

TT No.117: Mike Latham - Sat 17 December 2011: Lock Stock Welsh Alliance Football League Division One: **Caernarfon Wanderers** 1-1 Nefyn Utd; Att: 50 (h/c); Admission: £2; 32pp Prog: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 3*; Ground Postcode: LL55 2EF.

It's always good to visit a club 'on the up' and the rise of Caernarfon Wanderers in recent seasons has been nothing short of remarkable.

Only formed in 2007/08, Wanderers won the Caernarfon League Division Two crown in their debut season, were Division One champions in 2008/09 and were elevated to the Gwynedd League, earning promotion to the Welsh Alliance when they started a second division. A championship season in 2010/11 elevated the Wanderers to the heady ranks of the Welsh Alliance Division One, level three of the game in Wales.

Wanderers' rise has coincided with the demise of the town's main team, Caernarfon Town who were a regular feature in the Welsh Premier League until experiencing a rapid fall from grace. Town, who had a memorable FA Cup run under John King's management in 1986/87, accounting for Stockport County and York City before bowing out to Barnsley almost went out of existence two years ago before a heartening revival was instigated by a newly formed group of directors and supporters. They are fighting their way back up the Welsh pyramid and are currently in the same division as Wanderers.

The worst of the wintry weather that accounted for so many fixtures elsewhere had mercifully avoided the north- tip of Wales; though the air was cold and the chance of rain or hail was always present there was no threat to the game taking place at Cae Top, Wanderers' elevated location behind a housing estate on the A4086 Llanrug road east of the town.

It's immediately apparent that a lot of hard work has taken place to ensure Wanderers have taken their place at this level. There are three green-painted metal buildings, housing both dressing rooms and a tea bar and referees' room. The playing pitch has a white-painted fence surrounding it and dug-outs and advertising boards dominate the far side of the ground. The view inland is simply stunning, especially as the distant mountains are flecked with snow, and with the sun occasionally breaking out from behind dark clouds some of the changes in mood and light are awesome.

Wanderers' roots can be traced back, the informative club programme informs, to 2006 when Gwynedd Council announced it has been passed that one of Caernarfon's most famous football fields into an extension for the local cemetery. The adjoining field is known as Cae Top, and had long been used by local junior and Sunday league teams and a kick-about field for local youngsters. Following further discussions between a group of friends, Caernarfon Wanderers FC was formed with the intention of working with the Council to preserve Cae Top as a football field and also develop the site with dressing rooms and other facilities. A

new school is now being built next door to the site and it looks as if the Cae Top playing fields will be safeguarded for recreational use by the community.

After such a successful run Wanderers have struggled in the top flight and went into this game in the bottom four of a highly competitive league. Their visitors, Nefyn United, were at the bottom but knew that a good run of results could swiftly see them rise through the ranks.

Wanderers dominated the early stages and went ahead with a goal on 20 minutes following a corner. But Nefyn were competitive throughout and looked far more competent than many bottom-of-the-table-sides. Their equaliser came six minutes after the re-start and if anything, the visitors looked the more accomplished side throughout the rest of a game played in good spirits and excellently refereed.

The tea bar was open throughout the game, serving hot drinks in mugs, hot dogs and chips and the locals were friendly and clearly proud of their team. I really enjoyed the game and the occasion.

As darkness descended, I headed off into town on the final shrill blast of the referee's whistle.

Caernarfon Town were playing Bethesda Athletic in the same division, the game having kicked-off half-an-hour later. The Oval, a ground I have visited several times before, is a superb facility and would still not look out of place in the WPL. Since threats over their existence the town's football followers have rallied behind Town and gates this season average over the 300-mark.

Town were 2-0 up when I arrived and under the floodlights went on to record a 4-0 victory, playing with impressive fluency and tempo. On 27 December Town entertain Wanderers in what should be an eagerly-contested local derby, having won 4-0 at Cae Top earlier in the season. From my brief time in Caernarfon I got the impression the two clubs were friendly rivals and I would recommend making time to visit this game if your Christmas commitments allow.

A long time ago a team known as Caernarfon Wanderers became the first from north-west Wales to enter the FA Cup. That was in 1886; they lost 10-1 at Stoke and the club secretary reputedly pawned his watch to pay for the journey home as the gate receipts had not covered the team's expenses. In the 1960s, a local centre-forward, Wyn Davies, made his debut with Caernarfon before going on to a glittering career with Wales, Bolton Wanderers and Newcastle United. 'Wyn the Leap' as he was known is still a legend in these parts- recognising my accent a club director I got into conversation with asked where I came from; when I replied 'Bolton' he immediately replied 'Wyn Davies' and we had a long chat about football.

They know their football in this town and if you venture to Caernarfon Wanderers or Town, or both as I did on this occasion, you are assured of a warm welcome. Days out watching football don't come much better than this.

07/20

