

TT No.187: *Justin Holmes* - Saturday 10th March 2012; **Farleigh Rovers** v Westfield; Combined Counties League Div. 1; Venue: Parsonage Field, Warlingham; Score: 0-1; Admn: None; Programme: Free; Att: 11 (h-c); Match Rating: 2.

For today's fare, I quite fancied taking in a game in the northern Surrey area, having not been there for some time. Although Godalming, Sandhurst Town and Ash United came into consideration, in the end I plumped for a visit to Farleigh Rovers, with the weather set fair for the long walk to the rural location of the ground.

Parsonage Field is located about a 45-minute walk north eastwards from Whyteleafe rail station (or Upper Warlingham, the two stations being almost adjacent to each other on different lines). It is not an easy walk however, being steep uphill for about the first half of the three-mile walk, although buses do ply the route for those less energetic. The ground is something of a throwback to the very basic grounds that one used to encounter in the County Leagues decades ago, the type that the FA appear determined to eliminate, from senior football, more's the pity. Indeed, surely Parsonage Field is living very much on borrowed time, with Farleigh Rovers already having played some games at Croydon FC in recent seasons and the ground could certainly not host Combined Counties Premier League football without extensive improvements. Considering the team's current position, that is not likely to be an issue for quite some time. Located down a track, the ground appears to have not received any TLC for many years, and is all the more quaint and charming for that. There are no floodlights, and facilities are very basic, with two buildings housing the clubhouse and the changing rooms, with some corrugated cover stretching between those and the pitch-side railings, providing the only cover in the ground. For the rest of this length there is hard standing, along the other length is just grass to stand on although there are some old-fashioned railings which are collapsing in places, and it is not possible to stand behind either goal. Behind one of the goals is the track to the ground and fields and behind the other are trees closely lining the goal line, all of which provides a nice rural feel to the ground. Ugly strewn junk behind the hard-standing area does detract from the appearance of the ground though. Surprisingly, there was nobody to take any admission money (although the attendance only just reaching double figures that may have included club officials probably meant there was little motivation to bother having someone on the gate). The official attendance was published as 20 - surprising, as by my counting, the figure peaked at 11. Programmes were available - free of charge - from the bar, and the 20-page publication was basic but well-presented and with enough information of interest to read to fill ten minutes or so.

Farleigh Rovers are battling against relegation, although they deserve credit for it not being a foregone conclusion already, having lost their first eight games of the season and only picking up three wins and three draws from their opening 20

games. However, a 0-6 home defeat to near neighbours Warlingham at the turn of the year seemed to inspire a change in their fortunes, having won three and drawn one of their subsequent five games, the only defeat coming against runaway leaders Guernsey. Going into this game, they were in fifteenth place in the eighteen-team league, six points clear of the bottom two and the potential relegation places. Westfield are settled into a season of mid table obscurity, in eighth place, but having played more games than all other teams, there is very little prospect of making up the 12 points to a promotion place. Their recent form has not been good though. Before winning last time out at home to Feltham, they had picked up only one point from their previous six games. When the two teams met earlier in the season, Westfield let a two-goal lead slip and the match ended 2-2.

The first half was a rather dull affair, with no real chances being fashioned, although the home side probably showed more of the attacking ambition, particularly in the early stages. A goalless score-line at half time was not surprising. As the bright warm sunshine gave way to overcast skies for the second half, within eight minutes of the restart, Westfield were awarded penalty when a fierce shot towards goal was blocked by a defender's hands. Shane Cheeseman placed the ball excellently low into the bottom left corner with the keeper going the other way. This did spark the game into life a little more, and 64 minutes, a lovely curling shot from a Farleigh's Thomas Nyarko from fully 25 yards hit the crossbar. As the second half wore on, Farleigh Rovers put more and more pressure on the Westfield goal, although they rarely convinced that they could find an equaliser. Three minutes from time and Westfield could have put the game to bed when a jinking run into the box resulted in a placed shot that was deflected just wide. Deep into injury time, and Farleigh Rovers had their best chance of the game when a corner, which their keeper came up for, was headed over the keeper to the back post, but the ball was stabbed just wide, and so it was Westfield who kept their first clean sheet away from home since August to earn the three points.

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