

**TT No.64: Keith Aslan** - Sun 26th November 2012; **Barnet Ladies** v Watford Ladies; Women's Premier League Cup; Kick-Off: 14.04; Result: 0-1; Admission: £2; Programme: £1; Attendance: 112 (67 home; 31 away and 14 neutral).

With the Northern Line actually running for the first weekend since the Olympics (remember them?) it would be churlish not to support T.F.L's exciting initiative and take a trip to the end of the line at High Barnet from where you can see the ground on the left as you enter the station. London Underground play their cards close to their chest about exactly why the line has been shut for so long, but a 35-minute delay due to a signal failure at Archway suggests improving the infrastructure hasn't been top of the agenda.

This is Barnet's last season at their cute Underhill ground. They are moving to their training ground, "the Hive" in Cannons Park, where, depending on who you ask, they are either building a brand-new stadium or completing Wealdstone's half-finished ground.

Barnet's current home is what I would call a proper football ground with plenty of terracing and is well worth a (re)visit while you still can, worth going just to see the sloping pitch you are ever likely to see (and I include Yeovil's old ground in that).

Underhill is also home to Barnet's Women's team who this season make their male counterparts seem like world beaters. Currently bottom of the league and without a win this hasn't been a vintage season for the Queen Bees and with most of the team still around from last season, the departure of top scorer and record appearance maker, Stacey Sowden, has proved pivotal. She allegedly left to take a 12-month sabbatical, but returned two weeks ago to try and turn things around. Nobody is quite sure why she changed her mind and came back so soon, but I suspect a lot of begging by Barnet was involved. On her home re-debut she came on as sub. which was her 200th appearance.

It is going to take more than Ms. Sowden to inject any life into the Women's Premier League Cup, which is based on the format of European competitions of playing endless games for no apparent reason. In women's football they seem to do it to supplement a very sparse league fixture list. The answer to a lack of games is to admit more teams into the league, not this nonsense. This was a game that demonstrated the futility of existence with both teams already qualified and there being no advantage to finishing top. The draw for the knockout stage will take place on Wednesday amid a blaze of indifference. Last season the draw was pre-made with half the teams finishing second getting home draws while teams finishing top getting away ties. This resulted in one game, and I won't say which for legal reasons, in which both teams tried as hard as Chinese and Korean badminton players to lose and get the home draw by finishing second.

Ironically for a game of such total pointlessness Barnet got one of their largest crowds of the season, helped by the large (by women's standards) away support. Clearly not much to do in Watford on a Sunday afternoon! That Watford won by a first half penalty was irrelevant, nobody cared and Barnet have far more important engagements coming up.

Women's football is a good opportunity to visit Underhill for those who don't want to pay £18. Normal admission to the girls is £3 but was £2 today because according to the steward who let me through the gate "the turnstile operator hasn't turned up". They might as well give women's 'Programme of the Year' award to Barnet at the start of the season as they always win it and hot drinks are available throughout the game. All in all, it's very pleasant.

04/20