

**TT No.12: *Andy Gallon*** - Wed August 20th 2008; **Kirkbymoorside** v Teesside Athletic; Wearside League; Res: 1-1; Att: 210; Admission: £2; Programme: 50p (14pp); FGIF Match Rating: \*\*\*.

Some pleasures are a delight to anticipate. As if watching a jeweller laying out for inspection gems on black velvet, I'd looked forward to this off the beaten track trip since spotting the game - quite by chance - in the fixture list a few days previously. Finishing work in East Yorkshire at half-past three gave me plenty of time to take the meanderingly scenic route up to Kirkbymoorside for a 6.30pm kick-off. With the clouds rolling back steadily to reveal a perfect summer evening, the stunningly beautiful villages of Sutton-upon-Derwent, Elvington, Stillington, Gilling, Oswaldkirk and Helmsley slipped by my windscreen on a welcome visit to the unhurried parallel universe that is 'B' road heaven. There'll always be an England while there's a country lane.

Kirkbymoorside, a pleasant market town located in farming country between the better-known tourist honeypots of Helmsley and Pickering, lies on the broad valley floor of the shallow sided Ryedale Valley. The heather-clad North Yorkshire Moors are to the north and the rather leafier Howardian Hills to the south. With its characteristic honey-hued stone buildings and red pantile roofs, the town is North Yorkshire to its marrow. It boasts of being the 'Gateway to the Moors', and the lonely, lovely vales of Farndale (famous for its daffodils), Rosedale (once home to a high-level mineral railway) and Bransdale (noted for its tiny church at Cockayne) are close at hand. The football ground, part of a multi-purpose sports complex at Kirkby Mills owned by Kirkbymoorside Town Council, is a short distance east of the attractive sloping high street, where the big event advertised on shop window posters was a dominoes drive.

Despite a summer of hard work to meet the grading requirements of the Wearside League, the newly-promoted Moorsiders, runners-up in the Teesside League's First Division last season, have big plans to develop their facilities further. They are seeking the go-ahead from planners to build a two-storey block behind the west goal. There will be dressing rooms for players and match officials on the ground floor and a function room, a potentially lucrative source of income, on the first. The existing dressing rooms and club house are earmarked for demolition, with the access road to be diverted across this area. The club hope to put in floodlights, despite the difficulty of sharing a touchline with a cricket team, and would like to bring the field at the east end of the ground into use as a second pitch to prevent inevitable wear and tear resulting from four sides using a single playing surface. The town council is talking to a farmer about buying the field and then renting it to the footballers but it seems, for now, the landowner is happy to drive a hard bargain and deadlock has been reached. Providing some cover for spectators is also on the Moorsiders' wish-list.

Access to Kirkby Mills is via a hard-to-spot gate next to the main A170 road. A metalled lane leads past the cricket ground, on the right, to a table and gazebo acting as a turnstile, where programmes can be bought. To the left is a wooden cricket pavilion, which appears so ramshackle its only purpose may be to serve as a scoreboard. The dressing rooms and club house, which contains a bar and a refreshment hatch, find a home in a low building fashioned from prefabricated panels. There seems absolutely nothing wrong with this structure and it is a sign of the Moorsiders' ambition that they want to knock it down and start again. Mind you, joining the pyramid system makes them eligible for all sorts of grants, which must focus the mind to a certain extent. The lane, with modern bungalows on the other side of the wall, broadens out into a car park. There is an uninspiring brick building ahead housing squash courts and a much more appealing floodlit bowling green over to the right. As with a good many people, I'm 'saving' bowls for when I get past pensionable age. Many of the greens you come across look wonderful, though, don't they? Behind, the land rises quickly to tree-topped heights dotted with desirable residences. Next to the hedge-lined bowling green are two tennis courts. In front of the hedge, a grassy bank provides the best view of the pitch, which slopes down towards the main road. The bank is supported by a breeze block wall, painted green with coping stones finished in white. Flagged hardstanding runs along its foot, with breeze block dugouts, sparkling in fresh white paint, positioned either side of the halfway line. Metal railings, on which hang a number of advertising hoardings, enclose this north touchline and go round to the goals at each end. The barrier surrounding the rest of the pitch is rope on wooden stakes. The club have been given special dispensation for this arrangement because of the cricket pitch but have been told to erect a permanent barrier as soon as possible. The field of dreams (of sheep, actually) is behind a row of mature trees at the east end. On such a sunny evening, it's all very attractive. And dramatic, too, when angry clouds begin to counterpoint the golden blaze of the setting sun.

This is not the forum for discussing how a team from Ryedale and another based in Redcar come to be playing in the Wearside League. Suffice to say, this competition is becoming more and more of a misnomer as its catchment area expands. Still, Kirkbymoorside's first home game in the competition has generated a lot of interest and a crowd of more than 200, for this level, is most impressive. An absorbing, and occasionally feisty, 1-1 draw ensures both teams stay unbeaten after four matches, with the hosts hanging on to top spot and Teesside Athletic holding second place. The Moorsiders - initially - are beset by opening night nerves, and the visitors go ahead in the eighth minute. Michael Dowes gets past Paul Hodgson on the left and pulls the ball back from the dead-ball line for Billy Millington, arriving late at the near post, to thump a volley into the roof of the net. Bundle of energy Millington (19) rolls a loose ball inches wide after Rob Campbell had parried a 25-yarder from Roy Hunter before Daman Cox (32) hammers a clear chance to equalise fractionally over the crossbar having been picked out unmarked at the back stick by a Jonathan Brown cross.

The pitch, well grassed but soft after days of rain, possibly contributes to a less eventful second half, which bursts into life with 17 minutes left when Liam Wood

clumsily bundles over Karl Richardson in the penalty area. Andrew Hodgson's spot-kick, though well struck, is a nice height for the keeper and Dan Hall dives to his right to push it away. But the Moorsiders aren't finished and when Eddie Strickland heads a deep cross back into the six-yard box Hodgson is there to make amends for his earlier blunder by crashing the ball home from close range. A frantic finish amid failing light sees Brown almost win it for the hosts in the depths of stoppage time but his deft 18-yard shot on the turn is deflected agonisingly wide of Hall's left-hand upright.

Kirkbymoorside, as a club, really are the perfect antidote to those jaded by the increasingly tiresome excesses of the professional game. Much of the ground improvement work this summer was carried out by the players, nearly all of whom hail from Ryedale. Can you imagine Rio Ferdinand popping down to Old Trafford on his day off to repaint a bit of masonry? Moorsiders officials burst with pride and enthusiasm, and greet many of the spectators as the old friends they undoubtedly are. Everyone is as mellow as the weather, there is plenty of good humour and the generations - from the elderly to young children - mingle happily. Community spirit, lost for ever in so many places, burns brightly in this bucolic backwater. Don't be put off by all those back roads on the map. Set off early, take your time and feel the tension drain away.

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