

TT No. 138: Paul Roth - Sat 31st January 2009; FA Trophy Round 3; **Forest Green Rovers** vs. Hednesford Town; Res: 1-0; Att: 768; Entry: £12; Prog: 36-pp £2; Weather: Overcast and cold; French Onion Soup: None!

The 'Credit Crunch' has finally come knocking on my door.

Earlier in the week I had found myself applying for a personal loan. At 10.30 am on Wednesday morning my appointment with the lending manager's assistant's assistant at my local Lloyds Group PLC branch is set to go ahead. Unfortunately, this gentleman is off sick, so his deputy's understudy conducts the interview. At this staffing level I'm wondering if the kindly Beth also doubles up as the cleaning lady! Although commensurate with form filling, she insists that she leads me through this tricky process. Name, address, D-O-B, and occupation questions successfully answered with the acumen of a Mastermind contestant, the interview comes to a juddering halt.

The "Reason for Loan" question is the stumbling block.

"Admittance to and purchase of matchday programme at Football Conference match" "You want a loan for £17" incredulously enquired Beth. "No, lets round it up to £20, then I can eat as well" was my reply.

LOAN DECLINED.

Geoff is with me today as we head West towards Gloucestershire to take in this 3rd round FA Trophy tie. A few unspectacular GBG pubs are visited along the highways and byways, although a couple of rather spectacular ales are dispatched.

During the week leading up to this match, Geoff and myself had been talking in some depth about the general scruffiness of football supporters and the appallingly shabby way some people dress nowadays (us included); so, for a bit of a giggle we toggged ourselves up in our finery today. We are the only two people in the ground, and probably in the whole of the lovely town of Nailsworth also, to be sporting cravats...I actually collect cravats and have 32 of them; My Father always wore a cravat on a Sunday and I inherited many from him. Occasionally I've added to his collection. Originally worn by Croatian soldiers and traditionally white, this fashion accessory now comes in every colour imaginable. Dapper is how to we both looked, I'd say.

This is my third visit to a ground on the steep incline that is Nymphsfield Road, having formerly visited the 'Old Lawn' and Taverners FC respectively, which by the way is actually adjacent to the New Lawn.

It seems I didn't need that loan after all; £12 is the reduced price of admission today!! Mind you, we had to pay £3 to park the car!! Call me old fashioned and possibly out of date, but £12 does seem an awful lot of money to me; after all, you can get into Dover FC these days for nothing; even when I popped along to the

Emirates Stadium a few seasons back I did get £2 change from a fiver! A further large gold coin bought the value for money, impressive, newsy, all glossy 36-page programme. For today's match you could sit and stand wherever you wanted, although the Shortwood seated enclosure was closed.

The New Lawn is an impressive build, with a 1500-seater main 'Thermal' stand running the length of the pitch on the town side of the ground. A seated, covered area occupies that Shortwood end and another standing tribune is some 120 or so yards opposite this. Finally, there is an uncovered terrace which backs onto steep fields liberally scattered with unconcerned sheep. Geoff treated me to a gourmet luncheon of chips, smothered with curry sauce and an excellent sausage roll. In all honesty, for football grub, it wasn't half bad. Mercifully, on-ground catering DOES NOT include French Onion Soup!

Now to the least exciting part of our day; the football itself.

Hednesford had the better of the early exchanges without ever really looking like scoring; as time wore on though, the homesters came more into it, netting the deciding and ultimately only goal of the tie, as the Pitmen's defensive largesse allowed Adriano Rigoglioso to crash home a 20 yard shot in the 4.93rd minute.

At teatime we were witness to a worrying incident, as an elderly gentleman collapsed in the main stand, badly injuring and cutting his face. In truth and for a while, we thought he was 'Surrey-All-Out', but with the aid of a doctor, recovered sufficiently to retake his seat and watch the second half. Bet now he wishes he hadn't!

So putrid was it, that both of us looked longingly at Shortwood Utds' floodlights in the valley below, illuminating their stadium as they fought out a 2-2 draw with Highworth Town (Hellenic Premier League). Geoff actually said to me he would rather have been watching Taveners FC next door, even though they had no home game today!

Best described as a war of attrition, neither side created a single chance in this latter forty-five minutes; Hednesford did have a goal disallowed late on, which sparked some nasty, violent scenes between the two rival tribes of supporters. Policemen piled into the ground to calm things down and make some arrests: Somehow, that just about summed up this game of football...UGLY!

It's been a mixed week for the club, as president Peter Vick had passed away the previous Friday, but this narrow win puts the team on course for Wembley and for a 3rd FA Trophy final appearance; they have been runners up the two times they have managed to get there, so maybe it's a case of third time lucky.

As ever is, when Geoffers and I get together, a fun filled day ensues. We could have done without the football though.

FGIF Star Rating: 4*.

06/20

