

TT No.28: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 9th September 2017; **Darlington** v Leamington; Conference South; Kick-Off: 15.02; Result: 0-0; Admission: £14 (£10 for old people); Programme: £2.50p (very good); Official Attendance: 1277 (including at least 7 neutral)

I'm not a fan of the Conference. Overrated, overpriced with a most ludicrous ground grading system which they use to get rid of teams they don't want. Cambridge City and Kings Lynn are just two of the clubs thrown out for minor infractions because 'rules are rules' unless of course you get crowds of six thousand then the league just ignore the rule about having a four-sided ground - Oxford United for instance. Darlington were stitched up last season, when with two months left of the season, they were told they wouldn't be allowed to compete in the play offs, leaving it much too late to make the necessary ground 'improvements'. Their point that they should have been informed of ground requirements at the beginning of the season would seem to me to be quite reasonable, but reason has never featured very prominently in this league. The club is busy making the adjustments to allow them to enter the play offs this season, but taken on today's performance it is an academic exercise. Oh yes and whoever decided that Bishops Stortford is in the north of England clearly wasn't paying attention in Geography lessons. This league is an absolute 'shambles'.

In spite of hearing much negativity regarding Blackwell Meadows I liked the place. A 28-minute walk from the station, it has six rows of covered terracing behind one a goal, a grass bank behind the other and along the far side a local stand for local people, a no-go area for visitors who are thrown out because there isn't enough room. And here lies the problem, the ground isn't really big enough. It was o.k. for today's smallest crowd of the season but I wouldn't like to be there next week for the 2,500 they are expecting for the cup game with South Shields. It has a comfortable bar with food and the pre. match entertainment was watching Liverpool get 'tonked' on a big screen.

Leamington were formed in 2000 two years after their predecessors A.P. folded. This is their first season in the Conference having been promoted through the play offs. Their most famous old boy is Harry Redknapp. I doubt many people could name their ground. It is of course the "Phillips 66 Community Stadium". Darlington's recent turbulent history is well documented and it's good to see them back in town although the ultimate aim of a return to the football league is unlikely to be accomplished at this ground.

The *Non-League Paper* gave this match one star which was being a tad generous. Leamington came for a point and Darlington weren't good enough to prevent them getting it. The visiting keeper started wasting time in the eighth minute with the rest of his colleagues soon joining in. The referee spent most of the match telling them to hurry up and pointing at his watch seemingly undeterred by the fact they weren't taking any notice of him. Try booking somebody mate that usually works! Leamington sucked the life out of this game in the second half, not that there was

much life in it to start with. Remember when three points for a win was first introduced, we were told it would create lots of goals and exciting football as teams wouldn't settle for a draw and go all out for the win. What a load of rubbish.

The game started late presumably in homage to Darlington's sponsors, our old mates *Virgin Trains*. There is a similarity between football and the privatised railway in that being up to 8 minutes late is actually on time. Branson's private island was devastated by the hurricane and he was actually on it when 'Irma' hit. Sadly, he was unscathed so we will still have to put up with the publicity seeking little runt a while longer. The programme was an excellent read and well worth the money. And, while on the subject of football programmes, I am indebted to last week's Deal Town proggy for coming up with the most appropriate anagram in history. 'The new stadium' is an anagram of 'West Ham United'.

Another wonderful day out in the north east only partly spoilt by having to watch a turgid football match in the middle of it.

04/20