

Which local team to watch?

Ben Masters and Ed Humphreys ponder whether watching lowerlevel football has more appeal today than the expensive top leagues

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FOR ANY child growing up to be passionate about football, choosing the team you want to support is one of the most difficult decisions of your life. If you are able to resist the peer pressure of choosing Chelsea or Manchester Utd and instead choose a local team, the decision is still not straightforward. Take York, for example, where you can choose between the struggling York City in the Conference or perhaps Leeds Utd, currently in the Coca-Cola Championship but once of the Premiership and Champions League. For any student coming to York who can't live without the unique flavour of a football match, the dilemma of who to go and see manifests itself as a similar choice between two very different levels of football.

We decided to address the problem in what was the beginning of a tale of two cities, the question being if a trip to Championship team Leeds United or witnessing a Conference clash at Kit-Kat Crescent would provide a better footballing experience.

A visit to York City is characterised by the smell of stale tobacco, the hallmark of any lower-league fixture, and with a bitter breeze howling through the turnstiles one might have to ask themselves what reason there is to spend a Saturday afternoon watching York City play such illustrious sides as Woking. With an attendance as threadbare as a 9:15 lecture and the kind of crowd one would expect of a locally supported team, loyal but subdued, the match against Woking was dreadful. Enduring poor quality football, we witnessed a terrible performance from the home side lead to an inevitable goal for Woking in the 45th minute, followed by a bungled second in the 89th to secure victory for the visitors. The best entertainment on the afternoon was the rousing York City goalkeeper, who seemed intent on grabbing the headlines before Delia Smith, yet failed miserably.

In contrast with a trip to KitKat Crescent the promise of Elland Road invited a feeling of excitement and anticipation that was difficult to subdue. The idea of watching two clubs that have the historic pedigree of Leeds and West Ham seems to make it worth the hassle of taking the train to the match and paying three times the amount for a ticket. A fleet footed performance by the local Yorkshire Lasses also did plenty to warm the heart. The firsthalf though was still poor at best, although the match brightened up after the break as Leeds dominated large spells and went on to win 2-1.

In terms of football then, although the quality was certainly better at Leeds, the first half remained as dire as that in York in terms of entertainment so there was little to choose from in this respect. What then explains the fact that watching Leeds was so much more enjoyable? Ultimately it was the atmosphere provided by an enthusiastic crowd that filled a stadium fit to be in the Premiership. As a result a match at Elland Road becomes so much more of an occasion, something which is so important to get you excited about going to watch a match.

Inevitably the pull factor of going to see two of the most famous names in British football gives a Leeds match the edge over the unfamiliar teams that face York week in week out. The atmosphere is also a big factor in adding to the experience, and even the £2 pies were good enough to possibly tempt Rooney

across the Pennines! In the modern age going to watch a top-flight football match has become very expensive but for the reasons suggested above it will never stop people being more than willing to spend an extra few quid. Lower-level football has seen an increase in attendance over recent years but despite being competitive there just isn't the same prestige.

(Ben Masters & Ed Humphreys)



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