

TT No.96: Mike Latham - Sun 17 October 2010: Welsh Premier League: **Airbus UK Broughton** 2-2 Neath FC; Attendance: 224; Admission: £6; Programme: £1.50; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

Ten years ago, as the excellent programme at this game commented, it would have been impossible to forecast that these two sides would be meeting in the top echelons of Welsh football, especially in a Premier League this season reduced to just 12 elite teams.

It's a measure of both clubs' progress that they should achieve this feat and a visit to the Airbus factory on a pleasant, sunny and dry afternoon was eagerly awaited, not least the chance to watch Lee Trundle in action.

Trundle was the headline signing in the WPL this season after an accomplished Football League career, notably with Swansea City, Wrexham and Bristol City. I remember seeing him play for Chorley many years ago and, undoubtedly one of the most skilful and talented of players not to have played Premier League football he has been a real fans' favourite for his multitude of skills and talent.

Airbus UK Broughton was formed in 1946 and has played under various guises within the factory which is located just over the Welsh border off the A55, Vickers-Armstrong, de Havillands, Hawker Siddeley, British Aerospace and Bae Systems.

Their rise to the top level of Welsh football has been astonishing, with a background in the Chester & District League and the Welsh National League (Wrexham area) before moving into the Cymru Alliance. After winning that league in 2004 they moved into the Welsh Premier League and have stayed there ever since, last season earning their best position of seventh.

Every time you visit the ground some improvements have taken place and it was no different for me this time. A new seated stand has been constructed behind one half of the pitch-width behind the far goal which means the ground now has seats on three sides. The main club house side has a distinctively shaped roof and a neat 250-seated stand straddling the halfway line has been a feature of the ground on the other side for the last two seasons.

Backing onto the airfield and with the massive Airbus factory adjoining the venue is immaculately kept and the welcome at the turnstile and from the friendly stewards patrolling the ground make this a joy to visit.

With special retractable floodlights which are raised and lowered for games, as the pitch is adjacent to an active runway, this is an unusual ground but one with several great vantage points and there are added bonuses- a simply magnificent club shop with a magnificent array of programmes and other souvenirs, a sensibly priced mobile catering van and the adjoining Broughton Wings Social Club which extends a warm welcome to football supporters from near and far.

Airbus has made rapid strides in recent years and clearly have developed an excellent club infrastructure headed by manager Craig Harrison. This was rewarded by them being awarded an U21s Welsh international against Poland recently.

I had visited the Airfield several times over the last few seasons but this was my first day visit, my others being on Friday evenings and so the opportunity to take some photographs of the ground was too good to miss.

Neath took a 2-0 lead in an intriguing encounter but Airbus came back strongly to equalise and then created the best chances until Trundle hit the bar with a dipping shot in injury time. This was an excellent advertisement for the league and from walking around the ground it's clear that many people have adopted Airbus as their favourite 'second' club behind the likes of Everton, Liverpool, Wrexham and Chester.

A visit to this friendly, well-run and hospitable clubs comes highly recommended.

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