

TT No.70: Paul Roth - Sat October 15th 2011; Kent County League Div. 2 East; **Guru Nanak FC** vs. Sevenoaks FC; Res:4-2 Att: 50; Entry and programme: N/A; Altitude and global position: The Guru Nanak Sports Ground, Khalsa Ave is 21m (68.897 ft) above sea level; latitude 51 degrees, 26.03 mins N, 0 degrees, 22.6 mins E (position derived from centre circle); Weather: Warm and sunny; Club shop: No; Local MP: Adam Holloway; My day's carbon footprint legacy: 13.7.

Sitting in our back garden the other afternoon, soaking up the day's last warming rays of sunshine, the cacophony of children happily playing a short distance away wafted across the patio. This sound of childhood innocence must be amongst the most evocative intonations; it transcends all languages and every culture.

Since their formation in 1965, Guru Nanak FC have enjoyed unrivalled success, winning The Gravesend League and numerous local cups many times; they've also been successful in various Asian-based competitions too. In 2004 they were elected to the Kent County League, where they remain to this day. The only time previously I'd visited the club was at the end of the 2005/06 season, when it was playing its home matches at the AEI Henley Sports Club, in Dunkirk Close. Located in Gravesend's Badlands, in close proximity to the A2, this was a soulless venue that even the most rose-tinted amongst our brethren would have had difficulty eulogising about.

In 2009, out of necessity, the club decamped to Khalsa Avenue, in the town centre, to make its headquarters within the grounds of the newly-constructed Shri Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara Temple. This move followed a devastating fire at the previously mentioned venue, which completely destroyed all facilities en-site.

The Sikh community has had a presence in the Thames-adjacent north Kent town for more than seven decades (a stroll around the place today is more commensurate with a walk around the Punjabi city of Amritsar, given the demographic of the Sikh population hereabouts), and with the completion of the Gudwara - that cost upwards of £20M - in 2010, years of hard work sees this magnificent edifice virtually completed.

Its Disney-esque structure also provides us groundhoppers with what must be one of the most unique venues - and backdrops - anywhere on the non-league circuit.

Set alongside the temple's southerly flank, the railed-on-three-sides pitch includes two spacious dugouts, and has extensive sports halls and changing areas set across the (private) road from the field of play.

The inside of the Gudwara itself is cavernous - anybody can enter, the only proviso being that footwear is removed and one's head is covered. The multi-roomed structure is as decorous inside as it is out; but its undeniable spirituality, and overwhelming sense of calm that pervades throughout, was what particularly struck me.

After my quasi-religious stop-over the inner sanctum of the GBG-listed Jolly Draymen, around the corner, was my next port of call.

Befitting the magnificence of the surroundings, the two teams served up easily the best match I've seen all term. Three up at teatime, Sevenoaks pulled one back with 20 minutes on the clock still remaining. They reduced the arrears still further two minutes later, then duly missed the chance to draw level by missing a penalty kick with seconds left. 'Nanak responded immediately, scooted up the other end and delivered their own fourth goal quietus.

Apparently, it was a gang of teenagers who torched Dunkirk Close's pavilion. It goes without saying, I do not condone arson, of course not: but praise be to the parents, at whose behest, those youngsters set out to play a few years' back, armed only with paraffin, rags and a box of Swan Vestas matches, who took it upon themselves to rid the world of the AEI Henley Sports Ground.

It transpires that the sound of children at leisure isn't always quite so angelic. Little did those fire-raisers realise how they'd hastened the move of this charismatic football club to far more salubrious surroundings.

FGIF Star rating: 5*.

07/20