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## TT REPORTS 2024-25

updated 13/08/24.

**TT No.12: *Jon T Green*** - Saturday 10th August 2024; **BOVINGDON** v Huntingdon Town U23; South Midlands Football League - Division Two; Venue: Green Lane; Result: 4-0; Admission: £3; Programme: No; Attendance: 70

As the visiting players exited the field after their pre-match warm-up, one lad said to another “are you ready for the slaughter?”. His mate shrugged, grinned and kept on walking. Whilst this might not have been the most upbeat of attitudes upon studying the facts he may have had a point: a) Bovingdon finished runners-up in the league last year; b) this was Huntingdon’s first game at this level and c) on a warm afternoon they only had twelve men.

Green Lane is a long road full of large houses with well-manicured front gardens. At one end it intersects with the attractive High Street - the 18th Century Bell Inn is a lovely pub for a pre-match pint, and at the other with Bovingdon Green, where you can find the quintessential English village cricket club. The ground itself is situated next to a tennis club, the sort where the members can actually play properly so you know it’s a bit upmarket. The single covered stand with its fading white woodwork contains a few rows of wooden benches and a small terrace which unfortunately today is being used as more of a storage facility than somewhere to watch the game. Not that we are in need of any shelter as it’s a pleasant afternoon and most people are taking advantage of the nice weather to sit outside the clubhouse close to where a couple of ladies are busy cooking up a huge batch of burgers. As you would expect for a club operating at this level, the rest of the ground is undeveloped with only a narrow strip of hard standing next to the grandstand. The dugouts are situated on the far side and at best can be described as bijou; the ‘Home’ one is in the process of being extended but whether this upgrade will extend to the visitor’s bench is unclear, a cunning psychological ploy perhaps?

From the start it’s clear the home side are going to dominate the game; Tom Flanagan looks a cut above the rest, Keane Fullwood has pace to burn and centre forward Scott Burge is always threatening. Huntingdon centre half Tom Steeples is doing his best to stem the tide, he’s playing with a smile on his face and with a mixture of comedy and sarcasm which is getting a laugh and winding up the home

players in equal measure. Bovingdon are creating chances at will but without really forcing any real saves from Town's captain 'keeper Zander Watson. When Watson is finally called into action, he does well to save Burge's weak penalty and then even better to block the follow-up shot. There have been some heated exchanges between captain Haydn Cassidy and his manager as the frustration levels continue to rise - Cassidy does not reappear after the break so maybe the fallout was more serious than it first appeared. With Town just beginning to think that they might reach the break on level terms, Flanagan twists and turns his way free and scores into the far corner. The same player then doubles the advantage after Fullwood skips his way down the right flank before providing a perfect pass.

During the interval the Huntingdon management team keep their charges on the pitch (maybe to avoid the lure of a freshly cooked burger) and are delivering an incredibly positive team talk; "they (Bovingdon) will be getting blasted for that, they should be ten up. Let's shore up the centre of midfield and then hit them with our pace. We can still get a point from this". His confidence certainly boosts his players as Jack Peters almost puts in David Starling before the latter has a great chance but can only strike his shot against home 'keeper Leo Smith. Sadly, for Town this was as good as it got as Bovingdon gradually reasserted their superiority, Gary Dowling going close with a far post header and Joe McCarthy narrowly failing to turn in a Flanagan centre. Things then get even more difficult for the visitors as Dylan Hughes receives his second yellow card and is rightly dismissed. It's not until the very closing stages do Bovingdon add to their tally; Burge reacts first after Steeples can only deflect a low centre into his path before, with seven minutes of added time played, Fullwood crosses and Dowling, looking suspiciously offside, nets from close range.

In reality not too much can be read into this result, Bovingdon have some classy players and will clearly be amongst the pace setters whilst Huntingdon will gradually gel as a unit and, with continued positive comments from the sidelines, could yet develop into a competitive side.

