

TT No. 164: Mike Latham - Sat 20 February 2010: Skill-training Northern League Div. 1: **Dunston UTS** 3-1 Horden CW; Attendance: 100 (h/c); Admission: £4.50; 52pp Programme: 50pence; Raffle ticket: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

Another Saturday morning dawned with deep frost outside the bedroom window and the prospect of football matches being postponed due to icy pitches, but the excellent MetOffice website gave clues to eager groundhoppers with the time and patience to weigh up the options. The north-east appeared to have been let-off relatively unscathed and a check telephone call to a friendly Dunston official brought confirmation that the game was on- good enough for me.

After a relatively straightforward journey north, the traffic slowing only as Newcastle was approached due to a combination of the Toon being at home and shoppers going to the Metro Centre, the ground of the re-named Dunston UTS was easily found, just half-a-mile or so from the A1.

Dunston was once a small village in its own right but these days it is absorbed into the metropolitan district of Gateshead. Located south of the River Tyne it is the home town of Paul Gascoigne and Brian Johnson, the lead singer of AC/DC.

The roots of the football club are recent ones; formed in 1975 as what the excellent programme describes as a 'humble works outfit' they progressed through local leagues into the Wearside League in 1987 and then the Northern League three years later. In those days the Dunston Federation Brewery provided considerable assistance and sponsorship, enabling ground improvements at what became known as Federation Park. The club quickly established itself and have won the first division championship on two occasions and the league cup five times, a tremendous achievement.

I knew that Dunston were a club highly respected by groundhoppers for the warmth of the welcome and was not to be disappointed. The gateman proffered a cheery smile and kindly gave me a potted history of the club, his pride at being involved clearly evident. There were 15 or so committee members, he said, and all had their own job to do. The club had faced a challenge after losing its main sponsor two years ago. The Federation Brewery, sponsors of the club from 1987 to 2005, had been taken over by Scottish & Newcastle Breweries who continued sponsorship for a further two seasons before withdrawing.

But thanks to the support of other sponsors and followers of the club the potentially disastrous loss of such welcome patronage had been mitigated. Several locally based firms had become involved and during the last closed season UTS Engineering Limited became the principal sponsor and hence the club name was changed From Dunston Federation to Dunston UTS and the name of the ground changed to the UTS Stadium with company owner Shaun Sadler becoming Club President.

The club had, my new friend explained, obtained the necessary ground grading to move up into the UniBond League should the opportunity arise but this was a potentially massive step that needed to be thought-through carefully.

The ground is simply immaculate with not a piece of litter anywhere, any graffiti or a speck of dust to be seen. It reminded me of a trip to Brocton near Stafford last season, another club with an active committee and an obvious pride in their surroundings. Located in a semi-residential and industrial area with an elevated position affording views across the valley, the ground has a smart seated stand on one side and a neat covered standing area opposite. The club house and tea bar are situated behind the far goals. The rest of the ground is open standing. The tea bar was excellent and, as a nice touch, team sheets are posted on notice boards around the ground. The programme is an outstanding effort packed full of information.

Dunston went into the game in third place in the league, their opponents were third bottom of the table. But the visitors were arguably the better side in the first-half played on a heavy pitch on a dry but chilly afternoon. Though Dunston finally took the lead just before the hour-mark through Neil Tarrant's close-range goal Horden equalised when Chris Dunwell headed home a free-kick. But two goals by Fergal Harkin, a former Bohemians player, gave Dunston the points.

It would be the most churlish or critical groundhopper who would not thoroughly enjoy a trip to Dunston- an outstandingly friendly and approachable club with a host of officials who clearly and quite rightly take an enormous pride in their team. It was a top-drawer afternoon.

06/20