

TT No.243: Keith Aslan - Mon 8th May 2012 (KO 13.29); **Ryehope CW** v Boldon CA; **Monkwearmouth Charity Cup Final 2012**; Result: 3-1; Admission: £2; Programme: £1; Attendance: 249 (146 home 55 away 48 neutral).

With Ryehope having been accepted into the Northern League for next season this was my natural Bank Holiday destination to see if they could take another step to creating a record that I doubt will ever be beaten. The ground is still a work in progress, as evinced when somebody asked where the toilet was and were directed to the nearby cricket club, but it is coming along nicely, with new dugouts and a new stand already in place and the rest of the work will be completed by the start of the season.

The team however are the finished article with the last 67 league and cup games producing just one defeat. The history in the making came last season they completed the quadruple, only the third time in 120 years this has been done. That's the league title, and Shipowners, Monkwearmouth and league cups. They are now just one game away from repeating the feat, away to Stockton next Saturday in the League Cup Final. Back to back quadruples, impressive huh?

Taking the excellent Metro from Newcastle, get off at Park Lane (not Sunderland City Centre) where in a perfect example of integrated transport, the bus interchange has routes all over the north east. The buses to Ryehope village run every few minutes, even on a Bank Holiday, and there is a 15-minute service that drops you right outside the ground. I can never understand how the Newcastle Metro is financed. There are no guards on the trains, no staff or barriers at the stations, and buying a ticket doesn't appear to be the preferred option for most Geordies. Apparently, there is a large team of travelling ticket inspectors, but in all the times I've used the system I've never seen any of them.

The game started on time, worth a mention as I can't remember the last time one did. The referee managed this feat by leading the players out onto the pitch five minutes before the advertised start. It's so simple I can't understand why his colleagues haven't sussed it out. I must mention E. Heward, who appears to be about as popular as John Terry when it comes to pre-match handshakes. Nobody offered this 4th official the hand of friendship and while the players and officials were out pressing flesh in a display of bonhomie, E.H. was skulking by the dugouts looking very upset by the snub. Given that the pre-match handshake is an integral part of the FA's staggeringly unsuccessful Respect Campaign does this mean nobody has any respect for the fourth official? OK he doesn't do very much but that's not his fault, surely, he deserves to be in on those vital early handshakes that set the tone for the rest of the match? The man was a true pro and putting it behind him he produced a faultless display of 4th officiating for the 5 minutes he was called on to do something. At least he was presented with a medal after the match which was so deserved.

The game was a barnstormer in spite of an icy gales blowing across the Wearside tundra which made ball control difficult, and me very cold. Although clearly the better team, it wasn't until the last 20 minutes that Ryehope actually looked like winning. Although 0-0 at half time Ryehope dominated and continued to do so in part two. Football being what it is, Boldon then opened the scoring ten minutes in with a glorious long-distance daisy cutter from a free kick. It took 5 minutes for Ryehope to level and a somewhat optimistic Boldon player had a go at scoring direct from the kick off. I've seen lots of players try this but none have managed to miss by quite so much as this man. The idea that the strong wind might put off the goalkeeper only applies if the wind is blowing in roughly the same direction as you are kicking the ball. The wind here was blowing across the pitch hence the shot troubled the corner flag more than the keeper. For the next 15 minutes Ryehope dominated, but Boldon twice hit the woodwork (work that one out) before the home side got the ball in the net with 15 minutes to go, and the third one near the end was just the icing on the (cup) cake.

07/20