

TT No.83: *Mike Latham* - Sat 7 November 2009: **Staveley M W** v Brighouse Town; Northern Counties East League Division 1; Result: 4-3; Attendance: 65; Admission: £4; 40pp programme: £1.

The Northern Counties East League continues to develop and grow in esteem and importance. In many ways it is a shining light of just how a league at steps five and six of the non-league-pyramid, should operate.

Leading the way is the league's superlative website, a model for others to follow. It is clear, concise, informative, quickly updated and has excellent links; it is simply outstanding. And many of the league's clubs are outstanding, too, with facilities that stand out at this level of football.

I had been informed by a groundhopping friend of mine that a trip to Staveley, three miles east of Chesterfield should be reserved for a Saturday afternoon. 'Far too good a ground to waste for a visit under floodlights in the middle of winter,' he said. They proved to be wise words, as my trip to the Inkersall Road ground on a mild and dry afternoon proved highly enjoyable.

For the car-driver the ground is easy to find, just a few minutes from J30 of the M1 and close to the centre of this old mining town. There is a large club car park situated off Inkersall Road and the first thing that greets visitors are several brightly painted signs that welcome supporters old and new to the ground.

Once inside the favourable first impression is built upon. The ground is simply immaculate with not a rail not newly painted nor a piece of litter or graffiti anywhere. Should the team ever rise up the pyramid there is plenty of space to develop more accommodation but the moment the facilities are more than adequate though there may be a lack of cover on a rainy day.

There is a small cantilevered main stand with smart seats opposite the dug-outs and a small terraced cover behind the far goal. Most of the facilities are at the entrance behind the nearside goal where the dressing rooms, tea bar, hospitality rooms and club offices are located. The tea bar was excellent, the staff friendly and there was a large area in which to relax and watch the latest scores on the television.

The programme is a fine effort, too, neatly produced with 40 pages full of information and photographs. The club history reveals that a team from Staveley defeated Sheffield Wednesday in the FA Cup of 1883 but that the current team's origins are far more recent.

A Saturday side was entered in the Chesterfield Amateur League in 1989 playing at Inkersall Road, joining the Sheffield County Senior League two years later and the Central Midlands League in 1993. The club's rapid rise up the pyramid continued when they were accepted into the NCEL in 1997.

The club was saved from extinction in 2007 after the football committee resigned en bloc before the current chairman and a team of helpers rushed through a rescue package. Placing an emphasis on youth football Staveley now look an established and respected set-up and their win here in an exciting game cemented their second spot in a highly competitive league.

Played on an immaculate pitch, the game began as a skilful and competitive one, the home side deservedly taking the lead four minutes before the interval through their prolific scorer Ryan Damms.

But Brighthouse, in only their second season in NCEL football, are adjusting well. They looked well organised and determined and turned the game on its head with three goals in the first eleven minutes after the break, all stemming from right-wing crosses.

But a visiting midfielder was red carded for a clumsy, mistimed challenge that looked accidental but bad none the less. Staveley pulled one back then equalised from the spot through Damms on 76 minutes after the visitor's centre-half also saw red for a second booking.

Down to nine men the visitors hung on until left-back Joel Birks cut inside to fire home the winner with five minutes remaining. The referee, who ended up with about ten yellows to add to his two reds- unbelievable considering the game was played in a good spirit and contained barely a bad foul- played nearly six minutes added time before Staveley's victory was confirmed.

A visit to Inkersall Road comes with my strongest recommendation.

06/20