

TT No.231: *Paul Roth* - Sat April 21st 2012; **AFC MOTTINGHAM** vs. BEXLIANS FC; Kent County League Div. 2 West; Res: 6-1; Att: 43; Entry and Programme: N/A; Altitude and global position: Coldharbour Leisure Centre, Chapel Farm Road, New Eltham is 46m (150.918 ft) above sea level: at latitude 51 degrees, 26.1 min N; 0 degrees, 3.2 mins E (position derived from centre circle); SAT NAV:SE9 3LX; Weather: Sunny and warm; Club shop: No; Local MP: Clive Efford (Lab); My day's carbon footprint legacy: 13.7.

Isn't it a bugger when the weekend's well-laid footballing plans go up in smoke, as the onset of a debilitating ague lays you very low indeed. The hope is that the malady's onslaught won't amount to anything dire, but if it does, and it occurs early enough in the peace, its symptoms will have sufficiently faded come 3pm Saturday.

Of course, they never do, and by midday Friday death's door stands ajar before you. Your mind's by now wracked in turmoil as the deadly cocktail of bacterial and viral infection coursing through stinging veins and throbbing limbs plunges you headlong into perceived oblivion. Confused thoughts focus only on which hymns to have played at the impending funeral.

Terrifying introspection manifests itself as to what it'll be like screwed down inside that suffocating walnut casket, awaiting the flames of the crematorium's furnace; this horrifying countenance jolts you back from the edge, into the here and now, more effectively than any defibrillator's highly-charged paddles. Far, far worse: that grotesque, unimaginable, nightmarish, stultifying truism is dawning: you could actually miss out on footy this week altogether!

I hate colds.

My affliction though was no Ebola-like fever. It was a complaint I'd not suffered since childhood, and at one stage seemed likely to rule out travelling anywhere today. A reddening of my left eye, accompanied by itchiness and intense soreness, last Sunday morning became full-blown conjunctivitis by Wednesday evening.

My Aunt Saliva (not an aunt at all, but a family friend entitled Sylvia) used to extol the virtues of employing a poultice of one's own urine to alleviate such inflammations. In the name of the Lord I beseech you not to embrace such Witch Doctor-esque mumbo-jumbo. Not only did adopting this foolhardy practice make the condition worse, at one point it had me genuinely fearful the sight in at least one, or both, of my eyes might be extinguished forever. Not for nothing was the Dubonnet-swigging harpy oft referred to as 'a bloody loon'. Everybody loved her to bits though.

Somehow, when football comes around, like Lazarus, we alpha males uncannily are always able to haul ourselves off our deathbeds. Sitting opposite me, draped across our chaise longue the evening before departure, stockinged feet protruding

from a seductive peignoir, autumn jacinth in colouration (that's cantaloupe to you and me), my paramour's callous comment.....'you'd get there even if you were in an iron lung' at a stroke snuffed out expectant ardour of what I'd wrongly perceived to be a moment of approaching amore.

Not quite an iron lung, but one of South-eastern Railway's Javelin trains (given the parlous state of my eyesight, wheel spinning the Hot Rod out of its pit lane onto the M2/M20 racetrack would have been calamitous) was ultimately utilised to propel me Mottingham-wards.

Slipping into Rebecca Adlington's rear carriage (the vehicles are named after famous athletes), I settled myself into a first-class compartment. The agreeable cost of just £90.30p for a day return - this included unlimited omnibus, underground and DLR usage - negated the invidious gaze of the hoi polloi. Having attained Ashford International moments after departing the Riviera, the journey now took on a superior dimension. G-forces akin to that of a Space Shuttle, launch had passengers pinned in their seats as the locomotive's acceleration reached an unperceivable velocity.

Within minutes Ebbsfleet Parkway had come and gone, with Stratford International achieved nanoseconds later.

Hereabouts the venue of the 30th Olympiad soars above the horizon. The ghastly present-day hinterland makes one wonder what, if they were still tellurians, William Shakespeare and his beau, Anne Hathaway, would make of their erstwhile village, today transformed into an agonised melange of gnarled-steel and soulless concrete.

From chap-fallen Stratford the Docklands Light Railway contrivance conveyed me onward to Lewisham, where life-giving succour was mercifully on hand. A prolonged, and I do mean prolonged, fill-up in the Watch House was followed by two TFL omnibus extravaganzas, that delivered me into agrarian New Eltham a tad after two minutes past 14.04hrs.

AFC Mottingham's Coldharbour Leisure Centre home is a showstopper. The vast green space provides multifarious sporting opportunities to the local populace, and is a veritable lung for what otherwise is a densely built-up area of south east London. A licensed bar hosts SKY SPORTS on large-screen TV, and on the day was well patronised by home fans (let me say that again - home fans) watching the Arsenal-Chelsea Premiership clash. The football club itself plays on the pitch nearest to the centre's main building, and although in close proximity to other fields, is tucked away in a corner, thus giving the arena a compartmentalised feel.

The simplistic statistic of this top-of-the-table KCL Division Two West fixture was that if Bexlians won they'd be crowned league champions (Mottingham were out of the running, a long way behind, in third spot). That they ultimately lost by such a large margin is surprising to say the least. Even accounting for the absence of their influential centre-half, they played poorly and were overrun by a rampant amethyst-suited home side who took their chances with such aplomb that any

neutral onlooker would have been forgiven for thinking AFCM were themselves the champions-elect.

Three up by half-time, the rubber was effectively ended as a contest minutes after the restart, when to the delight of the home supporters Mottingham added a fourth. The reds did manage a consolation, but two terrific late net-stretching strikes condemned the side from the neighbouring borough to their heaviest defeat of the campaign. Worse still, news had by now filtered through that Erith 147, their nearest title rivals, had beaten Crofton Albion 2-0, meaning the race for top spot will go down to the wire. Both clubs have one tricky-looking away fixture remaining, at Halstead and Lanes End respectively.

It had been my intention to venture further afield this Saturday, but as it happened a rare outing on the train due to my now-improved malaise turned out to be a thoroughly enjoyable, if at times slightly blurred, adventure. For this one time only - I hope!!

Football-Grounds-Out-of-Focus Star Rating: 5*.

07/20