

TT No 178: *Andy Gallon* - Sat 6th March 2010; **Wolviston** v Windscale; Wearside League; Res: 2-3; Att: 24 (h/c); Admission: £2; Programme: 50p (16pp); FGIF Match Rating: ****.

For my money, Metcalfe Park is the pick of the Wearside League grounds, many of which are little more than railed-off pitches. This attractive venue is fully enclosed, and though it lacks hardstanding and floodlights, there is a decent-sized stand on the far touchline and the presence of tall evergreens on two sides gives it a homely, intimate atmosphere.

The ground, named after Harry Metcalfe, a former club chairman who died in 1986, is a mile west of Wolviston, one of Teesside's most appealing villages. Admittedly, the competition is not fierce. This affluent community boasts a duck pond, two greens, and little darlings on horseback. It is way too posh for anything as proletarian as a football ground, therefore Metcalfe Park is located in Wynyard, on the other side of the A19 dual carriageway. The site is shared with Wolviston Cricket Club, of the North Yorkshire and South Durham League, and whose Armstrong Park ground is the closer to the village. The cricketers also chose to honour one of their stalwarts. Harry Armstrong, who died in 1995, was a former club captain, groundsman, chairman, president and patron.

The two clubs use a common car park adjacent to Wynyard Road. It is unmade and backs on to the north end of the football ground. Football and cricket also share the same changing rooms, social club and toilets, which are in a dreary, flat-roofed building, opened in 1988, and accessed via the gate to Armstrong Park. It means the footballers have to trot down a taped-off path, and reach Metcalfe Park through a gate in the north-eastern corner. A pay hut is positioned just inside. Note here the memorial to Harry Metcalfe, and another to Eddie Poole, who died in 2008 after 46 years' service as player, manager and chairman. The interlocking evergreens, about 20 feet high, run the length of the east touchline and the north end. After such a dreadful winter, the grass around - and on - the pitch was absolutely sodden. A barrier of concrete posts and metal rails surrounds the playing surface, which cut up badly, but was reckoned by the home players to be far superior to their previous game here.

The sole stand, of red brick and about 20 yards long, straddles the halfway line on the west touchline. Unusually, its side walls form part of the structure of the adjacent dug-outs. One on each side makes for pleasing symmetry. A lick of paint, particularly on the timeworn fascia, which announces the name of both club and venue, would not go amiss. The stand contains three rows of red plastic tip-up seats, and benches at the back, with plastic screens at each end. The south end of Metcalfe Park is narrow, open and dominated by two leafless oaks towering above the grey metal sheeting perimeter fence. Over to the south-east and south there is a good view of ICI Billingham's smoking chimney stacks, and the linear range of the Cleveland Hills. The most obvious peak on the horizon is the 1,049ft Roseberry

Topping, nicknamed 'Cleveland's Matterhorn' because of its conical shape, which owes more to a geological fault and alum and ironstone mining than erosion. Power lines, sweeping from east to west, rather spoil the prospect.

Not a great deal to play for in this fixture between teams in the bottom half of the table. The players didn't appear to care because it was an energetic contest decided in the last minute after an exciting finish. Such a thrilling finale didn't look likely in the first half, which, though tight and competitive, lacked goalmouth action. Windscale, from the west Cumbria town of Egremont (once described, memorably, by musician/comic Mike Harding as "the gateway to oblivion"), were the better side. Despite missing five regulars (oh, the joys of shift work at the Sellafield nuclear plant), and the pitch resembling rice pudding, the visitors moved the ball around sweetly and easily. Wolviston, predictable as the drizzle, didn't manage a shot on goal in the opening 45 minutes, but Scales went close from distance, without forcing a save from Jamie Lawrence, through Sean Pollen, Kevin Holliday and Dean Rogers.

The game finally exploded into life in the 66th minute when Windscale broke the deadlock. Wolves defender Daniel Rowbotham allowed the ball to squirm under his attempted trap, and the nippy Rogers got away down the inside-right channel. His ball gave substitute Ricky Parnaby a one-on-one, and after Lawrence had made the block, Holliday side-footed the rebound confidently from 20 yards into an empty net. Seven minutes later, the hosts equalised. Nathan Summersgill's corner from the left picked out skipper Lee Butterworth, whose, angled 10-yard header had enough power to roll past Ryan Fitzwilliam's attempted fly-hack on the goal-line.

Windscale restored their lead within 60 seconds. Rogers, a tricky customer, again found space on the right flank for a cross, and Andrew Hurley, arriving in the box late, clipped the ball wide of Lawrence into the far bottom corner. Now things were livening up! Parnaby wasted a great chance in the 77th minute, taking too long to control the ball, and shooting weakly at the home keeper. With five minutes left, Wolviston made it 2-2. Michael Arthur sent over a corner from the right to the back post, Guy Whatmore nodded it back across goal, and unmarked substitute Daniel Shiels prodded it into the net from a couple of yards. Three minutes later, the Wolves were aggrieved not to be awarded a penalty. From where I sat, it looked as though Fitzwilliam caught Whatmore's heels on the right side of the box, but the referee, in no position to see the incident clearly, waved play on. The hosts were close again four minutes later when keeper James Dolan had to get down quickly into the mud to clutch a goal-bound Whatmore header. But Windscale, enjoying a mid-season revival under new player-manager Matt Henney, the former Barrow and Workington midfielder, added insult to that penalty decision injury by scoring the winner in the 90th minute. More slack defending from Wolviston saw possession conceded on the right, and when Hurley pulled the ball back from the bye-line, Parnaby, all alone 12 yards out, found the top corner of Lawrence's net with a crisp effort.

Most clubs in the inaccurately-titled Wearside League (this was Teesside versus Cumbria) represent a long trek for travellers, but Metcalfe Park, one of the more

southerly, really is worth making the effort. Wolviston, run by a friendly bunch of people, and who field seven junior teams, also take the trouble to issue a programme - an increasing rarity in this competition. It's a shame they struggle so badly for spectators, though, with Billingham's two Northern League clubs, Synthonia and Town, camped on their doorstep, small crowds are no real surprise.

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