

**TT No:16: Keith Aslan** - Sunday 11th October 2015; **FC United of Manchester v Buxton**; FA Cup 3Q Round; Kick-Off: 15.02; Result: 1-1; Admission: £9; Programme: £2; Official Attendance: 2357.

To paraphrase an ancient Chinese proverb 'a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single rail replacement bus service'. Yep it's a weekend and on England's execrable privatised railway that means it's just too difficult to run any trains in Thanet. You can't even call it a third world network as third world countries manage to run trains seven days a week. And while on the subject, firmly in the category of 'it can only happen in this country' is the circumstances of this game being played on a Sunday. They weren't allowed to play it on the Saturday due to the Rugby Union World Cup match at the Etihad. It is difficult to get your head round why a non-league game with a couple of thousand people, kicking off 5 hours before the World Cup, should present any problems, but it becomes totally bizarre when the Grand Final of the Rugby League with 75,000 played at Old Trafford on the same evening is fine to go ahead!

F.C. United play in Moston, about 4 miles from the city centre. Plenty of ways to get out to the ground, all of which, along with maps, timetables etc. can be found on their excellent website, by far the best one I have come across. I opted to get the tram from Piccadilly Station to Newton Heath & Moston which is about a 20-minute walk from the ground. No need for any exercise as there is a free shuttle bus direct from the tram stop to Broadhurst Park. If you are put off by their connections with a certain Salford based club, don't be, F.C. United are the polar opposite of the other United. Everything about this club impressed me. The wide variety of sensibly priced food, the open-air bar under the stand has proper chairs and tables and a very convivial atmosphere, and although I didn't partake myself, I heard somebody say the beer was £2.40 a pint. The programme was a great read with an eclectic mix of articles including "the world's highest football grounds" and a history of African club the Kaizer Chiefs.

The crowd was very friendly and vociferous, it is a proper ground with a large covered terrace behind one goal and a seated stand running the length of one touchline with terracing below, and although you can stand on the other two covered sides I assume they are due for extension when finances permit. I've never seen so many flags strung up around a football ground, interspersed I'm pleased to say, with plenty of anti-tory banners. This is football how it used to be but without the hooliganism. I can't think of anything negative to say about the matchday experience here, it's just great.

The game didn't quite live up to its surroundings with a couple of United players graduates of the Vinnie Jones Charm School and I'm pleased Buxton held on, somewhat precariously towards the end, for a draw giving them a shed load of money from the replay. F.C. United have deservedly captured the local's imagination with league crowds all above 3,000. Today's game was somewhat less

due to the "magic of the cup". Interestingly they must be the only team from the Premier League down to parks football, that don't have any shirt sponsorship.

As you may have gathered from this article, I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to F.C. United and I wish them a speedy journey to the football league which is their ultimate destination.

04/20