

**TT No.232: *Andy Gallon*** - Sat 16th May 2009; **Golcar United** v **Wibsey**; WRCAL Premier Division; Res: 2-3; Att: 34 (h/c); Admission: Free; Programme: None; FGIF Match Rating: \*\*\*\*.

It's a bit of a job finding a game to spark one's interest amid the dying embers of another season. The West Riding County Amateur League campaign is still trundling towards a protracted conclusion, thanks primarily to fixtures lost during the wintry January weather, and the number of cup competitions in which its member clubs are obliged to be involved. There was nothing at stake - my least favourite scenario - in this Premier Division match, but it turned out to be a lively encounter. I suppose I should have expected a few goals. In the preceding round of midweek games, Wibsey had trounced Meltham Athletic 9-5 in what must have been an astonishing clash, while Golcar United drew 3-3 at Hall Green United.

Happily, the Longfields Recreation Ground has a strong sense of place. Halfway up one side of the Colne Valley, on the border of Golcar and Milnsbridge, between Huddersfield and Marsden, it commands spectacular views. The dramatic scenery of millstone grit country is ample consolation for a lack of facilities. In common with many grounds in this league, Golcar's basic-as-they-come home is simply an enclosed pitch. There's no cover, no hardstanding, no floodlights and no dug-outs. The west touchline is the best vantage point. From here, the land falls away precipitously into the village of Milnsbridge, whose parish church tower can be glimpsed to the north-east through the foliage. The narrow, steep-sided valley climbs away to the east, with the houses of Linthwaite clinging precariously to its vertiginous slopes. One or two industrial chimneys can be spotted, though most of the former textile mills to which they are attached have now been converted to flats. Over to the south-east, just visible on the horizon beyond trees and rooftops, is the Victoria Tower, which stands 106 feet high and tops Castle Hill, a scheduled ancient monument settled for 4,000 years, like a cherry on a Bakewell tart. This gaunt, but undeniably elegant, structure, which was built in 1899 to celebrate the interminable reign of Queen Victoria, is one of Kirklees's most conspicuous landmarks.

The ground is hemmed in to the north, south and east by what appears to be rather drab 1970s housing. Golcar is famed for its former weavers' cottages, but none of these can be seen from here. The west portion of the ground is more spacious, with room for a second pitch and a children's play area in the angle created by Longfield Avenue, also lined with modern homes - somewhat more attractive bungalows. Access is via a broad, metalled drive, which peters out quickly behind the south end goal of the second pitch, used on this day as a pre-match warm-up area. Note how this, and the main pitch, slopes downhill markedly with the valley side from west to east. Level terrain away from the valley floors in this part of the South Pennines is almost impossible to find. A flat-roofed building, disfigured by graffiti, in the south-west corner houses the dressing rooms, toilets

and a kitchen providing the usual refreshments. Steam and the acrid stench of liniment fill the air. The players reach the pitch, which is surrounded by a metal post and rail fence painted white, along a short concrete path.

On this evidence, finishing does not seem to be Golcar's forte. They could have had this game won in the opening quarter, but paid dearly for their wastefulness in front of goal when Wibsey netted twice in the last 10 minutes. Gary Holmes should have scored after Simon Fagan had failed to hold a Danny Senior shot, only for the visiting keeper to smother the close-range follow-up. It got worse. Holmes was weak when through on goal, and Simon Ollerenshaw somehow stabbed wide from a couple of yards after Holmes had put the chance on a serving dish with a knock-down from a Nick Robshaw cross. Then, surprise, surprise, Wibsey took the lead in the 28th minute. Oliver Purdy, who had been finding a lot of space on the right side of the pitch, crossed low to the back post, where unmarked skipper Chris Wood had the time to trap the ball and pick his spot from 10 yards. Adam Johnson just cleared the crossbar with a fierce drive, but immediately got his bearings right with a 30th-minute equaliser. Ollerenshaw put a ball in from the left flank, and Johnson finished coolly with a crisp effort which beat Fagan all ends up. Golcar almost took a lead into the break, but the busy Ollerenshaw's free-kick from an extremely tight angle came back off the crossbar. Chris Hanney, down at the other end, and in lots of space, headed carelessly over at the back post when Pat Hollinger's corner had picked him out beautifully.

Into the second half, and Wibsey's Damien Melvin sliced horribly wide when through on goal before Robshaw saw a point-blank header clawed away by the fast-reacting Fagan. It prompted an anguished "why can't we \*\*\*\*ing finish?" comment from one Golcar fan. Johnson, putting in a useful shift for the home team, was denied by the Wibsey keeper's reflexes close to the hour mark, but Golcar went ahead in the 67th minute. Ollerenshaw's well-struck free-kick from just outside the penalty area clattered Hanney's shins on its grass-skimming way into the back of the net. The heavens opened (coming from the west, presumably the same rain which had soaked Old Trafford), and web-footed Wibsey struck twice during the downpour. With 80 minutes gone, keeper Danny Konic, under no real pressure, dropped a hotly-disputed corner, and Melvin pirouetted with the alacrity of a prima ballerina before forcing the loose ball into the roof of the net from close range. The men from Bradford ensured their 2008-09 campaign ended with a victory when, in the 85th minute, a terrible mix-up in the home defence left Hollinger with the straightforward task of steering a shot wide of the exposed Konic from 12 yards. Golcar pushed to the end, but their frustration was complete when an angled Johnson attempt failed to find a way past three defenders on the goal-line.

Golcar United, an FA charter standard club who also run several junior teams, look a well organised little outfit. The Longfields Recreation Ground is leased from a local authority, but the club do all their own work on the pitches - and their commitment to TLC is apparent in the quality of the well-grassed surfaces. A surprisingly decent end-of-season hop.

