

**TT No. 158: Paul Roth** - Saturday 28th February 2009; Suffolk & Ipswich League Senior Division; **Framlingham Town** v Grundisburgh FC; Res: 1-2; Att: 85; Entry: Free; Programme: 16 pages, also free; Weather: Overcast but mild; French Onion Soup Availability: None.

Suffolk & Ipswich League Senior Division (Top) as at 28.02.09: Grundisburgh - P18; 43pts; Framlingham Town - P22; 37pts.

If given the choice of any match to watch anywhere in the world this weekend, I'd most certainly plumped for the 'Yukselme grupu' play-off fixture, due to be played this Sunday afternoon in the eastern Turkish city of Mersin, between local rivals Mersin Idman Yurdu and Tarsus Idman Yurdu. It's the cadence of the names that appeals!

Another choice would have been Zalla's 2-1 away win at Zarautz yesterday, in the Spanish La Liga Tercera division group 4; how many of us have watched two teams play that start with the letter 'Z' before?

Instead, I've opted for the delightful surroundings of Framlingham Town's Badingham Road for this top-of-the-table clash and as I sit here penning this, I'm jolly glad I did too. A painless run up to Suffolk then had me scurrying around the winding country lanes thereabouts, seeking out a couple of watering holes, before arriving in Framlingham at about 1 o'clock.

The ancient town is a beautiful place to visit in its own right, without the lure of the splendid football club; it's lucky to have three jewels in its crown, those being the glorious 12th century castle, owned by English Heritage and open to the public from mid-March. The aforementioned football club, which I'll come to shortly, and the stupendous Station tavern, owned by the nearby Earl Soham Brewery. I'd visited this pub previously but a chance to sample a pint of their Gannets Mild was too tempting an opportunity to miss. This is Mild how I remember it.

Follow the B1120 out of town, this being the road towards Badingham, and you'll almost immediately spot the club's floodlights on your right. Carry on a couple of hundred yards and you enter the sports club, via the driveway, which brings you to a smallish but ample car park. First impressions were that I couldn't quite believe how magnificent a set-up this is. I would have expected the club to be playing at a much more elevated position in the football pyramid than in the Suffolk & Ipswich Senior division, where they currently find themselves.

There's an impressive stand with FRAMLINGHAM TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB' emblazoned across the top, huge toilet block, six floodlight pylons, two newish looking dugouts, a sturdy railing bedecked with advertisements surrounds the whole, a comfortable clubhouse serving alcohol at play's conclusion and a set of new, modern-era goal frames and accompanying netting. Hot drinks are served from a hatch within the main stand at teatime; by the way, that horrendous soup

is not to be found here, thank the Lord! All the committee members were smartly dressed, wearing green tops, sporting the club's logo, along with black trousers, giving an instantaneous and professional appearance. Behind the town end goal is a floodlit training area and even the pitches that lay to the back of the ground are well appointed. Wow!

It cost nothing to get in and Fiona Whatling, the club's charming secretary, gave me a copy of the 16-page programme for free. Coloured throughout, this issue is an excellent example of how you don't need eighty odd pages of content to constitute an absorbing read. I loved having both teams' strips on the front cover, leaving me in no doubt who was who. Mind you, green and white proliferates everywhere on the ground, so you could take an educated guess that Fram play in those colours.

Although this is a top two billing, the truth of the matter is that visitors Grundisburgh look to have the league title all but sewn up, so far ahead are they of the chasing pack with games in hand too (see table above). Nevertheless, Fram gave it a real go in a lively and fast flowing first half and just about deserved to be leading at teatime, virtue of Lee Drummond's neat finish; during this initial session they also hit an upright. Grundisburgh, themselves, contributed greatly to the entertainment. The latter period was a completely different story though, as the visitors laid siege to their hosts' goal. Darren Harper's celerity to get his head to the ball first, following a corner, earned them their equaliser in the 48th minute. With 10 or so minutes remaining, after neat inter-play, Jamie Scales secured all three points for Grund with a twenty-yard screamer that left home 'stopper Darren Dixon clutching thin air.

The standard of play belied the level of football on offer today and it just goes to prove: "You don't need to cough up £20 or more to watch a professional match when you can see a game like this". A quote taken from today's programme regarding Fram's 3-3 draw away at Melton St. Audrey's last week.

Now, have I enough time to get to Mersin?

FGIF Star rating: a 5\* lettuce (a little gem!).

06/20