

TT No.65: Steve Hardy - Sat 26th March 2016; **FC Birmingham U21** v Whittington U21; Birmingham & District League U21 Division; Result: 3-4; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 1 (one!).

The Under 21 division is a new addition to the old Birmingham AFA, which has now remodelled itself as the Birmingham & District league. It hasn't gripped the majority of the member clubs yet though, as it has just five clubs to start with, but I hope more clubs decide to join in as this is a worthwhile addition to the fold in my opinion.

FC Birmingham are a new club this season, with their senior team playing in Division 7 (the bottom division), and they play home games at the Magnet Centre in Erdington. This turned out to be an absolute gem of a ground in a dilapidated sort of way, with a single railed off pitch in front of the magnificent Midlands Greek Cypriot Community centre. This fabulous building was once owned by GEC, but was bought by the Greek Cypriot community in 1984. The ground has staged Midland Combination football in the past I understand, with a friend telling me he watched Continental Star play Aston there a few years ago. There are several blocks of terracing and even a small covered area down one side which would have been most welcome if the promised heavy rain and high winds had actually materialised.

On the pitch, it would be fair to say that this season has been a bit of a struggle for FC Birmingham. The under 21s are rock bottom of the league and haven't been helped by not getting many home games played due to the dreadful state of the pitch. It hadn't rained for a couple of weeks in Erdington, but yesterday the pitch was still waterlogged in places, and the Referee must have been tempted to call it off I would have thought. Luckily, he didn't, and FCB surprised everyone by taking a deserved 2-0 lead, before normal service was resumed and Whittington equalised just before half time. In the second half Whittington took control and took the lead in the 75th minute, but, to their credit, FCB came back with a splendid solo goal of their own to level things up again. Unfortunately, their defence couldn't hold out though, and Whittington scored the winner as we entered extra time, leaving the FCB players collapsed on the pitch in disappointment.

With the ground virtually underneath the elevated M6 at junction 6, this turned out to be a contender for the noisiest ground I have ever visited, alongside clubs such as Marlow United and Old Altrinchamians.