

TT No.67: Andy Gallon - Sat 11th October 2008; **Bulwell Town** v Phoenix S&C; Central Midlands League Prem Division; Res: 2-4; Att: 39 (h/c); Admission: £2; Programme: £1 (16pp); FGIF Match Rating: ***.

Not many clubs have to wait until the second weekend in October for their first home league game of the season. It's what happens when you share with cricketers. The changing rooms at the impressive Goosedale Sports Club are not sufficiently commodious to cope with cricket, football and hockey all occurring on the same afternoon. Hence Bulwell Town's delayed grand opening as a Central Midlands League club. This fixture certainly attracted attention from the region's groundhopping community. It's always good to see the aficionados (as Eddie Waring liked to put it) of this canny little competition out in force for the big games. I can say that without a trace of irony. But with a twinkle in my eye.

Town, formed as recently as 2001, haven't begun particularly well in the CML, struggling for both goals and points, but maybe a run of home fixtures will help them turn the tide. The men in garish orange and black were outplayed in the second half of this game having held Rotherham-based visitors Phoenix Sports & Social to 2-2 at the break. But more of that later.

The isolated Goosedale Sports Club is located east of Hucknall, between the villages of Bestwood and Papplewick. It is well beyond Nottingham's city limits amid pleasant countryside defined by undulating cultivated fields and distant clumps of trees on low hills. A drive as straight as one of local legend Robin Hood's arrows takes you unerringly to the entrance gate. The pitch used by Bulwell is immediately on the left as you enter the complex. It's basic and tidy but rather featureless and uninspiring. A lack of floodlights I can cope with happily but a cover-free zone is a little irritating on an afternoon of Peter Kay's fine rain. Soaks you through. To add insult to injury, the journey down the M1 had been conducted in bright, dry weather. I'd selected this game for my afternoon's entertainment on the basis it would be a good one for a decent day. Only after Hucknall did the dreaded raindrops start falling on my windscreen.

A large, unmade car park runs between the complex entrance and the centrally positioned single storey building which serves as social club and distant dressing rooms, and also boasts a hatch to help with dispensing refreshments. A grassy bank runs down to the pitch, which is surrounded by a metal post and rail barrier painted white. A temporary fence at this near - south-east side - ensures the ground is fully enclosed and meets the CML's grading requirements. A gap to the right, serving as the turnstile, affords access to the best of the rest.

A tarmac path provides hardstanding the width of the near end and halfway down the north-east side. The remainder is grass, with considerable amounts of spare turf running up to the plentiful trees which fringe this rural ground. Twin dugouts straddle the halfway line on the north-east side and are part of a back-to-back

arrangement with those for the adjacent hockey pitch. This boasts floodlights and one of those outdated artificial pitches which have to be sprinkled with sand. Beyond this enclosed facility, cricket and football pitches stretch away as far as the eye can see.

There's not much else either to see or to say, so let's get on with the action, eh? Pre-match analysis, given the teams' lack of success in the scoring department, pointed to a goalless draw. Thank goodness that prediction was wide of the mark. Questions, from the Bulwell players and among the crowd, had already been asked of the Phoenix keeper before he conceded the first goal in the 15th minute. James Duffy curled a left-footed free-kick round the defensive wall from the edge of the box but Mick Else perhaps should have done more to prevent it going in. No matter because, within two minutes, Phoenix were level. Carl Lacey's delivery from the right gave an unmarked Dave Parry a simple task of nodding past Alex Smith from close in. Parry poked the visitors ahead again in the 29th minute following another Lacey cross. But Bulwell equalised on the stroke of half-time when Shannon Bird converted a penalty after a wholly unnecessary foul by action man Lacey on the intriguingly named home striker.

My feeling was Bulwell were lucky to still have a shout in this game. And the second half belonged to Phoenix, who added two more goals to their tally and really should have had a few more. Such was their dominance. Parry completed his hat-trick in the 62nd minute with a crashing volley. Volatile home full-back Terry Gent, off whose shins the ball pinged on its way into the net, was unable to repeat his trick of a moment earlier when he cleared a Steve Woodall header off the goal-line. Gent, a young man with a short temper, was lucky to stay on the pitch as the half wore on. Parry guided a direct free-kick, whipped in wide from the left, over keeper Smith's head with 17 minutes to round off his one-man demolition job. It was a soft goal and, on this evidence, Bulwell, who - ominously - had just one substitute, face a testing debut campaign at this level. But I said the same about Phoenix having seen them this time last season and they went on finish well away from the lower reaches of the table. So, let's keep the faith a little while longer.

06/20