

TT No.75: *Andy Gallon* - Sat 22nd December 2012; **Scarborough Athletic v Maltby Main**; NCEL Prem Division; Res: 4-0; Att: 321; Admission: £7; Programme: £1.50 (28pp); FGIF Match Rating: **.

In common with most hoppers, I had a struggle to find a game that had beaten the weather on this rain-lashed Saturday. Most played safe and opted for 3G, but I bucked the trend by getting to a fixture played on grass. It was a miracle, really, because most senior matches in Yorkshire were postponed: non-league and Football League suffered alike. Queensgate, Bridlington, was not a 'tick' of course and this wasn't a particularly memorable contest, but beggars cannot be choosers. In football as in life, something is usually better than nothing. The drive from York onto the Wolds escarpment and beyond revealed a landscape of swollen rivers, flood plains awash and countless paddy fields. The Bridlington ground-staff deserve huge plaudits because the Queensgate pitch was in superb condition. Inevitably, it cut up a little as the rain bucketed down, but there was never a moment's doubt the match would be completed. A fantastic effort!

I've written a Traveller's Tale from Queensgate before - Scarborough Athletic's first game at the venue, as it happens - therefore I won't go over (if you'll excuse the pun) old ground. There have been some interesting developments, however, since that visit in the late summer of 2007. FGIF readers will recall that upon the demise of Scarborough FC, liquidated in June 2007 with debts of £2.5m, the fans split into two factions: the larger group, the Seadog Trust, established Scarborough Athletic; the smaller set up Scarborough Town. Using the original club's 6,400-capacity Seamer Road ground was not an option. After years of increasingly depressing dereliction, it is now razed and the relatively modern cantilever stands at each end have been sold (in April 2011) to Featherstone Rovers for re-use at the rugby league club's Post Office Road stadium. Houses are to be built on Seamer Road. Town stayed closer to home, at a couple of venues near Cayton, and joined the Teesside League, whilst Athletic agreed a groundshare with local rivals Bridlington Town, twenty miles away. Athletic were able to start from a higher level in the pyramid, the Northern Counties East, and have made most progress, albeit securing just one promotion, during their second season. But Athletic do hope to return to Scarborough within two years.

Put simply, a sports village is to be built by Scarborough Borough Council in the Weaponness Valley, very close to the site of Seamer Road. Athletic are to be accommodated at a multi-sport and leisure complex featuring a community stadium. It will be on the site of the former Weaponness park & ride in Ashburn Road. This is on the opposite side of the A64 to Seamer Road, but nearer town. The Scarborough to York railway line will separate the ground from the A64. There have been numerous delays, not least because of budget cuts in local government, but the council remains committed to the project and is confident of 'football coming home' to Scarborough by 2014. A meeting with the FA and Sport England

took place in November. The three remaining bidders have been invited to submit final tenders, which will be received during the first quarter of 2013.

The intention is to provide, at the south end of the Weaponness site, a football ground with a 3G pitch and a capacity of 1,950 (capable of increasing to 3,000), 250 covered seats, covered viewing for 500 and floodlights. Also, on the site will be a 25m swimming pool, aerobics, gymnastics & weights suites, squash courts, a sports hall, two all-weather pitches and a community room, bar and function room. It all sounds great for Athletic, not to mention Scarborough itself, a place where tourists appear to come first and locals a distant second. I imagine Town, now members of the Humber Premier League after a spell in the Wearside League, will also play at the community stadium. Perhaps common sense shall prevail and the two clubs merge. The root cause of the original Scarborough FC's problems was lack of support. Memorably, a few years ago, a Boro' chairman was asked to explain why gates at Seamer Road were so low. He suggested, doubtless with a wry smile, that it was because half the club's spectator catchment consisted of fish and half sheep. Why continue with two competing clubs?

The excellent programme for the Maltby Main match revealed that interest in Scarborough Athletic is on the wane. Playing in Bridlington cannot help, but falling gates are clearly a concern. This season's average (league games only) is 386. In his Countdown to Kick-Off notes, director Geoff Osguthorpe wrote: "The loyal supporters have played a vital role helping the club thus far, but we need to get the word spread out to everyone, quicker and better than we are currently doing. If every fan can bring an extra friend or family member to a game, it would make a massive difference, not only to the match day income, but the atmosphere and support the players get."

In similar vein, chairman Dave Holland, in his From the Top notes, warned that Seadog Trust membership had sunk to an all-time low. He wrote: "This is partly due to poor recruitment and retention, but has also been partly due to our inability to get our message across effectively." Holland has been looking at other supporters' trusts, such as Lewes, to see how they do things. He warned: "With Weaponness hopefully just around the corner, our trust needs to be invigorated. Once people see the development of the sports village begin, it will be easier. But the clock is ticking and we must be ready."

No surprise, given the weather and the game's last-Saturday-before-Christmas timing, that the attendance for this match was well below average. It was a decent contest up to half-time. Maltby had taken seven points from their last three games and, in patches, looked useful. I feared the worst when Tom Adams gave Athletic a sixth-minute lead. But the visitors struck the bar soon after and held out until half-time. All Scarborough after the break, though, and goals from Tony Hackworth (52min) and Ryan Blott (58min & 90+2min) completed an ultimately comfortable victory. The three points were enough for the hosts to leapfrog landlords Bridlington and top the Premier Division table.

Let's hope, in a couple of years, we'll all be able to chalk up a new 'tick' - at Scarborough Athletic's, gleaming Weaponness Valley home.

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