

**TT No.9: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 3rd August 2019; **HERNE BAY** v Witham; Pre-Season Friendly; Kick-Off: 15.02; Result: 3-1; Admission: £3 for ancients; Programme: Nope, but begging produced a team sheet; Attendance: 118 (109 home, 8 away & 1 neutral)

The first day of the season and I'm doing a local friendly for a revisit without a programme which will have my fans asking - what's going on? I should have been at Burton for the last chance to do an ex. football league ground but life seldom pans out as planned and a call from Ashford hospital to inform me they had a space on Friday night to perform long awaited surgery on my nose meant I wasn't very perky when they let me out on Saturday morning.

I had strict instructions to go straight home and stay there but I don't ever do what I'm told unless there is no alternative. I was also told that my nose would be bleeding continuously for a few days and they weren't wrong there. Sitting on the bus to go back to the station I was still contemplating zipping up to Burton when I sneezed and the back of the bus turned into a film set from a Quentin Tarantino movie. Blood everywhere, it hasn't stopped since and due to the operation. I can't put anything up my nasal passage to stem the crimson tide. Decided to go home. Still wasn't going to stop me going to football, but of a more local variety, so armed only with an industrial quantity of extra strength *Kleenex* for men I bled my way along the coast to Baywatch! The logic was if I am going die at least I'll snuff it doing something I enjoy.

Herne Bay has two claims to fame. It had the second longest pier in the country (after Southend). You can see how far it reached with the end out at sea just visible in the distance, alas no longer connected to the rest of it. The other fact to know is that Herne Bay is the only place in England to have a block of flats named after a 1960's Australian female tennis player with Margret Court two minutes from the ground. Winches Field or Altera Stadium as it is now known is a 12-minute walk from the station, plenty of seats and cover on three sides of the ground all built without recourse to the *Atcost* shop. There has recently been talk of the club folding with no money or players but there wasn't anything amiss today apart from the Golden Goal tickets being £2 a throw. You won't be selling many at that price boys. I spent most of the game responding to the question 'Do you know you're bleeding?' and I had many, kind offers of cotton wool to stuff up my nose (at least I presume that's where they wanted me to put it). It's good to have the scores back to watch at half-time in the clubhouse and the return of the theme music to *Sports Report* meaning that it's the first day of the season and all is well with the world.

The match was unremarkable, highlight of the first-half was an eighteen-man brawl resulting from the Witham No. 6, a graduate of the Joey Jones charm school, performing a two-footed drop kick on a home player, and when everything had settled down the referee showed undue leniency in only booking two players. It may just be a friendly but the 'tackle' was horrendous. The goals all came in the

second half with Witham taking the lead before Herne Bay came back to take the points, or would have done if there'd been any on offer. Best goal came in the 91st of the 90 minutes with a goalkeeping boo-boo that was really very funny.

Most of the afternoon's entertainment came from the Witham Ultra, wearing a replica shirt that really did have 'Ultra' printed across the back, a Witham baseball cap, Witham scarf and armed with six (6) flags which he festooned behind the goal at the 'unpopular end' of the ground. It must have taken him ages to put them all up and take them down again. All on his own he sang, chanted and generally made a noise throughout the game and got far more excited than he really should when Witham scored, totally oblivious to the fact he was being a bit of a dick, albeit a harmless one. Without wishing to be cruel here is a man who would do well to type the words 'Girlfriend' and 'how to find a..' into *Google*. Witham did have a few other supporters but they all gave him a wide berth.

Having drifted in and out of consciousness due to blood loss I just about made it back to my country dacha and I can now spend the rest of the weekend bleeding out in the privacy of my own home. At least if I'm overwhelmed by blood loss I'll die with a smile on my face. In the letters page in today's *'Non-League Paper'* a Brian Thompson from Hendon was complaining about long journeys for away games with the line 'The travelling time is certainly an incontinence' What a load of \_\_\_\_!

04/20