

TT No.165: Chris Freer - Saturday February 20th 2010; **Corinthian-Casuals v Croydon Athletic**; Isthmian League Division One South; Score: 2-4; Crowd: 107; Entertainment value: 4/5.

Never under-estimate the importance of good communications. How history could have been changed by just one mobile phone call. "Just passed an iceberg, watch it, it's a big 'un..." "There's more Zulus over that hill..." "If you're going to Hastings, watch out for them arrers..." Equally so, I'm not sure how I ever survived my youthhood by not knowing where all my mates were at any given moment (we got round it by just meeting in the pub, same time every night.)

There are four young lads behind me in the ticket queue at Waterloo station. They're panicking because they can't get a reception on their phone. I empathise because I've been relying on mine all morning, after setting up my base camp in the Willow Walk in Victoria regularly scanning the Mitoo Isthmian League website (the official Isthmian site is pants) for updates about who's on and who's off. This winter has certainly been a stern test for groundhopping, and I estimate that already this season I've arrived at my jumping-off point at least four times to find my chosen game called off. Make that five today as my planned day out in Chatham is scuppered early doors.

Granted I don't know the local conditions, but I can't help but think that a 10.00am pitch inspection after a frosty night is not really giving the ground a chance. With the sun coming up and a sweltering 4 or 5 degrees predicted, surely midday makes more sense, especially as most games in the Isthmian South are essentially local derbies. It's not as if the away team is travelling from Exeter, or wherever!

After two and a half hours in the pub, I still don't know where I'm heading but I reason that, with many of the surviving fixtures requiring a rail trip from Waterloo, I should decamp the mile and a half across the Thames. When I arrive another check on my I-phone reveals nothing new so it's time to make some calls. The first one comes up trumps and I'm on my way to Tolworth to visit Corinthian-Casuals.

A Zone 1-6 Travelcard (£7.50) is sufficient to buy passage to Tolworth, and King George's Field is about ten to fifteen-minutes-walk alongside the speeding A3. Duck under the railway bridge and there is the ground. No fear of frost here, as the adjacent playing fields are positively boggy. The stadium is not exactly state-of-the-art but the whole set-up smacks of a community club, steeped in the traditions associated with the names. The cover over the terracing, essentially a roof over scaffolding, is celebrated by a plaque on the wall thanking the chaps that put it up. There's a similar structure behind each goal, and a seated stand of comparable proportions.

The snack bar looks very unpromising (chips again!) so I dive into the clubhouse which is not massive but adequate for the kinds of crowds the club gets. There's

sports TV and although a scan of the bar reveals no cask beer, there are bottles of Spitfire in the fridge. The barman is doing a sterling job, serving customers whilst holding the phone to his ear confirming to callers that, yes, the game is most definitely on. The power of communication!

And a reasonably entertaining game it is too. The home team, in their distinctive brown and pink halved shirts, are the underdogs against league leaders-elect Croydon Athletic (about to go top when Folkestone's 10-point deduction kicks in) but enjoy a bright opening half hour in which they take a well-earned lead, only to be pegged back as the visitors finally get their game going. After the break Croydon start to dominate and go in front, only for the home side to square the game. It's all see-saw stuff and despite once again going behind, Corinthians have a chance to level it up from the spot. The ball ends up on the adjacent playing fields, possibly the worst-struck penalty I've ever seen.

Another goal for Croydon and the game is up. There's been some sparkling attacking football with no little skill and it ranks as one of the better matches I've witnessed recently. The Croydon coach has shouted himself hoarse for most of the game, with much of his advice directed at the referee. Maybe a direct mobile phone connection between match officials and touchline coaching staff could be the answer to curbing some of the profanity that echoes around small grounds such as this!

As I arrive back at St Pancras station following my post-match warm-down (couple of ESBs and a curry) I am still marvelling at the way good communication has saved my day. I didn't waste a train ticket travelling to Chatham only to find the game was off, thus preserving valuable drinking time. Then I'm reminded that, even in these enlightened times, the rail services can still get it wrong. The line is blocked up near Leicester, and most trains are cancelled. People are standing around wondering what's going off, and the signage is giving no clues. The staff are courteous but they know very little.

I'm eventually directed onto one that is going to Long Eaton, then they announce that it's not and so I get off. Then they announce that it is again and I get back on. They don't tell me that it's detouring round Melton Mowbray and will not arrive in L.E. until one in the morning. Communication. eh? Who needs it?

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

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