*contributed on 13/08/24.*

**TT No.11: *Craig Dabbs*** - Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> August 2024; **Avery** v Wombourne Allstars; West Midlands (Regional) League Division One; Venue: Tat Bank Road; Result: 2-6; Admission: £4; Programme: 12pp, £1.50; Attendance: 62

Avery? That was the question put to the chairman. It's the company in its various guises that made weighing equipment. The connection, seeing as Avery FC were only formed as a youth team in 2020? Well, they used to play in Bearwood where Bourneville RFC are and this was the original home of Avery FC who many years ago played in the Birmingham Works League, so they adopted the name. Now they have a tie up with Warley RFC over the two sites they have, in nearby St Johns Road where the youth team is based and the newly formed first team have set up camp at the main site on Tat Bank Road.

The current configuration at Tat Bank Road is a pitch immediately in front of the clubhouse with Warley RFC's pitch to the left and Avery's to the right. The proposal

the club are making is for Warley to move in front of the clubhouse and for Avery to take their place. This means that they will move away from an absolute gem bit of cover that I knew nothing about prior to visiting; it's obscured by trees on maps, and that looks to have been the case for a number of years from looking at *Google Earth*. All I can say for now is it wasn't there in 1945 as the site was covered by industry.

So, the foundations are there for the club to progress should they start to get it right on the pitch. After this fixture Avery's playing record reads: Played: 3; Won: 0; Drawn: 0; Lost: 3; Goals For: 3; Against: 23; GD: -20. Grim, and that's because they are still building with mainly youth players on the pitch at present.

I was told that one of the problems is that their heads drop when they go behind. So, after doing just that and the score doubling in just five minutes full credit to them that their heads didn't drop, and they kept plugging away even threatening to pull level at one point. In truth they were second best and if Wombourne had put away their many chances the scoreline would've been very high indeed.

I do wish them well. Starting up and establishing a club isn't easy, they've made good progress as a youth team over four years, and I hope that they stick at this transition into adult football because if the beatings continue to come then the danger is that everyone's heads drop.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 11/08/24.*

**TT No.10: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> August 2024; **EVERY** v Wombourne Allstars; West Midlands League Division 1; Kick Off: 15.01; Result: 2-6; Admission: £2 for the elderly; Programme: £1.50p; Attendance: 62 (44 home, 8 away & 10 neutral).

Previously just a youth set up, this season sees Avery's first ever season as a grown-up team and while early results have left a bit to be desired, they have an enthusiastic bunch of volunteers and there's a really good vibe about the place. Nobody at the club seem unduly concerned about getting tanked every match.

The club play at Warley Rugby Club in Oldbury, an easy place to get to for the carless. Langley Green station is a 6-minute walk while buses to Birmingham City Centre stop literally outside the gate. Can't fault Avanti today, spot on coming and going. However, on the hour and a quarter run from London I couldn't help pondering how nice it would be if only there could be a way to cut a few minutes off the journey time. So big thanks to our politicians who are doing just that with the wonderful HS2, and all for a paltry 100 billion quid. Unfortunately, I'll be long gone before it's finished, as will nearly everybody else, but major infrastructure projects like this are what makes England the great nation it is. Although the Birmingham station revamp is over six years old, I still manage to get lost. If you need to change onto another platform now you have to leave the station, walk through a shopping mall and come back in at a different entrance. And this is better how? At least it didn't cost 100 billion.

Stopped off at Ronnie Mac's Oldbury outlet for my dins. I had a 'happy meal' which was rather ironic. I shouldn't imagine happiness is an option if you live in Birmingham and work in McDonalds. Arrived at the ground one and a half hours before kick-off and watched the lunchtime footie in the clubhouse (no food or hot drinks). A young lady was already on the gate with a box of the finest paper. Volume 1 number 1, good to see a club making the effort to issue these days. The pitch is adjacent to the rugby field with a mixture of metal barrier and rope surrounding it. Surprisingly there is cover, a corrugated iron structure that looks like a very large bicycle shed which I think it originally was. It would keep you dry in the rain and today it sheltered me from the unremitting sunshine.

