

TT No.28: *Chris Freer* - Sat September 8th 2012; **Parkgate** v Staveley MW; Northern Counties East Premier Division; Score: 2-3; Attendance: 177; Entertainment value: 3/5.

Remember the Monty Python sketch about the Four Yorkshiremen? As each one had his say in turn, his statement was more outlandish than the last. It wasn't so much about the content of the sketch, though, more about the choice of county. I mean, four Worcestershire-men doesn't quite have the same ring, does it?

With the exception of possibly Scousers, Yorkshire folk would probably stand out - to the rest of us - as the loudest and most self-opinionated people in the country. You think Brian Clough, Geoffrey Boycott, Brian Blessed (maybe he's just loud). There's nowt wrong wi' bein' proud of t'eritage of course. To be honest, the missus and I love the county and intend to retire to a cottage there if we get half the chance. And they've given us a few chuckles over the years too. Remember the Goodies Eckie Thump sketch? or the most recent claim to have won more Olympic medals than most small countries.

Because one of my customers operates a couple of pubs in Yorkshire, I get to venture up there once or twice a year, even if it only as far as Sheffield where I am headed today. First, I drop off my son at his old mate's house, the one who has just moved to the city, and who has not yet added t' before every word. Give him time. Then I visit the pub in question, a few hundred yards from Hillsborough, and where the landlord and landlady - both Nottingham folk - have taken to supporting t'Owls. Helps to win over the locals I suppose.

Then I'm in the Z3, lid down, arm over the door, and sunbathing my way through the back streets of the steel city and under the M1 towards Rotherham, before veering off to the northern suburb of Rawmarsh and the Roundwood Sports Complex home of Northern Counties East Premier table-toppers Parkgate FC. You need a good map or satnav to find this place, signage is economical and chimney pots a-plenty, but when I do emerge into the car park of a golf club, the lush turf of the Rotherham United FC training ground is spread out before me. To the right, on an elevated platform and behind a screen of coniferous trees, is the ground of Parkgate FC.

The clubhouse, which presumably is shared with the golf club, is accessed from outside the ground, and offers panoramic views of the Rotherham training complex. It is a spacious facility with Sky Sports News on the TV, but the bar has minimal stock other than several keg beer founts offering various 'smooth' choices plus the inevitable black stuff. And Carling. Now it's a hot day and I'm thinking 'let's have a Carling for once, how bad can it be...?'. The answer is what does this beer have going for it? It's cold, but so is chilled water. It has nothing in the way of taste or body and there's only the faintest smacks of any hops. In truth, it's

a very poor beer. And yet tonight, thousands of cretins throughout clubland will be ordering it by name. It's a funny old world.

Inside the ground, most of the spectator facilities are grouped at one end, with two small stands behind the goal. As I arrive, non-playing substitutes are taking pot-shots at the goal, and despite huge billowing nets catching most of the strays, the odd belter still gets through the defences, so it's coconut shy time as you walk past. The snack hatch is right in the firing line, though they have had the good sense to put up a deflector screen right in front. Just as well, says the old dear selling me chocolate, as they've had t' tea urn obliterated before now. Down one side of the pitch is a one-step terrace with some cover, but the grassy bank beyond is deemed out of bounds to spectators, which is a shame as it would have been the ideal place to settle down on a hot sunny day such as today.

Parkgate have had a good start to the season and are in number 1 spot as they take on lowly Staveley Miners Welfare from neighbouring Derbyshire. The miners were FA Vase semi-finalists last season and the assumption is that they are yet to get into their stride, a theory underlined as their defence opens up obligingly to allow a home midfielder to thump an opener after only five minutes. A frenetic first quarter settles down to a more sedate pace as the hot sunshine begins to take its toll on stamina, but when Parkgate's leading scorer Forbes-Swindells turns and fires in a second shortly after the break, it looks all over bar t'shouting. A word about the home No9. He's a big strapping lad in the Jason Roberts mould. Impressive when he's got the ball, not so much so when he hasn't. Slow to track back - despite constant encouragement to do so from the very vocal home coach - and not what you would call a team player. That said, 11 goals from 10 games so far this season isn't TOO bad a return.

As Parkgate take their foot off the gas, the visitors come more into the game and after grabbing one back from a long range free kick that takes an age to reach the back of the net, the playing field is levelled as the home No7 ends his long-running argument with the referee with a second booking and the long walk, which he eventually takes. Within minutes a header from a free kick makes it 2-2 and the turnaround is complete just before the end with a neat turn and shot as Staveley celebrate what had looked an unlikely victory.

The four Yorkshire standing next to me trudge off t'bar, no doubt describing in ever-inflated terms the scale of the capitulation that has just unfolded before them. Me, I'll no doubt be back up here within the next month or so for a pint or two. And it won't be Carling. I'm reet sure about that!

There's more on my blog at <http://flynn123.wordpress.com/>

Reet Champion...!

04/20