

TT No.29: *Andy Gallon* - Sat 3rd September 2011; **Basford United** v Bilborough Pelican; CML South Division; Res: 1-1; Att: 80 (h/c); Admission: £3; Programme: £1 (32pp); FGIF Match Rating: **.

Keeping up, in a hopping sense, with the Central Midlands League is akin to painting the Forth Bridge. It's an endless task. Just when you think you're done - another batch of new clubs joins. Basford United, formed in 1900 and Notts Senior League runners-up in 2010-11, are among this season's intake. Their reasonably attractive ground at Greenwich Avenue is located in a pleasant residential area between junction 26 of the M1 and Nottingham city centre. United have played here since 1990, having moved a mere hundred yards north from the site of their previous ground on Mill Street. Home from 1935, this is now covered with houses. In addition to the main pitch, which is fully enclosed, United have three other pitches. All are local authority-owned. The club have a 99-year lease (from 1990) on the training pitch, between the old and new grounds, and the main pitch, but have no security of tenure on the other three. You'd imagine, to a developer, the site was worth a fortune, but I was told it's a flood plain, which is bound to deter builders. United, with an eye on rapid promotion to the East Midlands Counties League, want to erect floodlights, but these ambitions could be scuppered because the area alongside the River Leen, which runs through a man-made channel immediately east of the ground, has been deemed a wildlife corridor. Bats are among the species it is feared could be adversely affected by operational floodlights.

A grassy field, between the west end of the ground and a row of retirement bungalows (the immaculate gardens are a dead giveaway) on Greenwich Avenue, provides plenty of parking. The dressing rooms are in a separate block about 50 yards from the ground entrance, a gate in the south-west corner. A small, boxy wooden stand, set back a little, on the south touchline has two rows of bench seats. A red-brick shed nearby dispenses refreshments. Opposite are four dug-outs (the smaller of the two pairs apparently redundant) and, in the north-west corner, is a small corrugated iron shelter over hardstanding, which has been laid round only the western half of the pitch. This slopes noticeably downhill towards the river, hidden from sight by an impressive line of poplars. Beyond these, Nottingham's sexy modern trams can be seen passing constantly, either arriving at or departing from the Highbury Vale stop. On the whole, it's a nice setting, surprisingly semi-rural considering the centre of Nottingham is just three miles away, but simply too open and undeveloped to have any sensation of cosiness or intimacy. Pretty bleak in bad weather, too, I'd hazard.

This was not, I have to say, the greatest of games. It was competitive (as you'd expect of a derby), but after an eventful opening 10 minutes, it rather petered out. Neither side had enough quality in the final third, though I got the impression Basford would have won comfortably if they'd had a full complement of players.

They didn't because Ben Middleton was sent off in the seventh minute. He couldn't have any complaints. Middleton hauled back Dave Udoh as the Pelican striker was about to tap in a ricochet off keeper Lance Walker, who had found a free-kick too hot to handle. Joe Ashorst tucked away the resulting penalty very confidently. Within a minute, Basford were level. A cross from the left to the back post was nodded back into the penalty area and Reggie Royes, unmarked 10 yards out, headed past James Johnson.

Jack Henson should have put Pelican ahead on the half-hour, but headed high and wide when well placed, and team-mate Johnson did exceptionally well to push aside a close-range Courtney Hastings prod on the turn. The second half, spoiled by a strengthening wind, was short on entertainment. Pelican created the best chance. A superb cross-field ball sent Danny Blanchard scampering away on the right side of the box, only for the striker to volley across Walker and a foot wide of the far upright. A series of clattering challenges from both teams, and banter between the Bilborough bench and a broad Scots linesman, provided some interest before the final whistle sounded. There was, for me, the consolation of learning that my other match option for the day, the fixture in the same league at Alton Manor between Belper United and Blidworth Welfare, had ended goalless. At the 11th hour, I'd decided to save them for another day of metaphorical bridge painting.

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