

TT No.81: Keith Aslan - Mon 4th May 2015; **Darlaston 1874** v Wyrley Reserves; West Midlands Regional League 2; Kick-Off: 15.02; Result: 7-0; Admission: £2; Programme: £1; Attendance: 78 (77 home, 0 away & 1 neutral).

It's a Bank Holiday and with many escaping the Black Country for a day by the seaside I escaped the seaside for a day in the Black Country.

Having been to Birmingham New Street literally hundreds of times, I actually got lost today with a massive "improvement" project in full swing at the station and the entrances, exits and interchanges being unrecognisable. I don't know what it will look like when it's finished but the bottom line is it's still going to be in the middle of Birmingham! The line up to Walsall is a wet dream for ground spotters, the short journey passing Villa Park, the Bescot Stadium and Fellows Park, or Morrisons as it is now called.

The 452 offers a regular (and breathtakingly expensive) service from Walsall Bus Station to within a 10-minute walk from Bentley Youth where Darlaston are residing for this season only. They are moving a 100-yards up the road to their own ground at the Bentley Leisure Centre. I popped in on the way, a work in progress but it should look pretty impressive once the hard standing and covered stand is in place. If you haven't done it, no need to miss out on Bentley Youth, Red Star Alma from the same division also play there.

Darlaston has a buzz about the place with an atmosphere that is a rarity at this level. Everybody seemed to know everybody else and I doubt you will see so many replica shirts being sported anywhere else in the West Midlands League. Their hospitality is immaculate with both the secretary and the chairman taking time out to speak to me. The latter gave me a free badge and the former offered me a complimentary pass (which I declined). Eighteen months ago, they had no ground, no team and no club and the enthusiastic committee have worked a small miracle to get Darlaston 1874 to where it is now, helped by what I would imagine are about the highest attendances in this division. Their magnificent old ground a mile down the road is still there but uninhabitable now thanks to the local pond life trashing it.

The tea hut was serving hot drinks at ten bob a go and it also contained a television which for some inexplicable reason was showing the shopping channel! The ground is fully enclosed and roped along both touchlines with chunky brick dugouts on the far side, and if things are perky off the pitch, they are equally so on it. These are exciting times in the West Midlands League Div.2 with Kington already as good as champions, F.C. Stafford, Warstones and Darlaston are chasing the other two promotion places. All have 61 points and guess who are Darlaston's last two opponents, Warstones and F.C. Stafford. Today's game couldn't be described as exciting, but was highly entertaining with Darlaston 5-0 up, plus a missed penalty, by half time. Goal number two is worthy of note. As a cross came

into the box the keeper just got a hand to it before being bundled over by an on rushing forward. The ball went into the net and to everyone's surprise, not least the prostrate keepers, the referee awarded a goal. For those who think goalkeepers are too heavily protected these days, they certainly aren't when Mr C. Clinton is refereeing.

Thanks go to the bus driver who recognised me from the outward trip and waited patiently at the bus stop as I painfully limped along after the game. Plenty of buses but catching this one equated to getting back to Farage country an hour earlier. I'm not actually match fit at the moment with a collapsed knee and my G.P. taking sadistic delight in explaining the surgical procedure to get me walking again. No need to worry about it for some time as it's a non-essential operation I could be waiting years so I will be having close calls for buses and trains for some time to come. Can't even get an appointment to see the knee doctor at the moment as the computer says No. Now if there was only a political party, I could vote for that would sort out the National Health Service (as oppose to all of them saying they will which is not the same thing).

I am looking forward to returning to Darlaston's new ground next season, it really is wonderful what's happening here to keep this fine old club alive. May everyone concerned with the venture achieve the success they deserve.

04/20