

**TT No.49: Keith Aslan - Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017; Bearwood Athletic v Two Gates; Holder Cup Final @ HOLLYFIELDS; Kick-Off: 15.03; Result: 3-0 to Two Gates; Admission & Programme: Free; Attendance: 108 (60 TG, 30 B & 18 neutral)**

The Cup Final season is in full swing occasionally throwing up an unexpected gem, and Hollyfields is 50-carat. Fully railed with a concrete path, a smashing stand built with metal and wood, and a clubhouse with food and the lunchtime footie on TV. This ground will probably have gone under the radar of many hoppers as no 'major' non-league team plays here although the facilities could certainly support one. Prime tenants are a well-known team round the Birmingham and District league called simply 'The Village'. Today, as a prelude to the main event, they had an early kick off on the second pitch. I wonder who was Number Six? (If you're under 50 get your parents to explain that reference).

The ground is a 25- minute walk from Erdington Station, which is in turn a 15-minute ride to the north of Birmingham. I don't want to be too critical of the place but it makes Shepherds Bush look like Disneyland by comparison. I did discover a bus stop five minutes from the ground with a service that goes direct to Birmingham International every half hour, probably a better bet if you are one of those people with free bus fares - so that's everyone except me then. Hollyfields is adjacent to Holly Lane who used to strut their stuff in the Midland Combination a few years back. This final should have been played at Sutton United (the one where pie eating hasn't been criminalized) but Bearwood played at Sutton three weeks ago and in a 'robust' match they had a player sent off and the team indulged in some major naughtiness both during and after the game resulting in them being banned from the ground, so a new venue had to be found at relatively short notice. Apparently Bearwood have a bit of previous for this sort of thing, but they behaved themselves today. It must be down to the pre-match handshakes!

The referee, Kevin Rzepkowski, has a very impressive c.v. including 10 years as a Football league linesman. Beginning his refereeing career in 1969 he must be of the same vintage as myself. I assume the 2.30 kick-off shown on the front of the programme was an April Fool and at the allotted time everyone was ready to go except the players and officials who needed another 33 minutes. All very annoying, I could have spent an extra half hour sightseeing in Erdington. Maybe not. They'll be dancing in the streets of Two Gates after this result, a surprisingly easy victory considering how close the two teams are in the league. Two Gates are the oldest team in the Birmingham League (by about 100 years I would think) being formed in 1888. I have never known a team at this level last so long. With three figure crowds, the norm for these finals I often wonder where all the supporters come from, or go to, given that the average attendance for league games is the proverbial 'one man and his dog' (and even the dog gave the lunchtime Village game a miss).

There are eight Birmingham League Cup Finals played at different grounds around England's second city. All superbly organized with informative programmes at

places where you wouldn't normally expect paper. This is the third one I have been to over the years and thoroughly enjoyed the lot. All details on the league website with plenty left to play if you fancy taking one in. Mind you, the rest of the grounds are unlikely to be of the same standard as Hollyfields.

04/20