

TT No.201: *Richard Panter* - Tuesday 15th March 2011: **Rochdale** v Notts County. NPOWER League 1; Result: 1-0; Admission: £18; Programme: 76pp, £3; Attendance: 2,019 (199 away); Match rating: 2 stars.

Catch 92 Continues...

Bury troubadours Elbow have a song on their current album Build a Rocket Boys called Jesus Was a Rochdale Girl. This lyrically obscure Guy Garvey song came to mind throughout this rather torpid match, simply because my attention was not held by events on the pitch. To cut to the chase, Rochdale took the points with a towering header from Craig Dawson when he nodded home from a corner early in the second half.

After a conversation at work in the morning with Steve, a well-travelled exiled Spirite, I decided to go to take his advice and go to Spotland rather than Bury. Steve said simply that he liked 'Dales home more than the Shakers residence. In terms of distance Rochdale is about ten miles closer to my home in Hathern. As I went northwards on the M1 a blanket of patchy fog covered a large area from north Nottingham to the very edge of Rochdale. This meant a high level of concentration was called for along with a deal of anxiety worrying whether the game would fall victim to the weather. I always leave plenty of time for delays en route or the need to find an alternative fixture due to postponements. This meant I drew up and parked outside Spotland at just before 6.00. Forward planning and intelligence revealed that the Wilbutts Lane Chippy, opposite the away side, served a mean cod & chips. Therefore, after purchasing a ticket and programme from the club shop, I took my place in the queue. By the time I had my hands on the food, the shop floor was swimming with my Homer Simson like drool. Make no mistake, this was food from the Gods, well Neptune at least!

I waited in the car listening to 5Live and was deeply worried that Sir Alex Ferguson was not at all confident about the outcome of the most important club in the worlds match that evening. I was in such a fretful state that I considered turning round and going home on hearing such profoundly disquieting news. On the same station I also heard something about meltdown at a nuclear reactor somewhere, but of course this was not as important as the latest problems from Old Trafford. I wrestled with my conscience and managed to come to terms with the situation, and at seven o'clock I clicked the turnstile and entered Spotland.

My ticket granted me access to the Pearl Street stand which offered unreserved seating which suited me fine. I walked the stand from side to side and top to bottom clicking away with my trusty Canon Power Shoot A700. From the top of this stand I looked at the compact covered Sandy Lane terrace to the south. To the right was the Wilbutts Lane stand which is reserved for away fans. The programme gives away support among its many packed pages, this stand has coped with as many as 3,200 Owls fans and as few as 112 Daggers supporters. For this match, and

I suspect for most games, the visitors were confined to the centre of the stand, this meant that Notts supporters only had about nine seats each.

I assumed that the Kop would be located in the terraced area. It was to a certain extent, but rather to my surprise I was actually amongst the loudest Lancastrians in the ground. They were a good humoured, passionate bunch who offered encouragement and thunderous support to their boys. The sprinkling of Notts fans had the odd chant, but from my place of residence this was all but inaudible. In all honesty, it has to be said that neither set of supporters had much to get excited about though. Much as I hate the expression this was 'typical end of season football'. Both teams have games in hand but neither club have a chance of the play-offs, on the other hand they are both reasonably safe from relegation. So, thinking about it, all concerned at the match did their best to get things going on the pitch. The remaining side housed the Main Stand and all its administrative offices for the football club and resident rugby league club, Rochdale Hornets. The Main Stand has a curious design quirk. The home dug out stands astride the halfway line. This means that the teams enter to their right of the line, the visiting dug out being even further rightwards of the halfway line. I have to say Steve was right about Spotland. It is a very good football ground.

Finally, a note about my favourite subject concerning football, the bits of paper offered to the punter. The Voice of Spotland cover is rather indifferent and gives little clue as to what lies await inside. The standard £3 purchase price gets you this 76-page gem. All of the expected features are thoroughly covered along with heaps of statistics. The club's history is discussed at length over four pages and this makes extensive use of contemporary programme covers. Traveller's Tales spends two pages musing over the recent visit up the road to Huddersfield Town. This is sub-divided into before, during and after, there is also a scan of the programme cover. Programme Vault picks up a copy of Rochdale v Notts County from 30th November 1968. This was from a Football League Division Four fixture and sold for one shilling (5p in modern coinage). The cover was four-coloured, with the inside text in the club's blue, inside this there was also a copy of Football League Review, naturally the full colour cover of this is shown. We are told that the match ended as a dire goalless draw, so perhaps I was lucky on this evening. The rather enigmatically titled Scrutator starts by discussing a recent horrific injury sustained by Town's Anthony Pilkington. The writer then goes on to comment on how bad things were for the football fan in the mid-eighties. 'Scrutator' is thoughtful reflective and chilling in equal measures. Quite how a club of such modest proportions can offer a publication of such staggering quality is beyond me. Frankly, this is the best programme I have purchased for many a year.

Phew relief washed all over me...when I got back in the car. I was absolutely delighted to hear that the great ones had made it through to the next knockout round of the Champions 'League'. But they suffered more injuries and Rio Ferdinand is not happy with the England manager and United will struggle against Barcelona, or Tottenham or Chelsea...

Still 37 of the current 92 to do...

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