

**TT No.41: *Mike Latham*** - Saturday 2 January 2016: NCEL Division One: **Hull United 2-1** Winterton Rangers; Attendance: 174; Admission: £4; Programme: £1; Raffle ticket: £1.

There's no better way to start the New Year than with a new ground and on another rainy Saturday East Yorkshire offered the best opportunity of avoiding the worst of the elements.

There are two new Level Six grounds in the city of Kingston upon Hull for groundhoppers to enjoy visiting this season. Hall Road Rangers now play at Haworth Park and Hull United, who formerly played at Rangers' old Dene Park ground have, since November ground-shared at Hull Kingston Rovers' Craven Park ground.

Rovers moved here in 1989 after leaving their atmospheric old ground on Holderness Road. Now renamed the KC Lightsteam Stadium under a sponsorship deal it's far improved from the rather austere ground it was when it opened and an impressive new seated stand at the north end has given it a far more enclosed feel.

Located in East Hull on Preston Road, just off the Hedon Road the ground has plenty of parking, certainly for a game of this nature and it is certainly an easy ground to visit for the car driver.

The main stand with shallow paddock in front is open for Hull United match days. The seated stand has an impressive rake and a superb view of play from a lofty position and with 4,500 seats must be one of the biggest in non-league football.

Looking east towards Withernsea and Hedon and south towards the docks the views are spectacular on a clear day. But this afternoon was drizzly and a chill wind blew in from the Humber. The pitch stood up perfectly to the game. and with the new Super League season not due to start for another month there were no rugby markings on the field, though the presence of the rugby goal-posts just behind the portable goals gave a clear indication this was a Rugby League ground first and foremost, the perimeter track that once housed the Hull Vikings speedway team now demolished.

It's an ambitious move for the Hull United club that only entered the NCEL this season after finishing runners-up in the Hull Premier League last season. With their roots in the old St Andrews Police Club formed in 2005 the club was re-named in 2014. They have Curtis Woodhouse as manager and another ex-Hull City player Ian Ashbee as chairman and showed signs of their ambitions by recently signing Gary Bradshaw, an accomplished non-league striker in these parts.

It seemed strange to be watching a team playing in black and white- the colours of Rovers' arch rivals Hull FC from across the city as the 'home' team. United produce an excellent programme for only £1 and the admission charges are also incredibly

reasonable making this a good day out for local football fans in pleasant surroundings. The first-floor lounge of the main stand was also open for food and drinks and some chose to watch the game from this area, though most of the crowd were in the main stand looking across to the empty large covered standing terrace that on rugby match days houses Rovers' most vocal and passionate fans.

Considering the excellent state of the surroundings it seemed strange to be watching a game of no great quality. The visitors, deep in relegation trouble looked set to deservedly return across the Humber Bridge with a share of the spoils until Bradshaw supplied a rare shaft of quality late in the game to net the winner, majestically sweeping home a right-wing cross.

United are very much in contention for a second successive promotion and had taken the lead in first half stoppage time as their other striker, who lacks nothing in work-rate finished off a long punt downfield from a suspiciously offside-looking position. But Winterton drew level from a penalty when a home defender was red carded for denying a goal-scoring opportunity.

I enjoyed my visit here, especially as having seen Rugby League here on many occasions it was good to experience the round ball game. But realistically crowds of 174 are not going to make such an ambitious ground-sharing move work in the long-term and Hull United have much work to do to establish themselves in the highly competitive pyramid they have aspirations to climb. They certainly have a good off-field organisation and an excellent Twitter feed and I shall watch their progress with interest.

I'd recommend a visit here, it's stress-free and nice and relaxing at what must be one of the best-appointed grounds in non-league football. Leaving the city west bound on the Clive Sullivan way I later passed North Ferriby, a small village club who scaled the pyramid and who attracted a gate of over 600 for their National League North game against Gainsborough on the same afternoon. I wonder if Hull United will one day match their climb through the divisions?

04/20