Avery's results so far have been 0-9 and 1-8 and it looked to be more of the same today when Wombourne took a 3-0 lead after 20 minutes. But Avery fought back and it was 2-3 early in the second half when for 15 glorious minutes Avery were chasing an equalizer. It was not to be, but scores are improving every match and a first victory can't be that far away. It's the height of the 'drinks break' season. How football was quite happily played for 130 years without them I can't imagine. And why does it take two and a half minutes to have a drink of water?

A good day out in Birmingham if that's not a contradiction in terms.

*contributed on 11/08/24.*

**TT No.9: Steve Hardy** - Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> August 2024; **Norton Canes v AFC Somers**; West Midlands Regional League Division One; Result: 2-3; Admission: Free; Programme: Free; Attendance 17 H/C

After losing its step six status, the WMRL now consists of just 2 divisions with division one seemingly grabbing any passing club that even hints at wanting to join them.

Tonight's match was a prime example of this. This is the first season as an adult club for Norton Canes, so they have no history for the league to judge their admittance or not. Visitors AFC Somers played in the Birmingham League when I saw them a few years ago, so have at least played as a team before.

Norton Canes are playing at Burntwood Leisure Centre for their debut season. There are 2 grass pitches here, as well as a plastic pitch and all were in use this evening. My match took place on the grass pitch next to the car park and despite all my scepticism turned out to be an excellent and entertaining spectacle.

Somers took the lead on 21 minutes and held it until half time. The second half began with a flurry with Norton scoring twice on 50 and 54 minutes to take the lead, only for Somers to equalise shortly after. End to end stuff followed before Somers scored a deserved winner on 76 minutes to complete a 3-2 win.

Just 6 miles from home this one, so I gave Sarah Satnav the evening off so that she could watch the wall rock climbing. An Olympic sport...really?

*contributed on 07/08/24.*

**TT No.8: Brian Buck** - Monday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2024; Girton United v Swavesey Institute; **Cottenham Charity Cup Semi Final**; Venue: played at **Cottenham United FC**; Result: 1-2; Attendance: 20 approx.

I always enjoy coming here, as I was born in Cambridge Maternity Hospital. I actually lived in Cottenham for the first two years of my life. I was made aware of the existence of this game earlier in the afternoon.

In the good old days, all the local villages in the area had their own charity cups, and the Cottenham Charity Cup has survived longer than most although this one appears to be struggling this season. A few years ago, there were at least six sides in it, and they played group matches first of all. However, tonight, this was the only semi- final to be played as Cottenham's opponents had dropped out of the other one a few days earlier.

This match did not capture the public's imagination either. Swavesey, the 'senior' of the two sides tonight took the lead on 4 minutes when the unmarked scorer thumped the ball home from about ten yards out and for the remainder of the half they were all over Girton and it seemed to be a question as to how many they would score. However, for no particular reason they couldn't find the net again in this period, perhaps because they thought that in the unlikely event of Girton scoring then they could up their game immediately. We listened to their half time team talk, which was in 'we've already got this won mode', but things didn't pan out that way initially as Girton stuck to their game plan and Swavesey lived with what they had. Then on 54 minutes Girton did actually equalise after their scorer ran on largely unchallenged. Now we had a game on our hands. Girton now played with more confidence and Swavesey found that they couldn't just turn it on with a drop of a hat. However, on 86 minutes they did manage to conjure up the winner with a powerful header from a corner. There was still time for Girton to equalise but another run on goal by their previous scorer was halted following an offside flag raised by a club lino, which upset a Girton player to the point where he was red carded by the ref. Overall, sentiment apart, the right team won, just!

*contributed on 06/08/24.*

**TT No.7: Brian Buck** - Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2024; **Harrowby United** v Eastwood Community; GCE Hire Fleet United Counties League Premier Division North; Kick-Off: 6pm; Result: 1-8; Attendance: 437.

We then moved onto our second game of the day, which was part of the United Counties League 'Hop', arriving with about twenty minutes to spare. There was no queue to speak of to get in, as most of my fellow Groundhoppers had arrived long before us. This was my third visit here, the last one being in May 2015 when a friend and I made the uphill walk from Grantham railway station to reach this ground, which is on the east side of town.

