

TT No.213: *Paul Roth* - Sat April 10th 2010; The AFA Senior Cup Final; NOTTSBOROUGH FC vs. WINCHMORE HILL FC; Played at **Norsemen FC**, Edmonton Sports and Social Club, Church Street, Edmonton, London N9; Res:0-3 Att:400 Programme:24 pages for a donation that will be given in entirety to the NSPCC; Weather: Majestically Spring-like; Altitude: The Edmonton S&S Club is 23m (75.459 ft) above sea level.

The AFA was formed in 1907, when the Football Association required all county associations to admit professional clubs. Originally called the Amateur Football Defence Foundation, the name was quickly changed to Amateur Football Association which has become the Amateur Football Alliance today. Its aim, as the decline of amateurism at the highest levels of football set in, was to protect and preserve the original amateur spirit.

Three current AFA members are previous FA Cup winners: Old Etonians, Old Carthusians and Clapham Rovers. Past members include Ipswich Town, Barnet, Cambridge City and Corinthians. Many of its leagues still maintain local rules stipulating that post-match food and drink should be provided for their opponents and matchday officials in a clubhouse or nearby public house. Most importantly, the AFA has always prided itself on the skill and competitiveness of its leagues, and on its traditions of fair play and respect.

Today, it provides the appropriate structures and systems to control, manage, regulate and promote the game at all levels, ensuring maximum participation by all those who wish to play our beautiful game. The AFA's heartland is in London and the Home Counties but it has member-clubs throughout the country.

The two combatants for today's Senior Cup final tie, played at Norsemen Football Club's Sports and Social Club ground in Church Street, Edmonton N9, have profoundly differing histories. Winchmore Hill FC, who I actually visited a few seasons ago, were founded in 1920, and played their first friendly game against Latymer Old Boys FC the same year.

Nowadays the club competes in the Southern Amateur League, last winning the competition in 1983/1984.

In their ninety-year existence they can boast a lengthy honours list, which includes four victories in the Senior Cup, although the 1953 campaign was a shared success. One year later, in 1954, they were the runners-up. To reach this year's final Winchmore Hill have come through five hard-fought ties, after receiving a bye in round one. Their 3-0 home win against Alexandra Park in round three being their most comfortable margin of victory. In fact, they needed extra-time to get past Southgate County in their initial match.

As mentioned above, Nottsborough FC's history couldn't be more contrasting. Established as recently as 1988, the club derives its name from Nottingham and

Loughborough universities (I suppose they could as easily have been entitled 'Loughingham FC'), from where founding members John Lister and Jonty Hill graduated. A chance meeting in Covent Garden between the two, and a mutual love of the game led to a football team being created that originally competed in the Wimbledon and District League. After early success they enjoyed twelve happy seasons in the Southern Olympian League (as it was then known) before progressing to the Southern Amateur League.

Remarkably, every year since inception, one of its four XI's, has won silverware of some description. In 2001/2002 the club won the SAL Senior 3rd division title, and after further promotions the zenith of its triumphs came in 2006/2007, when the Senior 1st division championship was captured by the Kingston University-based side; a further championship title followed two years later. Surely the club's arcane motto, 'Nikkerus Nakkerus Dropperus floorius'...Nicknaks, Nicknaks on the floor, has profoundly alcoholic connotations!

They too entered this year's affray in round two, with an eye-catching 12-0 demolition of Kew Association.

Nottsborough FC had not conceded a single goal in 360 minutes play, until they met Broomfield in the semi-final; a thrilling encounter, won by the odd goal in nine, gave them the opportunity to defend the trophy they won last April.

Both clubs' websites are worthy of perusal and meritorious instruments of information, erudition and fascination.

Similarly engrossing is host side Norsemen's site; their history section recounts a wondrously descriptive and drunken trip to Ipswich Town in 1930; the side's 3-2 defeat of KL Slade Green FC in the 1979/1980 FA Vase is also mentioned.

Norsemen's facilities are first-rate too and despite being located next to the busy A10, the huge green area is partitioned-off into individual sporting sections by the clever use of tall hedges, giving each one a distinct, compartmentalised feel. A smart new changing block sits on the halfway line but it's the multi-roomed clubhouse, which boasts a modicum of seating on its upper-level balcony, that's without doubt the focal point and hub.

Real Ale, hot food, tea and coffee were all supplied in copious quantities to the appreciative 400-strong throng who packed the taped-off side-lines.

The playing surface, immaculately unfluctuating, aided both teams' penchant for fast-flowing, skilful play. A glossy, colourful and informative 24-page programme was given away for a donation, all proceeds this year going to the NSPCC charity.

Almost a 'home' game for Winchmore Hill this, their Paulin enclosure being only .448 miles west of the ES&SC, the outcome of this final had seemingly been too close to call. Hill currently lead the AFA senior league section but Nottsborough, at present in fourth position, will overtake them should they win their four games in-hand. But 'close' it never was. With Nottsborough losing key players to injury, Winchmore Hill took full advantage of their parlous predicament, dominating

proceedings from start to finish; 'keeper and captain Andy Carter lead from the front(!), barking instructions to his responsive, mauve-shirted troops in front of him. It took them 22 minutes to get their noses in front, the goal coming after the men in red and black lost left-back Matt Rolfe to a twisted ankle, the goal being stabbed home from close range by Andy Barrell after his initial shot had been parried.

Teatime came and went with Hill in the ascendancy and just as the south Londoners looked as though they might haul themselves back into it, disaster struck. A soft back-pass hit the only divot on the pitch, resulting in 'stopper Dan Ashley 'kicking' thin air as the ball trickled over the line for the softest 'OG' you'll ever see. Nottsborough did get the ball into their opponents' net during their best period of the match shortly afterwards, but the effort was deemed offside; just to emphasise their superiority, man-of-the-match Barrell thundered in a left-footed third for Hill with the trophy's destiny already decided.

At the game's conclusion, league president J.R. Wilson presented the winners' and losers' medals and the famous old trophy to the victorious captain. So, the biggest prize in pay-to-play football is deservedly Winchmore Hills's once again, after a brief four-year interlude. On this impressive showing, it could be theirs for many years to come.

An unforgettable and truly glorious day in every respect, spent in the company of the true 'Amateur'. A day so redolent of a past that was how Association Football used to be. A day when the purist form of our game came to the fore.

FGIF Star Rating: 5*.

06/20