

TT No.3: *Andy Gallon* - Mon 6th August 2012; **Denaby United** v Doncaster Rovers Youth; PSF; Res: 1-3; Attendance: 515; Admission: Free; Programme: £2 (24pp); FGIF Match Rating: **.

The front cover of the impressive souvenir programme produced for this prestigious friendly in Conisbrough announced 'United Are Back'. Strictly speaking, Denaby United have been back in business since March 2011: a welcome return to the non-league football scene for a club (formed 1895) that folded in 2002 whilst members of the Northern Counties East League. Their death knell was eviction by Denaby & Cadeby Miners' Welfare from the hugely likeable Tickhill Square ground. Many hoppers will recall with affection United's former home, its impressive main stand speaking volumes of how it used to be hereabouts when the reigning monarch was King Coal. Denaby were renowned for David Green's multi award-winning match programmes and if the issue for this game is anything to go by the reincarnated club are keen to maintain the tradition. Colour, glossy and packed with interesting reading (now, there's a novelty!), it deserved to sell out its 'limited edition' print run of 150.

Content included an article by Green, no longer resident in South Yorkshire, about the sorry state of football in Doncaster, the status of whose highest-ranked pyramid club (Armthorpe Welfare) is a lowly Step Five. He compared that situation with the much healthier position in Leeds and Bradford, administrative districts of not dissimilar size. Green went on to suggest it most unlikely that United could return to Tickhill Square. The ground, he revealed, has been allowed to fall into disrepair and now lacks dressing rooms, pitch perimeter fencing, seats and floodlights. Thousands of pounds, he reckoned, would be needed merely to bring it up to the pyramid's basic standards.

The new Denaby United play on a park pitch adjacent to Old Road in Conisbrough, a village close to their headquarters in Denaby Main. The club's debut season in the Doncaster & District Senior League saw them carry off the Division One title and secure promotion to the Premier Division. Pleasingly, a director of the property company which sponsors United's shirts played for the original Denaby club. I was told United have contacts at Doncaster Rovers; hence the attractive opposition for this high-profile friendly. It certainly created a lot of interest, and takings from programme sales, raffle tickets and refreshments ought to have boosted United's coffers nicely.

The Old Road ground, as you might imagine, is easily described. It is a mere pitch, railed off on each side, sloping down towards the entrance on Old Road. The set-up has neither floodlights nor cover. No surprise at Step 12! I doubt United would get permission to erect any additional permanent structures on the site, which might pose problems in the future. Raising the necessary finance could also prove difficult. The dressing rooms are housed in a grandly titled 'pavilion' located in the south-east corner. Built in 1996 and refurbished in 2008, the squat, ugly building is

shared with Tomhill Amateur Boxing Club. I arrived in time to see Conisbrough's answer to Hilary Swank going through her jab, jab, jab, punch routine. The sizeable park is a welcome oasis of green amid a sprawling estate of dreary red-brick semis.

I'm really not one for friendlies. This was the first I'd watched in more than a decade, and it might be as long before I bother with another. The 'action' was fairly typical of the species, and the whole experience struggled to rise above its inevitable artificiality. Good to see Rovers manager Dean Saunders in conscientious attendance, though. The first half was eminently watchable. Denaby shocked the Rovers youngsters by taking an eighth-minute lead through Ryan Oakley, who finished coolly in a one-on-one. But the visitors, who had the benefit of slope and breeze, hit back with strikes in the 13th, 33rd and 38th minutes from Diode, Gomez (both trialists) and Chris Whincop. Oakley hit a post in the 24th minute with a tremendous shot, but Rovers squandered several chances and should have been well clear at half-time. Different story after the break, however. Rovers introduced virtually a new team (even fresher faced than their predecessors) and the opponents became more evenly matched. The game steadily petered out, with little goalmouth incident, and I was glad to hear the final whistle. The official attendance, revealed on the Denaby website and attributed to a Rovers official, was 515. My headcount came to about 325. Someone was seeing things!

Despite not being the most exciting evenings (though, understandably, the Denaby lot were thrilled with both performance and crowd), it's always good to collect a 'tick', particularly at a venue to which I was unlikely to devote a regulation season Saturday. And that programme? A few more awards could be heading Denaby United's way!

04/20