

**TT No. 106: Paul Roth** - Saturday 28th November 2009; Wessex League Division 1; **AFC FAWLEY** vs. AFC ALDERMASTON; Res: 9-1; Att: 38; Entry: £4, including a 16 page programme; Weather: Chilly and dull, then torrential rain; Altitude: The Waterside Sports and Social Club is 34 metres (111.548 ft) above sea level.

"Take a calculator with you"!

I'd arrived in Hampshire far earlier than I'd expected, affording me the luxury of a leisurely, liquid preamble around the New Forest en route to Long Lane, Holbury, the home of high-flying Wessex League AFC Fawley. I lived for some of my childhood in Milford-On-Sea and as a consequence know the area reasonably well, so it was most pleasurable to pass by some old haunts. The 'Turfcutters' at East Boldre, where I was welcomed by not only the ebullient landlord but also by two of the areas' eponymous pit ponies, was my favourite pre-match halt.

The juxtaposition of the beautiful New Forest countryside set starkly against the industrial milieu of the ESSO Oil Refinery, as I approached Holbury from the west, is at the same time both stark, intriguing and terrifying.

AFC Fawley, probably better known to us all as ESSO Fawley FC, have their headquarters at the magnificent Waterside Sports and Social Club, located alongside the A326, 11.634 miles south of Motorway 27. The club's facilities are worthy of special mention here, as coupled with the multifarious sporting activities on offer, the social needs of the populace are catered for with stupendous aplomb. The comfortable function room itself is big enough to stage a football match in and is augmented by conference facilities, a theatre and even a ballroom! Naturally, this has all been provided by and paid for by the omnipresent oil giant, ESSO.

The football ground is located beyond the rugby pitch (Fawley RFC were incidentally hosting Verwood RFC today) to the back of the social club buildings, some 93.447 meters distant. It, too, is most impressive and on first viewing put me in mind of Hythe and Debden FC's Ewart Recreation Ground arena located just up the road, such being the eclectic mix of pitch-side constructions. The club have recently erected a new stand, which boasts modest but nonetheless adequate seating, an indication that AFCF intend to continue their climb up the football pyramid. The playing area has been moved away from neighbouring residential housing but an old stand, painted in the club's colour of blue, still remains. The entirety is posted and railed, floodlit that unusually boasts two sets of dugouts that face one another.

A £4 admission fee came inclusive of a newsy, colourful, 16-page programme and with the multi-chimneyed backdrop of yonder refinery, the assembled were ready, calculators at the ready, for kick-off.

Hapless AFC Aldermaston are this season's Wessex League Division 1 whipping boys (pre-match played 16.....Lost 16) and after last weeks' 0-8 home drubbing at

the hands of AFC Portchester, a cricket score seemed probable. A la San Marino-England-1993, AFCA duly took the lead with less than a minute on the clock; so surprised was I at this turn of events, that I hastily checked my programme to ascertain that it was in fact Aldermaston playing in red! Normal service soon prevailed and by teatime a score-line of 7-1 prevailed. I felt for Ben Brown, the visitor's 'keeper, who performed heroics at keeping it down to just the seven. The truth is, that with a defence in front of him about as safe, trustworthy and porous as a defective condom, what more could the young man have done to stem the 'Blitzkrieg' that confronted him? Do not let my above, negative eulogy detract from the truism that AFC Fawley have some very talented footballers amidst their ranks that play attacking, creative and entertaining football.

Strong tea and a KitKat were gleaned from the portacabin situated behind the near goal at this juncture, quickly followed by the pressing need to find shelter as incessant torrents of rain now swept across the arena. It didn't relent either and the latter forty-five minutes were spent chatting to *Groundtastic's* erudite Vince Taylor in the relative dryness of the 'Grandstand' that occupies the nearest point to the tennis courts. That Fawley only managed to breach their opponents goal line twice more was testament to a much grittier performance by Aldermaston, rather than the homester's largesse.

Okay, maybe a calculator wasn't required to keep score, as suggested to me by Amesbury Town's secretary Tony Hinchcliffe (that's a long story), but a club official did actually think it was only 6-1 at teatime! He was standing at the wrong end mind you, so maybe spectacles, rather than an abacus, would have been of more use to him!

FGIF Star rating: A great, old fashioned 'hopping day 5\*.

06/20