

TT No.242: Ian Hill - Saturday 18th September 2010; **Worcester City** v Workington Reds; Blue Square Bet North; Result: 1-2; Att: 758 (approx.); Admn: £11.00; Programme: £2.50: Rating: 3.

An away day at Worcester City is one of my games of the season on the Workington Reds fixture list. St George's lane is a large old-style non-league ground which may not be around for much longer if City move forward with the plans for a new stadium.

Getting There

I travelled there by car and the location of the ground puts a bit of stress on my Sat nav. The ground is tucked in between tight terraced housing and a canal. Street parking is limited in the area so it's better to get there early to secure a parking place.

Worcester City FC

Worcester City Football Club was formed on 9th September 1902 when another Worcester-based club, Berwick Rangers, went into liquidation. The Birmingham League agreed to let City take over Rangers' fixtures, and the Club moved to St. George's Lane in 1905. City's first honour was the Worcestershire Senior Cup, which was won for six successive seasons between 1908 and 1914, and in the final season before World War 1 a Birmingham League and Senior Cup double was achieved.

There was little success in the early post-war years, but eventually City began to attract some quality players and surprised everybody by winning a second Birmingham League title in 1924/25.

For 1928/29 City appointed a full-time player-manager, Frank Womack. City clinched the title with ten wins out of their last eleven matches, but Womack then stunned City by accepting an offer to manage Torquay United. He was succeeded by Joe Smith, an ex-England and West Bromwich Albion full-back. 1929/30 season saw the title won again, City scoring an incredible 153 goals in 34 games. At home they won all their matches, mostly by cricket scores, with a six, five sevens, an eight, two nines, a twelve and a (then) club record 13 against Stourbridge, with Billy Boswell getting six, a club record he still shares.

During the 1930's the Birmingham League was considerably weakened as teams left and in 1938 City joined the Southern League, winning the Southern League Cup in 1940 - it was wartime and City were able to field several Football League professionals as guest players!

Although crowds flocked to the Lane when football returned after the war, there was little success until 1957/58, when under player-manager Roy Paul, City took Aldershot to a second replay in the F.A. Cup First Round, going out at St. Andrews, Birmingham in front of a crowd of 22,926 - a record for a City game. The following

year, City achieved a famous Cup result which is still talked about today. They first beat Millwall and then Liverpool - at the time playing in Division 2 - at the Lane before losing to Sheffield United in front of a record home crowd of 17,042 in Round 4.

City nearly went out of business in the early sixties, but supporters rallied to keep the Club afloat and were rewarded with some big-name signings. Players such as Peter McParland, Norman Deeley, Eddie Stuart, Ivor Allchurch and Gerry Hitchens all appeared in the blue and white shirt but it was not until the appointment of Nobby Clark as manager in December 1974 that the glory days truly returned.

The Southern League Division 1 North was won in 1976/77, with City gaining 69 points from a possible 76 and losing only one League match - the final one! Two years later, the Southern League Premier Division title was won for the first time, and in the same season City secured a memorable victory over Plymouth Argyle in the F.A. Cup. In 1979, City joined the newly-formed Alliance Premier League (Now the Football Conference), and finished third in its inaugural season. There were further F.A. Cup successes at home to Wrexham and Aldershot, but Clark was dismissed as manager in 1984, and City were relegated back to the Southern League twelve months later.

In 2001 former City star John Barton steered his team to success in the Dr Martens Southern League Cup, and during his five-and-a-half-year reign as manager two City players - Adam Wilde and goalkeeper Danny McDonnell - were capped by England at semi-professional level.

In 2004 City became founder members of the Conference North but in January 2005, Barton resigned and another former City player, Andy Preece, took over. His greatest success came in 2005/06, when City reached the second round of the F.A. Cup, losing 1-0 to Huddersfield Town at the Lane in a game televised live on the BBC. To compound City's misery, Huddersfield were drawn away to Chelsea in the next round.

In October 2007, Preece was replaced by Richard Dryden, assisted by City legend Carl Heeley. City switched to the Blue Square South for the 2008/09 season, and Heeley took over as manager at the start of 2010.

