

**TT No.95: *Rob Champion*** - Sat 16 October 2010; **Stretton Eagles** v Archdale '73; Midland Combination League Division 1; Venue: Shobnall Leisure Centre; Admission: £2; Programme: £1; Att: 30 (head count); Match rating: 3/5.

Would we see nine goals today? That is the question Gary Spooner and myself were asking before kick-off, as regular readers of All Roads Lead Somewhere will know we have seen this feat in the three previous games we have seen. In the end we achieved 2/3 of the “magic” number, more of which a bit later.

Stretton Eagles play in Burton-upon-Trent and their fixture today was chosen primarily due to the proximity of Burton to Leicester, and secondly, we have both visited a number of grounds in the top two divisions of the Midland Combination over the years. An example being is that (more by accident than design) I myself have only one ground (Brocton FC's Silkmore Lane) currently in use in the premier division to visit.

Stretton is a village on the northern outskirts of Burton in East Staffordshire and its name means Street Town due to it being on the Roman road of Rykilnd Street. The football club were formed in 2004 and were accepted into the top division of the Burton & District League. A 5th place finish was achieved in the 8-team division. The following season they finished runners-up to champions Barton United with only one point separating them and with it came promotion to division two of the Staffordshire County Senior League (SCL). They took to their surroundings like a duck on a pond and won the divisional title at the first attempt in some style. Only one game was lost in thirty league outings and they amassed 139 goals in the process. The 2007/08 season saw Stretton in division one and like the previous year they were divisional winners recording 62 points from 28 games played. Promotion to the premier division followed and they continued their rapid rise in achieving a 4th place finish. Last season saw the club crowned SCL champions and with what they hoped another promotion. An application to the premier division of the Midland Combination (MC) was made but the Shobnall Leisure Centre did not meet the ground grading requirements but were accepted into division one. This in effect is a sideways move with both the premier division of the SCL and division one of the MC at the same level of the non-league pyramid.

The Shobnall Leisure Centre is in Burton itself and is fairly easy to get to. If coming from the A38 (Derby) take the A5121 exit and go into Burton, going past the Pirelli Stadium (Burton Albion FC). At the island with the B5017 (Shobnall Road) turn right and the entrance to the leisure centre complex is on the right-hand side. The village of Shobnall and the leisure centre is well signposted for good measure. The ground is a basic affair with the pitch being fully railed and two permanent dugouts on either side of the pitch. There is no hard standing, cover, floodlights or clubhouse pitch side, though at half time they were selling hot drinks next to the changing rooms. Admission to the game was £2 with a further £1 for a programme.

The club were very welcoming and friendly and it is impressions like these that make watching the grass roots game all the more enjoyable.

The game was not the most skilful I have seen this season but was enjoyable enough all the same with the home side recording a deserved victory, in fact the margin should have been a lot greater as they (and Archdale to a lesser extent) were guilty of missing a lot of chances with either the final ball or finishing itself letting them down. Stretton took the lead on seven minutes when a cross from the right was turned in from a few yards out. Ten minutes later and they doubled their lead when a through ball down the middle was hit first time into the corner of the net. It appeared to be a case of how many Stretton would score with the Archdale defence in disarray at times. A third for the home side came on 28 minutes when a quick free kick caught the visiting defence napping and the ball was slotted past the keeper for a simple but well worked goal. Six minutes from the end of the half the visitors got themselves back into the game when a cross was headed back across the Stretton keeper into the far corner. The second half saw Stretton dominate in terms of possession, territory and chances created but woeful crossing and finishing let them down. Around the hour mark Archdale hit them on the counter attack and brought it back to 3-2 when their number seven turned home a cross from the left-hand side. Mid-way through the half and Stretton restored their two-goal cushion when their number ten found himself unmarked in the box and hit a first time shot from twelve yards past the keeper into bottom corner. Both sides continued to look to add to the scoring but alas for us neutrals this came to nothing, and in the end, Stretton ran out comfortable winners.

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