

# Meet me on the Kirby Corner



Whilst the national press fall over themselves to see who can heap the most over-the-top praise on Liverpool, we at the WestEnders intend to stay well clear. Whilst Dalglish names £2.7m worth of players as substitutes we intend to bring you news and comment from the grass roots of the game. Here, we take a look at what was formerly the Southern League - now the Beazer Homes League - and at local club, Coventry Sporting.

In case you never look a lot further than the 4th Divvie, or even the GM Vauxhall Conference in the football results on a Saturday evening, it's worth investigating life in non-league football. More often than not away from the glare of the media are a lot of well-established clubs, and not until that great romantic soccer cliché, the potential giant-killing act, do we usually get a few cursory column inches. We've all surely been cheered by the success of the likes of Yeovil and Telford. Locally, Nuneaton Borough were arguably the strongest non-league side around a few years ago, albeit in what is now the Vauxhall Conference, and a number of their players from those days like Trevor Morley, Richard Hill and Paul Culpin are now playing for league teams. Players moving in the other direction have included ex-Sky Blue notables like Kirk Stephens to Barnet and Alan Brazil to Witham.

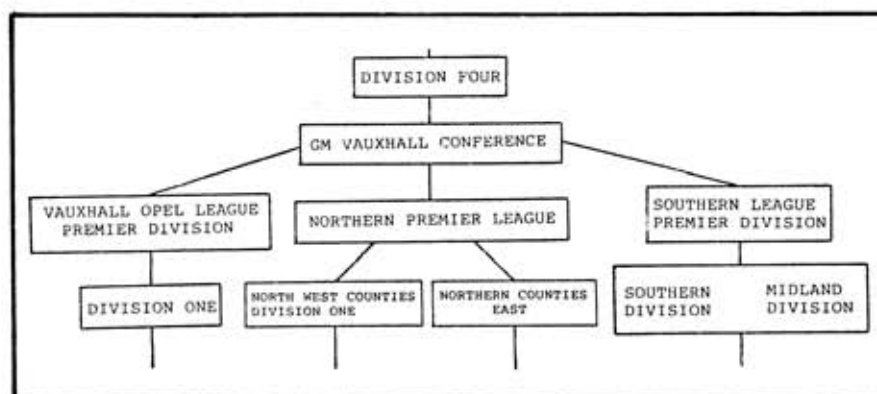
The Southern League, as it was known before sponsorship, began in 1892 and now includes 3 sections, with direct promotion from the Premier Division into the GM Vauxhall Conference. Considering the relatively recent introduction of the "pyramid" promotion system, the incentive is there for clubs to grow at a steady pace, improving facilities alongside playing standards, with a possibility of reaching the Conference and the

chance to play against the Barnets (probably not for much longer!), the Lincolns and the Maidstones. Next Stop - Division Four!

Coventry Sporting began life as Coventry Amateurs way back in 1946, playing at the Butts stadium, before moving two years later to their present home at Kirby Corner Road. One of the club's moments of glory was beating Tranmere Rovers in the 1975 FA Cup first round, before going out to Peterborough in the next round in front of 8,500 fans. Both ties were played at Highfield Road.

## Mooted

The club's Kirby Corner Road ground has a well-appointed club house with Corners nightclub attached. Plans mooted last summer that may have filtered through to some ears, about



"Pyramid" promotion

a return to the Butts Stadium nearer the centre of the City, have been scrapped. According to club secretary, George Calcott:

"We proposed to take Coventry Sporting club en bloc, down to the Butts stadium. In other words, all we wanted to do was provide the Butts with another source of income, and with a club house which it hasn't got. We'd pay to have it built."

It sounds like a variation on a familiar theme. A quick look around Kirby Corner will reveal a booming (in Coventry?) Science Park, overspill from Warwick University.

## Fillip

Eventually the Council will want the land. The difference here though is that the club involved is quite willing to move. From their point of view, attendances would receive a fillip if the ground was more central. George Calcott agreed:

"It would help us out. If we had a regular crowd of 150 odd we wouldn't have any problems at all".

The threat of being relegated to a lower level is understandably something George Calcott and the club would not like to think about, with loss of income and the probable departure of their better players.

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"Yes, it's a backward step as far as we're concerned. We don't want to go backwards and there are many teams in the league that don't want us to."

The horrible truth is that the team needs strengthening in a few positions, and the manager John Clarke has admitted having some "irons in the fire" in that respect. The club suspended its youth team this year which will make it difficult for young players coming through, but they do have some experienced campaigners, among them defenders Lennie Derby and Terry Angus. Up front, Kim Green is always value for money, and is currently the club's top scorer. In goal, Wayne Starkey is a good prospect. It seems league clubs, particularly at the upper reaches of the First

Division are all too often disinterested in the non-league scene, except when an exciting player emerges for them to sign up. The press do not focus nearly as much attention as they could on non-league football - they do not publish a lot of league tables below the Vauxhall Conference - and consequently the incentive to go to the games is not there for any but the most committed spectator.

## Fleece

This is a shame because not only have non-league clubs produced many current league players, but you are as likely to see a good match in the Beazer Homes League as the Barclays league, particularly in the current phase of a win-at-all-costs mentality and offside traps. Non-league sides also have one or two things they can teach the "big boys". For one thing, how about providing the channels to be a member of a club, where membership actually means something other than a way to fleece the fans. Finally, in a similar vein, the attitude of most league clubs to its supporters usually extends to their refreshment facilities. At Kirby Corner Road, the half-time tea, burgers and coffee are delicious and excellent value for money. They would easily put to shame anything likely to be encountered at any league ground!



Sporting in action v Merthyr Tydfil