

TT No.24: *Chris Freer* - Sat September 5th 2009; **Billericay Town v Tooting & Mitcham**; Isthmian League Premier Division; Score: 0-0; Crowd: 418; Entertainment value: 2/5.

After an eighteen-day gap in my fixtures schedule resulting from domestic obligations, yours truly is back on the road again, and it's the first of many trips this season to London, courtesy of my new best friend, National Express. The 440 runs from nearby Loughborough, and though it requires an early start and a very late return, at £10 (recently sneaked up to £12) you can't fault it for value. The drop-off point, in London - Victoria Coach Station - is also very handy for my preferred breakfast haunt, the Willow Walk, a Wetherspoons institution where the staff probably recognise me by now.

Followers of my blog will know that I like to walk everywhere whenever I can but this may be a little curtailed this season following wear and tear on my left foot (something to do with my metatarsal says the quack) so I decide to catch the tube most of the way to Liverpool Street, alighting at Tower Hill so I can take in at least some of the scenery. My train out to Billericay also affords a great view of work-in-progress on the new Seb Coe's Folly Stadium being built at Stratford.

There's short hobble from Billericay station to the main drag, where the Coach & Horses and the inevitable Wetherspoons see the benefit of my cash/vouchers, and then it's around a twenty-minute hop to the ground which is just the other side of a 1960s housing estate. The stadium features various lo-rise covered stands, a mix of terrace and seating, whilst a very quaint but tiny main stand provides the only elevation. The ground boasts a sizable clubhouse with an impressively large sports TV screen but sadly nothing worth drinking, whilst the snack shop next door has very little of interest to the veggie. The menus on the outside wall lists various filled baguettes and a choice of pies alleged to be on offer, but further enquiries reveal these to be from a bygone age and provided you only want chips, you'll be OK. I decline on this occasion. The programme is £2 and has a nice shiny cover but apart from a good stats page is a little advert-heavy.

The teams emerge to a medley of film theme classics - there's a bit of Star Wars and Rocky in there - in front of a crowd of a little over 400, a good proportion of whom are supporting visitors Tooting & Mitcham, currently No2 in the Isthmian charts. The ball is high up in the air for most of the first half hour and it's tough going. I'm amused by a little boy standing nearby with his father. Clad in a sparkling new Barcelona away kit, he's about three, clearly at his first game and is asking the questions we've all wanted to ask but daren't.... "Why does the linesman keep running up and down, Daddy?" "If all the balls go out of the ground, what happens then, Daddy?" "Why are all the players shouting at each other, Daddy?" - if only someone would tell us!

Everything kicks off on 35 minutes. A series of robust challenges results in the inevitable melee, following which a visiting forward picks up a second yellow for being 'gobby' and heads for that early bath. Tooting had been starting to gain a degree of dominance but that goes by the board in a largely one-directional second period which at least is more entertaining than the first. Billericay are making most of the running with some slick interplay, but timid finishing and an imposing visiting keeper results in a shut-out, my first goalless game of the season.

I watch the first half of the England friendly in the clubhouse before limping back to the station and sharing my homeward journey with all the bright young things that come out to play in London when the sun goes down. I finally arrive home tired and footsore exactly 18 hours and 45 minutes since I locked the front door this morning. Roll on next Saturday!

There's more on my blog at <http://flynn123.wordpress.com/>

Groundhopping from the real ale swilling, veggie perspective...

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