

TT No.60: Keith Aslan - Sat January 18th 2014; Hillingdon v Interwood; Middlesex County League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 14.03; Result: 3-4; Admission & programme: Free; Attendance: 18 (16 home, 1 away & 1 neutral).

With the ark building weather of late, another plastic peregrination, this time a dip (almost literally) into one of my favourite leagues, the Middlesex County and I was rewarded with an absolute corker.

Hillingdon's usual ground, the athletics stadium, is, I would guestimate, about a 25-minute walk from Uxbridge tube station. I can't be accurate as I didn't walk it because, being a Saturday, the line was shut due to what London Transport euphemistically like to call their "Improvement Programme". Surely the biggest improvement would be to run trains seven days a week like every other underground network in the world! However, bus U1 offers a frequent service from outside the ground to a number of stations in West London that are actually running trains.

The capacious athletics stadium with a large covered seated stand was underwater, but no problem, the club just switched their match to the adjacent artificial pitch round the back which has its own changing rooms. The set up here is very impressive, with Uxbridge cricket and rugby clubs, a leisure centre and outdoor swimming pool all situated within the complex. The place was buzzing and obviously very well used by the locals. I had a pre-match meal in the leisure centre cafe, very tasty but a bit pricey and had a look at the fantastic outdoor pool, all art decor like something out of the TV series "Poirot". Very effective. Although open, nobody was using it. Surely this would be the best time for a swim, it must get packed on a summer weekend so now would be a good time to avoid the crowds.

Regular readers (and who isn't?) will know I am unstinting in my criticism of referees' timekeeping, but the official was totally blameless for the late start on this one. The officials emerged from the changing rooms six minutes before kick-off to get things going which was the signal for the home team, who had been out warming up for half an hour at least, to disappear back into the changing rooms. Why on earth do teams do this? All credit to the home secretary for telling the manager as he went in that it was almost kick off time. At least there were two of us who thought a game due to kick off at 2 p.m. should actually kick off at 2p.m. Needless to say, the manager wasn't the slightest bit interested in starting on time.

You never know quite what you are going to get in this league, but today I struck lucky with an hour and 34 minutes top class entertainment with Interwood 3-1 down before fighting back to win 4-3 with the winner coming in the final minute. It wasn't lost on me, although it most certainly was on everybody else, that if Hillingdon hadn't deliberately delayed the start, they would have long been in the

dressing room when the deciding goal went in. I think that's what you call natural justice.

Let's end with a few words on programmes. Amid much scepticism the Middlesex County League made issuing compulsory in the top division some 10 to 15 years ago. In all my visits to 47 grounds in the 16-team division I've never been let down in spite of very low crowds in this league. Hillingdon did a great little 4 pager for this match and all credit to whoever does it for what must be a very limited readership. I was the only person I saw with a programme. Other leagues, with larger crowds have teams that steadfastly refuse to issue in spite of it being "compulsory". So well done Hillingdon and well done the league. From the programme I learnt that the Interwood chairman's daughter, Jade Bailey, accompanied David Beckham in the boat along the Thames when he was carrying the Olympic Torch before the opening ceremony of London 2012. How many other football chairmen can say that? Well none actually.

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