

A View From The Terrace

Last Saturday provided an afternoon to remember with a splendid match on a strength sapping surface between two well matched sides that produced the fairest possible result. Some will feel disappointed that we failed to make the best of our first half domination, but, on the other hand Wycombe had the best of the second period.

The last five minutes were full of thrills as Trevor Bunting made two breathtaking saves while many would feel that another five seconds would have produced a winner for Slough. That was when the ball dropped at Devon Petty's feet, and with just Lester to beat as he drew back his foot to shoot, the final whistle sounded.

Would that have produced a last gasp winner to trouble Wycombe as they became near to clinching the title? Sadly we will go to our graves without ever knowing, although Devon might be aware just how much strength remained in his legs to produce that killer blow. In many ways the best thing of all was the reminder of non league football at it's best an experience that used to be commonplace in times past when crowds in their hundreds made their way to their local grounds to cheer on their own side.

An early spring afternoon, a crowd of 2144, the Wanderer's flag flying proudly at the masthead at the top of the ground. The supporters of both sides freely intermingled, a game well refereed, and plenty of atmosphere, a whiff of the glory of exciting competition without recourse to that modern killer, the off side trap. How sad that this experience will not return next season in a Premier Division match for by then Wanderers will have surely taken the high road and we will have to rely on a cup competition to make this magic work again.

On the return from Loakes Park it was difficult not to feel envious of our mid Bucks rivals and their obvious strengths.

I am not sure that I like their stand particularly, nor am I an admirer of the slope, but the strength of tradition enfolded within that ground is something that will take a lot of creating here. The splendid terraces and excellent cover on the "popular" side, the functioning clock, the excellent public address system and announcements handled by Alan Parry of Sportsvue fame all showed a professionalism that we would do well to learn from. The situation of Loakes Park near to the centre of things in High Wycombe may rob them of the excellent parking facilities that we can provide here, but it certainly does not rob them of support. This match produced Wycombe's tenth game with attendance of over 1000 this season, and their second of over 2000, the previous being the 2473 in their home match with Yeovil Town. Support has held up well after beginning with a mere 675 for their first home league match with Windsor & Eton.

In contrast here, after starting the season with crowds in the order of 480 or so our league attendances have dropped to around the 350 mark despite what must rate as a good season. Just why this should be is a total mystery. Our Supporters Association is almost 300 in number and all the usual faces turn up. There is a rumour that we use a different side when we play away from home but that is just not true.

Where the rest have gone it is hard to understand. They have come for the cup and the big matches, there were 1435 for our home game with Wycombe, but since then attendances have been very disappointing.

This problem was rather starkly illustrated in the Wycombe programme where an extra photograph taken at Wexham Park the previous Saturday

from our game with Dulwich Hamlet showed a large expanse of empty terracing watching Ken Wilson's goal attempt.

I sometimes think that in our departure from the centre of Slough we lost several regulars who regarded the removal to the outskirts of the town as something akin to cutting our links with the past. Certainly our gates have never been so good since those times.

Possibly the worst decision that our club ever suffered was that of the committee members back in the thirties who rejected the purchase of the Dolphin from "Old George Bennett" for a small sum thus allowing the Greyhound Association to take over. Had they made a more positive move we might well be still playing in the middle of the town, causing considerable traffic disruption at the roundabout, or alternatively we might have sold the site for several million pounds a couple of years back and now be settled into the finest non league stadium in the country on the proceeds.

Sadly, we would have to go back over half a century to turn that decision around, and so we have to look to the future with courage and hope.

Alan Davies has always said that the potential here is tremendous. We will always seek to discover the right way forward and improve this ground as quickly as possible so that we like Wycombe can compete at the highest possible level. However we have much to learn from the way that the Wanderers do things for the proof of their success is there for us all to see.

John Tebbit.