

TT No.175: *Chris Freer* - Saturday February 27th 2010; **Whyteleafe** v Worthing; Isthmian Division One South; Score: 1-4; Attendance: 146; Entertainment value: 5/5.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe I may have mentioned the weather on odd occasions in my recent posts. It's not been THAT bad a winter really, not like the ones when I was a kid when we tunnelled our way to school through ten-foot snowdrifts. It took a lot to get a game called off in those days. In my early formulative years watching Leicester City (before a new god stood before me and his name was Brian) it was commonplace to watch games on any surface other than grass. It was mainly sand at Filbert Street, and certainly one match played on snow at St Andrews.

So, I do get a bit cynical about all these 'waterlogged pitch' and 'frozen ground' lines appearing under the latest rash of postponements. I fear it is the modern-day health & safety scourge that allows players - given the choice - to influence management and ultimately referees in deciding whether a match takes place or not. Either that or the man in black and his cohorts just don't fancy it (I mean the rearranged game is another pay-day, isn't it?).

It's a familiar pattern today. I've come to London armed with a portfolio of alternatives should my chosen match at Fleet receive the dreaded 'P' against its name, which it subsequently does. I wile away the time in the Willow Walk educating visiting French tourists about the weird ordering protocol in this country (go to the bar, tell 'em where you're sitting, order your food and pay for it there and then). Seems logical to me but then I'm not French.

Given that I'm in Victoria I decide to go for the Whyteleafe option, but make a call just in case. 'Pitch is fine' says the voice on the other end, 'unless it rains...' Wow, that's reassuring. A Zone 1-4 railcard gets me into Surrey, and I arrive at Whyteleafe station at 12.30 with no idea of the pub situation. The Whyteleafe Tavern opposite the station doesn't look that inviting but I'm wrong. It's a busy community pub and on entering I'm asked 'Are you here for the Football?' Why, are they expecting some troublesome away fans then? No, transpires they're showing the Chelsea game on one TV around the corner, so that's where I head. The Shepherd Neame Spitfire is in pretty good nick too, so I settle down for a pre-match session.

Whyteleafe's Church Road ground is about seven or eight minutes from the pub, and is tucked away down a leafy suburban street. The focal point of the ground is a large covered seated stand behind one goal, whilst a smaller seated stand straddles the halfway line. Either side of this is uncovered stepped terracing. Behind the other goal and on the other side is covered flat standing. The clubhouse is outside the ground and benefits from big-screen TV footy, and Fullers London

Pride on handpump. As Fullers is one of my favourite brewers. I feel it rude not to indulge. Foodwise it's veggie soup or 'nowt'.

The pitch is certainly playable but I do see why the man on the phone was fearful of rain. There are several dips and hollows where potential ponds could form, and no amount of the sand that is in evidence would ward off a sustained deluge. Fortunately, the rain stays away and we have a game. And a good game it is too, with promotion hopefuls Worthing in town. I saw them despatch a poor Whitstable side early in the season, so I know they can play some good football. Whyteleafe find that out the painful way, going 0-4 down before a late home strike in the first half.

There's pain on the Worthing side too, as their centre half is laid spark out in a seemingly accidental collision. He's not in a good way and the ambulance turns up to whisk him to the nurses. The visitors have bought with them a good contingent of supporters and the grumpy old men amongst their number - practically all of them - are keen to advise the referee of the shocking nature of the challenge. In fact, the ones in front of me are having a go at anyone and everyone, including the giant home keeper, who studies them with disdain and makes a mental note. They are noticeably quieter after that.

The second half opens with a flurry of attacks from Whyteleafe, but woodwork strikes, good goalkeeping and rank bad finishing keep them three goals in arrears. Worthing respond on the break and for much of the half its end-to-end stuff, very enjoyable despite the lack of any further scoring. It's one of those games where you feel there will be a goal with every attack and well worth the entry fee. And that's despite a pitch that's somewhat less than conducive to good football.

So, for yet another Saturday I get to see a match, but not the one I originally scheduled. Now I can't be sure, but I doubt that my day at Fleet would have been more enjoyable than the afternoon spent in Whyteleafe. So, for that I have to thank the weather. It rained in Hampshire but not here!

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

compiled by the only veggie in football...

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