As with all 'hop' games you see a myriad of people you haven't seen for ages, so the temptation is to spend more time talking to them than you do watching the

match. With this in mind, on arrival I headed off to the seats as quickly as possible. The downside of sitting here was that you had the sun in your eyes, but my multipurpose hat helped a lot. This match was more low-key than the previous game, both in the playing and refereeing of it. The pitch here was big, possibly full size and when players took corners it seemed like they were taking goal kicks.

The visitors took the lead on 26 minutes, from the spot after an attacker, going away from goal, had his legs pulled away. The goal was given, but apparently shouldn't have been allowed because the taker halted his run as he ran up to take the kick. This lead was doubled immediately before half time with a shot from about ten yards out which went just inside the post. In the second half the game quickly slipped away from the hosts. On 50 minutes the scorer 'passed' the ball into the net after swapping passes with a colleague, before completing his hat-trick with another 'illegal' spot kick on 56 minutes. Then on 64 minutes Harrowby pulled a goal back, which I didn't see, as I was busy talking to the UCL chairman, Alan Poulain at the time. With time running out, I made my way towards the exit, but I need not have hurried, as there were twelve and a half minutes of added time at the end and during this period Eastwood scored four more goals to give them a well-deserved win, but perhaps by a slightly inflated margin.

*contributed on 06/08/24.*

**TT No.6: Brian Buck** - Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2024; Newark Town v Ashby Ivanhoe; GCE Hire Fleet United Counties League Premier Division North; Kick-Off: 3pm; Result: 1-1; Attendance: 246.

Due mainly to health reasons it is rare that I get a 'new' ground in these days, so I was very grateful to be driven to this game and I was immensely thankful to my driver for taking me here. So, after ticking off a very pleasant 'micro' pub on a housing estate near to Newark beforehand, we rolled up at the ground about half an hour before kick-off. Its address is YCMA Newark & Sherwood Sports Community & Activity Village, Lord Hawke Way and is a relatively new build. In fact, when I walked along the old railway track to visit Newark Flowserve many years ago now, I recall that the whole complex was basically fields.

The attendance surprised me as this was not a 'Hop' fixture, but the place seems to have captured the imagination of the locals and they were out in force today. The venue is a caged 3G pitch, not only can you walk around the whole pitch once inside it, but they also have two seated stands plus a small area of standing cover behind the bottom goal. Initially we sat in the biggest of the stands on the far side of the pitch, but soon found out that this is where their rowdy fans, both adults and children, also stand. So, after tolerating this for a short while we moved into the other seated stand and sat with the 'normal' people.

As for the game, it was physical and very competitive, contested in the main by mature looking adults rather than by players who looked as though they'd just left school. As a whole the match was generally fairly even, although the visitors looked as though they might end up winning it. It was they who took the lead on 39 minutes, from the spot, following a foul, deserved because they had looked more

like scoring than their hosts. The second half saw both sides create less up front. The game was still physical, but the strong ref was up for it and by the end he'd booked three Ashby players. As the match drew to a close so Newark brought on some influential subs and without exactly throwing the kitchen sink at Ashby, more like a wash basin really, they by now deservedly equalised on 87 minutes with a well hit shot from about 25 yards out, which may have taken a deflection on its way to goal.

*contributed on 06/08/24.*

**TT No.5: Brian Buck** - Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2024; **Great Paxton** v Ramsey Town; Friendly Match; Result: 3-2; Attendance: 15 approx.

Thanks to *Twitter (X)* I was saved a longer journey tonight when this fixture showed up late afternoon. I've been here a few times in the past, notably one evening when they had an attendance of something like 320 for a game. The trouble was that about 300 of them were watching the game from a train, stuck at a red-light signal for the entirety of the match, due to a fire up ahead.

On my arrival here I noted that one of the home players was walking around the pitch with a wheelbarrow and a spade filling up the holes in the pitch with dirt. He didn't do a great job though and while waiting for the players to get ready the ref took over and filled in some more holes. They have no lights here, so I was a bit surprised that they didn't kick off until 7.20pm. Would they get it all in without shortening the game?

