

**TT No.95: Paul Roth** - Saturday 14th November 2009; FA Vase 2nd Round; **WELLS CITY FC vs. LARKHALL ATHLETIC FC**; Res: 2-3; Att: 103; Entry: £4; Programme: 24 pages, £1; Weather: Torrential rain throughout with very strong wind; Altitude: The Athletic Ground is 20 metres above sea level.

Driving rain, flooding and high winds. All this before I'd even taken the car out of neutral on Friday morning! My long-awaited weekend away with my great friends Bob and Hilary, in their idyllic Somerset cottage, looked as if was going to be a washout football-wise as the weather worsened with each mile I drove westward. In fact, parts of the M3 and A303 resembled more a boating lake than a major arterial carriageway by the lunchtime.

I'll spare everyone the grizzly details of the merriment that ensued following my arrival at West Hatch; let's just say it was an effort to rise the next morning, even with the administration of Bob's 'Kick-starter' homemade brandy. But 'get going' was what we had to do, as the 10.05 am bus from Taunton bus station to the Cathedral city of Wells was our objective, even though we both doubted our intended FA Vase 2nd round tie between Wells City FC and Larkhall Athletic FC would be on.

Secretary Stevie Vowles had promised to text me after the 10.30 am pitch inspection and, true to his word, as our No. 29 bus departed the environs of Glastonbury, his message arrived stating that the game was definitely on. What service!

I can't remember how many pubs we frequented in the city between our arrival at just after 11 O'clock and the 3 pm kick-off, but I do know that the time we spent inside each one was the only period of that entire day we managed to remain dry; well, almost! Even venturing along to the Athletic Ground, located off the A39 on puddle-strewn Rowdens Road, we still thought it could not possibly still be on. To our undying amazement a gentleman was waiting to take our monies (£10 for two, including 24-page programmes) from us at the pay hut and we were in.

The ground, which is 20 meters (65.616 ft.) above sea level, is shared with cricket, having a characterful old stand running along its southerly side, which is where the changing rooms are also located. Naturally, the arena is floodlit, being railed in its entirety and has the pinnacles of St. Andrew's Cathedral looking down upon it, past the myriad of terraced housing that abuts the ground. The clubhouse lays across the cricket square, on the opposite side, and is a well enough appointed pavilion, despite not selling Real Ale (Guinness and Drambuie sufficed on the day). The tea bar, on the stand side, disappointingly only sold teas, coffees and rolls from Switzerland. The playing surface, by the way, was immaculate and the game was never in doubt.

And what an eventful game it proved to be. The visitors from Bath led 1-0 at half time through a Kieran Baggs penalty, against the run of play I felt, but Wells City

deservedly equalised midway through the second half to take the tie into extra time. At least that's what Bob and I thought but referee P. Rees deemed differently, thinking it was back to Larkhall for a replay on Wednesday, after the ninety minutes. Whilst supping our post-match 'digestif' and with us both remonstrating that extra time should have been played to all that would listen, a club official then announced that the ref had been in touch with the FA, Somerset CCC and the West Midlands Regional League, who'd all confirmed that extra time indeed must be played. Both teams had to change back into their respective kits and take to the field for the additional half hour...what a farce.

The foregathered 103 spectators, now reduced to 27, the other 76 having gone home fifty minutes earlier, now witnessed the game's most dramatic period with Wells grabbing an overtime, half time lead, only for Larkhall to equalise with a disputed penalty and ultimately progress with a well-crafted, close range header from Tony Perry following a well flighted free kick, with seconds remaining. A match that commenced at 15.02 pm, concluded at 18.13 pm!

Incredible stuff, that was accepted in pretty good fashion by the losing homesters. In the end, when we thought we'd see 'nowt', we'd witnessed perhaps the most unusual FA Vase tie either of us had ever seen. We didn't half need a drink afterwards!

FGIF Star Rating: 5\*.

06/20