

**TT No.37: Keith Aslan** - Sun 10th November 2013; **South Brentwood** v Emerson Oak; Brentwood Sunday League 3; Kick-Off: 10.33; Result: 3-1; Admission; Free; Programme: £1; Att: 7 (4 home, 2 away (both wags) 1 neutral (me!).

I'm sitting in a train, sun shining, beautiful November day, on my way to Brentwood, not a care in the world when I open the *Non-League Paper* and my world collapses. Virtually every match within a 20-mile radius of where I'm going, including Brentwood itself, was postponed the previous day due to rain. This place must have some sort of micro climate, and with today's match being played on a council pitch this was going to be a wasted journey. No, it wasn't, so hats off to Brentwood council who allowed all their games to go ahead this Sunday on pitches that were more suited to mud wrestling (alas there wasn't any this weekend).

South Brentwood FC play at Hartswood Park on the exotically named "pitch 3" but don't be put off by this, it is a wonderful place to watch football. Hartswood is a massive expanse of green with 6 football pitches, 3 rugby pitches, a golf course, ornamental gardens, woodland walks and a cafe selling full meals.

This was a thoroughly entertaining game (though possibly not as much as the previous meeting which finished 4-9) which the home side won 3-1 with two goals in the last eight minutes. Played on a pitch resembling the Baseball Ground in the Seventies, the mud added to, rather than detracted from, the match. Plenty of goalmouth incident with the players splashing around, just like football used to be. Now here's the thing, I very much doubt this pitch was any better than most of the games that were called off the previous day. Football is a winter game, you can play it in mud, it isn't dangerous, it doesn't spoil the game and it is a perfectly natural outcome when rain and grass come together as it often does during the season.

While swearing is so prevalent at football matches you don't notice it, it is certainly apparent when there isn't any, so let's have a name check for the referee, Jack Pemberton. Wearing a beany hat and mittens, colour co-ordinated as per FA rules, I would put him somewhere in his mid-seventies and he was brilliant with a zero-tolerance policy on any sort of abuse. In the second half a Brentwood player skied a shot and let out an expletive aimed solely at himself. The referee called him over and warned him he would send him off if it happened again to which the players response was "sorry ref." This is called "respect", not to be confused with the FA's pathetic "Respect Campaign" which is a joke. One referee like this is worth a thousand pre-match handshakes.

Now let's talk programmes, this one is brilliant: 20 pages professionally printed with enough reading matter to last the journey home. It has everything a programme should have and I wonder what their opponents think when the ed. phones up for club histories and photographs. It was a fascinating read from where I learnt that if there is a colour clash in this league it is the home team that has to

change kit which must be fairly unique. Also, that Phoenix98fm is the station for people living in Brentwood which seems to be taking the concept of local radio to its limits. When Alan Partridge leaves North-Norfolk Digital this must surely be his next job. What else is round these parts I wonder, Shenfield Sound? Gidea Park Gold? the mind boggles. I was surprised to learn that the programme actually makes a profit and is used to pay the referee's expenses every match. It goes to show what can be done if, and it is a very, very big if, there is someone willing to do it.

South Brentwood's fixtures appear on Mitoo and this really was a smashing way to spend a Sunday morning with the whole experience being a flashback to a bygone age of mud heaps and players behaving themselves (well most of the time). In a week where BT Sport announced the ludicrous amount, they paid for the Champions League with the strap line "Football's changed forever" I'm please to say that not in the Brentwood Sunday League it hasn't.

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