

RAMBLINGS REPORTS 2024-25

Note - all FGIF match and ground ratings shown are marked out of a maximum of five stars.

updated on 06/10/24.



R No.5: WebEd - Saturday 5th October 2024; **South Leeds** (v AFC Wakefield); Northern Counties East League Division One; 3.00pm; Venue: South Leeds Stadium, John Charles Approach, Leeds, West Yorks; LS11 5DJ; Result: 2-1; Admission: £6; Programme: Yes - 8pp, £2; Attendance: 231.

REPORT TO FOLLOW



R No.4: WebEd - Saturday 28th September 2024; **AFC Crosby** (v College Wanderers); Scunthorpe & District Football League Challenge Cup Round One; 2.00pm; Venue: Foxhills Sports Ground, Foxhills Road, Scunthorpe, North Lincs; DN15 8LH; Result: 3-4; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 20.

FACING A TOUGH START

It's a busy time of day but the toll booths on the Humber Bridge are running smoothly. I'm way down the queue in lane three but have no need to panic as the friendly guy collecting the money (plastic) is super-efficient and it's not long before I'm handing him my invisible £1.50 fee via his contactless handset. He wishes me a pleasant afternoon as I continue my journey onto the south bank of the estuary and into sunny North Lincolnshire.

Within half an hour I'm pleased to see the signs for Scunthorpe (not a phrase used that often in these parts). My destination is the Foxhills Sports Ground, which is reached by taking a sharp right into Foxhills Road (surprise, surprise) next to the Cocked Hat pub and turning moments later into the main driveway on the left. It's not an easy entrance to spot and if you go past the Outwood Academy opposite you know you've gone too far - guess what, I did and had to come back down the road again. Doh!

The tree-lined site is the main playing hub for Crosby United FC and is used by several junior teams as well as by adults who play at the weekend. To the left is a large old brick building called the Foxhills Club which has a double bar, and social facilities used for receptions and parties. Built back in 1955, the place was once a thriving venue used by many of the football teams for a post-match pint or six. Sadly, those days have since long gone and it's eerily quiet inside the club as I potter around for a few photo hoppers ahead of kick-off. The team I'm here

to watch today, AFC Crosby, has no allegiance whatsoever to the once bustling set up. Indeed, the lady running the bar told me that only a handful of locals would be buying a pint throughout the day; even at just £1.50 for a drink of the dark stuff, it's no longer enough to tempt the punters through its doors, such is the drop in footfall attending pubs like this nowadays. Sad times.

The main football facilities are located over to the right of the complex; these include a couple of grass practice areas, a mini floodlit all-weather 3G pitch and some modest portkabin changing rooms housed near to the entrance and car park. The pitches are marked out beyond. A large fox's head laid out neatly over a green and black striped background (same as the club's logo and kit colours) is painted on the side of this temporary structure and welcomes the neutral visitor to the ground. As I make my way around the back, I am surprised to see a couple of very well-manicured and lovingly maintained pitches immediately in front of me; incredibly both are fully railed off by a sturdy wooden fence which continues around the entire perimeter. As I follow the players out across the field, I soon realize that this was not in fact the main pitch hosting this afternoon's game - according to one of the coaches I speak to, this is instead used by the Crosby United 16's team who have recently received a £14K *Football Foundation* grant to develop and maintain the grass pitches for their junior games. On first impression this looks to have been money well spent.

After a few minutes' walk, I had now reached the opposite side of the field and, along with the players and spectators gathered, clumsily straddled the outer fence leading into an adjacent and separate open playing area. I shouldn't be attempting these athletic feats at my age, should I? Just ask Sir Keith about this. Yes, this was my venue for the afternoon!! Despite my immediate misgivings the lovely tree-lined setting was the perfect place to watch a game of football and to enjoy some beautiful autumn sunshine at the same time.