At its peak the attendance was roughly 20 people but after about 20 minutes five of them, all female, departed to The Bell pub, adjacent to the pitch, possibly because they had embarrassed themselves having a kick around on the side of the pitch, having to stop when the ball went onto the main pitch, leaving one red faced 'player' having to go on and retrieve it!

As for the game, it was keenly contested. Neither side looked especially fit and although the enthusiasm was there the quality wasn't, but I enjoyed it. This was more my type of football and both sides enjoyed themselves. Ramsey took the lead at the end of the first half when a shot was parried and followed up by a teammate. Then on 50 and 59 minutes, Paxton were given and scored from two spot kicks, both given for fouls. On 79 minutes Ramsey equalised when from a deep ball in, it was headed home. Four minutes later Paxton got the winner when an unmarked player shot home from just inside the area. The match was then played out to its natural conclusion with the light holding up well.

*contributed on 06/08/24.*

**TT No.4: Jon T Green** - Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2024; **STAPENHILL** v Coventry Copsewood; Midland Football League - Division One; Venue: Maple Grove; Result: 0-3; Admission: £6; Programme: £1; Attendance: 96

On a warm Summer's Day there can be no finer way to approach the town of Stapenhill than across the Trent Washlands. Leaving neighbouring Burton, a raised

walkway takes you above the riverside meadows before crossing the magnificent 19th century black and white wrought iron bridge. The tower of St Peter's pokes its head above the tree line and, with the flowerbeds of Stapenhill Gardens in full bloom, it's an idyllic spot. The club's Maple Grove ground is a mile or so away on the southern edge of town and manages to be both suburban and rural in equal measure. Entrance is via a well sized car park and once inside a paved covered terrace, extending only to the near goal, is immediately to your right. Trainy's Bar is the current clubhouse with a new outside kitchen area being built a few yards away - when completed in the next few months it'll allow fans to grab some food and drink whilst still within view of the pitch. Changing rooms are situated between here and the Main (Freddie Sleigh) Stand. It's an interesting construction, split into three sections: the middle one has wide square brick supports whilst the two end "wings" seem to have been converted from the original terracing. Overall seating capacity is just over 150. Of note is a strip of grass between the front of the stand and the pitch rail - most clubs simply concrete this area so it's certainly an unusual feature.

Behind the far goal is a fenced off area which, perhaps at some stage, was used as a kids practice pitch. Intriguingly there is a small black wooden building outside of which is a board featuring the slogan "cakes, cakes, cakes". Sadly, and despite a thorough inspection, there seemed to be no Victoria Sponge or Lemon Slices on offer - a cruel hoax if you ask me. This end of the ground and the entire side opposite is out of bounds to spectators rendering it effectively a two-sided venue.

Both sides finished last season in mid table and with the newly formed Nuneaton Town certain to be the team to beat this time around it's already looking a competitive division. Despite winning a succession of early corners, Copsewood found themselves under pressure in the opening stages with Stapenhill's centre half Harry Lansdowne volleying over from Connor Ward's free kick. The visitors then almost gifted their hosts a penalty after 11 minutes as Faith Okundaye's back pass sold his 'keeper short but, fortunately for him, the referee adjudged the subsequent foul on Cameron Steele to have taken place outside of the box. With the free kick being cleared for a corner Steele then went mightily close with a right foot effort that Nathan Pearce acrobatically turned over. Despite his early error Okundaye was a tower of strength, marshalling his defence and always looking to bring his midfielders into play. As the half drew to a close the match exploded into life: Coventry's Harvey Wells got free of the home defence only to see his lob drift disappointingly wide of the target. There followed a moment of contention as Steele and full back Ryan Pedley clashed with the latter appearing to stamp on the Stapenhill man. Steele raised his shirt to show stud marks on his shoulder blade but, with neither the referee nor his assistant having a clear view, Pedley avoided what would have been a straight red card. Within seconds of the incident Copsewood were ahead; Paul Hollis beat away the initial shot but could do nothing to stop Sam Ellis firing home at the near post after Harvey Wells had squared the ball to him.



