

TT No.281: *Justin Holmes* - Sat 14th May 2011; **Caerau (Ely) v Goytre United**; Welsh League Division 1; Venue: Cwrt-yr-Ala, Ely; Score: 3-2; Admission including prog: £4.00; Attendance: 50 (estimate); Match Rating: 4.

With most senior leagues in England having drawn to a close by now, at least there is one of the few certainties in life for groundhoppers that the Welsh League will continue beyond most English leagues, and on that basis, I headed over the Severn Bridge today to extend my footballing travels for the season. My original choice of Aberbargoed Buds versus Llangeinor was scuppered by a late coach arrival in Cardiff - just as well as it turned out, as that game ended goalless - and instead stayed within the environs of Cardiff for what turned out to be a surprisingly pleasant venue as well as witnessing a decent game for an end of season affair.

Cwrt-yr-Ala, home of Caerau (Ely), is located about four miles west of Cardiff city centre, a walk I took on the way there, taking just over an hour, although as it was not a pleasant walk through some of the uglier parts of Cardiff, I caught the bus back to the city after the match. After walking along busy roads and housing estates, it came as something of a surprise to walk under a bridge and into another world - suddenly before me was a very rural and picturesque ground. It is surrounded by colourful trees with a hill behind one length of the pitch. The ground is fully enclosed although with see through fencing, hard standing around three sides of the pitch, not behind the goal where there is a rubbish tip - happily though, it doesn't become apparent that is what it is unless one walks up to it. There is a small stand straddling the half way line, although quite how health and safety concerns have not condemned the stand, I am not too sure, with broken and crumbling steps aplenty and with very unstable and uneven looking gravel covering the steps. However, to be fair, plenty of people did feel safe enough in the surroundings. A shallow clubhouse painted in club colours is located just outside the ground and blends in well with the surroundings. Despite there being other more idyllic venues for football in the Welsh League, this would be a very pleasant venue if only there were a mute button that one could press to turn off the constant loud roar of traffic coming from the adjacent busy dual carriageway which separates the ground from the housing estates. A programme was included with admission (although they did not arrive until half way through the first half) and it would have just about done the job with league tables, pen-pics and potted histories of both teams - had it not turned out, rather embarrassingly, that all of the information about the away team referred to Goytre AFC, a completely different club to Goytre United!

This was both teams' final game of the season, and with this being Caerau (Ely)'s first ever season at this level of football, it has been an excellent achievement that they are guaranteed to finish at least sixth, and could finish fourth but they are mostly in the hands of other teams for that to happen. They have been in excellent form too, winning four straight games before a 3-3 draw at Cwmbran

Celtic on Thursday, and have lost just once in their last ten games, that being against probably Welsh Premiership bound Afan Lido. Goytre United have consistently been one of the very strongest teams in the Welsh League, being champions last season and in seasons 2007/08 and 2005/06, and were runners up in each of the other seasons during that period. That they are not plying their trade in the Welsh Premiership is purely their choice never to have applied, a rather curious choice considering they have installed floodlights at their ground, one of the very few in the Welsh League to have them. They have found life more of a struggle this season though, down in eleventh position in the sixteen team league, although they cannot finish any lower than that and could finish as high as seventh - they would be guaranteed tenth with a draw today and ninth with a win, as two teams above them have already finished their season. They have been in very good form too though, having lost just once in their last eight games.

One wondered if fatigue may play a part in this game, with this being the second game Caerau (Ely) have had to play in three days, but such thoughts were quickly dispelled as the home side opened up a two-goal lead. They were certainly given a helping hand for the first goal inside ten minutes, when a Goytre United defender looped a ball in the air from out wide back to his goalkeeper. The Caerau (Ely) forward had anticipated a potential back-pass although the ball made it back to the keeper. However, he couldn't get the ball under control quickly enough and was dispossessed by David Vincent, who had the easy task of racing towards goal and slotting into the empty net. They doubled their advantage about five minutes before half time when a cross was headed firmly into the roof of the net by Liam Beattie. 2-0 was how it remained at half time, slightly harsh on the visitors who were possibly slightly the better team. However, they pulled a goal back on about ten minutes into the second half when a sloppy tackle resulted in a penalty, and the keeper was sent the wrong way. The comeback was complete ten minutes from time when it was time for the home keeper to make a howler, having raced off of his line to make a challenge he could barely hope to succeed with, and the ball was played towards goal from about the outer corner of the penalty area. It looked like the ball was going in, but the ball was nodded in to make absolutely sure from a couple of yards out. Suddenly it looked like the visitors would find the winning goal if it were to arise, but within a couple of minutes, the home side scored what turned out to be the winner when Tyrrell Webb sprinted forward from the half way line and his initial shot was blocked, with the ball bouncing out close to the touchline - full credit to Webb for showing superb accuracy and composure to find the net from an extremely narrow angle. And so Caerau (Ely) rose to fourth in the table this evening, although they could still fall back to sixth as both Bridgend Town and Pontardawe Town still have games to play, whereas Goytre United must settle for a final placing of eleventh.

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