Although the club also operates an adult men's Sunday League side, AFC Crosby is a completely new team having been formed over the summer months and joins the Scunthorpe & District League Second Division to compete for the first time on a Saturday. The club is run by husband-and-wife duo Eddie and Natasha Donskey who, along with several of their players at pitch side this afternoon, joined the new set up from fellow S&DL side Gunness and Burringham FC. This is their first home game of the season and only their second in total having been hammered by Beckwood Rovers 11-0 at the Co-op Sports ground in the Challenge Shield on the first day of the campaign exactly three weeks ago.

It's going to be a tough game for the hosts as they welcome Scunthorpe-based side College Wanderers FC to the Foxhills Sports Ground for a Challenge Cup first round tie. The knock-out cup competition is one of several (six) contested by teams in the Scunthorpe & District League - with only two small divisions left, it helps to supplement league fixtures and extends the season that bit longer. Wanderers, perennial league and cup winners in these parts, currently sit atop the Division One rankings and look like firm favourites ahead of today's tie. In fact, *Wraybet*, the new fictional bookies on the block, is confident that a big win is on the cards.

As expected, the more experienced visitors do win the game and it's no surprise they romp home to victory by a 1-6 scoreline; as a result (pardon the pun) they progress to the next round where they will meet Barnetby United at home during mid-October. Incredibly their goals come courtesy of six different players who each manage to get their name on the scoresheet - it's a statistic that will take some beating even by clubs playing at a higher level of football. I'm not sure if they have been practicing set piece situations beforehand but four of the goals are converted by headers from corners. Despite this defeat AFC Crosby and their players deserve great credit for not throwing in the towel, battling hard and earning a consolation goal coming on the hour mark, incidentally from another headed dead ball kick.

The game, played on a very large, open, bumpy pitch, attracted just over twenty spectators, most of whom had travelled over to support the visitors. Although it was mostly sunny it did for the first time feel much cooler than the preceding weeks especially when taking photos in the shade of a large tree near the top goal. The slightly elevated pitch afforded some cracking views over the neighbouring Ancholme Valley where a vast swathe of wind turbines can be seen in the distant landscape. I know many people see them as a blight on the countryside, but I am captivated by their presence. How sad is that?

As I said earlier it's been a tough baptism of fire for the newbies from Crosby. Perhaps with a good run of results in the league against potentially less difficult opposition they may start to hit some good form and grow in confidence. I certainly hope so. The league certainly doesn't need any more teams dropping out at a time when the very future of many of our smaller but long-established competitions is seemingly at risk of folding. Sadly, we lost the Scarborough & District and the Harrogate & District Leagues over the summer months up here, let's just hope that everyone connected with the Scunny League can help to buck this unwanted trend and turn a corner. The joys of hopping on the south bank continue...

FGIF Match Rating: 3 FGIF Ground Rating: 2**



R No.3: WebEd - Saturday 21st September 2024; **Rufforth United** (v Helperby United); York Football League Division One; 2.00pm; Venue: Rufforth Playing Fields, Wetherby Road, Rufforth, York, North Yorks; YO23 3QA; Result: 3-4; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 20.

THE DIZZY HEIGHTS

I'm heading westbound along the M62 this afternoon to take in an eagerly awaited York Football League fixture. It's my first outing this way for quite a while and gives me the chance to tick off another new ground in the competition. A quick glimpse at the *FA Full-Time* league tables shows that I have already completed thirty-five grounds out of the fifty-seven listed this season. There are still plenty to tick off with several new clubs signed up, following the demise of the Harrogate & District League back in the summer months. If my Maths is right (and it isn't always) this leaves just twenty-two 'to do' which is quite satisfying for the obsessive hopping neutral.

Today I'm joined by daughter Steph who sees this has in ideal hooportunity to accept a free lift on her way to enjoying a couple of hours of retail therapy at the new P and R Outlet located just off the A19/A64 junction. After a stress-free journey by-passing Howden and Selby, I drop her off at the main entrance before working my way back out of the shopping complex (it's massive) and joining the A64 outer ring towards Tadcaster. Despite the busy roads I make good time and arrive at the village of Rufforth some twenty minutes later.

