

TT No.75: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 15th December 2018; **EASTWOOD HANLEY** v Hanley Reserves; Leek Cup; Kick-Off: 14.03; Result: 0-1; Admission & programme: £3; Attendance: 30 (24 home, 4 away & 2 neutral).

A truly miserable afternoon, this was one of those 'what am I doing here?' days. Suffering a debilitating bout of Man Flu and making a round trip of over 400 miles to stand in the freezing cold and driving rain watching a game of football in a cage is not the action of a sane man, but sanity has never been my strong point. Eastwood Hanley play at the Northwood Stadium, I would guesstimate it's about a 45-minute walk from Stoke Station. No buses, they all to go to Hanley bus station, which is where I went and cut out about two thirds of the walk. My orienteering skills were tested to the max. getting to the ground with only a 50-year old Ordnance Survey Map to help me. Coming back, I splashed out (literally) on a taxi which was only £1.90p more expensive than the bus. Taxis are pretty cheap in Stoke - bus fares most certainly aren't. Northwood Stadium has a large stand that would provide shelter from the deluge, unfortunately the adjacent 3g pitch where Eastwood actually play has nothing but a rail to lean surrounded by the ubiquitous green fence. Boy did I get wet.

With the clubs playing only a mile apart this was the last chance to watch this local derby until, well next Saturday actually when they meet again in the league. They've already played each other in the 'Hanley Cup' so not exactly strangers. The last time I saw Eastwood Hanley play they were in the Northern Premier League, but repeated vandalism saw them go out of business. The revived club are hoping to move back to their original ground, and made an unsuccessful attempt to get into the North West Counties this season. The leisure centre, which contains the changing rooms, has tables and chairs and central heating where I made a futile attempt to get dry while giving the hot drinks machine a good workout. A 20-page glossy colour programme is included in admission and was available at the gate with the poor chap selling them trying to take some shelter from the upturned boot of his car. Eastwood are one of the very few Staffordshire League teams that issue.

The Under 9 team were acting as mascots and part of the deal was that they had to watch the match and I felt sorry for the parents who stoically stood with the little sods, I mean offspring, throughout the match. As we all got pneumonia together at least I had the consolation that my martyrdom was through choice. This was an awful afternoon with the will to live diminishing the wetter I got. This is no reflection on the football, both sides gave it a good go in spite of the conditions and I will be forever indebted to Jordan Hall for scoring the second half goal that spared everybody the abomination of extra time.

I got back to my country dacha miserable, cold, wet and flu laden. After I'd dried out, I immediately got stuck into my double issue '*Traveller*' to see where to go next week.

