

**TT No.99: *Dean McClean*** - Sat 27th October 2007. Essex Senior: **Romford** v Mauritius Sports & Pennant; Res: 3-1; Att: 107; Admission: £5; Programme: 24pp, £1.50; FGIF Match Rating: 4\*.

After two midweek visits to soulless new grounds, it was a refreshing change to visit an old atmospheric and traditional non-league ground.

The history of Romford is rich and fascinating; the original club founded was founded in 1876, and has subsequently folded and re-formed twice. In 1880-81 and 1884-85 the club made the last eight of the FA Cup, losing firstly to the mighty Darwen (15-0) and then to Blackburn Rovers (8-0), who were on their way to a historic hat-trick of FA Cup wins. After folding in 1909, the 2nd club was founded in 1929 when local figure Tom MacPherson headed the formation of a new Romford FC and they moved into the local Brooklands Stadium. The pinnacle of the second club was reached in 1949, when it reached the FA Amateur Cup Final, losing 1-0 to Bromley in front of 95,000 spectators in the first final to be held at Wembley. In 1959 the club took the bold decision of turning professional and joined the Southern League, where they were perennial applicants to the Football League, though they never really threatened the championship. Once again the club plummeted and were eventually closed down in 1978, after failure to reach the Football League had left them penniless and homeless, as their Brooklands Ground was sold off to finance debts and as there wasn't enough money left in the pot to build a new stadium, the club was left in a nomadic state, whilst their proposed new stadium was turned into an Ice Rink. 1992 saw Romford FC rise from the ashes once again. However, the resulting 15 years haven't been smooth running and a groundshare and merger with Collier Row; various complications with that ground and an eventual move to their current Ford Sports ground have all preceded. Let us hope the club has found a permanent home and that they suffer no more upheaval and have a period of stability.

The current Ford Sports ground, Romford's current home, is a truly wonderful venue; traditional and atmospheric. We really need to keep non-league grounds such as these, in my opinion, as they are truly wonderful. Entering the ground in the bottom corner, via two turnstiles, one for admission and one for programmes, bizarrely! In front of you as you enter is the large grandstand, with around a 100-seats, painted white. Either side is flanked by terracing and this was the popular choice of regular supporters. The opposite side of the ground also has a large amount terracing and a small covered shelter flanks the halfway line and populated by one supporter, indeed the gentleman in question was, for the large part the only spectator not standing on the grandstand side of the ground!

All food, drink and toilet facilities are located in the club's excellent social club, where a large choice of hot and cold food is available.

On the programme front: an excellent production this one I must say; 24 pages and almost no adverts at all. Three match reports, results and fixtures, a few pics and appearances and goal-scorers keep one interested during the half-time interval.

Last season the club had a near miss for promotion as they finished second in the Essex Senior league. Today's visitors are new boys Mauritius Sports and Pennant, who after finishing 14 out of 15 in the Middlesex County League, somehow found themselves two steps up the pyramid and in the Essex Senior. Talk about rewarding failure. They also don't have their own ground up to the required standard and currently groundshare with Aveley. Obviously, the Essex Senior to the Middlesex County is a chasm in class as the new-boys currently prop up the table with only one point from a possible 30, so far this season. However, saying that they could probably have taken a point away from this game, as only kamikaze defending (they gave away two penalties), cost them a deserved point. They played some good football in parts but their often, woeful, finishing and schoolboy defending often let them down!

All in all, an excellent day out and even a six-hour drive home, due to roadworks and inconsiderate drivers, couldn't dampen the spirits!

06/20