

**TT No.7: Paul Roth** - Sat August 11th 2012; FA Cup Extra Preliminary Round; **Boldmere St Michaels** v Bridgnorth Tn; Res: 1-3; Attendance: 53; Entry: £5; Programme: 16-Pages for £1; Altitude and global location: The Trevor Brown Memorial Ground, Church Road, Boldmere, Sutton Coldfield is 133m (436.351 feet) above sea level; at lat. 52 degrees, 32.5 mins N; 1 degree, 50.5 mins W (position derived from centre circle); SAT NAV:B73 5RY; Weather: Augustly auguste; Club shop: No; Venue's Atcost status: Atcost-free; Local MP: Andrew Mitchell (Cons); Nearest Wickes DIY superstore: Perry Bar Extra, 2.7 miles; Pitch squelch-ometer reading: 38; My day's carbon footprint legacy: 13.6.

What a summer!

Our exhaustive efforts of the past thirty-six months to have our beloved Persian cat Ben's remains buried in consecrated ground have finally been stymied by the local see. To us Benson, Archduke of Lotharingia was a saint, and it seemed fitting his final resting place should have been in such venerated surroundings.

Distraught at what appeared to us to be cold-hearted intransigence - we had initially investigated an internment within the boundaries of Canterbury Cathedral - I briefly considered taking the matter up with Archbishop Atkinson himself; from the outset though it was made clear to my wife and I that the authorities weren't for budging, continuously deigning animals haven't souls, thus cannot be posthumously housed within such holy confines.

Despite a none-too-parsimonious offering of cash and all of my 2013 Wetherspoon CAMRA tokens, our wishes were denied. Never mind: having briefly delved into the worlds of Zen Buddhism and Sikhism, we've now plumped to go down the Memorial Diamond route.

On a more up-beat note, I donned whites for the first time in many a year - the act was accompanied by gentle hazing from the good lady, correctly cock-sure of herself that I'd no longer fit into them - in order to turn out for the Marquis' XI at Great House. Initially disgruntled at being drafted into an opposing team disparagingly entitled The Idiots, was by the by, as by even-song-tide a memorable day had been had.....by that time I'd reacquainted myself with that venerable English comestible, the Vietnamese Whirl.

Whilst opening the batting at the bourn end, on one of the summer's less sodden Sunday afternoons, having accumulated a quick-fire 7, and with half an eye on a headline-making returning century, I totally misread his worship-fullness' great-grandson Skye's carom ball: my hoick-horribillus to cow corner - or in this case canine corner - was consummately taken, in front of the koi pond, by his majesty's Springer Spaniel, Rocket.

When TI fielded my revenge was as sweet as it was swift, claiming the accursed duo's wickets in my second spell of hard-to-hit military medium seam-up, trapping

the hound PBW (paw before wicket) with an unplayable in-swinging yorker, and the nine-year-old clean bowled twelve balls later - the over, I concede, did contain five no-balls and nine harshly adjudged wides. Ultimately my sterling exertions were in vain, as TI lost the rubber by 4 wickets.

Naturally other things almost as important have been occurring during the close season. Back in June we enjoyed the Queen's Diamond (notwithstanding Barclays' Bob's misfortune, it appears to be the year of the diamond!) Jubilee celebrations, amongst which was that never-to-be-forgotten soggy Thames River Pageant, now infamously etched upon the populace's psyche for the dumbing-down it received from the Beeb.

Familiar instruments of torture, namely penalty-kicks and Roger Federer, again thwarted early summer British sporting success, although a certain 'hirsutely', side-burned, chap's spectacular victories in first the Tour de France, then the Olympic Speed Trial, sensationally restored national hubris. A month after losing the gentlemen's Wimbledon singles final to his nemesis, Andy Murray regrouped to miraculously claim our first ever Olympic tennis title. Talking of Rodge, I reckon I'd look pretty cool in some personally monogrammed casual wear: how's about a sporty little FGIF insignia-ed bandanna?

The Olympic Torch took forever wending its peripatetic way along the length and across the breadth of the country - one evening, a few days before the meet's long-awaited start, the flame surreally passed through Albert Square - before eventually arriving in Stratford-upon-Avon. My personal highlight of that pre-tournament marathon is of our beloved Thanetian, Trace, jogging effortlessly down the Riviera's Fort Hill, onto a packed corniche, golden conflagration aloft.

I confess to having harboured reticence by the bucket load regarding the 30th Olympiad, despite having it drummed into me that this was 'a once in a lifetime thingamajig'. So, in the spirit of detente, I stayed up 'til gone midnight to watch the opening ceremony, expectantly waiting to discover who'd be igniting that be-petalled cauldron, only to fall asleep and miss the actual moment. When I awoke and realised it had passed me by my enthusiasm for the event had sunk to its withering nadir. But once we started meddling it was altogether a different story, and surely only the most hard-nosed couldn't have failed to have been caught up in the jingoistic adrenalin rush. I'm so inspired by what I've witnessed I'm seriously contemplating taking up the bars, uneven or otherwise.

Fears about road bridges collapsing, transport system meltdowns and terrorist strikes mercifully never materialised.

In the final analysis the country can be proud of what the organiser, and more especially what our sportsmen and women, achieved. The whole shebang now heads for sleepy Rio, but we've still the 2012 Paralympics to look forward to: I'm moist at the thought of watching more wheelchair tennis: Lance, our overtly metrosexual pedicurist, somewhat derogatorily, tells me he can't wait for the circuitous one-armed rowing to commence.