The club plays its games at the Rufforth Playing Fields which is set in a large area of land about four miles to the southwest of York city centre. There's quite a rural feel about the place and the site, which along with football, shares its facilities with the local tennis and cricket clubs. It is also used as a popular centre for camping, caravanning and car boot sales at the weekends. An unmade, bumpy drive leads you around to the ample car park and main buildings - unusually access

to the club house (on the first floor) is via a set of metal steps attached to the outside of the building (vertigo sufferers beware). Once inside, there is a narrow function room with a bar at one end and kitchen and toilets at the other. The changing rooms and equipment store are found around the back and face outwards towards the playing fields.

Rufforth is also well known for its village airfield which borders the playing field over to the left. Set in a vast swathe of land, it was first selected as a suitable base site in 1942 for the RAF to plan its long-range bombing missions during World War Two. It was later taken over by the Flying TC before returning to agricultural land once the airfield was closed in 1974. Some of the air strips (not all) have been re-opened with strict controls in place to allow light civilian aircraft and gliders to take to the skies. Indeed, the York Gliding Club is now based here operating a fleet of single and two-seater gliders which helps a once proud flying tradition to remain in the local area.

Back to footy. The main pitch is marked out on the other (far) side of the cricket square - you can see where part of the infield staddles the pitch by the well-manicured and much shorter grass mown between the goal line and the edge of the penalty area. Although there is no perimeter fence or rope there are two permanent covered dug outs (with bench-seating), placed facing each other on opposite sides of the pitch close to the half-way line. The home club's name is proudly painted on a board attached to the front of the roof fascia. At the far end of the ground you may notice that some of the branches from a group of willow trees are beginning to encroach onto the pitch and in some places hanging very close to the goal frame itself (check out the photo above and those in the album gallery).

Today the hosts, currently sitting in top spot after two victories (out of two games played), welcome Helperby United (yet to play) to Wetherby Road in an intriguing division one league fixture. For the record, the game was an absolute belter and a great advert for York League football. Although Rufforth opened the scoring inside the first two minutes, it was the only time they found themselves in front during the entire game. It was end-to-end stuff with the score standing at 2-3 going into the break. Although the homesters levelled within ten minutes of the restart, the visitors snatched what was the winning goal nine minutes from time to record a terrific 3-4 victory.

The game, played in beautiful late summer sunshine on a well grassed and in places tussocky surface, attracted twenty spectators. A word of praise must go to Ken Ashbridge who was tasked with the job as a stand-in referee just before kick-off when it was revealed that the appointed official had failed to turn up. After gathering all the players around the centre circle, a stern pre-match 'pep talk' delivered by the home chairman asked for common sense to prevail so everyone could enjoy a clean game. It worked - there was absolutely no trouble, no cards, no back chat - in fact, the game and the officiating were a joy to behold!! If this happened more often, wouldn't it be great? Mind you I don't think young coach Ken would possibly agree with that assessment preferring much more to stand at pitch side each week...

I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to the Rufforth Playing Fields and was given a warm welcome by all. A word of warning though - you might find it quite challenging to concentrate on the game during your hop. From the minute I arrived my gaze was quickly averted to the sky each and every time as an assorted number of planes carrying their attached gliders took off throughout the afternoon. The sound of the roaring engine moments before take-off created great drama. Like a kid in a sweet shop, I couldn't help but stare up at this terrific spectacle. It was quite funny really as no one else present seemed remotely one bit interested except me.

Apparently, according to the York Gliding Club website, visitors can take advantage of a special pre-booked glider flight using a voucher which offers an introductory lesson; you can experience stunning views over the Vale of York and beyond and relish the opportunity of taking photos from the air. The good news is that you have a fully trained glider pilot with you at all times (now that always helps!). In summary, the flight takes you up to 3000 feet, lasts twenty minutes and costs just £115.

