

**TT No.216: Paul Roth** - Sat 25th April 2009; West Midlands Regional League Premier Division; **Ludlow Town** vs. Pelsall V; Res: 3-1; Att: 60(?); Entry: N/A; Prog: ff. in 9 days; Weather: Spring-like wonderment; French Onion Soup: No.

This week has seen me fulfil no less than four long-held aspirations.

First off, to visit Ludlow Town FC, which actually has been on my 'to do' hit list for quite a while now.

Next up, to see and step foot inside the Kremlin. Another, to stand alongside and face to face with (well, almost) Ronnie Corbett. Finally, and most indulgently of all, I've long harboured a yen to hire a limousine for a day that would take me around as many public houses as could possibly be fitted in, in the allotted time, culminating in a trip to a nearby non-league football match, without any risk of impunity.

The latter has been a gnawing yearning for many, many, years, now, since joking about doing such a thoroughly excessive jape with Bob; that ludicrously, self-indulgent whim was finally brought to fruition last Saturday.

Through a friend and business associate of my pal Geoff Seers, and at a hugely preferential rate to ourselves, D.C. Limousines of Ware and Hertford were booked for the occasion. Geoff and his extremely curvaceous girlfriend, Raksha, whom later during the day I was to discover is related to the late Leslie Crowther, despite herself being of Indian descent (don't ask me how that works, I'm no genealogist), shared this ultimate Groundhopping extravaganza with me.

Our chauffeur-for-the-day Ray, a rubicund, taciturn fellow with aquiline features and loping gait, was attired in a dapper light grey suit and black peaked cap, arrived to pick us up at the appointed hour, 7.30 am.

I had, incidentally, B & B'd at 'chez' Geoffers. Ray had been instructed as to our intended itinerary and had already punched the necessary co-ordinates into the silver-grey Mercedes' satnav, setting off down the M40 towards sunny Shropshire, in plenty of time for pub opening. Our end-of-season blow-out was now off and running!

Fifteen pubs had been lined up, with a strategy even Sun Tzu would have been proud of; alas, only twelve such hostelries were possible, owing to volume of traffic on the M40 and our own tardiness. We concurred that our most favourite watering holes were the King & Castle on Kidderminster SVR station, the Mug House in Bewdley and the Kremlin("KER-CHING") at Clee Hill: great views from up here, by the way, at Shropshire's highest inn.

At half past one our chauffeur had dropped us off in the centre of lovely Ludlow, recently being acclaimed a 'Cittaslow' town; it is also more famously, of course, on the 'Black & White' county town trail. A 10-minute drive around the block took in

the impressive Norman castle, the home of successive Earls of Powis, and the stunning wooden-framed houses; a quick, and very much needed couple of pints were hastily downed in the Church Inn, located on the Butter-cross.

By a quarter to three we were waving our gratis match tickets at the turnstiles of the SBS stadium, in Bromfield Road, the impressive, newish home of LTFC. It's just about now that things started to go slightly pear shaped.

For starters, the turnstiles weren't functioning, so the free tickets club secretary Chris Moss had furnished us with were rendered rather valueless, as nobody at all paid to get in!

Next, and most disappointingly, no programme was forthcoming: yes, I do admit, I was myself a tad miffed at this lack of paper. Geoff, my erstwhile placid companion, on the other hand, on hearing this devastating news, had now turned into a boiling, vitriolic, overheating, venom-spitting volcanic firebox. He was, to say the least, incandescent with rage! The old chestnut of the printer having been stolen by drugged-up, shotgun-carrying vandals, was proffered as the highly unlikely excuse.

The SBS stadium is a rather pleasant place, located one mile and one hundred and seventy-five yards outside of the town, just past the cricket and bowls clubs and juxtaposed to the busy A49 Shrewsbury / Hope-Under-Dinmore turnpike. Rolling countryside is all abounding and frames the arena in a glorious backdrop of tranquil English serenity. An impressive grandstand has seating for 150 and is a-backed by similar facilities on its reverse side; this 'flip' side boasts a 3G, floodlit pitch, on which Ludlow Reserves were gainfully employed demolishing Telford Town 7-1.

The No. 1 pitch has a concrete walkway around it, is also floodlit and is protected by sturdy wooden posts and metal railings. Red and white striped goal-nets hang from the goal frames. In fact, red and white is prevalent everywhere. Upstairs, there's a licensed bar and a refreshment area that sold hot pies, chips, filled rolls, teas and coffees. A huge TV screen pumped out the latest FL scores, which my friends kept referring to, to see how their beloved Brentford FC were fairing at Darlington. Thank god they won promotion following a 3-1 victory, as I don't think I could have endured their lamentations along with their constant, irritating Reggae music that spewed out from their expensive l-pods, on the long journey back to Hertfordshire. A balcony is accessed through sliding doors, offering stupendous views of the action, and the traffic trundling along the carriageway beyond.

The game was a real relegation tussle; Villa were without four key players, and this quickly proved decisive, as Ludlow, in the red and blue strip, quickly established an early two goal lead. Not that arduous in truth, as Pelsall were extremely poor in this initial period; so much so that their only 'shot' at the home goal was one that hit a slow-moving Morris Oxford on the 'A' road above! Teatime arrived with LT holding this two-goal cushion.

I'll give credit where it is due; Pelsall stepped up their game slightly in the second half; they actually pulled one back after an hour, but the home side responded almost instantaneously with their third and ultimately match-winning strike, two minutes later. It was an entertaining game, the three of us agreeing that as new stadiums' go, the SBS is aesthetically pleasing, and could easily grace a higher echelon within the football pyramid.

Even more 'pleasing' was the sight of Ray with all four of the Mercs' doors open in readiness to whisk us back eastwards. Upon departure, the truth of the matter was that we only got as far as the Nelson Inn, on the towns' outskirts, which was closed when we'd driven past earlier! A vital thirst quencher was dispatched here with alacrity. The good books' Kidderminster entries were quickly negotiated, as were no less than five, yes FIVE, new 'comfort' breaks en route home.

After dropping the lady and paying our chauffeur off (a score in his back bin from each of us gentlemen seemed to be about the correct level of remuneration for his personal kindnesses) Geoff and I were soon installed in the Old Cross, ready for a nightcap, long before closing time. A last-gasp Jamaican(!) Latte, liberally laced with Tia Maria rendered us both virtually comatose; neither of us roused before midday on the following morning.

An incredibly expensive day, to follow on from my £145 taxi trip back to Margate from Waterloo a few years back, and another silly lifetime's ambition achieved. Add three new brewery beer bottles discovered throughout proceedings, now added to my extensive collection, easily making today the most expensive day out at football of my entire life.

Was it worth? You bet. For the end of next season, I'm already thinking about a helicopter football outing. Manston airport is only 3.42 miles from us!!

And of Ronnie Corbett? What more can I add than what the wee man said to me, last Tuesday afternoon - "Life's not much fun, when you're only four foot one".

FGIF Star rating: 5\*.

06/20