

TT No.82: Mike Latham - Sat 8 Nov 2008: Southern League Midland Division: **Bedworth United** 1-1 Leamington. Attendance: 413; Admission: £6; Programme: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

Football in the Warwickshire town of Bedworth has had a chequered history, as detailed in Kerry Miller's enduring classic book *The History of Non-League Football Grounds*.

Miller's book provides a potted history of senior football in the industrial town situated between Coventry and Nuneaton and describes how the origins of the present Bedworth United FC can be traced back to the late 19th century.

Bedworth United these days compete in level four of the non-league pyramid and the visit of runaway league leaders Leamington was eagerly awaited, not least for the financial benefits accruing from the large visiting support.

On a cloudy but mild afternoon a crowd of 413 was easily Bedworth's highest of the season so far, far exceeding the 193 that gathered for the August visit of Bromsgrove Rovers.

Bedworth play at the Oval, a former rugby and athletics ground that once boasted a 440 metres cinder running track. The ground is splendidly appointed close to the town centre in a welfare park funded by the once thriving local coal-mining industry that once provided the major employment and incorporates neatly mown gardens and an impressive adjoining cricket ground.

Pronounced 'Bed-uth' by most of the locals Bedworth are known as the Greenbacks and boast a thriving junior set-up. The club almost went out of business in the mid-1990s but a supporters' group took control of the finances and rescued the situation.

The ground has plenty of character and is a lovely place to watch football. The playing pitch was in excellent condition and a modern, brick built main stand, situated in an elevated position on the halfway line and built in the 1990s provides the main feature. With its distinctive green painted roof and well-maintained exterior, it provides a fine view of the action despite several roof supports. Thoughtfully the club provide pieces of carpet for spectators to take with them into the main stand and add comfort to the seating.

Opposite the main stand is a low roofed single storey building housing the dressing rooms, a well frequented tea bar and a thriving social club that was thronging with happy chattering supporters long before kick-off. The rest of the ground is open standing with the curved banking behind both goals remaining as a link to the past as an athletics stadium. Surrounded by mature trees in a pleasant parkland setting that backs on at the far end to the town's leisure centre the Oval is an atmospheric ground and a tremendous community asset.

The programme is good value at £1 and contains plenty of reading material. The stewards are friendly and rightly proud of their club. One, recognising me as a stranger, took the time to give me a potted history of the club, show me the way to a second tea bar secreted under the main stand that served delicious home-made soup and gave me a look inside the vice presidents' lounge that had a photo on its walls of Bedworth's pre-war home at the British Queen ground.

Leamington's 100pc league record came to an end at the eleventh attempt as the home side earned a deserved draw in a splendidly contested encounter. The large Leamington support were a friendly bunch and helped create a good atmosphere at the Oval. A visit here comes highly recommended.

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