Finally, a massive BRAVO to our wonderful Armed Forces who not only plugged security gaps left by now-discredited firm G4S, but who deservedly filled the rows of vacant seats scandalously left unoccupied by corpulent corporate sponsors. One of their number, Royal Artillery Captain Heather Stanning, along with her rowing partner Helen Glover, even stepped up to the plate in the women's 2000m to provide Britain with its initial 2012 gold.

However, the enforced break's defining moment had to be that new Guinness World Record set for the largest assemblage of ukulele players (aka a Formby). How I'd loved to have been Cleanin' Windas' with those crazy dudes in Yokohama that evening.

Most of all it's been the atrocious weather that's been the main topic of conversation. It chucked it down so hard here on one occasion the sea actually flooded.

Hurrah.....Another football campaign is up and running, and I'm starting in similar vein to how I ended last year's, viz in the esteemed company of the Seismologist. Since our Ascension Day jolly to Hondschoote, Alan tells me he's been relentlessly honing his little-known, to me at least, ventriloquism skills. My cohort, accompanied by his sinisterly and menacingly forward-staring glengarry-topped dummy, Peaches McBleechem, make their long-awaited debut at the Canterbury Festival later this year. 'Hoppers; you've been warned: if you hear extraneous utterances coming from an area of a football ground you're visiting, and can't pinpoint from whence the disturbance emanates, then look around. If Mr. Quake's presence is skulking in some shadowy cranny, the answer to the conundrum's at hand.

Boldmere St. Michaels FC's FA Cup Extra Preliminary Round tie versus Bridgnorth Town FC is first up for me. It was great having company on as long a journey, although the drive would've been more pleasant had my friend not been constantly practicing his voice projection skills. The halving of the not inconsiderable fuel costs was also welcome.

A smart getaway following our early rendezvous had us in the West Midlands soon after midday.

All of you will be aghast to hear it will not be establishments plucked intuitively from the Blessed Book that I'll be chasing pre-match this term. Instead I'll be hunting down branches of the DIY superstore chain Wickes (hence the reference in the heading). Since setting foot inside their magnificent emporium at Westwood X, our nearest outlet, for the first time earlier in the summer, I've been hooked.

A photograph of the branch's superstructure, an inconsequential purchase (chez-Roth now has a stockpile of all manner of batteries, light bulbs, screws and nails) and a black-ink-only signature, or initial, supplied by any on-duty uniformed employee annotated on a page of a hitherto virgin Unigate Dairies accounts ledger book, constitutes the tick. It's not as barmy as it all sounds: my Blackpool-based confederate Steve Hurley has been collecting Tesco - I'm reliably informed that's

industry-speak for more than one Tesco - for the past four years; as at July 17th he'd accumulated 62. To Shakey's chagrin we managed three Wickes's beforehand, finally decamping to Church Road at 14.02hrs.

The golden be-medalled (see what I just did) traveller amongst our brethren will have visited this venue previously. Somehow, for reasons unknown even to myself, the 'Mikes' - the epithet's derived from the time of the club's formation, when St. Michaels FC were a church side that played friendlies against other ecclesiastical organisations - have managed to elude me.

Set amidst the leafy suburbs of one of Birmingham's more well-heeled post codes, next door to the eponymous church, the club's tidy stadium is one of those that once espied demands closer scrutiny. Once inside, joie de vivre is all-consuming. A turnstile block, not in commission today (a redoubtably solid wine table was in situ to collect spectators' entrance and programme monies) leads into a car park that's jointly utilised by the adjacent bowls club.

Looking across the manicured, steeply sloping pitch from here the aspect is to a 200-seater grandstand running more or less the length of the field's furthest flank, which in turn is backed by tall trees affording the arena an almost bucolic feel. A level covered tribune behind the clubhouse end proffers elevated panoramas to the pasture below, which cascades dramatically downwards.

There's hard standing all round, with a black and white (the Mikes' colours) metal barrier encompassing the whole. Floodlights, the best limited funding permits, provide illumination as and when required. Ham or cheese cobs retailed at £1 a throw from within the pavilion, with hot food (nice chips!), teas and coffees available ten minutes before kick-off from the on-ground servery. The edifice positively exudes likability and is perfectly suited to the Midland Football Alliance step 5 level of football at which Boldmere St. Michaels, along with today's visitors Bridgnorth Town, currently play.

What a shame all this sylvan elegance couldn't have been transposed into the context of the match. There were fleeting moments of note and an awful lot of huff and puff that came to nought; but the truth of the matter is the goalless first-half was pretty much a non-event. At half-time we were kindly invited into the boardroom for refreshments, the hospitality of long-serving secretary Alan Parso Parsons and his fellow committee members indicative of the friendliness of this professionally-run club. Oh, how I wish I could report that the latter forty-five minutes were in complete contrast to the first - but I can't. Quite how the two combatants managed to procure four goals between them is a mystery, although we're mighty glad they did! A Preliminary Round tie a week on Saturday away to either Lye Town or Bartley Green awaits the Shropshire outfit following this straightforward-enough victory.

We boldly went, and now it was time to boldly return, but not before diverting to Wickes in Radford Road, Coventry, thus augmenting my steadily burgeoning ironmongery superstore aggregation to a whopping 15.

On-arrival home, having garaged, refuelled and secured the Hot Rod, there was to be one regrettable occurrence to mar what had up to then been a momentous day. As quite often happens around this time of year, when the weather turns humid and the tides at its lowest come sunset, I fell victim to a mercilessly malevolent Altdorfer. The bites on my right leg are I suppose a small price to pay for such groundhopping wonderment. Pity about the football though!

FGIF Fearne Cotton Star Rating: 5 ffffs!

04/20