

TT No.124: *Chris Freer* - Saturday December 12th 2009; **Sutton United v Kingstonian**; Isthmian League Premier; Score: 1-1; Attendance: 731; Entertainment value: 2/5.

One of our business customers is a well-presented lady with, as far as I am aware, no interest in football whatsoever. She has a wall in her office on which are displayed several pictures under the collective heading 'It's A Woman's World'. One illustration is a mock-up of a cover from a Haynes Motor Manual. It just says 'Blue Car' on the front. Another is of a car fuel gauge which has three marks - green for full, orange for half full, and red for 'Ring Boyfriend'. But the one that makes me smile the most is that of a TV presenter who is proclaiming... "Today's live match between Arsenal and Liverpool will follow after extended coverage of events in Albert Square...." The cheek, eh?

I bring this up because I am on my way to the capital today and although it's not the East End I'm heading for, a local derby in 'Sarf' London will surely raise the temperature to Albert Square levels. One can only hope.

I decide to travel by rail for a change, despite fares having gone up dramatically over the last twelve months or so. At least it gives me a chance to take my morning walk through theatreland and down the Mall, where I am overtaken by a speeding convoy featuring some royal or other. At the Willow Walk I get an extra veggie sausage on my plate, no doubt making up for the lack of Hash Browns I suffered in Glasgow last week. Then it's the short rail journey to Sutton, where my choice of hostelry is limited to two more Wetherspoons, followed by a Youngs pub, the Robin Hood. As I sit supping my pint of Youngs Winter Warmer in the latter, I remember exactly what it is that a real community local has that a Wetherspoons will always struggle to replicate - atmosphere.

I head for the ground, pausing only to check whether the local Holland & Barratt has sold its one Scotch Egg of the day. I've found that each branch only ever has the one daily egg, so you have to get in there quick. Today is my lucky day. There's around a 20-minute walk from the town centre to the ground. You can in fact get a train from Waterloo to West Sutton which will take you virtually to the doorstep, but you'd miss out on the pubs, and as I like a pint, I prefer to suffer the extra footslog.

The Borough Sports Ground used to feature a running track with a pitch in the middle. Evidence of this still exists at one end, but the rest of the stadium is reasonably well developed, with raised terracing all the way round, a decent sized main stand, and covered standing areas on one side and behind a goal. The bar - best accessed from outside the ground prior to the game - is under the main stand and soon gets pretty busy, due to its compact nature. The good news is live footy via Sky Sports, a food hatch selling (albeit pricy) veggie-burgers, and two handpumps on the bar, dispensing Directors and an excellent pint of Bombardier.

With a tough local derby ahead of them, I fear for a team playing in - according to the official programme - amber and chocolate! What's that all about? Looks like yellow and brown, to me. Prior to the game Sutton are a handy 8th in the table with visiting Kingstonian flying in third. Although not played at such a breakneck pace as I've been used to suffering in recent weeks, there is a lot of venom going into the tackling, players no doubt stoked up by the banter of the two sets of fans, who clearly have little respect for each other's town. I smile when I hear the visitors refer to Sutton's home with a 'shit ground, No fans' refrain. They're soon reminded of their own shortcomings as the locals respond with 'Shit fans, no ground'...

As I reflect on a dour and reasonably uneventful first half, half a dozen chaps walk past wearing Crombies. If indeed the long-awaited 'Smoothy' revival is underway, I'm well up for that. The game kicks off in the second half with no quarter asked and no quarter given. Kingstonian take the lead and the atmosphere hots up. Tackles clearly designed to take man and ball become the norm, and when Sutton equalise late on from a suspiciously offside position, the referee knows his ear-battering is only going to reach critical levels.

The Kingstonian contingent continue to pour scorn on their hosts, spurring a young blond woman pushing a pram and towing a youngster to hurl a volley of abuse in their general direction. Tribal warfare, feisty blonds, dodgy language ... It's more like a scene from Eastenders, only, of course that's real life. This is just a football match.

There's more on my blog at <http://flynn123.wordpress.com>

Ramblings from the only real ale swilling veggie in football...

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