

TT No.42: *Andy Gallon* - Tue 13th September 2011; **Buckley Town v Rhyl**; Cymru Alliance; Res: 2-3; Att: 431; Admission: £4; Programme: £1.50 (28pp); FGIF Match Rating: *****.

Not, in all honesty, a ground to set the pulse racing, but the Cymru Alliance came up trumps again in the football thrills department. This proved a compelling contest in which the fortunes of both sides ebbed and flowed before the outcome was decided in stoppage time. Ideal fodder for the neutral. Rhyl, a powerhouse at this level, grabbed the late clincher to deflate a Buckley team who had played really well in the second half. A draw would have been the fairest result.

Let's deal with the ground first. This is Buckley's 11th season at The Globe, located some way from the town centre on a former landfill site. The club's previous ground, in the town, still exists. The Bucks opted to move because of problems created by anti-social behaviour. Combing the pitch for the discarded syringes of drug addicts was no-one's idea of fun. The Globe, on Globe Way, is splendidly isolated with a rural feel. Trees fringe all but the north end, and create an appealing sensation of enclosure and intimacy. The car park, at the north end, is restricted to the vehicles of players and officials. A path down one side of the main building, a red-brick, single-storey structure, leads to a pay hut. A pukka turnstile block is under construction on the other side of the building, which houses the dressing rooms, a hospitality area and a kitchen/refreshment hatch. The players reach the pitch, lush and level, via a 25-yard long path, passing an all too familiar kit stand in doing so.

The oldest cover is on the west touchline. A third of this simple stand is given over to four rows of seats. The dug-outs are positioned in front. To the rear, a grassy bank rises to a line of trees and the perimeter fence. This stand is to be moved to the south end, the only part of The Globe without cover, and a 300-seat replacement erected. Opposite, on the east touchline, is a substantial propped cantilever stand, with dark green cladding and six rows of red plastic tip-up seats. Alongside are some rather tired - and apparently mostly unused - portable buildings. A high mesh fence behind is designed to keep stray balls off Globe Way. Nonetheless, several cleared this obstacle and made it onto the road. Hardstanding has been laid round the pitch, which is surrounded by a solid barrier. The floodlights, not great and scheduled for upgrading, are mounted on masts. Being relatively new, this ground lacks a bit of character, but its pleasant situation is some compensation.

Pitch problems meant this rearranged fixture was only Buckley's second at home this season. The landfill base, not all it should be, produces, I was told, a hard surface in dry weather and a morass when it's wet. Installing new drains led to the Bucks (or the Claymen) facing a wait to get into action in front of their own fans.

The crowd for this game (my headcount totalled 250; where the official 431 came from, I don't know) was swelled by a big following from Rhyl, and they watched their team dominate the first half. With better finishing, the Lilywhites might have had the points sewn up by the interval. Rhyl took the lead in the 27th minute when James Gambino got away down the left wing, and his cross was met on the volley by Michael Pritchard, who saw his shot loop over keeper Jamie Hulse. Buckley went route one to equalise 10 minutes later. A long clearance was flicked on, and Derek Taylor, in plenty of space, kept his cool and slotted a rising shot past advancing keeper Stefan Holden. Rhyl deservedly regained the lead in the 39th minute. Gambino slung over a corner from the left, and skipper Russell Courtney was given the time and room to pick his spot with a downward header.

Buckley brought on all three subs at half-time, and this bold strategy translated into a vastly improved performance. Rhyl hit the woodwork twice, but the hosts matched them blow for blow, and drew level in the 66th minute. Veteran Lilywhites right-back Mark Powell was stranded upfield when a move broke down, and hadn't the pace to track back to challenge left-winger Neil Wynne, who outwitted Holden in a one-on-one. As the game entered stoppage time, Rhyl pinched victory. Sub Tom Rowlands his luck from outside the box, and his speculative low shot had the direction to squeeze between Hulse's right hand and the post.

Though doubtless disappointed, Buckley are planning to use this season to improve their facilities and strengthen the squad. Marketing manager Matt Torgersen, formerly at Rhydymwyn, is keen to raise cash from as many sources as possible, and hopes soon to stage a special event aimed at groundhoppers. You'll be assured of a warm welcome at The Globe, a tidy, lovingly tended venue which seems to be evolving steadily and sensibly, as funds permit. Buckley (and Rhyl) have applied for a Football Association of Wales licence, required to secure promotion to the promised land of the Welsh Premier League.

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