

TT No.186: Justin Holmes - Sat 13th March 2010; **Penrhiwceiber Rangers** v Newport YMCA; Welsh League Div. 2; Venue: Glasbrook Field, Penrhiwceiber; Score: 3-2; Admission: £2.00; Programme: 50p; Att: 50; Match Rating: 5.

This was one of those groundhopping days when I unearthed an absolute gem, when I was thoroughly impressed with every aspect of the day and left with not the slightest tinge of disappointment. Having booked a coach trip to Cardiff some months ago, the original plan was to stay in the surrounding area to watch a game in the Welsh League (no club in the League of Wales is based anywhere near Cardiff), and watch Cardiff Corinthians, Dinas Powys or Cardiff Bay Harlequins. Once I realised that today would be blessed with blue skies and sunshine, I decided to be a little more adventurous and search for one of the many picturesque settings in the Valleys. On arriving in Cardiff by coach and spending a short time wandering around the very pleasant city centre, I embarked on the 45-minute train ride northwards to Penrhiwceiber, enjoying the intermittently beautiful scenery as the train wound its way alongside the River Taff and into the Cynon Valley.

Penrhiwceiber is a small village which itself is not particularly attractive, however the football ground, which is a couple of minutes-walk from the village centre and a little more from the train station, most certainly is. Glasbrook Field, which is fully enclosed but does not have floodlights (as is the case with most Welsh league grounds) has a steep hill mostly covered with trees as the backdrop behind one side of the pitch which has a small covered stand, whilst the other side, which has a shallow bank of stone terrace along its length, also has a more distant steep hill in the background, but is more immediately lined by a row of houses. Behind either goal there is just hard standing. All in all, this was a thoroughly inspiring and beautiful rural arena for a football match. A superb programme was sold for just 50p on entering the ground. It contains 32 colour pages printed on good quality paper, with an attractive cover and layout, all the essential stats and more, and pen-pics for players of both teams. And all for just 50p - it puts to shame vastly inferior programmes sold for £1.50 or more at similar or even higher-level clubs.

Everything pointed to a home win today. Penrhiwceiber went into this game top of the league, thanks to beating previous table-toppers Cwmbran Celtic away the previous weekend, and look in a strong position to gain promotion in a couple of months-time, having narrowly missed out last season. Today's visitors, Newport YMCA, are struggling at the other end of the table, although with a comfortable cushion from the relegation zone and they have games in hand on most of the teams surrounding them in the league.

The game started off with Penrhiwceiber very much on the front foot, and it was no surprise when they opened up a two-goal lead, and their attacking, expansive style of football was impressive and enjoyable to watch. Maybe they had reached the comfort zone at this point, as they definitely seemed to take their foot off the gas once they had scored their second goal, and by half time, Newport YMCA were

level thanks to some sloppy defending. At half time, this was a game that could have swung either way, Penrhiwceiber always looking the better team and made most of the attacking move, however Newport always looked capable of scoring on the break.

Ten minutes into the second half, Penrhiwceiber scored what turned out to be the winner, and although there was no further scoring, the match was competitive with action at both ends throughout, played in an excellent spirit, and Newport could probably count themselves unlucky not to have snatched a draw, as they camped themselves in the Penrhiwceiber half throughout the last quarter of the match. The quality of the football on show today was certainly quite impressive.

As I made my way back to the train station to embark on the long journey home, I reflected on a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon of football, probably the most all-round enjoyable experiences of the season. I would thoroughly recommend a visit to Penrhiwceiber if a friendly club playing at a naturally beautiful, rural setting and who produce an excellent programme is what you are looking for.

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