Although it would be nice to get some terrific aerial shots for the *FGIF* album gallery, the fact that I'm now an impoverished OAP (with this government in situ at any rate) and being a bit (a lot) frightened of heights probably makes it a no-brainer. I think it would be best to leave the whole gliding thing to the aviators and stick to watching footy where I know my feet will stay firmly on the ground (if you pardon the pun). The joys of hopping continue...

FGIF Match Rating: 4* *FGIF* Ground Rating: 3*



R No.2: WebEd - Saturday 14th September 2024; **East Yorkshire United** (v AFC Tickton); East Riding County Football League Division Three; 2.00pm; Venue: South Holderness Academy & Sixth Form College, Station Road, Preston, Hedon, Hull, East Yorks, HU12 8UZ; Result: 3-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 10.

MEETING A VERY SPECIAL PERSON...

It's a lovely, warm sunny day and perfect for the *FGIF* hopping neutral to take in a game of football. However, there's a bit of a problem. Moments before setting out, I find out that my first-choice game in Goole (Airmyn v Dunscombe Park in the York Football League) has just been postponed. Surely not? There's no time to waste so after hastily flagging up fixtures on the trusty ERCFL *Full-Time* web portal, I thankfully discover that Hedon-based East Yorkshire United FC are at home this afternoon. So, this is now my new destination, one which is relatively easy to get to, being less than twenty minutes' drive away.

The ground is found by coming off the east-bound A63 junction at the Staithes Road slip road (next to Skirlaugh ARLFC) and following signs into Preston village. A right turn at the four-way staggered traffic lights takes you down Station Road (B1240) where the narrow entrance to the South Holderness Leisure Centre is clearly signposted on the left hand side. A short driveway leads you around the back of the main school buildings of the South Holderness Academy to the football pitches behind.

For the record East Yorkshire United FC is a relatively new club, having been formed only three years ago during the tail-end of the Covid pandemic. They joined the ERCFL at the start of the 2021-22 season (when football was restored to some form of normality) where they finished in a creditable fourth position in division six of their debut season. Since playing its early matches at the Wilberforce School and then the Alderman Kneeshaw playing fields, the club led a rather nomadic existence since playing at several different venues in a short period of time. However, last season they moved onto a grass pitch at the school which has now become a permanent home for them.

They are fortunate to share the on-site changing facilities with Humber Premier League outfit Hedon Rangers who play their games inside the all-weather floodlit 3G cage adjacent to visitors' car park. The main grass pitch is marked out on the far side of the school playing field and is quite a trek (a good five-minute brisk walk even for the athletically minded) from the dressing rooms. As expected at this level, it's a basic affair with no dedicated cover or a perimeter rope to speak of - a belt of very tall trees straddling part of the left-hand side touchline offers some protection from the elements (not needed today of course). If you look carefully beyond the far end goal, you can spot the spire from St Augustine's Church in Hedon which is just over a mile away from here.

This afternoon United take on Beverley based AFC Tickton at the South Holderness Leisure Centre. For both sides this is their second game of the new season which got underway exactly one week ago. Although it's very early days, incredibly a league table already exists (what's the point?) and shows United at the bottom of the pile having been thumped 10-3 by a newly reformed Kingswood team in Bransholme last weekend. As for AFC Tickton, they enjoyed a close but much more pleasing result following an exciting 4-3 win over Withernsea on the 3G pitch at Longcroft School in Molescroft.

My match forecast was way off the mark. Indeed, the early season form book was completely overturned as United ran out 3-2 winners in what was an excellent end-to-end game of football. With the score standing at 2-1 going into the break, United looked the better side and soon added a third midway through the second half. They assumed full control and came close to adding more goals when the visitors pulled back a second goal following a well-worked counter-attack. With only ten minutes remaining this led to a frantic finale as the visitors camped inside the United penalty area looking for an equaliser. They couldn't find one as United somehow managed to hang on and claim all three points to get their season up and running. The game, played on a bumpy and end to end sloping pitch, attracted only ten spectators including young snapper Adam Dawson (brother of United's team manager) who joined me for part of the game at pitch side with his *Canon* camera (please note other brands are also available). Talking of low crowds, I also noted only a handful of fans had turned out to watch Hedon Rangers (v South Cave United) in a top of the table HPL encounter that ended 2-2 on the 3G pitch opposite.