Coventry began the second period looking to wrap up the opening day points and that's exactly what they did with a further two goals in an eight-minute blast. Firstly, Wells sent a towering header just under the bar following Harvey Billing's out swinging corner before Sean Kavanagh moved onto a long goal kick and calming lobbing Hollis. It was the kind of terrible defensive giveaway which drives managers and coaches to distraction. There was still almost half an hour to play but, despite the home team ringing the changes with a slew of substitutions, they never truly looked like reducing the deficit, until the closing seconds when substitute Seb Duffy failed to turn in the rebound after Pearce had failed to hold Steele's long-range effort.

Stapenhill will of course have better days and in midfielder Connor Ward they have something to build the team around. Cosewood look strong at the back and with a dangerous forward line could yet prove to be a surprise packet in the promotion race.

*contributed on 05/08/24.*

**TT No.3: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2024; **Nuneaton Town** v Paget Rangers; Midland Football League Division One; Venue: Bedworth Town FC; Result: 6-1; Admission: £8 (£6 concessions); Programme: Yes; Attendance: 511

A first look at Nuneaton's latest incarnation took me to Bedworth. The old club folded after their landlords evicted them for non-payment of rent etc, so the new club must be delighted to have been invited in by Bedworth which is only a few miles down the road. It is years since I last visited the Oval, so long that I don't think they had a plastic pitch the last time I was there.

The attendance was a very noisy 511, and it is good that see that the public of Nuneaton, who have had put up with all sorts of problems over the years, now have a team to support again.

The match itself was as one sided as the scoreline suggests. Paget actually had the nerve to take the lead on 24 minutes but that was as good as it got for them. Town equalised four minutes later, got a second on 31 minutes and a super third on 38 minutes for a 3-1 half time lead.

The second half was one way traffic and although the Paget attackers tried really hard, their defence was absolutely terrible allowing Town three more easy goals and it could have been many more.

Of course, this was only the first game of the season for both clubs so it would be silly to make any predictions. My only comment would be that Town will finish a lot higher than Paget.

*contributed on 05/08/24.*

**TT No.2: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2024; **Redditch Borough** v Southam United; Hellenic League Division One; Venue: The Cherry Tree Stadium; Result: 3-1; Admission: £5; Programme: 20pp, free; Attendance: 60

Redditch Borough has been on the radar for a while, but you know me by now when it comes to programmes, so a few days ago I checked their availability and found out yes there would be one. Yesterday, however, all was going well until I saw the dreaded QR code appear on "X". After a couple of text messages and a phone call late in the evening I decided to offer my services and spent printing programmes until 02.30. Aside from my own self-interest what you may not know is the fact that I'm trying to get a small portfolio of clubs on board where I can print programmes off for them at a reasonable and affordable amount and I felt it only right that Borough had a printed one for their first game at Step Six. I arrived early in Redditch with a lot of paper to fold up and I'm very grateful that the club has given me the chance to print their programmes this season on the back of this.

Cherry Tree Stadium isn't far from Redditch United's Valley Stadium; the change here is remarkable from what the club inherited when they moved here in 2017. A lot of the work has been completed now for this new chapter apart from the floodlights and seats which are to come sometime in the future.

It's no exaggeration that the clubhouse here, set away from the ground but on the same complex is one of the finest I've seen. There are three separate rooms one of which was being set up for a function when I left. The ground a short walk away does have its own tea bar which negates the need to walk back for refreshments and the overhang from this forms part of five areas of cover in the ground, curiously all devoid of any back to them.

The match itself was very nearly over before it really got going. A Southam player suffered a dislocated knee in the fourth minute which resulted in nearly an hour's wait before moving him onto a stretcher and off the pitch to allow a restart just as the ambulance arrived. Not long into the restart they suffered another injury to a player and despite flashes of promise they were second best to the newbies of the Hellenic League.

