

TT No.51: *Chris Freer* - Saturday October 10th 2009; **Waltham Abbey** v Hastings United; Isthmian Premier League; Score: 0-1; Attendance: 171; Entertainment value: 2/5.

Back on the 440 to London today but I don't follow my usual plan as I've set up a meeting with a guy, I haven't seen for nigh on 30 years. The re-uniting powers of the world wide web has put me in touch again with an East End lad called Wayne, who I last saw back in the early 1980's when I was a weekend second-generation mod and he was the real deal, playing in a band called the Numbers at the Marquee and other prestigious places.

We meet up at the Wetherspoons at Liverpool Street and reminisce about the 'old daze' as he puts it, and how he's gone on to a career, casting actors for films and adverts, including stuff for Match of the Day. He also did all the Nike adverts of a few years ago, and got to kick a ball around with Ronaldo and Rui Costa amongst others. I tell him I once propped up the bar with Alan Birchenall and he seems most impressed.

We bid Au Revoir and I get the train out to Waltham Cross, pausing only for a pint in the local Wetherspoons before the half hour walk via Waltham Abbey town centre to get to Capershots. En route I marvel at the number of customised hatchbacks speeding around like lunatics, a sight you don't see so much in the daylight hours up where I live. Then again, Essex man might well be a different animal.

Capershots is set back from the main road, and is accessible down a short track. I have to be careful now what I say, it seems, as perceived negative comments about St Mirren's new stadium earned me a bumper postbag and the most hits on the site in one day I've ever had! So, I'll just note that Waltham Abbey's ground is expecting to receive an upgrade in the near future, and at the moment is probably not a state-of-the-art stadium, unlike nearby Dartford's for instance. My first port-of-call as always is the clubhouse, which is outside of the ground. There's a big screen TV but I draw a blank on the beer front. There's a food hatch, in the bar and a meaty menu, with the unusual option of scampi (if you're a seafood-eating sort of veggie, like me). There's another food servery inside the ground, at the back of the changing rooms, but here the choice is even more limited - not even chips.

Having sat down at Fylde earlier in the week, I decide to rest my legs again and take up a seat in the stand. Along with a small terrace behind one goal, it's the only cover in the ground. I'm entertained by a little mascot in oversize kit and shorts down to his ankle doing kicks-ins and fancy tricks. He must about 3, but definitely one for the future - sign him up.

Lowly Abbey are today taking on high-flyers Hastings United, and there's not a lot to choose between them for most of the first half, a stunning strike from the

visitors No8 breaking the deadlock. The ball (or balls) seem to spend a lot of the time in the fields surrounding the ground, one effort going so high and wide that some wag behind me comments "...that one's in MY back garden!" Much of the second half is spent in honest endeavour and I'm starting to endure micro-naps as the excitement level plumbs new depths. I'm stirred by the home team deciding to go for broke and a double woodwork strike gives the Abbey fans something to be optimistic about. It's not to be, however, and the result reflects the form book.

I travel back to Victoria via St Pancras, so I can call into the curry house I found earlier in the year that offers a £5.95 Saturday night buffet. They're still doing it, and though there's not a massive choice, where else can you stuff yourself for six quid in London? Answers to my mailbox, please...

Programme: £2, on sale from a lad just inside the turnstile. Probably in the bar too. Although it's colourful and glossy, there's not much original stuff in it. I wasn't even going to attempt to tackle the two pages of text set aside for the complete history of Hastings United, in case I died of excitement halfway through...

06/20