

TT No.128: Paul Roth - Sat Nov 27th 2010; Kent County League Division 1 East; Premier FC v New Romney; Res: 4-3; Att: 15; Entry & Programme: N/A; Altitude/Location: Cherry Orchard Playing Fields is 18 m (59.055 ft) above sea level at a latitude of 51 degrees, 21.1 mins north & longitude of 1 degree, 8.0 mins east (position derived from centre circle); Weather: Icy cold but dry; Club shop: No; Local MP: Roger Gale.

Having completed the '92' well over twenty-five years ago now, there has of course been a rash of new-build Football League stadia that's now rather rendered my achievement out-of-date; on occasions I have attended some of these new arenas but my feeling is that once you've seen one, you've seen them all. However, the prospect of witnessing a Non-League club (a real minnow) at one of them - in relative, close proximity to my east Kent home - does slightly appeal, although getting motivated to do so requires considerable effort on my behalf. For example, last season's FA Cup 1st Round draw spat out 'Northampton Town FC versus Fleetwood Town FC' - the perfect opportunity you'd think for me to visit Sixfields. But when it actually came to it, not only couldn't I be fagged to go, other more appealing fixtures easily persuaded me to travel elsewhere.

Colchester United FC's home FA Cup 2nd round draw against the lowest-ranked team left in this year's competition, Swindon Supermarine FC, was another matter altogether though - and if I'm ever to take the plunge and watch such a game at one of these analogous venues, then surely this was the one to go for.

Yep, this time I'd revved myself up for it - GBG halts had even been annotated on a downloaded map, along with a rough timetable of how I'd expect the day to pan out - by my estimation the Fat Cat on Butt Road was due to be the third hostelry on my memorandum and should have been 'ticked' by 12.25hrs at the very latest.

But whilst making a batch of drop scones on Friday afternoon I was beginning to have second thoughts; my mind had started to wander and my resolve weaken. Did I really want to pay £60 or more, plus a further tenner for a glossy over-hyped matchday magazine, just to avail myself of a football match I didn't necessarily want to see? And then there was the prospect of jobsworths 'stewarding' me into some secluded, darkened corner for a humiliating and brutal strip search that would, in all likelihood, end up with the confiscation of my camera bag and my trusty Filofax: I'd have to suffer that gut-wrenching and over-priced inedible football-fare just because my beloved omnipresent jar of beef jerky:- "Isn't permitted within the confines, or within a three mile radius of the Community Stadium". The very idea too of being caged in a 35,000+ crowd baying for blood-anyone's -coupled with tribal and animalistic singing, pitch invasions and the very real threat of gratuitous violence made my stomach turn - twice!

The final nail in my proposed Colchester United sojourn's coffin came before bedtime when considering the very real risks I faced in just getting to, and away

from, the ground. Did I really want to run the gauntlet of street riots as rival fans set about one another as if their very lives depended on killing each other, be confronted by baton-carrying police, water cannon and snarling, flesh-hungry German Shepherds?

Worst-case scenario being of maybe having a Flick Knife stuck in my back, a Machete slashed across my face or even a Sea Axe (it is Essex after all!) imbedded in my skull was the final straw. No, there was no way I could go through with it - I have to face it, Paul Roth has unequivocally thumped his last Football League melon!

So, to plan 'B', or as it ultimately turned out, plan 'P' - Premier FC. Actually, that's not quite the complete picture. I had initially set off towards Northamptonshire and Leicestershire, but the unexpected severity of overnight frost and un-forecasted snowfall in that particular part of the world however soon scuppered those aspirations. Having achieved the Medway Towns, and with the fog thickening and the white stuff, in this case the 'Wrong Stuff', starting to fall I turned back, resigned to my fate of Saturday afternoon TV and the spectre of the wretched gin bottle. After a speculative and vain telephone call to Saga Sports FC that yielded another, this time fully-expected zero, one final desperate scrape of the bottom of the barrel surprisingly produced Premier FC versus New Romney FC at a venue previously unvisited by your correspondent.

My wife and I must have driven past the Cherry Orchard Playing Fields located on the A291 Herne Bay-Canterbury Road near the village of Herne a thousand times. Not aware until having spoken with secretary Steve Kennett that this was Premier FC's new bolt-hole - and also a return to their spiritual Herne Bay home, having recently vacated the ghastly environs of the Hersden Recreation Ground - I realised I was not going to be sans football after all.

The playing field is handily placed on bus routes 4 and 6 (the 4 goes clockwise, the 6 anti-clockwise around Canterbury - I think!) and is but a two-minute walk from the GBG listed and award-winning Butchers Arms - a pub you'll either love or hate. The Smugglers Inn, also GBG-listed, is literally within spitting distance across the road. Having Herne Mill perched atop the gradually-sloping incline as a backdrop and the setting having a somewhat pastoral feel this is not an unpleasant place to watch football, despite today's icy blast; even the nearby residential dwellings don't feel incongruous.

Premier FC - their original sponsor was a company entitled Premier Mortgages, thus the name - were formed as recently as 2006 and only joined the KCL two seasons ago, when they won promotion from Division Two East at the very first attempt. A successive promotion narrowly eluded them last season, on the very last Saturday of the campaign as it happens, and today the club sits in mid table of Division 1 East, but with numerous games in hand.

And what an entertaining game of football it turned out to be, watched by a meagre crowd that included some well-known Kentish 'hoppers. The home side, playing in the all blue strip, took an early lead but the Romney Marsh-based club

were soon deservedly level and at that point playing the better football. Just before teatime the homesters were again in front, but after the break the visitors quickly battled back to parity, only to generously once more hand the lead back to their hosts 10 minutes later. The men in red and black seemed to have earned a point when they crafted a third equaliser, but a dreadful error in their defensive ranks just before the end gifted Premier all three points.

Ultimately, and mercifully, a most enjoyable Football League, Flick Knife, Machete and Sea Axe-free afternoon, when it had looked odds-on, I might miss out altogether. The only dilemma now.....will Dover Athletic FC be drawn away to a league club that I've not previously visited in this evening's FA Cup 3rd Round draw?

FGIF Star rating: 5*.

07/20