need to understand their role within the game. Good stuff.

Two teams in similar league positions, with similar records promised an even contest. And even it was, as eight goals could not sperate them in this pulsating match. Amazingly, the home side lead 4-0 at half-time and quite easily it could have been more. Commenting at half-time in the tea-bar queue, most were of the opinion the 2nd half would be a bit of a non-event. "Probably finish 4-1" moaned one. How wrong we were! The proverbial Rocket by the visiting manager, seemingly doing the trick as the visitors came out all guns blazing in the 2nd half and produced an inspired display to take a deserved point back to Wrexham, in a breathless 2nd half. A humdinger of a match. Having attended an insipid Premier League game 6 days previous, this really was what the groundhopping doctor ordered. Now this may not eclipse Charlton's comeback from 5-1 down against Huddersfield, to win 6-5 in 1957, or England beating Australia in 1981, after following-on. But it's still a remarkable achievement.

I just wonder what the Queen's Park manager said (or did) to them at half-time...!

06/20