

TT No.7: *Andy Gallon* - Tues August 12th 2008; **Brighouse Town** v Yorkshire Amateur; NCEL Division One; Res: 1-2; Att: 110; Admission: £4; Programme: £1 (28pp); FGIF Match Rating: ****.

Brighouse Town are a worthy addition to the ranks of the Northern Counties (East) League - despite their home debut as a senior club ending in defeat. Recent improvements have transformed homely St Giles Road into a tidy little ground and Town, always one of the most progressive members of the West Riding County Amateur League, should be capable of bridging the gap between the two competitions. That they didn't win on their big night was down mainly to livewire Yorkshire Amateur striker Dempsey Smith, whose searing pace and clever running angles made him a constant threat and enabled him to set up the visitors' first goal and score a confident clincher just two minutes from time.

Town's ground is a couple of miles out of Brighouse, the point at which the Calder Valley begins to broaden and lose its dramatic appearance as road, canal, river and railway finally find some elbow room on its floor. Town can be found just off the Hipperholme road, which climbs steadily from the neither 'nowt nor summat' town centre to reach Hove Edge, a smart residential area which, as its name suggests, enjoys a lofty perch. St Giles Road is very much in the middle of nowhere, in a spot where the houses peter out and open fields begin. The unmade access track is reminiscent of a lane to a farm but actually leads to a large - and, on this auspicious evening, hugely oversubscribed - car park of compacted aggregate at the west end of the ground. The substantial single storey stone building with a pitched roof to the right houses the dressing rooms. A paybox on the left side at this end brings the spectator out in the ground's north-west corner. To the right, between the corner flag and the goal, are portable buildings in which can be found a club room, a hospitality area for officials and storage space for the groundsman's equipment. This is one aspect of the ground which is a let-down. Externally, the portable buildings are a little shabby. How much better they would look painted in Town's striking orange and black colours rather than a dark - and very worn - shade of green. Perhaps there haven't been enough dry days this summer to contemplate such a revamp. Or sufficient volunteer labour. Inside, however, they are very smart, with Town keen to show off the excellent coverage they get from their two local newspapers and past covers of their match programme.

Running down the left, north, touchline are a couple of broad steps of terracing with a 40-yard stand straddling the halfway line. This is a sturdy, modern structure, with corrugated sheeting supported by six columns over a steel frame. It provides the sole area of cover and from this vantage point you can see a second pitch running parallel to the main playing area and a third pitch, on which the players warm up, over to the right, adjacent to the dressing rooms. Beyond the wooden fence, which encloses the whole complex and cost Town £30,000 but keeps out dog walkers, the homes of Hove Edge can be glimpsed through mature

trees. The 1084ft transmitting mast on Emley Moor, a notable West Yorkshire landmark, dominates the watershed on the far horizon. Hardstanding runs round the pitch, which is surrounded by a metal post and rail fence painted white. Large breeze block dugouts, each with 11 seats, are positioned either side of the halfway line on the south side. The excellent floodlights are mounted on posts, with three on each side. Behind the east goal are more trees and though poles are present the netting required to keep the ball within the ground is missing. The players access the pitch, which looks enticingly green and lush after weeks of rain, alongside the goal at the west end from a 'tunnel' comprising hurdles laid on grass. The toilets are part of the building housing the dressing rooms, so if you use them at half-time you can eavesdrop on the choice language used by the rival managers.

Driving rain on a filthy day precedes the kick-off and returns almost the moment the final whistle sounds but the match itself is played out in relatively benign conditions. It proves an absorbing contest between two evenly matched teams and a number of spectators new to this relatively low level of football clearly enjoy what they see. Brighouse begin the brighter and for much of the first half look the likelier winners. Ammers keeper George Clarke makes two impressive saves, using his hands to beat away a well-struck 20-yard free-kick from Matthew Roy and his legs to deny John Booth's first-time effort. But getting the ball in the net is what counts, and the visitors do that with 26 minutes on the clock. The impressive Smith speeds past two defenders on a great run down the inside-left channel, draws keeper Paul Brown and squares unselfishly for Lee Turnbull to side-foot the ball into the empty net from 16 yards.

The second half opens in exciting fashion. The omnipresent Smith sets up Ben Weardon 12 yards from goal only for Brown to block superbly, Brian Matthews finishes weakly close in, Michael Nelson clearing off the line when the Brighouse man should have equalised, and Smith sees a rising, angled drive crash back off the inside of the far post. Three minutes later, Brighouse are level. How many times does that sort of thing happen? Michael Brook's fine pass takes the defence out of the equation and Shaun Gibbons, a tank of a man in midfield, clips the ball over the advancing Clarke (55). Game on. A draw looks the most likely - and fairest outcome - particularly with the game's flow disrupted by a rash of substitutions and increasingly fastidious refereeing. But Ammers continue pressing and Brown has to make a one-handed save to keep out a shot from substitute Matthew Thomas. Smith, fittingly, has the last word in the 88th minute. He latches on to a Pat Millar ball over the top and again displays great pace to leave Town defenders trailing and, from the right side of the penalty area, finishes deftly as Brown comes out to narrow the angle.

So, disappointment for Brighouse, who had won 2-0 at Teversal three days before and had high hopes of racking up another three points. But it will take time for their previously wholly amateur players to adapt to semi-professional football. Still, the club seem to have plenty of enthusiasm, both on and off the field, and should be capable of the sort of rapid progress previous newcomers to this division

have made. At least that should put the town in the spotlight for something other than its famous brass band and for being a property hot spot!

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