

TT No.223: Paul Roth - Sat April 17th 2010; Midland Comb Premier Division; **Pershore Town '88** vs. Heather St Johns; Res: 1-1; Att: 26; Entry: £3; Prog: £1.50p for 36 pages; Weather: Sunny, warm and mercifully, Volcanic Ash-free!; Altitude: The King George V Playing Field is 17m (55.774 ft) above sea level.

It all started last Autumn with the rather unsurprising revelation that our MPs were, how shall I put it, rather milking their expenses to the detriment of us, the long-suffering tax payers. From thereon in, the Winter months just got gloomier, as first torrential rains, followed by hurricane-force winds, sharp penetrating frosts and finally heavy snowfall befell our beleaguered nation. For groundhoppers there was even one disastrous weekend in January, when there was no football whatsoever for us to attend, country-wide.

But it's not just Britain that's suffered during this period. Mainland Europe has also endured its fair share of mayhem as the severe weather conditions brought flooding to mainland Spain, mud-slides to the Canary Islands and unprecedented rainfall to Madeira and parts of northern Italy. The earthquake that hit Chile on February 27th wreaked devastation, killing nearly 800 people and displacing a further 50,000. But surely the most agonising pictures that we've witnessed in recent times have been those from Haiti, where over 300,000 lives were lost when the biggest quake to hit that region for over three centuries laid waste to what was already an impoverished state.

Personally, the most upsetting spectre of all has to be that of the now-ruined, once-magnificent Presidential Palace, the Haitian 'White House' in Port-au-Prince, now razed to the ground. A more heart-breaking image it would be hard to conjure.

Then, just as Spring sprung and with our lives returning to some form of normalcy, we've been dealt the ultimate sucker punch...our beloved Government has called a General Election. The tactic is increasingly seeming like a ploy to bore the entire populace to death! Sorry, but politics do absolutely nothing for me. My view is that our elected parliamentarians do their utmost to look after their constituents, the electorate in general, and, quite rightly, themselves and their family members. Admittedly, these priorities now look as though they're observed in reverse order to the above!

The only time I've ever gotten remotely interested in the 'Hustings' was back in 1979, when the late Jeremy Fox stood for Parliament in my-then constituency of Dover, Deal and Sandwich. His Silly Party's rallying call of: "Be Sensible, Vote Silly" remains the most iconic shibboleth I've yet to hear. To me though, despite the heroics of Mr. Fox, the truism still remains that politics is one huge snooze.

My trip to Worcestershire today to visit Pershore Town FC was, on the other hand, anything but soporific. As soon as I turned off the M40 at junction 9, it was obvious it was going to be one of those enduring days. The drive through the blossom-filled

Cotswold countryside, on this gloriously sunny day, was a pleasure in itself and to have come across such idyllic ale houses en-route was an added bonus. The unchanged, multi-roomed National Trust-owned Fleece Inn at Bretforton, with its vast collection of antique pewter, becomes yet another of my all-time favourite hostelrys; a veritable piece of history.

What I most like about Pershore Town FC is that it's located just a hundred yards off the High Street giving it an instantaneous 'local' identity, something that's slowly being eroded as club after club sell up to the property developers and move out of town. Also, it's only a four hundred, and nine-yard walk to the excellent, GBG-listed home-brew Brandy Cask Tavern!

The King George V playing field lies next to the River Avon and is dominated in its background by the omnipresent Abbey Church of the Holy Cross, a famous landmark that in truth oversees the entire town. Fully enclosed, railed and posted and with eight floodlight pylons (four on each flank), the stadium's structures are located on the town side.

A tea hatch as you enter sells hot food and drink, whilst the comfortable bar area boasts SKY TV. Look out for the two amazing photographs of the ground under water, paradoxically at Eastertide and in Summer! A function hall and skittle alley adjoin the covered and seated grandstand, the whole being decorated in the club's colours of blue and white. By the way, the '88' epithet is derived from when Pershore United FC and Pershore Rec. Rovers FC merged, in...1988!

Entrance costs £3 (a pound less for concessions) with a newsy, colourful and well thought out programme retailing for a further £1.50p.

This Midland Combination Premier Division match appeared to be an away-win banker, Heather St Johns being presently in pole position, and with home 'stopper Steve Goran making three outstanding saves within the first 180 seconds there seemed no reason to doubt this assumption. But the fact that the young 'keeper did keep those efforts out at this juncture, was in reality pivotal to the game's final outcome. Yes, the Leicestershire side did go in a goal to the good at teatime, after both sides had seen efforts rebound off the crossbar, and they did indeed create a few half chances during the second period, but from that third minute onwards Pershore Town matched them in every department.

Deservedly, after manager Kevin Barry's asked-for extra effort had been made, they equalised with twenty minutes left and should have bagged themselves all three points in the final minute, when a scuffed shot tamely passed the visitors' right-hand upright.

The four points dropped by Heather in the two league matches between their Worcestershire hosts may ultimately prove costly in their title aspirations, their only consolation on the day being that fellow challengers Pilkington XXX surprisingly lost 2-0 at Dosthill Colts.

As a footnote, I must mention club Secretary Ian Gill. After a phone call to him on Friday evening to confirm proceedings, Ian purposefully sought me out during play

and kindly invited me to partake in a cup of tea with him, in the pavilion, at half time. His affable nature combined with his obvious affection and devotion for the club shines through; he's the sort of chap that makes Non-League football such an enjoyable experience for us 'Travellers'.

So, what's this week in store for me? Undoubtedly another tsunami (actually, we haven't had one of those for a while have we, thank god!) of party-political hyperbole and probably a hundredweight of volcanic ash descending on my newly T-cut motor vehicle, that's what. There's always next week's football to look forward to though!

FGIF Star Rating: An as-good-as-it-gets 5*.

06/20