The potential here for this club to kick on and move up is great. I can't help but think of Worcester City and how Worcester Raiders crept up on them into becoming a viable opposition playing at the same level before City moved up one level higher again this season. There's simply no reason that in time Borough v United could be a Boxing Day fixture, so we'll see how it pans out.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 04/08/24.*

**TT No.1: Jon T Green** - Friday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2024; **TAFF'S WELL** v Llanelli Town; Cymru South; Venue: Rhiw'r Ddar (Gentles Construction Stadium); Result: 1-1; Admission: £6; Programme: Online only; Attendance: 235

Cast your mind back if you will to a time when you last went to a league match where a) it wasn't under threat from water logging in the days running up to the game or b) it wasn't raining at some point during the 90 minutes. Can't think of one? No, me neither. Imagine my surprise then to find the village of Taff's Well bathed in a golden light on a distinctly warm Summer's evening. The ground is situated a little way from the centre and, with parking on the local estate

something of a contentious issue, you are advised to arrive early or face the prospect of a lengthy walk.

Rhiw'r Ddar, to give the ground its unsponsored name, sits between wooded hillsides and a busy dual-carriageway road. Entrance is via a single turnstile with the clubhouse (packed to the rafters with memorabilia) and changing rooms to your right behind the goal. A new gym, club shop, kitchen and managers office are being built and very smart they are going to look too. Tonight, there is a burger stall and, heaven help us, an ice cream van - what's happening here? Have we swapped South Wales for the South of France? Temptation calls in the shape of a chocolate Cornetto but luckily common sense prevails due to having put on a clean white shirt..... Like many Welsh grounds there is a total absence of covered standing but, for those who like to watch their football sitting down, there are two pre-fab stands facing each other across the halfway line. The Malcom Fraser Stand has 152 black and yellow seats with the Don James Main Stand opposite having just sixteen fewer. Both have been raised on brick bases and are reached via short flights of steps (also a disability access ramp in the case of Don James). This gives considerably enhanced viewing and is certainly better than the normal pitch level installation. Dugouts are built into the front of the Don James stand which again adds to the uncluttered sight lines. Of note is a now redundant shallow covered terrace which sits close to the tree line and is totally blocked by the Malcolm Fraser stand.

At the end of last season Llanelli Town had amassed precisely double the points earned by their hosts; only champions Briton Ferry Llansawal finished above Town whilst the Wellmen escaped the drop on goal difference alone. Llanelli might be known as the reds but tonight they turn out in an all-green strip against a home side wearing a somewhat garish yellow and black kit. It takes around 30 seconds to see that Taff's are set up to nullify the visitors passing game as they immediately revert to a 4-5-1 formation with centre-forward Owain Edwards being the only player regularly in their opponent's half. Barely ten minutes have been played before Joe Hunt swings over a cross from which Joe Lloyd sees his effort scrambled away when he looked odds on to score. Town's captain Ethan Cann then goes close with a long-range effort before his side go even closer as Hunt's in-swinging free-kick is helped onto an upright by Lewis Iles. Only the diminutive David Lyon is showing any attacking prowess for the home side and then often he is overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers. The opening goal arrives on 33 minutes as Henry Jones finds space between the defensive lines before firing an absolute rocket into the top corner. Both Kurtees Rees and Iles might have extended Llanelli's lead before the break, but they are so clearly the better side it's difficult to see anything other than a routine away win.

Within four minutes of the restart, the game is turned on its head as Edwards clips a ball to the far post where Lyon beats Scott Coughlin with a well-placed finish. The same player almost puts his side ahead but can't repeat the trick after outpacing the Llanelli back line. Lyon is then booked for dissent and incurs the wrath of his coaching staff who suggest that "you might want to shut up because you're no use to us on the bench" - wise words indeed. The match then resumes its attack v defence style but, with centre-half Ben Parry getting in the way of pretty much everything, clear cut chances are becoming increasingly rare for Town. Only

in the last ten minutes do Taff's come under sustained pressure; 'keeper Shaun Gardiner stretches to keep out Rees' header before Sean Cronin smacks a close-range header against the post. There is just time for Cann and substitute Theo Wharton to drag their shots wide before the referee signals the end of the game. The reaction of the home crowd and players is akin to a victory and is neatly summed up by Chairman Kevin Francis who turns to his son and says, "I wouldn't have put money on that result before the game". Who indeed Mr Chairman?

*v2 contributed on 30/07/24.*