

TT No.235: *Chris Freer* - Mon May 3rd 2010; **Brodsworth Welfare** v Long Eaton United; North East Counties Premier; Score: 0-3; Crowd: Officially 60 (!); Entertainment value: 1/5.

It's all about a ball, isn't it? Doesn't matter how talented the players are, how organised and efficient the team is, if you haven't got a ball there's no game. Apparently, Brodsworth Welfare have two, but unfortunately, we seemed to be using the wrong one for the best part of 70 minutes.

Why Brodsworth Welfare you may ask? A Step 5 soon to be Step 6 team, who have managed to score just 17 league goals in 37 games this season, whilst contriving to concede 179. That's not a misprint. The answer is we are looking for a game so I can give my new motor a blast. For some reason Bank Holiday Monday fixtures are in short supply, so my son and I settle on a trip to the outskirts of Doncaster, the other incentive being that the visitors are Long Eaton United, the team from the town where I live. Although I have no particular affinity to United, which may have something to do with how my lad was treated when he played for them a few years ago, I reason that at least we might see some goals today.

One thing we are destined not to see is a programme. The man at the turnstile says they've all gone. It's two o'clock, there's about six people in the ground, and I smell a rat. I seem to recall reading on a forum that, despite a League mandate to do so, Brodsworth have been quite happy to consistently break the rules on this. Nobody is admitting it but, unless some mischievous groundhopper has bought the lot to make a perceived killing on e-bay, I suspect that a programme for this game just hasn't been produced. We sit simmering in the clubhouse, munching over-fried chips and sipping out of cans, whilst darting accusing glances at whoever wanders in clutching a bulging rucksack in anticipation of a contraband bundle of official progs tumbling out. After a while it finally sinks in that I am anticipating in vain.

The clubhouse at Brodsworth is fairly typical of the ground, the outbuildings for which seem to have been gathered together from various farms and allotments across South Yorkshire and deposited in a heap by the side of a pitch. Club loyalists are doing their bit; frying the chips, selling the football card, ushering the kids out of the goalmouth; but it's fair to say Brodsworth Welfare FC has seen sunnier days. Funnily enough, the sun is out on occasions today, but a bitter northerly wind infiltrates every part of the ground, and it's bloody cold. We can't decide whether to sit in the small stand on the halfway line, or stand with the Long Eaton fans in the only covered terracing, behind one goal. In the end we pick a spot by the side of the pitch, from where the lad can target any stray ball which may hurtle in his general direction.

Ah yes, the ball, which for seventy minutes refuses to go anywhere near either goal. It's a dire game and you'd think that both these teams would be bottom two material. The lad thinks he's got his first stray, but the ball ends up down an open

manhole, a club official quickly at pains to keep us away from the cables and wires therein. “Don’t want a Health & Safety issue...” he says. On 65 minutes the lad breaks his duck, but two minutes later the ball is a goner, buried deep into a bramble bush from where not even the valiant home goalkeeper can retrieve it. Cue a change of ball and a miraculous transformation of the match! Within eight minutes we see more goalmouth action than the previous seventy combined, from which the visitors emerge with a 3-0 lead. Even Welfare have a couple of good chances, but in keeping with their season they proceed to gleefully spurn them.

As we depart the ground, a club official is burrowing his way into the brambles to retrieve the missing ball. I don’t blame him, either. If nobody can score with the thing, Welfare at the very least would be guaranteed a string of goalless home draws to outshine the solitary two points they’ve gained this season. It might even inspire them to produce a programme...

There's more on my blog at <http://flynn123.wordpress.com> - ramblings of a tired and weary veggie at the end of a long season...

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