

TT No.175: Mike Latham - Saturday 14 March 2009: Spar Mid Wales League - **Waterloo Rovers** 1-2 Carno; Attendance: 30 (h/c); No programme; Admission by donation; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

Waterloo Rovers are the junior team in Welshpool, playing at level three of the Welsh league system in the Spar Mid Wales League.

Their pitch is part of the impressive Maesydre recreational complex that also includes the homes of WPL side Welshpool Town, Welshpool rugby union club and the cricket club. The Waterloo pitch is the one nearest the A483 road on the Newtown road out of Welshpool close to the station. I had passed the ground many times and it was a great feeling to finally get the tick.

But there were a few palpitations along the way. At least the weather was fine; it was a lovely sunny, mild afternoon but there is always a worry when attending games at this level in Wales. Apart from a well-maintained BBC Mid Wales website information on this league is hard to find and certainly lags behind the excellent web presence of the Welsh Alliance and Wrexham Area Leagues that also occupy level three of the pyramid.

I knew that the Welshpool RU club had an early kick-off so that players could watch the Wales rugby international and also that the Central Wales Cup was occupying some clubs' attention with the Cymru Alliance site giving details of nearby Guilsfield's participation in a cup fixture.

I worried that there might either be an early kick-off or a cup fixture that I knew nothing about.

Upon arriving at the ground about 1-30pm my heart sank as a game was taking place on a pitch adjacent to Welshpool Town's ground. Fortunately, it turned out to be Waterloo Reserves in a Montgomeryshire League Division Two encounter that kicked-off at 1pm and a friendly local reassured me that the first team game was indeed scheduled for 2-30pm.

Sure enough, the players duly arrived in dribs and drabs, walking the long distance from the main dressing rooms, across two pitches and a bridge across fast flowing stream towards the Waterloo pitch. The referee was hanging about and he kindly provided me with the team line-ups and we had a good chat prior to kick-off.

He assured me that club linesmen in this league would adjudicate on offside decisions, a far better system than that in the Wrexham Area League game I saw last weekend when the referee insisted on making offside decisions and in doing so ruined the game.

Waterloo Rovers were formed in 1978 and are based at the Grapes pub in the town. The Grapes is in the Waterloo area, hence the club name. After working their way through the Montgomeryshire Amateur Leagues, they are now an

established Mid Wales League side though have no realistic ambitions at this stage to progress further. The club operates on purely amateur lines and they realise that a step-up to the Cymru Alliance would require a quantum leap in finances.

The Waterloo ground is superbly maintained and looked in far better shape than the Welshpool Town surface. The playing area is surrounded by a neat perimeter fence and there is a small seated stand on the halfway line with dug-outs either side. Included in the stand dedicated to the memory of Bob Mann, a much-respected sponsor of the club, is a small tea bar where a friendly lady served a selection of hot drinks and snacks.

Carno are still in contention for the title though the presence of WPL reserve sides tends to complicate matters, especially towards the end of the season. From 2010 onwards, though, levels one to three in Wales will be free of reserve sides and the 'stiffs' of Aberystwyth, The New Saints, Newtown and Caersws will have to play elsewhere.

Waterloo, in mid-table, gave as good as they got in an even struggle that was well contested. An early goal to the visitors looked to have decided matters until home substitute Matthew Knight chased a through ball and struck a brilliant finish past the Carno 'keeper for a stunning equaliser six minutes from time.

But as injury time approached all hell let loose. A home player was injured and lay writhing on the half way line but Carno carried on. Earlier, in a similar situation the home team had sportingly kicked the ball out of play.

The inevitable followed, the Carno substitute going on to fire home a controversial winner.

A fight erupted among the players, oaths were uttered and threats made. The home manager was particularly incensed. The referee restored order, red-carded a player from each side and the final whistle sounded soon afterwards. Very few handshakes were exchanged and the visitors trooped off on their long walk to the changing rooms a little shamefaced.

Sensibly, the home side stayed behind on the pitch for a good while before making their way back, thus defusing what could have been a potentially tense situation.

Welshpool Town's pitch currently fails to tick the boxes for inclusion in the WPL beyond 2010 and there was talk that they could swap pitches with Waterloo and develop an enclosed ground. But I was informed that the state of play is currently in limbo.

It seems ridiculous for here is a superb recreational facility for the town of Welshpool, easily capable of supporting the four clubs that play there and providing an enviable facility. What can be gained by throwing out Welshpool from the WPL when their current ground easily accommodates the people who want to watch their games in comfort?

That is not Waterloo Rovers' problem. They have a lovely facility and are happy to play at the level they find themselves. They are a friendly community club and a

visit here comes highly recommended. Shame they don't do programmes though- they used to but have now discontinued.

06/20