

TT No.072: 10/04/05 Ground/Club Focus: *Mike Latham* - Atherton Collieries (NWCL1)

Atherton Collieries 2-6 Fleetwood Town NWCL1 4 Apr 2005 (att. - 107)

Alder House is an atmospheric ground situated close to the centre of Atherton, a former coal-mining and mill town between Bolton and Leigh. Atherton Collieries were formed in 1916 by a group of miners representing the six pits in the district that had stayed at home to help the war effort. The club today is kept going by a sturdy band of loyal enthusiasts as the support from the townsfolk is dismal.

It never ceases to amaze how clubs at this level continually put out superb value programmes that make a mockery of the glossy and over-priced specimens in the Football League and beyond. Colls' programme was a mammoth 52-page effort containing news from their game only two days before, a superb statistical section and, as it was their last home game of the season, a review of the campaign.

Leaders Fleetwood Town brought around 100 spectators with them and they were rewarded with a six-goal victory though Colls, just one place off the bottom, competed spiritedly and not only took the lead with an early disputed penalty but then drew level at 2-2 early in the second half. Unfortunately, the game was spoilt in many observers' eyes by the worst kind of officious refereeing, culminating in the dismissals of the Fleetwood manager and the Colls' goalkeeper in the second half. The latter red card seemed incredibly harsh and was even disputed by the Fleetwood fans massed behind the goal. The Colls striker, who good-naturedly explained to the visiting fans that it was his first game, went in goal but was unable to save the resulting penalty.

So, Fleetwood march on- re-formed in 1997 they look a very accomplished team for this level. Colls, meanwhile, are in the middle of a dreadful run of results with just one point from their last dozen games though they had precious little luck on this occasion.

Alder House is an idiosyncratic ground with the dressing rooms housed behind the top goal next to a tea bar that served some of the best pies in the Northern Union and which did a roaring trade. The purveyors of the meat and potato crusted delicacies were one of the 48 local businesses that had taken out adverts in the programme.

Down one side a small club house and a lean-to construction housing some rudimentary bench seating was situated together with the away dug-out. The home dug-out is situated on the opposite side behind which are two shelters, one of which seems to defy the laws of gravity by remaining standing. The far end is open standing, the ground falling markedly away to reveal a spectacular view over the urban conurbation beyond. Admission was £4 for an entertaining and eventful

game and though two divisions may separate these sides next season the score-line reflected unfairly on the home side's efforts on this occasion.

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