

TT No.108: Keith Aslan - Sat November 28th 2009 (ko. 11.03); **Grange Park v Warren**; Middlesex County League Division 2; Result: 2-1; Admission: free; Prog: £1.50; Att: 67 (6 home, including two rather nice WAGs, 3 away & 58 neutrals).

Groundhopping is a funny old game. You spend most Saturdays travelling the length and breadth of Britain, yet here for the second week running, my football is just a short walk from my Hammersmith penthouse. Unlike the previous week's pleasant stroll by the Thames, this walk was somewhat less salubrious, encompassing Shepherds Bush and the White City Estate.

Wormwood Scrubs is a return to my roots, for in the adjacent Hammersmith Hospital at 8pm on November 3rd 1954 the universe began as far as I am concerned. I expect there is a plaque somewhere in the hospital to commemorate this momentous event. The world would be so much duller without me in it, although this doesn't appear to be an opinion shared by everyone who's met me.

This was Groundhop Day, a much-anticipated social event, a chance to catch up on old friends and enjoy loads of happy banter with other hoppers. But there was some football chat as well. Instead of the advertised £2 the programmes were selling for £1.50. Many felt £2 was deemed to be too expensive for a glossy 8 pager and 90 minutes football. What planet are they living on? An official explained Grange Park were just pleased to be playing in front of a crowd and weren't interested in making a profit. See my previous comment.

In a biting wind, very welcome hot drinks were available from inside the bizarrely named Linford Christie Stadium. Only in this country do we name our stadia after drugs cheats, I bet you won't find a Ben Johnson Stadium in Canada! The changing rooms were next to the Stadium, the pitch about as far away as you can get.

Well done to Talk Sports Tony Incenzo for his work in organising the game. A word of warning here. The crowd of 67, while being a divisional record, was well down on the 100 needed to make these games viable. Many people stayed away because they deemed it to be too low a standard. All I can say is this was as good a game as I've seen all season and the phrase "use it or lose it" springs to mind. Two hoppers had even flown down from Scotland for the game (in a plane of course) so there's no excuse not to get out of bed a bit early to patronize these matches.

Given Wormwood Scrubs is not very high up, the view is extensive and all London landmarks are visible in the distance. The London Eye, Canary Wharf, the Crystal Palace transmitter, but Tony only had eyes for the much closer floodlight pylons of his beloved Queens Park Rangers.

The game itself was a highly entertaining encounter. Grange took the lead a few seconds into the second half, a goal I missed as I was train spotting at the time. Warren equalized with an own goal before a cracking shot (which I did see) won the game for the home side. They may have won the match, but Warren won the

unofficial "most groovily named footballer award". Well done to Ged Zephyr and I hope you become the film star your name so richly merits.

At the final whistle Tony went to see the object of his adoration grind out another un-pulsating draw in their quest for mid table mediocrity while most of the hopping fraternity decamped a mile down the road where North Kensington had conveniently chosen to play this Saturday. Not so conveniently the groundsman had prepared the pitch for mud-wrestling rather than football and the game was called off, leaving a gaggle of cheesed off groundhoppers. If you are planning to do this ground, best to wait until we are in the middle of a drought.

For this hopper, my chauffeur for the day, took me on a hair-raising drive to Singh Sabha FC where we arrived two minutes before kick-off. As I'd been telling my driver all morning that this is where we should have made for in the first place, this is just one more example of how much better the world would be if everybody did what I told them to do! We needn't have rushed, the referee certainly didn't, and kicked the game off 9 (nine) minutes late. The assistant manager supplied us with programmes and also tea before the game and at half time, and wouldn't take any money. Presumably, like Grange Park earlier, Singh Sabha is a non-profit making football club. The hospitality was again top notch. Played on a plastic pitch there were no rain induced worries and the home side comfortably beat Southall, as unfortunately most teams are doing this season.

The next morning hop game is scheduled for three weeks-time, and to all you stayaways, in the immortal words of Danny and the Juniors "Come on everybody, let's all do the hop".

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