Before finishing, I must give a special mention to the affable match referee Mike Bickerstaffe who, at the ripe old age of 83 (yes, you read that right), expertly controlled proceedings. Displaying a calm authority throughout, he was a joy to watch as he gained the respect of all players and staff during the game. Having commenced his refereeing career back in 1970 (on the Cottingham playing fields, no less), he has since notched up over fifty years officiating in the game, an incredible feat marked by the ERCFL with a special award to commemorate his long years of service in grassroots football. What a fantastic achievement! He told me during the half-time break that he had also refereed games in the Northern Counties East League, the Midlands League and Yorkshire League as well as being a linesman in the professional game - he remembered with great fondness running the line when Hull City played Sheffield United in a Football League Division Two fixture at Boothferry Park back in 1979 and recalled most of the Tigers' squad that took to the field in that game! That's amazing really as I can't even remember the current Tiger's squad of players that lost 2-0 at home to the Blades last night (but the less said about that one, the better)!

For those hoppers interested in taking in an ERCFL game, then a visit to watch East Yorkshire United at the South Holderness Academy comes highly recommended. Adam did tell me that when the weather is poor and Hedon Rangers don't have a home game, the club has been known to play on the 3G pitch themselves, something that maybe worth noting for the winter months ahead. The joys of hopping continue...

FGIF Match Rating: 3 FGIF Ground Rating: 2**



R No. 1: *WebEd* - Saturday 7th September 2024; **Humber Colts** (v Thorpe Park Rangers); East Riding County Football League Division One; 2.00pm; Venue: Leconfield Recreation Ground, Miles Lane, Leconfield, Beverley, East Yorks, HU17 7NW; Result: 2-7; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 18.

ITS RAINING...GOALS

Today is my first game of the new season and I must say it's good to be back on the hopping road once again, following my enforced break. It's been a long time since I took in my last match, coincidentally a county league encounter at the seaside town of Aldbrough (v Eastside), back in mid-March. Nearly six months have passed since then, so you could say I am more than ready to get out and see some *FGIF*-ing action!

By chance, many of the clubs in the East Riding County Football League are also starting their programme of fixtures for the new campaign this afternoon. My chosen game, the Division One game between Humber Colts and Thorpe Park Rangers, looks on paper, at any rate, to be an appealing contest. It's also a shorter journey and being closer to home means I can get back in good time to watch the final evening of the 'must-see' Paralympic action from Paris. What's not to like?

The village of Leconfield is found about three miles to the north-west of Beverley town centre and is easily reached off the A164 which continues on towards Bridlington and beyond. The village was formerly home to the RAF Leconfield base which closed in 1977. Since being taken over by the Defence School of Transport it was also used in its time as an airfield for Sea King helicopters up until 2015. I bet you're glad I mentioned that.

The Leconfield Recreation Club is part of a lovely tree-lined site located off Miles Lane. It is set within a smart residential area and shares its facilities with the local Village Hall. As you turn into the main driveway a smart brick-built clubhouse, erected some forty years ago now, is found at the end with some parking available both to the front and side of the main buildings. The playing field, which is partly obscured from view by some tall, leafy trees contains two pitches set at a neat T arrangement from each other, is found around the back. The main pitch is marked just in front the pavilion where (separate) changing rooms are found behind the goal to the right. As you would expect for this level of football, there are neither dug outs for players nor covered accommodation for spectators (indeed no attempt is even made to rope off the pitch). For the ground collecting neutral this is grass roots football at its best!

Humber Colts Football Club was founded back in July 2009. The team used the playing field situated within the Swinemoor Estate in Beverley to play its home matches in the Wyke section of the Hull Sunday League. Fast forward some fifteen years and the side is now playing Saturday football, having joined the ERCFL just over a year ago. By the end of the season, they finished in a creditable fourth position in (the fourteen team) Division Three rounding off what was a successful debut campaign.

