

TT No.14: *Chris Freer* - Sat September 20th 2014; **Cogenhoe United** v Desborough Town; United Counties Premier; Score: 1-0; Attendance: 38; Entertainment value: 3/5.

Every couple of years or so the lads and lasses of my youthful 'gang' hold a reunion in the village where we all lived in the 1970s. It's fairly well organised with one of our number hosting a 'memories' website and invariably tracking down most of the erstwhile members who "got away".

Of course, we all have things we like to talk about, but as a football man I prefer to remind anybody vaguely interested that the village local - the Three Crowns - was the place to which I would return after yet another resounding Forest victory during their 'Glory Days'. I would invariably be celebrating the win, and I lost count of the cash I earned from 'bubble-bursters' who dared to wager good money on an unlikely reverse. It virtually paid for all my beer. Happy days...

And so, it's particularly apt that I'm heading back to the Three Crowns tonight as it coincides with the tenth anniversary of the passing of Brian Clough, one of my heroes then, now and always. Many times, I toasted that man with beer bought for me as the result of his genius. You can argue all you like about Alex Ferguson but the fact is he did it all with a big-time, money-no-object club like Manchester United, and if you can't succeed there, then, well, you're David Moyes. Clough did it with a small- town club like Dire-by and then slumbering giant Forest. Enough said.

But before this night's festivities, it would be rude not to take in a match, and today that's looking like a United Counties League game within striking distance of the reunion. I'm heading down the M1 towards Newport Pagnell FC, mindful of forecasts of thunderstorms further south, but as I pass Northampton the overhead gantries flash up reports of heavy congestion and long delays at the Milton Keynes junction, just the one I want! Fortunately, I have prepared for this setback and have a contingency, so exit the motorway at Junction 15 and head for Cogenhoe United, a Northamptonshire village side doing reasonably well in the UCL Premier.

The ground is at the southern edge of the village and is blessed with a fair-sized car park. I'm one of the first arrivals but the gates are open and I chat with a couple of club officials about the stadium, the club's progress and the reason for my being there today, namely the heavy traffic further south. One of them edits the club programme and apologises in advance for any spelling errors I might encounter - more of that in my Blog. The stadium itself is quite tidy, in an efficient kind of way. There's hard standing on all four sides, with a small four-step covered terrace behind one goal and a larger 200-seater stand straddling the halfway line. The clubhouse is at the back of a complex that also houses the club's offices and changing rooms. It's a cosy affair with a bar, sports TV, a disco-man setting up his gear (presumably for some evening event) and two ladies beavering away behind

what looks like a food-server. However, on further investigation, it transpires they are producing the sandwiches for the players post-match, and that there will only be hot sausage rolls for 'Joe Public'. My enquiries clearly garner sympathy, as one of the girls comes across to my table to ensure I'm not going to have to starve. When I explain about the blog, and my never-ending search for veggie food at football stadia, she is sympathetic and vows to consider it for the future. Meantime the cheerful barman points me in the direction of bottles of Old Speckled Hen, Old Gordon Hen and Marstons EPA which he has on sale, which makes up for the lack of any cask ale.

If ever there was a friendly, helpful club, this is it!

And so, to the game. It's a match between two of the top five sides, with visitors Desborough Town just a place behind Cogenhoe in fifth spot. While never a classic it's an intriguing encounter, with both sides contributing no little skill and effort. United have a Darren Stride (Burton Albion fans will know) lookalike bossing the midfield and always pose the greater threat, which tells with the only goal of the game on 58 minutes, a smart turn and shot which evades the visiting keeper.

And so, I head back up to the Three Crowns with yet another home victory to report. Not quite the Glory Days, and I may well have to finance my own beers this time, but the toast will still be the same - to Brian Clough. RIP

There's more on my blog at <http://flynn123.wordpress.com>

The Almighty Brian

04/20