

TT No.133: Paul Roth - Sat 24th January 2009; UCL Premier Division; **St Neots Town** vs. Deeping Rangers; Res: 2-1; Att: 260; Entry: £5; Prog: 52 pages-£1; Weather: Sunny but cold; French Onion Soup: None!

Odd things make one support and have soft spots for certain football clubs, don't they? As a family, back in the early 1960's, we would stay with my aunty Saliva at her big house near Market Deeping. She was neither my aunty, just an old school friend of my mother's, and her name was in fact Sylvia, and of course not Saliva! This rather unkind sobriquet was adopted by the Major, Pops, as the lady in question constantly sported small amounts of white foam in each corner of her mouth, caused, our family reckoned, by her ferocious intake of Dubonnet.

No word of a lie, she even had a glass or two at breakfast time! That said, Sylvia was a wonderful lady and I absolutely adored her. We stayed with her during late Summertimes, in Lincolnshire, in order to attend the Burghley Horse Trials, at nearby Stamford.

My most favourite memory of all is of being allowed to sit next to her chauffeur, who never said a word unless spoken to, in the front of her open top Rolls Royce whenever we ventured out. Years later, and after their emergence from the Peterborough and District League, ten or so years ago, my penchant for and interest in Deeping Rangers FC might now be just apparent to the reader.

Their UCL match at the New Rowley Park, home to the latest St Neots FC football stadium and my third such 'Saints' ground visited in the town, seemed an opportunity not to be missed. Picking up my pals Geoff and his attractive girlfriend Raksha en-route, at Bengeo, we all enjoyed a glorious morning in rural Hertfordshire, sampling a couple of GBG listed pubs, naturally! I collect bottled beers; I have about 450, each one coming from a different brewery, so imagine my joy in acquiring an offering from the tiny 'Son of Sid Brewery', located at the Chequers Inn at Little Gransden, which is actually in Cambridgeshire. Thank you, Geoff, for buying it for me.

Much praise, and rightly so, has been heaped on this new stadium and I too was mightily impressed. The approach road is a bit off putting at present, as all the recent rain has left the area resembling nothing more than a quagmire. Come back in ten year's-time, when this recession is well and truly over, and expect this area to be smothered in new housing, as the pleasant town of St Neots slowly spreads East. Ample parking space is available.

A blue note each gained our entry; a small gold coin bought the superb 52 page "New Rowley Review", the club's programme. This is a magnificent, well produced tome; I even liked the multitude of adverts inside.

Any reader ever been to the Greek, Cyclidian Island of Ios? On the small jetty there, a sign welcomes you and says something to this effect: "Welcome to Ios, all

colours, all races, all faiths, all cultures and both sexes: Enjoy your holiday." At the back of this programme a similar statement appears; it's an uplifting statement.

I'm sure every Groundhopper has read somewhere about this new ground, so I'm not going to bore you further with detailed accounts about the fixtures and fittings here. Our wondrous webmaster's article says it all in the 'Ramblings' section of this website. However, it's a memorable day for the club, as Paul Claydon, the co-editor of the esteemed 'GROUNDTASTIC' magazine, is in attendance to present the award for New Rowley Park attaining their vote as best new-build Non-League stadium of 2008. A commemorative plaque was presented prior to kick-off.

To the game itself. Rather blinkered eyed, I'd fully expected the reigning champions and current league leaders to win this match comfortably. How wrong could I have been? The men in differing shades of blue quartered shirts opened the scoring through Josh Sozzo, who hammered a fierce shot under the flailing body of the visiting stopper; Deeping responded well and were deservedly level by teatime, following Ashley Steven's well taken header.

The second half followed a similar pattern, with Saints once again retaking the lead, this time with a low cross-shot from Declan Rogers; this goal ultimately proving to be the winner. The Lincolnshire team pressed hard for a point, hitting the woodwork twice and having a goal disallowed. Gosh, I wish I'd had a pound for each time they were adjudged offside also. They couldn't manage it though, and after an intriguing, entertaining and hard-fought match that belied the standard of football as being that of UCL Premier Division level, St Neots took all three points. In fact, the club haven't lost at home since the 23rd of September 2008, turning their new headquarters into something of a fortress. Away from home, it's a different matter altogether though.

I must take a moment here to thank secretary Pete Naylor for keeping me informed by both e-mail and mobile phone as to the chances of play today, the recent wet weather having put this match in some doubt.

When you hear though that the chairman and secretary have both been out forking the pitch on Friday afternoon and again early on Saturday morning, you realise that this is a club going places, fast. I now too myself have a soft spot for ST Neots Town FC.

Now to the big question. Is this a better ground than the Carlsberg Stadium, the new home of Biggleswade Town FC, located a few miles further down the A1? Yes, it is! The Waders' clubhouse is more impressive mind you, selling good quality Real Ale, but on every other count The New Rowley Park wins hands down. The clincher for aunt 'Saliva' would undoubtedly be if Dubonnet was purchasable from either outlet!

Finally, let me leave you with the sentiments of a lady watching only her third ever football match, Geoff's girlfriend Raksha; "It was brilliant; I loved the ground,

it's fantastic. The football was terrific and the quality of play tremendous. If football was like this every week you wouldn't be able to keep me away"

I think that says it all.

FGIF Star Rating: 5*.

06/20