After a massive restructuring of the county league over the summer months the ERCFL now boasts seven divisions this time out. As in 2023-24 the Premier (top) division continues to operate as a feeder into the Humber Premier League above with two new regionalized Championship (second tier) divisions working beneath it. The Championship North section has been set up primarily to accommodate clubs who were formerly members of the now defunct Scarborough & District League which disbanded at the end of last season as well as accepting the already established Bridlington-based sides. The Championship South caters for those clubs located nearer to the main Hull and Beverley districts. Beneath this are four more divisions (one to down to four) to complete the restructuring line up for 2024-25.

Despite all of the constitutional changes that have taken place over the summer months it appears that both sides are no strangers, having met here just before Christmas last year in a Division Three fixture. In fact, Rangers (who eventually finished as runners up) inflicted a desperate 1-6 thrashing on the hosts which, according to those gathered at pitch-side this afternoon, turned out to be quite a feisty game. So, having been promoted by two full divisions it would be interesting to see how both sides would adapt to playing at a higher level - I would imagine that the Colts would also want to settle a few old scores (pardon the pun).

The game, played in torrential rain throughout (well, it is the football season after all), turned out to be a real cracker. The eighteen brave souls, including myself, could be seen desperately trying to seek refuge from the elements underneath an assortment of company themed umbrellas along the touchline. It really was rodding it down. Despite this distraction we persevered and were rewarded by some fine end-to-end football which saw the lead exchange hands no fewer than three times. As expected, the early stages were frantic and were punctuated by a massive (and almost obligatory) bust up on the ten-minute mark which involved most of the players arguing over what was a most innocuous tackle on the halfway

line. Along with the usual pushing and shoving, there followed a humorous exchange of banter between two particularly rotund players who decided to square up to each other and repeat the choice phrase: 'F**k off, you fat c**t'! The ironic comments soon brought a wry smile to the faces of onlookers who simply shook their heads in disbelief. Soon after this dramatic episode of body shaming the yellow-carded culprits quickly kissed (figuratively speaking) and made up by shaking hands. At least they felt better for getting it all off their ample chests and harmony could be temporarily restored before their paths crossed again later. To be honest, how the referee managed to keep a lid on things and restore order with twenty-two players still remaining on the field was remarkable. Who'd be a ref, eh?

For the record, it was the visitors from East Hull who took the lead with fifteen minutes having gone on the clock before being pegged back midway through the half to make it 1-1. Against the run of play, the hosts then took the lead themselves soon after but couldn't hold on for long as Rangers restored parity taking the score to 2-2 just before the break. The men from Thorpe Park dressed in their trademark green and white hoops started to gain control and looked the more confident side as the second half wore on. They regained the lead once more before going on to score four more times before full-time to win by an incredible 2-7 scoreline. It was a terrific and well-deserved result which sparked much joy amongst their six travelling fans, two of whom were dressed in bright day-glow orange boiler suits after arriving mid-way through the first half following their night shift duties on the roads! This was the second time I had seen the visitors since witnessing their superb 4-2 victory over East Side in the county cup last season. If you want to see goals, then maybe they are the team to watch...

In summary, a visit to the Leconfield Recreation Ground, home of Humber Colts, is to be recommended to all hoppers. You will no doubt receive a warm and friendly welcome if you attend their matches. I wish them well for the rest of the season.

Despite getting a good soaking from the elements, it was great to get back to pitch side hopping duties once again. Although I left home without my cap (and other assorted bits), I did manage to find my crumpled anorak and an old pair of rainproof trousers buried deep in the boot of the car. Doh. If only I was more organized (that's something Mrs. W regularly says these days)? Maybe, the hopping gods were looking down on me from above. Hopefully I'll be able to dry out in time before doing it all again next week.

FGIF Match Rating: 4 FGIF Ground Rating: 2**