

TT No.31: *Paul Roth* - Sat September 3rd 2011; Hellenic League Div. 1 East; **Highmoor-Ibis FC** vs. Chalfont Wasps; Res: 3-1; Att: 52; Entry: £4, incl. 12pp programme; Location and global positioning: Palmer Park is 48 m (157.480ft) above sea level at latitude 51 degrees, 27.1 mins N and longitude 0 degrees, 56.2 mins W (position derived from centre circle); Sat Nav: RG1 7AE; Weather: Warm/sunny; Club shop: No; Local MP: Rob Wilson (Cons); Carbon footprint legacy: 13.7.

Looking back, my time spent at school was unquestionably not the happiest days of my life. That said, they certainly weren't the unhappiest either, as my Alma Mater always luckily managed to preoccupy me in various sporting activities. The very thought of being hunkered down in a dingy classroom, having to learn about such mundane subjects as Latin, Biology and Chemistry was anathema; to be honest, as it's turned out, a complete waste of my precious time and considerable effort.

The subjects, besides those that required physical exercise and involved a spherical object, that mildly held my attention were Art, History and English: Art because we never actually learned or did anything much during the lesson - it was in reality an hour's skive; History because to 'Warm us up' our tutor spoke at length to us attentive schoolboys about the weekend's football or cricket results (much more conducive than any antics the stuffy Tudors might have gotten up to) and English, not necessarily for the dissection of The Classics - although I've always been an admirer of Enid Blyton's work - but because the master who taught me managed to make the subject interesting. How pleased I am now that I took a little time to learn the rudimentary mechanics of the English language; to spell; to punctuate and to adhere to some of the more important linguistic nuances such as...'I' before 'E', except after 'C' ; plus to...never end a sentence with a preposition.

From my Riviera bolthole to the Wheelwrights Arms at St. Nicholas Hurst (an inn best described as 'mainly hideous') took an unbelievable 4 hours, such was the weight of traffic, minor accidents and carriageway refurbishments.

From there it was only a further 2.62 miles to Palmer Park - the current residence of newly-promoted Highmoor-IBIS FC - in Early, on Reading's eastern extremity.

Even with such slow passage I was still on-site by 1.30pm. Erroneously I opted to purchase another tincture at the nearby College Arms 'Clinic'; even with my limited acumen I didn't need much persuasion to deem this hostelry 'totally hideous'. The moral of the story - never arrive early in Early!

A driveway off the A329, Wokingham Road leads into a large car park, which in turn fronts this sporting behemoth. Named after George Palmer, a local philanthropist and ex-mayor of the borough (a statue of said dignitary stands to the left-hand side of the grandstand upon entry), the arena was last utilised as a football venue 12 years' ago by the now-defunct Peppard FC (PFC folded soon after

they were denied entry into the Isthmian League, when Palmer Park was deemed sub-standard).

Its impressive facilities include an enormous 780-seater grandstand; a 6-lane running track; full track and field amenities; a banked 460-metre Velodrome, a state-of-the-art gymnasium; 11 floodlight pylons; a new and well-stocked snack bar; two 5-a-side football pitches and of course the main grassed footballing area. Perversely, its charm, to me at least, lies in its evident signs of decay and neglect. You don't have to look that closely to discover peeling paint on the wrought iron stanchions holding the roof in place, the lichen-encrusted rails and posts behind the crash barriers and the advancing undergrowth thereabouts.

The tannoy system though is still laudably audible.

I paid £4 for the privilege of watching IBIS' first-ever home Hellenic League match, which was accompanied by a disappointing 12-page programme - the tome's highlight being a leaf dedicated to some rather amusing limericks. This epigram particularly tickled my fancy-

*"There was a young man from Devizes
Whose balls were of differing sizes
One was so small
It was no ball at all
But the other was huge and won prizes"*

I'm not at liberty, on this website at least, to repeat the one that commenced, "There was a sassy whore from Nantucket..."

Annoyingly, photography is not permitted inside the crater, but having told the head steward I was in attendance as BBC Radio Berkshire's sports photographer, I neatly side-stepped this odious, near-catastrophic dilemma.

Having won the Reading Senior League last term, Highmoor-IBIS have struggled to come to terms with their new surroundings, and before kick-off had only gleaned a solitary point (that gained in a 6-6 draw away to Hungerford Town 'Development' FC) in five previous Division 1 outings. This particular water-loving avian has been wading in treacle it would appear! With table-topping Chalfont Wasps FC in town, I was fully expecting an away-win banker as I took up my viewing position.

Being so far away from the action, with the aforementioned runways between yourself and the playing area, something akin to The Hubble Telescope is required to aid spectating; what I'm trying to say is that it's all far from ideal and that the short-sighted needn't bother.

The first forty-five minutes of attrition was spent conning, easily I'm sorry to say, gullible referee Simon Tobin into awarding endless free-kicks with theatrical dives and feigned injuries. There was not one single attempt at goal, unless you count back-passes!

The latter period was much better, springing into life as it did on 48 minutes when the home side scored from a penalty-kick. Wasps equalised soon afterwards, the goal being a stunning strike that fizzed into the bottom corner, screeching past the out-stretched hands of the homesters' goalkeeper. To my surprise, IBIS completed their inaugural Hellenic League victory with two well-taken late strikes: they fully deserved it too. After enquiring why, it had taken them quite so long to get off the mark, I was informed that it was because half the side had either been away on holiday, or had just been released from maximum security prisons!

On egress I mordantly uttered "Well Played" to one of the far-from-happy Wasps players who had just left the field in high dudgeon following this shock reversal. His susurrus two-worded reply also cannot be reproduced herewith.

Suffice to say the hapless dullard is patently not a doyen of the English language. If he were, he surely would have realised that "OFF" is in fact a preposition!

FGIF Star Rating: 5*.

07/20