

TT No.244: Rob Champion - Sat 15th May 2010; **Troedyrhiw** v Corus Steel; Welsh League Division 3; Venue: The Willows; Result: 2-1; Attendance: around 60; Match rating: 1*.

Game two of our Welsh double sees us make a ten-minute drive in the Merthyr Tydfil direction to the village of Troedyrhiw for their Welsh League division 3 clash against Port Talbot side Corus Steel. Corus still have a chance of promotion to the second division after being promoted to the Welsh League in the summer from the South Wales Amateur League while Troedyrhiw's current stint in the Welsh League has been since 2001. The club play at the Willows Community Centre, a short walk from the railway station. The club are currently in the process of building a stand along the far touchline as the only cover at present is in the form of an overhang attached the changing rooms. I have included the following history on the club is taken from their website:

"Although Troedyrhiw have come from the very bottom of the pyramid system to attain Welsh League status in five years, this is not a new club. In fact, the former mining village between Merthyr and Aberfan has a long football history, with Troedyrhiw Stars first putting it on the map in 1908-09 when they won the South Wales Amateur Cup. In the years leading up to the Great War, the Stars enjoyed some good Welsh Cup runs, notably in 1912-13 when they reached the last eight beating Abertillery, Rhymney, Cardiff Corinthians and Colwyn Bay before losing 1-0 at Chester.

The Star's successors Troedyrhiw FC started to make their mark in the 1930's, winning the Welsh League's Division 2 in 1932 and starting a 20-year unbroken spell in the top flight, with again some good Welsh Cup runs (in 1933-34 and 1934-35 they reached the last 16) though their best league achievements came in the years following the World War 2, when they finished 4th, 3rd and 2nd in successive years. After that it was downhill until relegation came in 1951-52. After over a decade in Division Two East, they found themselves in the middle division when the Welsh League re-organised in 1964 but finished last-but-one. Rather than drop into the lowest of the 3 non-regionalised divisions, Troedyrhiw withdrew from the league in 1965.

And there their story might have ended, as the decline in importance of the South Wales coalfield saw so many village's clubs disappear from the scene. For 30 years Troedyrhiw was barely on the football map, though its Boy's Club continued. A local pub team, in 1993, approached Brian Harbord, who was on the committee for the Boys Club, and asked could they play at The Willows as the senior team and use the unused facilities on a Saturday afternoon. Brian, with the help of John Phelps pushed for this to happen and won a majority vote. Troedyrhiw Boys Club Seniors were formed with John Phelps as Chairman and Brian Harbord vice-Chairman. Mark Harbord took over as player-manager with the team based in the Merthyr Premier Division. After two seasons Mark Harbord brought in Brian Sparks

to take over as manager, and Mark took the player-coach role. In their first season together, they guided Rhiw to the title in dramatic style, needing to win their last game. After going a goal down they came back to win 2-1 and clinch promotion to the Amateur League (1995-96).

For some technical reason Troedyrhiw Boys Club Senior team had to become separate to the Boys Club and then became its own club, forming Troedyrhiw FC. After finishing in the top half on their first season in the Amateur League they went on to clinch the double in their second with the Division 2 title and the Intermediate Cup, beating Aberaman Ex to both. They then went on to finish 7th in Division One in 1999, and 5th in 2000. Then the next season, lying handily in mid-table while Bryntirion and Barry Athletic made the running, Troedyrhiw did not emerge as obvious promotion contenders until the closing weeks, when a fine run of results as they cleared a big fixture backlog put them in the frame. The disappointment of losing the SWFA Intermediate Cup Final did not deter Brian Sparks's side, who finally went top of the league well into May as the season reached a climax that bettered any boy's comic storyline: Troedyrhiw led Barry Athletic by one point and entertained them at The Willows in the last game - if they drew or won, they would win the league and promotion to the Welsh League, if they lost, the visitors would be champions. Watched by a crowd of over 400, Rhiw fell behind in the first half before battling back and deservedly equalising through Andrew Richards after the break as they put an ageing Barry side under mounting pressure.

Troedyrhiw FC were in the relatively unusual position these days of having a ground already fit for Welsh League Football, and it was this advantage that guaranteed their automatic promotion without the need for a play-off with the Senior League winners. The Willows ground, situated next to the railway line a couple of minutes, walk from the station on the Merthyr Branch line, is an enclosed ground dominated by the huge Boys Club building at its western end, behind one goal, the overhang of which provides a covered terrace. At the opposite end and on the southern side, the pitch is tightly hemmed in by the railway and houses respectively. Rhiw are back where they belong!"

We were charged £3 for admission which included a programme, though the programme unfortunately was for the original game scheduled in November. The home side went into the game in the bottom three but on the day, it was hard to tell which side was which as Corus did not look like a side going for promotion. To be honest it was a poor game and thus I have very little to write about that was settled five minutes from time when Chris Quinlan scored from the penalty spot at the second attempt, after the referee disallowed the first attempt for, I believe, encroachment.