

TT No.89: Paul Roth - Sat November 5th 2011; **Bredhurst Juniors** v Stansfeld Oxford & Bermondsey Club; Haart Kent County League Premier Division; Res: 1-4; Att: 18; Entry and Programme: N/A; Altitude and global positioning: Upchurch CC, Holywell Lane is 13m (42.650ft) above sea level: at latitude 51 degrees, 22.4 min N; 0 degrees, 39.3 mins E (position derived from centre circle); SATNAV: ME9 7HN; Weather: Overcast but mild; Club shop: N/A; Local MP: Derek Wyatt (Con); My day's CFL :13.6.

Crack open the Pomagne: I've now completed the Haart Kent County League Premier Division! Actually, last week's trip to Hadlow Evolution FC also rounded-off Division Two East for me, but that was more a Vimto-deserving milestone.

Having first watched Bredhurst Juniors FC when they were in residence at the 4-4-2 Club in Gillingham, the club subsequently spent last season playing at the Co-operative Sports Ground on the Isle of Sheppey. Their peripatetic existence sees them dropping anchor this term in the Thames Estuary-adjacent village of Upchurch. Set in what I'd term 'a bit of a backwater' (but all the better for it), their current location of choice is undoubtedly the most pleasing to-date.

Bredhurst have in fact not moved to another football ground per se, but to an arena more accustomed to hosting the summer game, namely Upchurch CC: my wife and I actually visited the club as recently as last July, when watching our beloved Sandwich Town CC in a Kent League 20/20 Cup tie, and thought the pastoral, Jersey Cow-munching setting idyllic then.

Boasting not one, but two full-size pitches, matters football-wise are convened on the field normally reserved for non-1st XI cricketing activities. Perhaps the reader might be unimpressed by the lack of facilities here, especially if he or she is more accustomed to having their football fare served up in stadia comprised of grandstands, terracing and towering floodlight pylons. To me however, this is just the type of bucolic, minimalistic setting I've nowadays come to love.

State-of-the-art goal frames and nets, an immaculate playing surface and on-going work to the almost-finished double-decker pavilion (the cricket club's members have not only raised all the funds to complete this conversion themselves, but have also performed the majority of the building work in-house too) combine with the leafy backdrop to make this one of the loveliest venues on the current KCL circuit.

My experiences when watching Stansfeld O&B Club have been memorable; for all the wrong reasons though. On the two occasions I've encountered them previously, they've managed to have three times as many players sent-off as they have scored goals. Before today's match the count was six and two respectively. At Norton Sports FC in December 1999, I well recall wincing at the sheer brutality - which at times bordered on downright thuggery - employed by their feckless players.

As proceedings got under way another unsavoury trait soon reared its ugly head. A tirade of foul language wafted skywards into the ether, fracturing the erstwhile demeanour of Arcadian serenity. So many F and C-words were bandied about that one could have been forgiven for thinking a new language had been brokered. 40 minutes of prosaic drear ensued, until slightly against the run of play Bredhurst opened the scoring. This only resulted in galvanising the bruisers in banana and blue into life; they came out after the brief half-time break with all guns blazing (a metaphor my friends - the south Londoners are definitely not the sort of people you'd ever want to encounter toting firearms). Strongarm tactics were employed to a lesser extent, but they possessed enough footballing nous without ever needing to revert to physical violence. Like swaggering sixth-form seniors, they cut the blue and white quartered-clad lower-form juniors down to size with wave after wave of clever attacking football. Bredhurst were indeed lucky only to concede four times during this period.

This was a thoroughly entertaining occasion, spent in a rather lovely, if somewhat understated, part of north Kent.

Yes, Stansfeld's biters bit, but not as hard as usual. The miracle - and I believe it to be exactly that - is that my personal Stansfeld Oxford and Bermondsey Club FC 'goals-for' ratio to 'sending's-off' has achieved parity. I never, ever imagined it would.

FGIF Star Rating: 5*.

07/20