

TT 197: Emma Jones - Tues 16th March 2010; Dunkirk v Holbrook MW (at **Gedling MW**); **East Midlands Counties League Cup semi-final**; Res: 2-1 (AET); Att: 86; Admission: £4; Prog: £1.50 (28pp); FGIF Match Rating: ****.

A middling wet, middling cold day. I'm away for work and have three choices for my evening meal - room service, dinner with colleagues, or a pie at a match. What will be least middling, and give me (and my partner, vicariously) the most enjoyment? As I am writing this for a groundhopping site, you can work it out for yourselves. Although, in the interests of accuracy, I should say that I had burger and chips, and very nice they were, too. Crinkle chips - I haven't had those since I was a kid.

Gedling Miners' Welfare were the neutral hosts for this match, a semi-final of the East Midlands Counties League Cup, between Dunkirk and Holbrook Miners' Welfare, and far from middling hosts they were. Their ground in Mapperley is tidy and well-presented, and I received a warm welcome, and directions to the handy on-site car parking; this is to be found down an unmade lane running between the ground and the next-door leisure centre. You are let in via wooden gates, aim for the tea hut, make a sharp right turn before you demolish both hut and queue, and turn left to see a broad, gravelled patch of parking before you. It is well-lit, easily visible from the hard standing behind the pitch, and, best of all, is included in the admission price. There is a bright, cheerful social club at right angles to the tea bar. They hug the north-west corner of the ground, which runs parallel with Plains Road, some three miles out of Nottingham city centre. There is hard standing around the ground, with nets at both ends, and two covered walkways running along the bottom side, one either side of the dugouts. Each provides cover for 24 seats in a single row, and extends beyond the seats at each end to protect the visitor from the drizzle that seems to be inevitable in England in March. The cover, seats and floodlights, and much of the rest of the work that has turned Gedling MW from a park pitch into the appealing set-up of today, have all come about since the early Noughties.

Neither team had played at Gedling MW since last October, but both quickly found their feet on a slightly uneven pitch, but one in generally good condition, despite the ravages of this winter. I started as neutrally as the hosts, but found myself warming to Dunkirk's pacey style. The teams were well-matched, though, and each in their turn was fast, or passed neatly, then failed to finish. At times, the play was scrappy and a little testy, but always lively. Holbrook took the honours for the first yellow card, and Dunkirk for the first goal, despite Holbrook having several chances in the 25 minutes leading up to it. Clumsy defending dropped the ball at the feet of Dunkirk's Lee Day, who wasted no time driving it home.

The second half started with more antler-rattling, and missed opportunities on both sides. At times, the movement from one end to the other felt uncontrolled, almost frenetic, but both teams gradually fell into more measured play as the half

progressed. It was Holbrook, though, who regained more composure, with Dave Moon shooting home a long ball to bring them level after 75 minutes. And there it stayed at full time, and to almost the end of extra time. With barely a minute left on the clock, Jarrod Westcarr, who had come on close to the end of the 90 minutes, and was clearly fresh, and very nippy, took his moment of glory. A lovely pass gave him a shot, which the Holbrook keeper, Damien Clark, who'd had a good game, deflected. Unfortunately for Clark, it flew straight back to Westcarr, who wasn't going to miss his second chance, and rammed it into the corner. 2-1, in the 118th minute. Exciting stuff. Dunkirk now meet Gedling Town in the final.

As a relative newcomer to the game, I was rather looking forward to my first penalty shoot-out, but I was also, to be honest, pleased to be heading back to the warmth of my hotel. Judging by the comments of my colleagues over breakfast next morning, I had the more thrilling, if somewhat colder, evening.

06/20