

**TT No.178: *Stuart J Pykett*** - Sat 12th February 2011; **Exeter University** v Exeter Civil Service; South West Peninsula League East Division; Result: 5-2; Admission: £2 incl. 16pp programme.

On Saturday 12th February I decided to head to Devon and the University Sports Ground for a local derby in the South West Peninsula League East Division, Exeter University v Exeter Civil Service. What a good decision it was!

The ground is easily reached from Junction 30 of the M5 (Exeter Services) following the Topsham signs. You pass Topsham Town FC on your left (whom I visited some years earlier) and the next turning is the University Sports Ground, though surprisingly it isn't signposted. If you reach the next entrance which is Topsham Rugby Club (which I did!!) you have gone too far!!

The University ground has ample parking and the main pitch is on a plateau some 500 yards from the changing rooms block. The facility also houses a hockey pitch and another tidy roped off football pitch.

On first inspection the venue seems very basic but what caught my eye was one of the most unusual covered areas around. It is situated behind the Perspex dugouts and can be described as a curved Perspex and concrete futuristic shelter that could accommodate about a hundred spectators at a squeeze! It looks like it has been designed by students in the design lab of the nearby University! If you stood here with rain coming from behind you, you would be wet to the bone but coming the other way you would be perfectly dry. It doesn't, however, prevent the wind from whistling round as it is more aesthetically pleasing than functional but a welcome addition to the Non-League world nevertheless! You could imagine a couple of solar panels perched on it to keep spectators warm!

The rest of the ground is of an exposed location however and on a windy cold day there would be nowhere to get out of the breeze. Fortunately, today was mild and behind the top goal and on the other side of the pitch are steep raised grass banking areas where superb views of the game could be had. The far side of the pitch it is roped off through steel posts but the rest of the pitch is fully railed off. The constant roar of the nearby M5 motorway is both audible and visible.

The game started remarkably with three goals in the first four minutes, I don't think I have ever seen a start to a game like this in all my years of watching football! This put Civil Service in front 2-1 but they were soon pegged-back by a tremendously enthusiastic young students' team and at half time led 3-2. They went on to win 5-2 in the second half but Civil Service fully played their part in an entertaining game which in all honesty could have ended up 10-5!

The referee also deserves mention. He dealt with the few flashpoints by communicating with the players instead of controlling the game by cautions and sending's off and the game was the better for it.

The pitch was surprisingly dry and bobbly probably due to its exposed location though I'm told it does waterlog from time to time.

Unfortunately, no hot food was available in the large dressing rooms area at half time though hot drinks were. A confectionary machine was also available.

A 16-page photocopied programme with all the essential features was available with £2.00 admission. Excellent value I would say!

I was back on the motorway within 5 minutes having seen one of my best games of the season. Thanks to both teams!

07/20