

TT No.13: *Paul Roth* - Sat August 20th 2011; **FC Romania** vs. Indian Gymkhana FC; Middlesex County Prem Division; Res: 4-2; Att: 4; Entry: £2 incl. 4 pp prog; Altitude/Global positioning: The Score Community Centre, Oliver Road, Leyton, is 9 m (29.527ft) above sea level, located at latitude 51 degrees, 33.5 min N; 0 degrees, 0.8 mins W (position der. from centre circle); Weather: Torrential rain, then health-giving sunshine accompanied by scorching heat; Club Shop: No; Local MP: John Cryer (Lab); My day's carbon footprint legacy: 13.7.

The majority of this website's readership will doubtless have been fully indulging themselves in the new 2011/12 football season, and I'm guessing some of you will have already watched 5, 10, 15 or maybe even more matches by now. If you've attended 30+, then you need to get out more!

As summer's warmth subsides and with the onset of autumn, that's the signal for me to spring into football action. Anyway, the football season as far as I'm concerned never properly commences until the initial round of Middlesex County Leagues matches have gotten underway. I've eluded to it previously, but this particular competition is unquestionably the finest of its type to be found worldwide. Its diversity, stunning venues and brilliance-of-product affords everything the true football aficionado could ever wish for.

We ourselves are still very much in cricket mode, and not even the initial tranche of Budweiser FA Cup skirmishes could have tempted me to abandon the sybaritic sound of leather upon willow. That all changed though when I happened to glance at the opening day's MCLPD fixtures, and spotted the thought-provoking FC Romania vs. Indian Gymkhana FC show-stopper of a curtain raiser - a veritable east meets east clash of the Titans! Has there ever been a more glamorous tie to grace the opening day of any football campaign?

With my decision made, a tenuous detente brokered with the good lady and in tentative preparation for the momentous day, an email was forwarded to the home club on Monday night - unquestionably the first and possibly only time I'll be in communication with a personage entitled 'Vlad' (hopefully not of 'Impaler' fame)- to confirm programme, venue etc. Then, from Wednesday onwards, when a positive reply thundered into my inbox, it was a hellish wait of seemingly endless days and sleepless nights, akin to those of an expectant schoolboy about to embark on an initial sojourn to his favourite Premier League football club, longing for Saturday's dawn to arrive.

Eventually, after what seemed an inordinate length of time, as of course it must, the big day finally arrived.

So, full to the brim with boyish verve, and following as traditional a Romanian breakfast as could be mustered, I sallied forth westwards and Smoke-wards at 5.15am for the hallowed turves of Oliver Road (the playing surface there is in truth a 1G affair) for only my second game of the season - a mini adventure at AFC

Totton's Testwood Stadium was undertaken with my seismologist cohort, last Tuesday evening.

An enjoyable liaison with my great pal Geoffrey Hussingtree Tamworth Seers, who was today dressed in a head-turning, bespoke vermilion-tinted lounge suit, along with his equally colourfully attired, canary yellow sari-wearing and Jimmy Choo shoed-up Bollywood film star actress girlfriend Raksha (who, incidentally is a distant relation of the late Leslie Crowther) took place inside the glorious Brodie's Brewery William IV public house, located at the northern extremity of Leyton High Road. Our quasi beer festival therein - a staggering, quite literally, 18 of their eclectic brews were on offer - added, to the day's wonderment still further; it's always uplifting to hook-up, albeit briefly, with such close friends who unfortunately live such a distance from my Riviera stronghold. Alas and alack, 'Huss' was today again in sombre mood, spitting vitriol in fact and once more incandescent with rage, this time following a particularly brutal altercation with an Irishman and his savage Bichon Frise three-week-old puppy. It all kicked-off apparently in the stairwell of a Leyton-bound No. 69 bus. "Animals, with the exception of those being transported in secure containers", my busman supremo vehemently explained to the caustic 90-year-old foreigner, "are not permitted anywhere upstairs, onboard a TFL-run double-decker bus." The directive delivered, for maximum effect it was explained to me, in the accent of a disgruntled Nazi Storm Trooper. My Moquette/Hairy (epithets for bus-spotters) mate - aka Reich's Chancellor Blakey - simply bristles with rule book quotations and omnibus paraphernalia nowadays.

Our brief rendezvous in the East End is explained by the fact that we were both off to different games that happened to be in close proximity to one another. Geoff, who presently has no desire to stray far from his Bengeo bunker, due in no small part to a botched circumcision (that already-unpopular myopic Mohel is unquestionably for the high jump), has decided to re-visit some of the grounds near to his Hertfordshire commorancy where in the past he had witnessed goalless draws. An ignoble, Tram-esque occupation methinks, which started amidst the boondocks of AFC Kempston's Hillgrounds coliseum last weekend. I fear this buffoon-like pastime will flounder sooner rather than later: his enjoyment at undertaking such a moribund pursuit will also surely have been severely tested, and might well have reached its inevitable withering nadir, at nearby Haringey Borough's White Hart Lane facility sometime during that club's preliminary round Budweiser debacle with the aforementioned AFC Kempston (them again!). Between 3 and 5pm, the sound of a solitary shotgun retort thereabouts would not have been totally unexpected.

