

TT No.52: *Chris Freer* - Saturday October 27th 2012; **AFC Hayes** v Chalfont St Peter; Southern Division 1 Central; Score: 1-3; Attendance: 59; Entertainment value: 3/5.

Decisions, decisions eh? What to do for the best. Just now and again I stand on somewhere like Victoria Station in London and have to weigh up my options. And that's what I'm doing today, fresh into town from a National Express 440 coach trip - my first of the season - and unsure whether to stick to my original plan of a tube ride to the local vicinity of AFC Hayes; to push the boat out and pay the near £25 to take me to Whitstable Town on the Kent Coast; or to go west on the Portsmouth train and alight at Godalming.

The latter game does look attractive with it's third-against-second scenario, especially as there's a forecast of more rain in Kent, where the midweek fixture at Whitstable only went ahead after a pitch inspection. As for AFC Hayes, well it's so close to London I reason I can go there anytime. So, I make up my mind and shell out £17.10 to train me down to Godalming. It's a bit like the Austrian Corporal Schicklgruber, standing on his empire's borders in 1941 and thinking 'maybe I'll go East, what could possibly go wrong....?'

He got as far as Stalingrad before he had his Homer Simpson 'Doh!' moment. In my case it's Clapham Junction. A broken-down train outside Woking is ensuring nothing can get past it. I check with the disinterested girl on the ticket desk. No, nothing is going to Godalming and she can't say when that situation will change. With kick-off only a couple of hours away, I can't afford to hang about. I make my decision. I withdraw my troops back to Victoria, buy a tube travelcard, and head off in the direction of South Ruislip, the nearest station to the Farm Park ground of AFC Hayes. My original target in fact. Just goes to show I should have stuck with that, not wasted £17 on an abortive rail ticket - I'll let you know if I get my money back - in the hope of seeing a better game.

It's difficult to say whether South Ruislip underground station - or the one before it, Northolt - is nearest to Farm Park. Having walked both routes on the in and out legs of my journey to today's game, I'm guessing it's a tad under 3 miles to each, as it takes me 45 minutes. The sensible option would be to catch one of the many buses that pass by, especially on the road to Northolt. Ah well, I re-assure myself, I really DO need the exercise.

The ground is set in a leafy area just outside of Yeading. The most prominent signs at the entrance still refer to Brook House FC, the club's name until 2007, and much of the programme content refers to the club as 'The Brook' so I'm not sure why they felt the need to adopt the new moniker, which must still cause some confusion with the other 'local' team, Hayes & Yeading. The clubhouse is adjacent to the car park, with both set a hundred yards or so from the actual playing surface. Although showing external signs of weathering, the inside of the

clubhouse is quite well upholstered, and features live TV football and a pool table. Sadly, the bar offers little promise, with no cask ale or craft British bottled beer, and I take a rare decision to make a Guinness my first pint of the day!

The stadium itself is protected by a sturdy metal outer frame, with continuous inner wooden fencing panels providing some protection from the biting, swirling Arctic wind which is demonstrating evidence of a coming winter. After my three-mile hike I fancy a sit-down in the small main stand, but I am soon chased out of there by the icy blasts which infest the structure, but apparently don't seem to penetrate the area behind the goal, to where I swiftly decamp. Most of the other spectators are either huddled in the small covered kit terrace on the opposite side to the main stand, or behind the other goal on a narrow strip of covered raised terracing.

Today's game is a mid-table encounter between Brook House - err, sorry AFC Hayes - and Chalfont St Peter. Both sides have a fairly even wins-to-defeats ratio coming into the game, so the outcome is anybody's guess, but the visitors make most of the running in the opening half and go ahead on 8 minutes with a rasping drive. It's probably against the run-of-play when Hayes equalise just past the half-hour, with leading scorer Tony Mendy getting his head to a ball he has no right to, given the defensive pressure all around him. But a second, albeit scrappy, St Peter goal in first half injury time restores a semblance of justice to the score-line. After the break, it's a lot of huffing and puffing. Both sides have decent chances, but you never feel Hayes have enough firepower to rescue anything from the game, and having gone 3-1 down on 83, and being reduced to ten men after running out of subs, the stout lady gets ready to sing.

Oh well, all's well that ends well. I see a mildly entertaining game, I MIGHT get some money back from some rail company or other, and there's even time for a post-match, pre-coach, pint in London before the journey home. Where's it to be? I know, the Cask at Pimlico. Probably my best decision of the day!

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

Art least I think there is....

04/20