

TT No.3: Keith Aslan - Sat 23rd July 2011; **Blackburn Rovers** v Preston North End; Lancs. Senior Cup Final; Venue: Lancs FA Ground, Leyland; Kick Off: 14.56; Result: 1-1 (3-1 pens) Admn: £6; Prog: £2; Att: 1288; Unofficial demographics 912 Preston, 304 Blackburn & 72 neutral.

There is a certain frisson when boarding a Virgin train as you never quite know if you will actually get to your destination. The 09.30 from Euston got to Rugeley Trent valley before stopping due to "signal problems" The delay was "only" 45 minutes, I missed my connection of course, but in Virgin terms this was a result. Wigan was buzzing, both platforms were choc a block, opposite were Rugby League supporters making for the cup match at Warrington while my platform was full of holiday makers/day trippers heading for Blackpool. An already full two car train apologetically pulled up, we somehow all managed to squeeze on and I had a very uncomfortable 15 minutes ride to Leyland.

The ground, home of former North West Counties League club Leyland Motors, is only a 10-minute walk from the station through what seemed like a pleasant little town. It has a large stand along one side, another behind the near goal, with the spacious Lancashire FA offices along the other side. Behind the terracing at the far end is a 3G pitch for community use. All in all, a very nice ground and well worth a visit. As well as Cup Finals, Bolton Wanderers Reserves play their home games here. My first port of call was of course to the refreshment kiosk. Cheap and filling nosh aplenty here. I bet neither of the competing teams knock out teas and coffees at ten bob a throw.

Preston took this game much more seriously than their opponents. Their fans outnumbered Blackburn's by 3 to 1, they fielded a team not too dissimilar to what they will be putting out for league games, all of the Preston players I had heard of, admittedly not a great number, were strutting their stuff today. Blackburn's mixture of reserves and youth were managed by their reserve manager while orchestrating matters from the Preston dug out was perma-tanned first team supremo Phil Brown. And Deepdale Duck kept a high-profile presence throughout while his opposite number (Ewood Eagle?) decided to give the game a miss. Excellent match, plenty of goalmouth action, with Preston's greater experience shading the chances but not the goals.

1-1 after 90 minutes, no spurious extra time - well done Lancs FA and straight to penalties. I am not alone in wondering why it takes referees so long to organise penalties, with some taking up to 15 minutes to get things going. So, five stars to Darren Handley for getting the first penalty taken in what must be a record 3 minutes 38 seconds after he blew the final whistle. What is he doing that other refs don't? The scene was set for Preston to be the first team to win the Lancashire Senior Cup (or any other competition I would imagine) without winning a game, their progression to the final being entirely on penalty shoot outs. Alas it was not to be and with both sides producing a masterclass in how not to take a penalty, 5

of the 9 were missed and Blackburn won it 3-1. All done and dusted by 16.58 thanks to the referee.

A highly enjoyable day all round, but if you fancy a trip to the ground from London, check the fares in advance, a standard day return on Virgin Trains comes in at a cool £286. Privatization eh, fabulous!

07/20