

TT No.182: Rob Champion - Sat 19th February 2011; **St. Neots Town 3-3** Blackstones; United Counties League Prem Division; Venue: Hunts Post Community Stadium, St Neots, Cambs; Admission: £5; Programme: £1.50 - 16 pp; Badge: £3; Attendance: None announced; Match rating: 3 ½ out of 5.

This bloody weather...postponements on mass caused by rain spreading across the country in an easterly direction overnight Friday and Saturday morning. Luckily our (my dad's) first choice survived. Two phone calls to the club, one at 11.30am and one at 12.30pm reassured us that the game would go ahead with no problems. And thus, we set off from Leicester to make the seventy-mile journey. The route took us down the M1 to junction 19, then the 45 miles or so along the A14 to the A1, onto the A1 itself which took us to St Neots.

The following information on the town itself is taken from the page on Wikipedia: "St Neots is a town and civil parish with a population of 26,356. It lies on the River Great Ouse in Huntingdonshire District, and is the largest town in Cambridgeshire, Cambridge and Peterborough both being cities. The town is named after the Cornish monk St Neot whose bones were stolen from the village of St Neot on Bodmin Moor and concealed in the nearby priory of the same name. The pilgrim trade brought prosperity for the town, and it was granted a market charter in 1130. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the town enjoyed further prosperity through corn milling, brewing, stage coaching, and railways.

Today, St Neots is a thriving dormitory and market town. The modern town incorporates Eynesbury (originally the main settlement and the oldest part of the town) and two areas across the river, Eaton Ford and Eaton Socon, which were originally separate villages. Already the largest town in Cambridgeshire, after the cities of Cambridge and Peterborough, St Neots continues to grow rapidly due to a huge demand for modern housing.

Technology-based industries now operate from some of the town's light industrial estates, and there is a gas turbine power station at Little Barford on the edge of the town. Recent development has added Eynesbury Manor and The Island, Little Paxton bringing the population above 30,000. Over 1,200 new homes are in course of construction at Love's Farm Estate, to the east of the town."

A history of the club is below, some of which is taken from the club's website:

The football club were formed in 1879 as St Neots FC and the first recorded honour was winning the Huntingdonshire Senior Cup in the 1888/89 season. This was won a further four times before the turn of the 20th century. Around 1924 the club changed its name to St Neots & District and won the Huntingdonshire Senior Cup in the 24/25 season. They also won the local Scott Gatty Cup three times in succession between 1927 and 1929.

In 1927 the club joined the Bedfordshire & District League Division 1 which is the first league I know St Neots played in. They finished in the runners-up position in their debut season and 4th the following year. In 1929 the league changed name to the South Midlands League (SML) and the Saints were crowned champions in 1932/33. In 1936 they switched to the United Counties League (UCL) until the outbreak of World War 2. When football resumed after the end of the hostilities, they re-joined the SML for three seasons before switching leagues again, this time to the Metropolitan & District League (MDL) in 1949. Success was immediate as they lifted the MDL title at the first attempt. Just one more season was spent in the MDL before another switch, this time to the UCL for the second time. In 1956 they changed their name to the present title of St Neots Town, and (something of which was becoming a habit) changing leagues again to the Central Alliance (CA). A mere four years were spent in Division 1 South of the CA before switching back to Metropolitan League. Not wanting to get too familiar they transferred to the UCL for a third spell in 1966. Three years were spent in the UCL with league and double being achieved in the middle of the three. A four-year stint in the Eastern Counties League followed between 1969 and 1973 before they were back in the UCL. They remained member of the UCL until 1988 when they were forced to disband following the sale of their ground by the landlords. Re-forming in 1989 they joined the local Huntingdonshire and won the title four years in succession before re-joining the UCL in 1994. They subsequently won the division one title and promotion to the premier division at the first attempt, and have remained there since.

This season they are in a three-way battle for the UCL title with Newport Pagnell Town and King's Lynn Town and currently lead Newport by one point at the start of play. Visitors Blackstones from Stamford currently sit in mid-table.

This is to be my second visit to St Neots Town having seen them at their old ground, Rowley Park for a friendly against Oadby Town around eight years ago. The Love's Farm estate now covers the site of Rowley Park.

In the end it was an injury time equaliser from Lewis Webb that rescued a point for the league leaders and were only ninety seconds away from only their second league defeat of the season. The first half saw a disjointed display from the home side, who without Shane Tolley upfront struggled to get any rhythm going. Blackstones soaked up a bit of early pressure and for the majority of the half were at least the equal in terms possession and chances created. A touch of good fortune gave them the opening goal on 25 minutes when a Ben Porter shot deflected off the unfortunate Jordan Gent to wrong foot the St Neots keeper Tim Trebes. Around ten minutes later and the visitors doubled their lead. Billy Oliver split the stationary home defence with an accurate through ball, and Addie Staffieri rounded Trebes and finished with aplomb into the empty net.

As expected, St Neots came out firing at the start of the second half and Stefan Moore pulled a goal back from close range on 49 minutes. The Alamo didn't materialise straight away and Blackstones stunned the home crowd by restoring their two-goal advantage a couple of minutes later. A free kick from Elton Holmes

was headed in by David Burton-Jones who just got to the ball a split second before the advancing Trebes. Moore then had a goal disallowed and the final third of the match was primarily played in the visitors' half of the field. With around fifteen minutes to go Moore got his second of the game as he bundled home a Lewis Hilliard corner. The equaliser should have come earlier than it did as firstly, Theo Davis side footed the ball wide with the goal gaping on 78 minutes and then a minute later a Kieron Davies shot crashed against the crossbar. With time about up Moore put in a cross from the left and Webb headed home to give St Neots a deserved share of the spoils and with it used up one of their “get out of jail free” cards.

Following on from visits to Boston Town, King’s Lynn Town and Harborough Town this season, this leaves me with the grounds of Division One sides Olney Town and Eynesbury Rovers to visit to complete the set.

With Newport Pagnell’s game called off and King’s Lynn in League Cup action, St Neots have a one-point lead over Newport but have played two games less. King’s Lynn themselves are seven points adrift but have played two games fewer than the Saints. The race for the UCL title is well and truly heating up, with St Neots still having to play both Newport (at home) and Lynn (away).

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