

TT No.225: *Chris Freer* - Saturday April 14th 2012; **Long Buckby** v King's Lynn Town; United Counties Premier; Score: 2-1; Attendance: 784; Entertainment value: 3/5.

There's a popular belief that football is a game awash with money. It's true, there are a number of clubs in the higher echelons whose sugar daddies seem willing and able to pump megabucks into their squads for a chance to run rings round Barcelona at the end of the season.

Sadly, apart from my occasional visits to Stamford Bridge, most of the places I go to feature clubs with barely two pennies to rub together. Even former leading lights like Forest, where fans will only know how much debt the club is in once new owners are found, are living from day to day. If I'd have won that £160-odd million on the Euro lottery a couple a month's back, I might not have been able to solve that one, but I'd have certainly been the knight on a white horse for Darlo, and maybe also had enough spare change to pay for levelling that pitch, at Berwick Rangers (a fantasy ever since I first visited Shielfield Park). Pipedreams of course, just like those enjoyed by fans of virtually every football club in the country, at all levels.

Money makes the world go round, but if you're not earning any there's always sick pay! I mention that only because my first job today is to call into the Royal Infirmary in Leicester, who ever-so-helpfully haven't told my wife's GP that they've plastered her up for six weeks. So, getting a sick note to cover this period hasn't been easy. That's why I'm having to travel 25 miles from where I live to pick up the relevant piece of paper, because they won't post it to us. Marvellous. It does, however, decide for me that the lad and I will eschew kids-for-a-quad day at Forest and continue southwards to a tasty looking game at the top of the United Counties Premier.

The village of Long Buckby sits just off the M1 motorway and is served by a railway station. I'm not sure if it has any other claims to fame and I suspect most Saturday afternoons probably under 100 or so hardy locals venture down to the Station Road ground of the local football team in the United Counties League. This season the team has been doing rather well, and sits in second place behind league leaders King's Lynn, who would be eminently catchable if the result of today's game between the two clubs goes with the home team.

So, a big crowd is expected, and the money machine swings into action. Let's charge £3 to allow you to park your car, warning you that you might get a ticket if you park in the adjacent streets - that should work. Let's charge you £8 to get in, even though the norm for this level is about a fiver. Let's charge you £2 for a 'program' (sic) despite the fact it's barely a quid's worth. Let's put on a barbecue and sting punters £2.50 for a hot dog, even though it's one that comes out of a tin....

Not just my observations, but echoing the gripes of the legions of Lynn fans who turn up to cheer on their team, and have to pay through the nose for the privilege. I suspect a few of the locals are equally miffed at being made to cough up more for this game, having cheered on their team through thick-and-thin throughout the season.

I can, however, find some positives. The clubhouse, which is situated on the main road outside the ground, has a handpump selling Charles Wells John Bull Bitter, at 5.3%abv not really a quaffing beer but welcome nonetheless. The snack bar inside the ground, while being a tad difficult to enter and exit, has Pukka Pies (all meat) and a range of packaged sandwiches, many suitable for veggies. Sadly, for the lad, who hates tinned hot dogs, there are no sausage rolls either, so he has to exist on a packet of crisps.

The ground today is bulging. 784 is the reported attendance, with seats in the modest main stand disappearing very quickly. Most of those at the game are supporting the visitors, and congregate all-round the flat standing, even encroaching into areas officially roped off for safety reasons. There's a never-ending queue for the toilets - men's and women's - and several punters, doubtless inspired by the entry fee, decide to come into the ground by vaulting the fence.

The sun is shining, but there's a strong chill wind blowing as the game kicks off with King's Lynn stealing the early initiative, scoring on 15. Within 3 minutes it's all square as a wayward defensive header gifts Buckby an equaliser, and the game is fairly open up to the break, without ever really being a classic. The ebb-and-flow pattern continues into the second period until a mass fracas on the hour changes the balance somewhat. The referee deems that the home No.5 is mostly at fault and he disappears from the field, while only yellows are brandished at opponents.

To the home team's credit, they don't let the handicap of being a man light affect their positive attitude to the game. Despite much Lynn huffing and puffing, I always feel that Buckby look the more likely to score even though the deciding goal, when it comes, owes more than a little to wind assistance as a hopefully in-swinging corner kick finds the far corner of the net. Second in the league sees out the remaining quarter of an hour without too many scares to put top of the league under some pressure as the season reaches its climax.

"Can we play you every week?" sings out a home voice from the stands. Having said that, maybe it's just the club secretary, counting the money....

There's more on my blog at <http://flynn123.wordpress.com/>

Worth almost every penny...

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