

TT No.54: Paul Roth - Sat 4th October 2008; Hellenic League Div1 W; **Hardwicke AFC** vs. Headington Amateurs; Res: 6-0; Att: 18; Programme: 16 pages, £2 with entry; Weather: Heavy rain and strong wind.

After 60 minutes of play, the extra-ordinary spectacle of two policemen coming on to the field of play and arresting Headington's No.11, left all present aghast. Nobody had ever seen anything like it before.

Rendezvousing just off junction 5 of the M4 with my old pal Geoff, we were soon in deepest Gloucestershire enjoying the stunning scenery and some magnificent GBG listed pubs. The Woolpack at Slad goes straight into my top five list of all-time favourite hostelries.

About ten minutes prior to kick off, we've turned into Green Lane and parked up in the car park of the Hardwicke recreation ground, next to the village hall. The football ground is assembled before each match with goals and netting, roping all around and six flagpoles constituting the furnishings. At play's end the field reverts to its more mundane usages of green space, playground and dog walking facility. It's basic but pleasant enough.

Stan Hine, the club's friendly secretary, has reserved two programmes for us. 16-pages, a bit thin on reading material but professionally produced, is the club's offering on this front.

From early on it's easy to see why Hardwicke have won every league match they've played so far this season, and to say they've adapted well to their new Hellenic League surroundings, after promotion from the Gloucestershire Senior League this term, would be an understatement. One up after 20 minutes, it's all one-way traffic.

At this juncture I should say that rain is now lashing across the arena and Geoff steadfastly refuses to get out of my Ford Focus and watches proceedings from the warmth of the vehicle, listening to the football on the radio and his beloved Reggae music on his £950 I-pod. A crowbar wouldn't have extricated him from that passenger seat!

Seconds from half time, the visitors have their No.3 sent from the field of play for retaliation. As he's trudging off, he attacks the Hardwicke chairman and an almighty melee ensues, with all 22 players involved. From where I was standing, I couldn't see that much, as the fracas continued around the side of the hall building, next to where the tea and coffee servery is located. Referee Ian Hamilton did magnificently well to restore order and sensibly he blew for half-time, with the homesters leading by that solitary goal.

The second half quickly saw Hardwicke extend their lead with a well taken Adam Dunsford strike and this effectively ended the match as a competition. Amazingly, then two police cars and a 'meat-wagon' arrive and onto the ground come two

burley police fellows and arrest the aforementioned Headington No.11. He's never seen again. All quite unbelievable! Apparently, he'd been spotted punching a spectator for no reason whatsoever. What is our beautiful game coming to?

The rest of the match is spent in around the Headington goalmouth and by full time Hardwicke have another three points to add to their current standing of 21 and have netted 6 goals into the bargain. It should've been double figures.

So, great company in the form of my chum Geoff, stunning countryside, breath-taking pubs and wondrous beer, 6 goals, a sending-off, an arrest and guffaws and guffaws of laughter made this a day never to be forgotten.

FGIF Rating: Normal service has been restored, 5*.

06/20