

TT No. 169: *Richard Panter* - Wednesday 22nd February 2012; **York City v Gateshead**; Conference Premier; Result: 1-2; Attendance: 2,683 (128 away); Admission: £15; Programme: 44pp, £3; TS: 10p; Match rating ****.

With my attack on the 92 nearing completion I decided to mop up the three remaining non-league grounds left that have hosted league football in the past. York City's Bootham Crescent being a little over 90 miles from my home was always on my list for an evening fixture.

Located on the northern side of the historic city hemmed in among row after row of solid, neat and tidy terraced streets this ground promised to be a gem. Entered from only two sides and externally built with local stone, red brick and a more modern grey wood cladding; it reeks of atmosphere and character. At the turnstiles I was asked if I would like to enter via the main gate as I was walking with a crutch (after a knee operation) but I thanked the steward for his concern but decide to pass through with a click of the gate, no computer bar entry here I am pleased to say! I stood on the covered home terrace that spans the whole of the northern goal line. To my right was a pitch long covered structure that in former days would have been a terrace; it is now a seated area. Opposite was a shallow open terrace that housed the raucous 'Heed Army'. On my right I looked at the main stand, fully covered and seated. Changing rooms, hospitality and goodness only knows what else took place deep in its bowels. Old fashioned in the finest sense, but in need of a little TLC. The ground was indeed a gem.

I had forgotten who the evening's opponents were and was happy to find out on arrival that they were the most northerly team in the Conference, Gateshead. I had never seen the Heed play and try as I might, I say the same for York City. So it was a rather unusual event to see two teams play for the first time at a what was a new ground for me.

City lined up in deep red shirts and dull blue shorts, Gateshead in white tops and black shorts and I am pleased to relate that the match officials wore black. In the second minute Micky Cummins artfully blasted home from a cleared corner to put the visitors in front. They comfortably held this until the break despite the home sides many failed attempts to get the ball into the Heed box. Cummins was on hand to net on fifty-seven minutes to double his pacey, strong and hard-working team's advantage. City manager Gary Mills rang the changes shortly after and a triple substitution saw fans favourite Jamie Reed net within a minute of coming on. From then on I expected a full onslaught from the home team but they didn't cause the visitors any real problems as they meekly played out the match. Gateshead thereby achieving a double over their more illustrious opponents. I doubtlessly caught York City on a bad evening as they looked anything but play-off contenders. On the other hand, Gateshead played magnificently to the delight of their fans.

Looking at the Conference Premier league table indicates how much non-league football has evolved since the formation of the Football Conference in 1979, and more importantly the introduction of automatic promotion to the football league in 1987. Thirteen teams have football league experience, a couple of non-league's traditional giants still hang around and the remainder are comparatively new members to the elite ranks. The continuing rise of Fleetwood Town and the achievements of Alfreton Town and Braintree Town warrant special mention I feel. Long may it continue.

07/20