

TT No.38: Mike Latham - Sun 27 December 2015- NWCL Premier Division, Maine Road 0-1 West Didsbury & Chorlton; Attendance: 360; Admission: £5; 80pp programme: £1.50; Raffle ticket: £1; Coffee: £1.

The great and the good descended on Manchester suburbia on a grey but mild December Sunday afternoon, as Maine Road's laudable initiative to stage their derby game on an unusual day was amply repaid by a crowd several times their average.

Maine Road FC have recently celebrated their 60th anniversary, a fantastic achievement for a club with deep roots in the local community.

Situated in Brantingham Road, Chorlton, Maine Road FC was originally formed by a group of Manchester City supporters and played its early games in the Rusholme Sunday League. The links persist to this day with Manchester City FC Supporters Club, formed in 1949 being the official club sponsors and the team playing in a light blue strip.

In 1972 Maine Road switched to Saturday football and after many years in the Manchester League joined the NWCL in 1987. All but five seasons since have been spent in the top tier of that league which is Step 5 in the national pyramid.

The magnificent 80pp programme, a fine mix of old and new, has plenty of historical detail and sets out the club records and history alongside modern day fixtures and news.

Six sons of fathers who played for Maine Road have represented the club, for example, and 26 sets of brothers have played for the club. Every player who has made more than one hundred appearances is honoured in the programme, the list led by Ian Walker who played 637 games while Chris Simms made 556 (and scored 138 goals). Neil Chappell leads the all-time scoring charts with 142 goals in 377 games.

The players still pay subscriptions to play for the club and maintaining a step 5 position remains a challenge, but Maine Road continue to punch above their weight and have a hard-working committee and other dedicated club volunteers who ensure the club's core values are passed on through generations.

Playing this derby game on a Sunday was a masterstroke and ensured far greater profile than had it been played 24 hours earlier. The Maine Road pitch is renowned as one of the best around and club officials told me the game would more than likely have survived the deluges of the past few days had the game been staged on the Saturday. As it was on the Sunday the pitch, though heavy in parts, was perfectly playable.

The ground is modest, but more than adequate for the level, comprising two covered areas, one running almost the length of the far side, the other a slightly

elevated standing terrace to the left of the dug-outs. The changing pavilion also houses an impressive tea bar.

There are several other sports clubs close-by, Whalley Range FC, the cricket clubs of Whalley Range and South West Manchester and the playing fields of the adjoining William Hulme's Grammar School also provide a break-up of the otherwise endless rows after rows of suburban dwellings.

It was over 30 years ago since I last visited Brantingham Road and I enjoyed my visit here; clubs like Maine Road are the bedrock of the community game and do remarkably well to survive and prosper in the highly competitive pyramid structure. Realistically they are unlikely to move above step 5 but to my mind there is nothing wrong in knowing your limitations as far too many clubs over-reach themselves.

Visitors West Didsbury & Chorlton were a welcome addition to the NWCL in 2012 and this is their fourth season, the last three in the Premier Division. They shaded this local derby with an early goal in what was an entertaining and hard-fought game and enjoyed by the many visitors present.

04/20