Founded as recently as 2006, FC Romania has won promotion to the MCL Premier Division for the first time this term, having finished as runners-up in some ghastly lower division last May. The organisation's rather impressive website recounts the side's overriding, *raison d'etre*, of one day being able to take part, like so many other smaller teams throughout the land had done today, in the prestigious English FA Cup. Unsurprisingly, the club plays its home fixtures in the motherland's colours

of red, yellow and blue (a laundry glitch today meant they played in a predominantly white uniform). The team's current home is The Score Community Centre, located slap bang opposite Leyton Orient FC's Brisbane Road headquarters; on-approach to the Romanian Quarter the unmistakable miasma of downtown Bucharest hangs heavily in the air.

The stage, that has the burgeoning Olympic City set a mile behind its southerly aspect, is aesthetically pleasing to the eye and today glistened regally under the E10 sunshine - once it stopped raining. It is surrounded by stunningly intricate malachite-coloured mesh fencing, and is blessed with state-of-the-art floodlighting. There is on-site an enticing refreshment room, and a magnificent full-size indoor football pitch. But it's the emerald-green, artificial flooring that enthral me most. Caressing my bare skin against its feather-like, sensual surface at full-time was more than cathartic; it was bordering on hedonistically sexual.....utterly visceral.

A decent, if somewhat arcane, 4-page matchday programme that retailed for £2 and included entry (see addendum below) featured an advertisement for the intriguingly named 'The Transylvanian Prince'. This authentic Romanian eatery, situated in nearby Homerton, is apparently renowned for nationally acclaimed dishes such as Friptura Inabusita de Vita (that's Ossobuco to you and me), and Sarmale (mincemeat wrapped in cabbage - yum yum!).

Action-wise, the game, as I knew it wouldn't, did not disappoint. Played at a blistering pace, full to the gunwales of skilful interplay, commitment and sympathetic refereeing, the viewer could easily have been forgiven for thinking he was witnessing one of those classic Barry Bundock West Kent Challenge Shield confrontations. It was truly that sort of a match. Two goals down after 25 minutes and with the sun now breaking through, the eastern bloc unit pulled one back by virtue of a stunning effort of a player whose surname ends with the letter 'U'. The equaliser, a candidate for any goal of the season, came via the same source; this time his sizzling strike hit the back of the net, almost bursting asunder the gossamer-like structure.

The tea break gave everyone present a chance to catch their breath. Afterwards, both sides strove for supremacy but with time running out, this end-to-end, transfixing contest appeared to be heading for stalemate. Dramatically though, FCR clinched it with two late scores, the fourth being crashed home by a dapper Owen Cooper look-alike, leaving IG licking their wounds and probably feeling as downcast as their compatriots across the Thames, at The Kia Oval. In fairness to the Indians however, they were without many first-team regulars; it is the height of the arranged wedding season you know!

Addendum: It should be pointed out that spectators are now no longer allowed inside the 'Cage' of any artificially-surfaced arena. They must, annoyingly and irritatingly, stand outside the structure to watch any match taking place within. To circumvent this inconvenience, I flashed my FGIF pass, and stated that I was covering the match for 'The Gazeta Sporturilor' newspaper; it somehow worked!

More irksome to myself was the stubbornly-closed, award-winning, GBG-listed Leyton Orient Supporters Club bar opposite. I've wanted to 'tick it off' for ages, but I'm never going to waste a trip to Leyton just to watch Orient! I'd have to be out of my mind to do that!

In summation, my first Saturday fix could not have produced a more pulsating, inspirational game of football, played at such an awe-inspiring venue. I think I now might just be back in football mode; wheel on Indian Gymkhana at Cardinal Vaughan School Playing Fields, in a fortnight's time!

FGIF Star Rating: 5*.

FOOTNOTE

Groundhoppers will be saddened to learn that Blackpool-based Steve Hurley's doggy Wishbone passed away on August 14th. Steve, Bella and Wishy had become iconic figures on the circuit, and many of us will treasure happy memories of the triumvirate at our social gatherings during the past 20 years.

My favourite recollection of the threesome was at Newquay's Mount Wise ground during the 2002 SWL Easter hop. Trailing a dozen or so steps behind them and approaching the entrance, a smile instantaneously fell across my face as the inseparable troika entered the ground through one of the public portals. They had chosen to ingress via the only one that clearly had annotated across its lintel....."NO DOGS ALLOWED".

07/20