

TT No.065: 02/04/05 Ground/Club Focus: *Mike Latham* - Doncaster Rovers (FL1)

Football League One, Fri 1 April 2005, Doncaster Rovers 1-1 Colchester United
(att.- 6,774)

Colchester United fans returning to Belle Vue nearly seven years on from their last visit would find the ground vastly changed and the whole atmosphere of Rovers' home since 1922 completely different...

In May 1998 Colchester were Doncaster Rovers' last opponents before they dropped out of the Football League, winning 1-0 before a crowd of 3,572. At that time the very future of Rovers looked imperilled and there was a sense of doom and despondency about the place.

Now Rovers, under their astute and inspirational chairman John Ryan, are a club transformed- successive promotions have taken them out of the Conference and straight through League Two into a position where they are not far from the play-off places for the Championship.

The ground looks neat and tidy, newly concreted terraces, a renovated main stand, a superb playing surface, excellent floodlighting from unusually tall pylons and a caring lick of paint here and there.

Rovers seem to have captured the enthusiasm of the town's youth- with youngsters forming a significant percentage of a 6,774 crowd on a warm spring-like evening. The sale of replica shirts, of the red and white hoped design, must be very high as a percentage of the average crowd as virtually everyone, young and old, seemed to be wearing one.

A £13 admission to the uncovered Town End behind the goal was reasonable and afforded an excellent view of an interesting game. The most vociferous Rovers fans packed into the covered terrace opposite the main stand. The main stand still has a standing terrace in front and with its distinctive extended roof looked quite a sight reflecting off the lights against the darkness of the night sky.

The Colchester fans gathered mostly at the uncovered end behind the other goal. The game had been switched to the Friday evening due to the Lincoln Meeting at the famous racecourse, home to the St Leger, across the road.

The programme, priced £2, contained 64 pages and some excellent articles and had obviously been compiled with a loving care by the four-man editorial team.

Rovers groundshare Belle Vue, now named Earth Stadium after the club's main sponsor, with Doncaster Dragons Rugby League club whose Easter Monday game against Castleford had attracted a crowd of 3,500. There were no obvious signs of harm to the playing area and the writer has been informed that the two clubs have a happy working relationship, unlike the sad tales of acrimony and warring factions at other clubs where the two codes co-exist.

With Rovers set to move to a new ground at Lakeside Village Belle Vue's days are numbered making one last visit there all the more recommended. It was a friendly, happy and vibrant place to watch League football and it was easy to see why Rovers are rated as one of the best passing sides outside the Premiership.

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