

TT No.84: Paul Roth - Sat October 29th 2011; **Hadlow Evolution** v Hawkenbury; Kent County League Division 2 East; Res: 5-5; Att: 10; Entry and Programme: N/A; Altitude and global position: The Sports Ground, Hadlow College is 37m (121.391 ft) above sea level: at latitude 51 degrees, 13.5 mins N; 0 degrees, 19.7 mins E (position derived from centre circle); SAT NAV: TN11 0AL; Weather: Autumnally mild; Club Shop: No; Local MP: John Stanley (Con); My DCFL: 13.6.

Of all the articles written over the years for this website, I wonder if there has ever been a tale told about as astonishing a football match as this? The eye-catching 5-5 score-line is in itself a relative rarity, but the truth is that, it actually beggars, belief.

Founded in 2008 by brothers Lewis and Tomas Wright, Hadlow Evolution FC (its American Football franchise-sounding epithet is derived from the hit Play-station game Pro Evolution) started life in Division 2 of The Tonbridge & District League before being elevated to the Premier Division two seasons later, immediately winning that competition at the first attempt. This term the club have accepted the challenge of an even higher standard of football, and are making their debut in the Haart Kent County League.

The club play home matches at Hadlow College, located on the A26 Tonbridge Road, a couple of hundred yards southwest of the village of the same name. The horticultural institution boasts a working farm, garden centre, equine facilities which are listed in the 2012 pre-Olympic Games Training Camp Guide, laboratories, indoor and outdoor classrooms, glasshouses, a commercial dairy, fisheries hatchery and the beautifully manicured Broadview Gardens. Its sporting facilities are also extensive.

Initially on arrival, having supped a beer or three in the Two Brewers on the High Street (The Harrow, a Shepherd Neame establishment further back towards Maidstone, is a worthy stopover point too: The Prince of Wales, nearest the college entrance is not, unless of course you hanker after the morose), my eyes lit up on seeing a fully railed-off pitch equipped with state-of-the-art dugouts. Alas this is used solely by Tonbridge Angels FC's academy side, but it is hoped that the club will soon be able to have use of it, as indeed they hope to be utilising the college's soon-to-be-refurbished licensed bar.

Before the match's 2.45 start, which was played on the adjacent sloping pitch, I'd fallen into conversation with Lewis himself. A more personable young man it would be hard to meet, and despite being busy with pre-match duties, he found time to chat with me about the club he and his sibling has nurtured since its inception 3 years ago (Lewis actually plays, but is side-lined at present and is awaiting keyhole surgery for a cruciate ligament injury).

With the game under way, it didn't take long for Hadlow to hit their straps and they duly opened the scoring within 10 minutes of kick-off. The hapless amber and

black-clad visitors were at sixes and sevens at the back, but it was their young 'keeper who looked most vulnerable. Long before half-time they were 5 nil down (centre-forward Sam Thompson had already helped himself to four goals) as 'Evolution's forwards sliced through the brittle defence with the alacrity and ease of a chainsaw through rotting timber. By the break they had however managed to pull one back.

Even so, I was fully expecting double figures to be achieved by the homesters as the latter forty-five minutes commenced. Hawkenbury reduced the arrears further within 5 minutes, made it 5-3 a quarter of an hour later and by virtue of a rasping cross-shot found themselves within touching distance of their hosts soon after. The impossible surely wasn't about to happen, was it?

As if an omen, the sun that had been hiding behind grey clouds for much of the afternoon, suddenly shone through casting an orange glow over proceedings. As the clock counted down Hawkenbury then won successive throw-ins the near their opponents' goal-line. Sensationally, with the penultimate kick of the game, their No. 8 stabbed the ball home; they'd equalised and come back from being 5 nil down! Cue, understandably, riotous celebrations from the Tunbridge Wells-based side. They had achieved what I'd imagined unachievable; with only ten men too!

As I bade farewell, I felt for Lewis. But give credit where credit's due. Although disappointed - and who wouldn't have been - he was pragmatic regarding what had just occurred. After all, Hadlow had scored five times themselves, and on any other day he'd have been delighted with that; it was just that they'd somehow managed to undo all their good work with a woeful second-half defensive performance.

I do wonder what on earth was in Hawkenbury's drinks as they regrouped during the half-time interval; It must have been a powerful elixir, or else it was the mother of all team talks! This was a once-in-a-lifetime game of Association Football, and one that'll live long in my memory; I'd like to congratulate everyone who participated for making it so.

FGIF Star rating: 5*.

07/20