

TT No.89: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 12th January 2019; **Denver** v Birchwood; UK Van Solutions North West Norfolk League Division 1; Result: 2-0; Attendance: 10 approx.

Although I could have reached this ground within about an hour from home by car, I elected to do the greater part of it by public transport instead. So today I used Cambridge North station for the first time, primarily because street parking here is easier than in Central Cambridge. My only gripe here was that they don't actually have a ticket office and it's all done by machines, although there was a man sitting at a table selling tickets. Anyway, 35 minutes later I was in Downham Market. From here it was a mile and a half walk to the ground which is right by the turning into the village of Denver off the southern bypass. With 75 minutes to kick off I was the first to arrive. Then someone else did and having confirmed that the match was on I headed off to the pub, a few minutes-walk-away.

Here I encountered four Denver players, to whom I said, "I hope what you are drinking isn't going to affect your performance as I've come to watch you lot play." They said that they weren't drinking alcohol, a fact supported by the barmaid. I then bought a pint of cider and ordered some food. However, while I was in the process of paying for it, I accidentally knocked over my pint, which partially went over the barmaid. Luckily, she was wearing black. This caused one of the Denver players to suggest to me, "Perhaps it's you who should stick to the orange juice!"

Anyway, I was back at the ground well before kick-off and already my reputation had gone before me! However, having seen the Tweet about this match I'd sent to both sides on the previous day I was warmly greeted by officials of both teams. The Birchwood manager told me that they were five key players missing with long term injuries. Meanwhile the hosts had been picking up some useful points in their past few games. Also, today we had a National League ref in charge, although as he explained to me, he usually only does lines and on the previous afternoon he was one of the lino's for Watford's U23 match at Wingate & Finchley.

So, a keen contest ensued and by the break things were evenly balanced. The second half saw Denver get on top and soon they were creating chances when Birchwood weren't. Then on 73 minutes the hosts number 7, having a couple of unsuccessful chances earlier, finally scored at the second attempt. However, in scoring his head came into contact with the keeper's knee. It was a complete accident. He collapsed to the ground with blood gushing everywhere. An ambulance was called, but it never came while I was at the ground. Eventually the player was carried off. For a while the bleeding stopped, by the end of the match it had started again. But both sides wanted to carry on playing and so after a 16-minute injury break they did. On 86 minutes Denver scored a second goal and the game finished at about 4.12pm with the light still OK. Then it was back into town to watch the scores come through in a pub before catching the train home.

