

**TT No.8: Paul Roth** - Sat 16th August 2008; FA Cup Extra Prelim Rd; **BOLEHALL SWIFTS** vs. **STUDLEY**. Res: 1-3; Entry: £3; Programme: 32 pages, £1; Att: 45; Weather: Overcast, windy but mild.

Travelling back from Prestatyn in north Wales, I was in search of a match equidistant from there to my home in Kent. Bolehall Swifts' extra preliminary round FA Cup tie, at their Rene Road HQ, fitted this-criteria, precisely.

Situated to the north of the Staffordshire town of Tamworth, a place I was surprisingly impressed with when I visited the Lamb ground many moons ago, Bolehall Swifts' Rene Road ground is found in between a row of houses and a school. Follow the narrow driveway, indicated by a sign advertising the club, into the modest car park which abuts the impressive clubhouse. This pavilion sells alcohol, rolls, tea, coffee plus the impressive 32-page programme. Research and leg work have made this publication an unusually good read. Much research has been done by programme editor Will Gould and the statistics therein, regarding previous meetings between these two clubs is exemplary. The leg work comes in the form of a most engaging article about, and interview with, today's referee, Chris Blake. The 'Credit Crunch' has made us all look more closely at how we spend our hard-earned cash, but this particular programme is worth every one of those one hundred pennies I spent on obtaining it. Eighty-six or so yards from the clubhouse the playing area proper is located. £3, paid to the man at the Formica table, got me in.

Rusting railings, a large changing room block and a modest brick stand on the far side don't auger well. But the ground is saved by a vastly impressive stand, resplendent with old-style bench seating, in situ behind the right-hand goal as one enters. The club's name is emblazoned across the top and it's a structure I've spotted often when hurtling past on the nearby Inter-City railway line.

As I settle down to watch the action my phone rings and I'm instantly talking to my great friend Geoff, who is watching an FA Cup tie too; his choice being Cockfosters FC. As our conversation draws to a close Geoff drops the bombshell that our mutual chum Steve Hurley, now of Blackpool fame, is in hospital with a suspected heart attack. Instantly I have visions of Steve having to have an A5 (aka a triple bypass) or even worse still, this health incident may have rendered him a 'Raspberry'. A subliminal moment has me visualising my old 'oppo' in a converted, Heath Robinsonesque bath-chair being pulled around as if in some sort of hideous sleigh-like contraption, by his beloved girls, Bella and Whipsnade. MUSH!!

Enough, and back to the excitement and drama that is the FA Cup. Studley quickly establish themselves as the superior team and go in one up at the half time break, by virtue of a penalty kick. Two further goals augment their lead and it's not until the final minute that Bolehall manage to get a shot on target and gain a consolation score they hardly merit. The epithet 'Swifts' comes from the apparent

flocking of that particular bird around the clubs' original headquarters at the Amington Inn, back when the club was originally founded in 1953. I'm sorry to report that the word is a misnomer, as there was nothing remotely 'swift' about Bolehall's play this afternoon. In fact, I used the words 'excitement' and 'drama' earlier in this piece. These too were commodities at a premium.

You'll all be pleased to hear that Stephen has in fact not suffered a heart attack as was first thought, but appears to be just suffering from chronic wind. Nothing new there then! It does occur to me however, that any travellers afflicted by coronary heart disease, hypertension or other such debilitating ailments, where blood pressure should be kept to a minimum, could well benefit from a visit to Rene Road. I fear that the pulse rates of those watching the 'Swifts' this term won't be unduly raised.

In a perverse sort of way, I might have just unearthed a type of 'Football Spa'!!!

FGIF Rating. A soporific, but blood pressure reducing 2\*\*.

06/20