

TT No.93: Rob Campion - Sat 12th November 2011; **Gretton** v Welford Victoria; Northants Comb League Prem Division; Result: 2-9; Admission/Programme: None; Attendance: 20; Match rating: 4 out of 5.

After last week's plan B scenario thankfully, there are no problems for today's trip to Northamptonshire. According to Google maps my journey from the Braunstone area of Leicestershire should take me through Leicester city centre along the A47 and out towards Uppingham, before heading south. Knowing what a ball-ache the inner ring road around Leicester city centre can be I decided to avoid this route altogether and head towards Oadby before taking the A6 to Market Harborough, then heading to Corby and finally north to Gretton. This took around fifty minutes to make the 30-mile journey. When heading between Corby and Gretton I noticed this huge structure ahead of me on the right and while trying to figure what it was, I missed the turning for Gretton. After turning around, I had a different view and realised it was sections of grandstand seating at the Rockingham Motor Speedway. When heading away from Gretton after the game towards Corby you get a scale of the size of it as it dominates the skyline like nothing I have seen before.

Gretton is a village in north Northamptonshire close to the border with Rutland and according to the 2001 census had a population of 1,240 inhabitants. It is located pretty much equi-distance (approx 5 miles) from both Corby and Uppingham. The village is noted for having the tallest church tower and second oldest running pub (The Hatton Arms) in Northamptonshire. It is also one of the few remaining villages to retain its stocks and whipping post which can be found on the village green. The last recorded use was in 1858 when a villager was put in the stocks for six hours after failing to pay a fine for drunkenness.

The earliest information I can find on Gretton Football Club only goes back to 1999 when they were accepted into division 1 of the Northants Combination. They won the division at the first attempt and also added the Division 1 Cup as well, beating Kettering Nomads 2-0 in the final. Promotion to the premier division was achieved but their stay in the league's top flight only lasted two seasons before they were relegated back to division 1. Four seasons were spent in division 1, the last of which in the 2005/06 season saw them finish bottom of the fifteen-team division and relegation to division 2. Two seasons ago they won promotion back to division 1 by finishing in second place, six points behind winners Corby Danesholme Vikings. They did add the Division 2 Cup title by beating Burton United 1-0 in the final which was played at Harborough Town FC. A second successive promotion was achieved last season despite finishing in 3rd place, some twenty-seven points behind divisional winners Ringstead Rangers. Runners-up Corby Morton Vikings were not promoted, reasons which I am unaware of. This season in their first back in the premier division for ten years Gretton have had mixed fortunes. They currently sit in tenth place recording two wins from their eight league games. Last time out they lost 2-1 at home to local rivals Weldon United witnessed by an

excellent crowd of 100. Welford meanwhile are in their second season in the Premier Division having won the 2009/10 division 1 title. This season they remain unbeaten in their seven league games, recording four wins and three draws. Their last outing saw them beat Corby Khalsa 2-1 at Newlands Road.

Before I write about the match itself I ought to mention that in the three times I have seen Welford play (twice last season and once the season before), their opponents have had a man sent off.

The recreation ground is situated on Kirby Road on the southern edge of Gretton and is your typical village rec affair that is common in the Northants Combination. The football club share the facilities with the cricket club and on site is a clubhouse and changing room block. At half time the club served hot drinks for 50p each. The football pitch was roped off on all four sides while a small pair of dugouts were located on the far side. There is a small corrugated stand also on the far side but to be honest it is neither use nor ornament as it is situated behind the dugouts and would not offer a view of the action at all!!!

To be honest I am not sure where to start on this one. A game in which the Welford forward line of Craig Cassidy and Seb Seward ran the home defence ragged and on the day were a different class. It started off so good for Gretton as they took the game to their unbeaten opponents. They deservedly opened the scoring on eleven minutes as a free kick was headed over their number 8. Welford equalised five minutes later when Welford had a free kick of their own. It was spilled by the Gretton keeper and Craig Cassidy followed in and finished from a couple of yards out. Gretton continued to push forward at every opportunity, and their goal-scorer was played onside by the visiting defence but his shot was well saved by Welford keeper. Welford took the lead on nineteen minutes when the Gretton captain was caught in possession by Cassidy in centre field who then ran unopposed towards the goal, rounded the keeper and finished with aplomb. Gretton continued to cause Welford problems but were nearly caught out on the counter attack. A quick break upfield saw Seb Seward have his shot well saved. Welford's third of the afternoon came just before the half hour mark as Matt Wootton headed home a corner at the far post. Five minutes before the interval and it should have been 1-4. A free kick on the right found a diving Matt Wootton at the far post and finished superbly. The home linesman incorrectly ruled out the goal for offside - a decision which incensed the Welford bench and players as Wootton timed his run perfectly as he came from behind a defender. Justice was done somewhat as Welford turned the screw even tighter with two further goals in the last minute of the half. The first saw another mistake by the Gretton defence and Seward was unopposed, as he slotted the ball past the keeper. The second (and Welford's fifth) was from the penalty spot - Iggy Mesias stepped up and finished confidently. Half time: 1-5

After the problems Seward and Cassidy caused the Gretton defence in the first half they sat deeper to reduce the space between themselves and their keeper. Obviously, an action causes a reaction and this resulted in the Welford midfield having a lot more time and space. Two goals in the space of four minutes before the hour mark saw Welford increase their lead to 1-7. A free kick fell kindly to

Seward who stabbed the ball home from six yards out despite the Gretton keeper getting a hand to it. Cassidy's hat trick and Welford's seventh was similar to their sixth with the only real difference was that it came from a corner. Gretton never gave up and were rewarded with a consolation goal midway through the half as the ball across from the right was turned in by a defender. Welford's six goal cushion was restored on seventy-four minutes when Cassidy got his fourth of the afternoon, heading in a cross over the oncoming keeper. Welford continued to create chances with Wootton drilling a shot across the face of the goal. With four minutes remaining and Welford were awarded another penalty as Seward was brought down. Cassidy stepped up but his shot to the right was saved by the keeper. A minute later and Seward completed his hat-trick. It started with a excellent one touch football on the right and ended with Seward getting the ball in the penalty area, cutting inside and finishing well for the final goal of the afternoon.

Running Score-line: Gretton: 11, 66 (OG) and Welford: 16 Cassidy; 19 Cassidy; 28 Wootton; 44 Seward; 45 Mesias (pen); 55 Seward; 59 Cassidy; 74 Cassidy; 88 Seward.

To sum up - an enjoyable afternoon in Northamptonshire in which I spent time talking to the Welford bench and was also good to put a face to the name of Andy "Pedro" Smith. I also hope to take in one or two of Welford's away fixtures in the new year - hopefully they will not clash with Oadby's home games. They are a good bunch of lads and you can tell they enjoy playing for the club and each other and good luck to them in their quest of the league title.

07/20