Events on the field in the last two years have been overshadowed by growing concerns over the viability of City's proposed move to a new stadium at Nunnery Way. Since 2008 there have been a number of changes off the field and a new Board of directors is now working hard to ensure the Club can survive and move forward. In 2010 the City Council approved a planning application for the St. George's Lane site to be redeveloped as housing. The sale of the ground will help the Club to pay off its debts and it is hoped to move to a new home within the next three years.

St George's Lane

The club plays at St George's Lane. The ground consists of the Dressing Room End and the Canal End (for away fans) which are uncovered terraces both located

behind the goals, the Main Stand (containing all 1,300 seats) alongside one touchline, with the North Side open terrace and the Shed covered terrace on the other.

The ground's record attendance is 17,042 from a fourth round FA Cup game against Sheffield United in 1959. The current capacity of the ground is 4,850.

The ground is soon to be vacated, as it has been sold to a housing developer. The sale is aimed at helping fund the building of a new 6,000-capacity ground to be built at Nunnery Way on the edge of Worcester.

One of the highlights of visit to Worcester City is the match day announcements by the very eccentric Roger "The Captain" Harris. Sometimes it's hard to decide whether some of his comments are genuine or just a wind up. He is certainly a breath of fresh air compared to some of the sterile announcers at some grounds.

The Game

Two cracking goals from super-sub, Matty Tymon, earned Reds their first ever win at St. George's Lane as Darren Edmondson's young side.

Indeed, the manager should be given a huge pat on the back as, once again, he tinkered with the line-up and the shape of the side making numerous changes to the formation during the second half. Supplemented by youthful exuberance and superb fitness levels, Edmondson's guidance is proving a winning formula. They were a bit sluggish early on and, whilst they showed signs of improving after City's opening goal, it wasn't until the second half that they got into their stride producing their best attacking forty-five minutes of the season. Even before their 15th minute opener, Worcester had gone close on a couple of occasions with Mark McGregor hooking one shot over the bar and Danny Glover sending a header in the same direction both, worryingly, via corners.

The lively, some would say annoying, Mark Danks, was given too much time on the edge of the box and he turned to send a low shot past Aaran Taylor for the afternoon's first goal.

It looked as though Reds had scored a perfect equaliser when close control, the hallmark of Arsenal or Barcelona, produced the skill moment of the match. Stephen Hindmarch played a delightful one-two with Shaun Vipond with the former then rolling the ball into the far corner of the net. A raised flag from the assistant on the far side of the pitch, however, confirmed we will have to wait a while longer to celebrate Stephen's first goal at this level. Hindmarch then found things going against him again soon after as he picked up a yellow card for leading with a raised arm (which is a complete joke in Conference North as all players do it) but, unperturbed, he still put in a great shift for the cause.

Reds made a positive start to the second half yet for all the football played in the match, by both sides it has to be said, it was a route one approach that almost produced an equaliser. Aaran Taylor accurately launched the ball downfield, Jonny Wright flicked on to release Gareth Arnison and the latter's well hit volley was

pushed over the bar by City 'keeper, Tim Sandercombe. Hindmarch then threaded the perfect through ball for Arnison but this time his low shot was saved by Sandercombe and there was to be no birthday goal for Arni.

When City launched a counter attack, Kyle May's nudge on Danks was enough to send the frontman to the turf and the referee awarded the spot kick. Danks took the penalty himself but Taylor dived to his left to save comfortably. Danks had lost his cool and ploughed into the back of May with the most reckless of tackles in the next attack. May retaliated by throwing the ball in Danks' direction and a yellow card for each player may not have pleased the assessor but it was a sensible conclusion by the referee.

Tymon, introduced to the game a few minutes earlier, then bagged a cracking goal with a quarter of an hour remaining. He shrugged off the challenge of City defender, Ryan Clarke, to send a low shot into the far corner of the net to the delight of the forty-strong Reds' support. Back came City who could have won the game through Matt Birley but he was thwarted by another important Taylor save. But super-fit Reds still looked determined to win and even the disappointment of seeing a Jonny Wright lob hit the bar didn't deter them. The pass of the season from Jonny Blake, all of forty yards, picked out Tymon who cut in from the left to send a shot, with the aid of a slight deflection, over Sandercombe and into the net for a dramatic and deserved 89th minute winner.

Programme

City's programme at £2.50 is slightly overpriced but it is one of the better issues in Conference North. Available inside the ground the A5 full glossy 36-page issue is well designed and has a good variety of articles.

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