

TT No.187: Paul Roth - Sat March 13th 2010; Hellenic League Division 1 West; **Lydney Town** vs. Cheltenham Saracens; Res: 0-1; Att: 37; Entry: £3; Programme: 24pps, £1; Weather: Sunny and hot; Altitude: The Lydney Recreation Trust Ground is 7m (22.965 ft) above sea level.

My co-pilot, navigator and long-standing friend Alan Beecham was in the ejector seat next to me for today's excursion to Gloucestershire, where we took in the Hellenic League Division 1 west fixture between Lydney Town and high-flying Cheltenham Saracens.

AB and myself have known each other for 35 years I guess, when he co-produced the Dover FC programme and I first started supporting the club. We actually did a bit of groundhopping ourselves, at the back end of the 1970s and early 80s, but went our separate ways, until a few seasons ago that is, when we met-up again at a mid-week match somewhere in east Kent. One conversation led to another and Alan, who is presently quite involved with Hythe Town FC, is now my permanent companion whenever I cross the Channel to watch football there. He has a more than passing interest in the Hellenic League himself, having 'ticked-off' numerous clubs in the three divisions, so this was an ideal opportunity to get the 'Monkey' that is Lydney Town FC off our respective backs (various impediments have curtailed our respective attempts to visit the club over the years).

Those who know Alan may be unaware that he's an accomplished linguist, even speaking fluent Mandarin; a virtuoso cellist and has a degree in seismology. So, if you're ever in Xiangtan trying to locate the whereabouts of the Peoples' Municipal Stadium, need a quick rendition of "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles" or want to know if an earthquake's imminent, he's your man!

A rendezvous in Faversham at the ridiculously early hour of 7.45 am had us crossing the M48 Severn Bridge into Wales by 10.52 hrs, in time for a relaxed cuppa in an appropriate lay-by just north of Chepstow. Like myself, Alan is also a member of CAMRA, so before decamping to Lydney itself a tour around some of the area's watering holes was undertaken. It's a part of the country neither of us knows but can now unreservedly vouch for its beauty and excellence of its country pubs. It is hard to imagine but a reality, especially from an aesthetical perspective, that the brutal industry of coal mining once played such an important part in the local community's economy. En-route we did also try to locate Ellwood FC's headquarters but with time flying by this pastime was aborted.

Lydney Town FC's headquarters are found at the end of Swan Lane, just off the High Street, 1.118 miles distant from the A48 by-pass and set back from the scenic Severn Estuary. Go past Regentsholme, the impressive home of Lydney RUFC, and the attractive cricket club to find abundant parking available next door to and in front of the club's slightly dated clubhouse.

We paid £3 each to the man on the 'table' to gain entry which included a colourful, informative and professionally produced 24-page programme. Immediately on surveying the ground, we both commented to the table-man what wonderful condition the pitch was in. He explained to us that the playing surface is the finest in the county with probably the best drainage of any pitch in southern England.

The stadium is fully railed, has six floodlight pylons, three on each side, and has black and white striped netting adorning each goal frame. Having the aforementioned sports venues as a backdrop (the rugby club were entertaining Barnes RUFC in a National League Division Two South match), coupled with the nearby Dean Forest Railway, fully operational during our brief stay as it happens, running along its western flank, the arena is an idyllic place to watch football.

To emphasise the area's predominantly rugby-playing preference, the football club's attendance of just 37 was outnumbered eleven-fold at yonder rugby stadium. Currently lying in pole position, 'Saras' are the division's leading goal scorers and have been finding the back of their opponents' net with alacrity of late. With Town languishing in mid-table, a comfortable away victory was assumed.

After half an hour's domination and having just taken the lead with a well taken goal via a Chris Pates lob, our presumptions seemed spot on. It's not to say the home side weren't in it, they were, but the visitors patently possessed the more polish. After the teatime interval that all changed, as the men in black and white laid siege to their guests' goal; try as they might and despite hitting the crossbar, having countless shots parried by 'stopper Sam Gilder and numerous chances squandered, Cheltenham Saracens hung on for an undeserved win. When you're top of the league lady luck always seems to go your way.

It's my opinion that "hanging on" to the football in one corner of the field at all costs, with no intention of trying to play the game, constitutes un-gentlemanly conduct in my book and ultimately wins no friends. If a player shielded the ball in such a way in the centre circle, then I'm certain referees everywhere would award a free kick for obstruction. Talking of referees, Andy Davies had an excellent match throughout and showed great common sense in allowing the players to take on board liquid during such a gruelling afternoon weather-wise, today of course being the warmest day of the year! We thoroughly enjoyed our brief stay at the LRTG, the varying array of ancient railway rolling stock that trundled by but most of all that glorious, health-giving, warm sunshine.

In summary-great fun!

FGIF Star Rating: 5*.

06/20