

TT No.112: Mike Latham - Saturday 5 December 2009: FA Carlsberg Vase Third Round: **Barwell** 2-0 Glossop North End; Attendance: 306; Admission: £5; Programme: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

Though the final of the FA Vase at Wembley Stadium is invariably played on a gloriously sunny afternoon, the right to play at the national stadium is earned on filthy afternoons such as this one in Leicestershire.

The rain came down incessantly during the second half, the pitch was muddy and the ball lost its zip across the surface; it was cold, gloomy and downright miserable. But Barwell battled through it all and could be on course for Wembley after achieving such a big scalp as last year's beaten finalists.

Glossop North End are a club very much on the rise, with some consistent form in the Vodkat (North West Counties) League seeing them established as one of the top sides and they hope ultimately to challenge for promotion to the Unibond League. They have a loyal and good-humoured group of supporters who add a sense of occasion to even the most mundane of away games.

This one was far from mundane, being a game that could well provide one of the finalists in the competition but Glossop fans hung seven huge blue and white flags behind one goal at the Kirkby Road ground that gave the occasion something extra.

Barwell are riding high at the top of the Midland Alliance this season having drawn two and won their remaining 17 league games so far. They are a formidable side with a prolific striking pair of Adam Cunnington and Kevin Charley but the visit of the Hillmen gave them perhaps their biggest test so far.

Barwell's ground is located in a largely residential area on the Kirkby Road out of the town centre. The complex has an impressive club house that is also used by the town's cricket club with the ground having staged three Leicestershire first-class games immediately after the second world war. There's also an indoor bowling club which is located behind the far goal of the football ground.

Barwell FC first appeared on the scene in the 1992/3 season after Hinckley FC joined forces with Barwell Athletic from the Leicestershire Senior League. They later became one of the founder members of the Midland Football Alliance League on its formation in 1994/95 and last season were runners-up to Market Drayton Town.

The village has a population of just over 6,000 and is said to derive its name from a wild boar that used to drink from a well near a brook in the centre. 'Boarwell' later became 'Barwell'. The brook is now called the River Tweed and is a tributary of the River Trent. St Mary's church is the oldest building in the village and dates back to 1220. Barwell owed its prosperity to manufacturing in the shoe, hosiery and knitwear industries but these factories have all but ceased trading. The new

ground of Hinckley United FC is nearby but given the way Barwell have started the season the area could soon have two high-ranking non-league clubs to support.

The football ground is reached by walking past the club house and round the side of the cricket pitch with the main entry alongside the cricket pavilion. Glossop fans had travelled in numbers and appeared to form a majority in the crowd of just over 300.

Once inside the ground is rather modest, a typical Midland Alliance venue in fact. The main, cantilevered stand, opened in 2001, occupies an area to the right of the halfway line on the entrance side of the ground, with the dressing rooms underneath. Alongside it is a small covered standing area. The rest of the ground is open standing with one end dominated by the indoor bowling building and the other two areas backing on to houses, with huge nets erected to stop clearances and misplaced shots entering gardens.

The refreshment bar seemed likely to be over-run by hordes of hungry supporters from Derbyshire who waited patiently in the long queues and then gave their players a heroes' welcome as they emerged from the dressing rooms.

Barwell started the stronger side and were robust in the tackle. It was no great surprise when they took the lead midway through the first half when Cunnington rose unchallenged to head home a right-wing cross. He was fortunate to escape at least a booking, though, for a demented celebration that saw him run 70 yards towards the bulk of the Glossop supporters before sinking to his knees.

Standing behind the goals at the Indoor Bowling club end of the ground showed how deceptive a first glance at the pitch can be. It actually slopes considerably towards this end and Glossop struggled to cope with the intensity of the Barwell play and were fortunate to go in at half-time just one goal in arrears.

Glossop came out much stronger at the start of the second half and not only hit the woodwork but had a good penalty shout turned down. Their frustration increased when the referee awarded the home side a penalty on 69 minutes in almost identical circumstances. Charley converted from the spot and Barwell's progress was virtually assured from that point.

Given the way the Barwell players celebrated their victory on the pitch after the final whistle sounded, they saw Glossop as a very important scalp and on this evidence I would not back against them achieving their Wembley goal. I just hope that when they walk down Wembley Way the weather is altogether better than this miserably cold and wet afternoon in the East Midlands.