

TT No. 1: *Keith Aslan* - Sat 15th August 2015; **Smithwood Firs** v Perrywood; Midland League Division 3; Kick-Off: 15.01; Result 5-1; Admission and Programme: Free; Attendance 37 (31 home, 3 away & 3 neutral).

Although a very pleasant ground, any visitor to the Mackadown Stadium might feel a little short changed if they were actually expecting a "stadium". Fully railed and painted in blue and yellow (as are all the surrounding buildings), the place cuts quite a dash. The corner flags are also blue and yellow which confuses people like me with the home team playing in all red. The high nets to stop wayward shots extend around three sides of the ground. Very useful along the far touchline as anybody venturing into the adjacent jungle to retrieve the ball might never be seen again. The nearside touchline is more or less the only place to watch the game with the brick dugouts and the small brick 'half stand' looking resplendent in freshly painted blue. I wonder if they are intending to put a roof on the spectator accommodation as at the moment if it rains you will get wet. As a big plus for plane spotters the ground is at the end of the Birmingham International Airport runway with planes flying over every few minutes no more than a Chris Waddle penalty above the ground.

Marston Green is the station for this one (the same as for Chelmsley) and the club is around a 20-minute walk away. Plenty of buses from Birmingham stop right outside the ground, but they all seemed to be empty, and having sampled the fares round here I'm not surprised.

The club should actually be two words, Smiths Wood, named after the suburb of Birmingham they come from, which is about three miles up the road. The 'Firs' is the name of their first ground. In the summer they applied to the Birmingham FA to change their name to just Smiths Wood (which is what is on their badge) but the request was declined as there is already a team of that name. A regular issuer, the superb colour programme was given away free, and myself and a fellow hopper were given pre-match teas by a committee member, again the offer of money was refused.

A bit early in the season to make predictions, but on the pitch the Firs looked like world beaters and were far too strong for the opposition. The obligatory melee occurred early into the second half which resulted in Liam Williams for the home side getting sent off. Didn't see what happened, but as I could hear Mr Williams shouting his mouth off from the far side of the pitch, I think the ref got the right one. Undeterred by their numerical deficiency Smithwood immediately scored their 4th with a 5th following 15 minutes later, the keeper injuring himself in attempting to save it and after lengthy treatment had to be replaced.

Surprisingly for this level the game had two kosher linesmen and while on the subject of officials, referee Peter Lycett deserves a name check (and not just for giving me his programme). The laws of the game state that a half of football

should be 45 minutes but then adds the dreaded words, "time may be added on at the referee's discretion". Trouble is nearly all of them don't seem to have any these days. Not so this one. The second half contained six substitutions, a three-minute delay sorting out the fracas, and five minutes to treat the injured keeper. The referee added on - zilch. Dead on 45 minutes he blew his whistle using his "discretion" or common sense as it is often called, knowing that however long he dragged the game on for, it wouldn't make diddley squat difference to the outcome. Well done ref. If only there were a few more like you.

Smithwood Firs is a very hospitable club and is highly recommended for a great day out (when it isn't raining!). But don't forget to bring your Ian Allan plane spotting book with you.

04/20