

TT No.190: *Andy Gallon* - Sat 20th March 2010; **Liversedge** v Nostell MW; Northern Counties East League Prem Division; Res: 3-3; Att: 55; Admission: £5; Programme: £1.20 (40pp); FGIF Match Rating: *****.

Another Saturday, another best laid plan sabotaged by this winter's lousy weather. Getting tiresome, isn't it? It's a sad fact that many clubs well down the pyramid, appealing destinations though they may be, simply do not have the resources to get a game on when the conditions are as inclement as they have been of late. This match, at a venue I last visited in 1994, and had no desire to see again, was option number four after torrential overnight and morning rain left Pennine pitches flooded. Groundhopping beggars can't be choosers, and we were lucky to get a game in at all. The referee (thankfully one with some common sense) passed the Clayborn pitch fit just 30 minutes before kick-off. The surface was saturated, but playable, and the fact this contest turned out to be an end-to-end cracker came as some consolation in what is proving a frustrating and forgettable season.

Clayborn is a pleasant little set-up near the foot of the Spen Valley, and a visit during daylight hours affords the best opportunity to enjoy the scenery. It's hidden away at the bottom of a single-track road - Quaker Lane - dropping steeply between houses. Given the constrained access, the ground's spacious setting comes as a surprise. The unmade car park is at the west end of the site. A turnstile to the left of the smaller stand's rear wall brings the spectator out close to the north-west corner. Immediately, you will notice how the ground is located on a shelf in terrain falling from north to south. The two stands, at the west end and on the north side, sit atop grassy banks, well above pitch level. The most pleasing feature is a pavilion, high on a perch above the north-west corner. This houses the dressing rooms, a social club and a kitchen/refreshment hatch. Two railed-off paths, one for players, another for spectators, wind down the bank to reach the pitch. More cricket than football, really, but undeniably charming.

With the land rising on all four sides, the ground feels as though it's in a bowl. The main stand, positioned between the penalty areas on the north side, is a modern cantilever. It has a breeze block superstructure, and a girder-mounted roof. Three rows of wonderful wooden tip-up seats on metal frames raise it above the ordinary. They're the sort you see or saw in Football League stands built during the 1920s and 1930s. I suspect these examples used to adorn the main stand at nearby Leeds Road, Huddersfield. It's a shame Liversedge haven't laid them out them properly because, without the correct risers, they leave spectators with knees under chins, and in discomfort very quickly. We were standing after 10 minutes. A floodlight mast, one of three on each side, burrows through the roof next to the halfway line. The stand is cut into a grassy bank, which backs onto houses to the rear.

The stone stand at the north end, positioned right behind the goal, is boxy, squat and deep. It shelters terracing, and has a roof supported by what appear to be five

sawn-off telegraph poles. Concrete hardstanding skirts the ground, with the south side, which features two breeze block dug outs, and east end open to the elements. Spare land behind each leads up to the perimeter fence. What is now the Spen Valley Greenway runs to the rear of the east end. This was formerly a Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway line linking Mirfield, in the Calder Valley, with Low Moor, on the south-eastern outskirts of Bradford, and once a busy junction with a station, yard and engine shed. All gone now. The Greenway is metalled, and its varied seven miles provide a lovely linear park for cyclists, horse riders and walkers. A mile or two south, the old line, on a high embankment, runs past the historic Beck Lane ground of West Riding County Amateur League club Littleton. Metal railings enclose the pitch, and at each end are filled in with light blue boards, which feature an attractive use of the club's name and crest.

Relegation-threatened visitors Nostell started the game third bottom, and without a victory in seven outings. Liversedge, safe in mid-table, soon took control, and were 2-0 up after 23 minutes. Jermaine Springer's clearing header caught the opposition defence on the hop, and Jamie Wasley raced away before calmly dinking the ball over Sam Dobbs once the advancing keeper had committed himself. Ryan Haigh cleared a Graham Marchant header off the line as Nostell sought a rapid response, but Sedge doubled their advantage after a bout of pinball in the penalty area. Scott Ryan's low drive from the right was pushed out by Dobbs, and when Brook Newton sliced his follow-up effort, an alert Ben Hardy diverted it into the net from close range.

So far, so predictable. Then came an astonishing change-round. With 31 minutes gone, Nostell got back into the contest. Dave Nicholas sent an unsophisticated up and under into the box, and Josh Hope sneaked in ahead of his marker at the near post to volley past Stuart Wilkinson. The Sedge keeper then saved superbly from Marchant, but Nostell levelled four minutes before the break. Tom Hope sent a corner deep to the back post, and namesake Josh rose well to nod in his second. The visitors edged ahead with a goal in the second minute of stoppage time. Another Tom Hope corner from the right - and again the hosts failed to deal with it. A partial clearance fell to Nicholas just outside the box, and he cracked a sublime half-volley past Wilkinson.

The second half was much tighter, but no less competitive. Wasley almost chipped Dobbs five minutes in, but we had to wait until the 76th minute for Sedge's equaliser. Dobbs made a hash of clearing a Gareth North back-pass, and Hardy returned it with interest from 25 yards, ramming a confident effort low into the bottom corner. Now, it was anyone's game. Dobbs did well to block a thumping drive from Wasley, and Nostell's Jimmy Jagger was just too high on the turn from 12 yards. Jagger then got an even clearer sight of goal, but could not beat Wilkinson, who stood tall and batted away his 10-yarder. Nostell were indebted to Dobbs for a point which could be priceless as the keeper pulled off a brilliant double save with three minutes left. First, he got in the way of a Wasley shot when the home striker was left unmarked in front of goal, and he then pushed the follow-up effort round a post.

So, we made the best of another bad job, and were fortunate to happen upon such an exciting match. But - surely - with the clocks going forward this weekend, that's got to be the last of the awful weather. Hasn't it?

06/20