

TT No.43: *Justin Holmes* - Sat 13th October 2012; **Northwood** v Woodford United; Southern League Central Division; Venue: Chestnut Avenue, Northwood; Score: 5-1; Admission: £8.00; Programme: £2.00; Attendance: 128; Rating: 3.

For my fare on "Non-League Day 2012", I shortlisted the handful of clubs who commendably offered free admission to those with a season ticket to a Premier or Football League club. With the more attractive games at Hemel Hempstead and Canvey Island not the easiest to get to on public transport, I headed to west London armed with my Charlton Athletic season ticket still undecided as to whether to go to Uxbridge or Northwood - ultimately, as my tube train pulled into Baker Street, I reckoned that getting to Uxbridge would be a little tight, and so it was to Northwood I headed.

Chestnut Avenue is located about a ten-minute walk from Northwood Hills tube station, and after their excellent free admission promotion and viewing their very informative website, it was surprising that the ground was so difficult to find. The football club is signposted into Chestnut Avenue, but there is then no sign of the football ground as one walks down the dead-end road - ultimately, I guessed that the ground must be down the side road signposted for allotments, and ultimately, I was correct. It was also surprising that the ground was not opened until less than half an hour before kick-off, and although visitors were clearly signposted towards the clubhouse, it did not feel a particularly welcoming environment for new visitors. Once inside the ground, the setting was surprisingly very pleasant for a London venue. Completely enclosed by tall trees and a rising recreation ground behind one of the lengths, there are three sections of a mainly all-seated stand along one length, whilst there are a few steps of covered terracing behind one of the goals. Along the other length is a covered terrace from the corner flag - where the teams enter the field of play - until just before the half way line, whilst around the rest of the pitch is hard standing. A slightly elevated view can be obtained from one corner of the ground, and I had the impression that there would be a rather spooky feel to the ground on a dank, misty winter's evening, with the large graveyard behind the trees behind the goal. The facilities are generally very neat and tidy, and so it is a shame that the tea bar is a rather scruffy looking structure, providing pretty poor standard of refreshments, and that litter has been left strewn around the ground from weeks previously. I had heard that the programmes at Northwood are excellent, and I was certainly not disappointed. In fact, I really could not fault it, with more interesting and relevant information than one would often find in the Football League, very readable with an attractive and professional design, a quite stunning effort from a club in the fourth tier of non-league football with a perennially low matchday readership.

This game would be between two of the early strugglers in the league. Northwood went into the game in 14th place in the 22-team league, with two wins and a draw from their opening seven games, although they had an excellent run in the FA Cup,

winning three away games before bowing out to Conference South outfit Boreham Wood. Woodford United have had a disastrous start to their season, rock bottom and pointless after their opening eight games, having scored just two goals all season.

With the sun shining brightly at kick off, the visitors almost took a surprise lead with just five minutes on the clock, when a free kick was curled onto the post, however Northwood went straight up the other end to open the scoring, when Oliver Hawkins met a free kick with a glancing header and the ball went in off the post. Ten minutes later and Woodford were back on level terms when the goalkeeper surprisingly decided not to come out to claim a high, looping cross into the box, and the ball was headed onto the keeper's shin by Tom Fountain and the ball squirmed into the net. Unsurprisingly given their position, Woodford made it quite clear they would be happy with a point as they engaged in blatant timewasting in the first half. It seemed to work, as the game became disjointed up to half time, at which time the score-line remained level.

However, six minutes into the second half and Northwood started to gain complete control of the match. A corner was passed around the edge of the box, before John Christian hit home a powerful half volley from 20 yards out. Three minutes later and Northwood opened up a two-goal lead with another fine goal, when the ball was crossed low to Christian, who volleyed home. On 67 minutes, the home scored their fourth, when Adamson Ajayi drove deep into the box but instead of shooting, showed excellent patience and composure in working the best opportunity for himself to score, which he did when he curled the ball low into the net facing the other way. Northwood scored their fifth just two minutes later with a really simple goal against increasingly beleaguered, opposition - a cross into the box was nodded home by the unmarked Hawkins for his second of the game. Just as one feared the score-line could take on embarrassing proportions, the triple substitution Northwood made immediately after scoring their fifth goal seemed to kill the game, as did a prolonged heavy hail shower. They still had further good chances to score more though, although credit to Woodford who kept battling gamely and had a couple of decent chances to score a second, despite having a player sent off five minutes from time for a stamp on a player.

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