

TT No.088: 19/04/05 Ground/Club Focus: *Stephen Harris* - Cogenhoe Utd (UCLP)

Saturday 16 April 2005; Cogenhoe United 3-2 Bourne Town; United Counties League; Att: c. 96; programme issued.

With my first-choice team, Leyton Orient, having played and won in most satisfying style at Southend on Friday night, the way was clear for me to visit a new ground on Saturday. I fancied seeing a top team in a fairly minor league and settled on Cogenhoe United, top of the UCL - a league in which I have little personal experience.

Cogenhoe turns out to be a small village south east of Northampton in the Nene valley - pronounced something like 'Cook-no' to my soft southern ears. The weather was good and, being in dire need of exercise and fresh air, I walked the six-or-so miles from Northampton station and most of the way back - pausing only for essential re-hydration stops at the White Hart, Great Houghton, the Olde Cherry Tree, Great Houghton and the Bold Dragon, Weston Favell.

The ground is not particularly impressive, being largely untouched I suspect since it opened in the 80s. A small stand midway along one side has 50 blue seats bolted on to an older wooden frame and also provides a little covered standing space. Otherwise facilities consist simply of a concrete pathway to stand upon and a rail to lean on. Views of spring fields and distant church towers help to make up for the lack of architectural beauty within the ground itself.

But Cogenhoe appear to be in the business of satisfying the ground graders; with a fresh concrete pathway being laid at the far end, and plans on the clubhouse wall for the proposed new 150-seater 'grandstand'.

Like most clubs at this level, the real heart and soul is the bar and this is where most of the 100-strong crowd were gathered before, after, and in some cases throughout, the game. There was plenty to drink, but my hunger pangs were hardly staved off by the cup-a-soup and chocolate bar acquired from the tea bar which opened only for the half-time break.

I expected the locals to wipe the floor with Bourne and this is how it looked when the home team scored in the first minute. But from then on, the teams were quite evenly matched and Bourne perhaps were unfortunate to come away pointless. Careful reading of the thin programme suggested that Bourne were no longer the whipping boys they had been earlier in the season.

Whilst the quality of football was lower than I had expected, this was a good day out and a welcome break from my usual London-based football diet.

