

WHITSTABLE TOWN 1 CRAY WANDERERS 1

Ryman League Division One South – Saturday 1 March 2008

Match Report by Trevor Mulligan

After Tuesday's mindblowing 6-1 victory against Bromley in the Kent Senior Cup, Cray returned to the bread and butter duties of the Ryman League on Saturday with a visit to Whitstable Town. However, any thoughts that the boys from the seaside town were harbouring about snatching a surprise victory were soon dispelled in the first half, but equally this game could have turned into a Hammer House of Horrors for the Wands.

In order for the Wanderers to maintain a presence at the top of the league, a win for them was a necessity, especially as the top two teams (Dover and Tooting) were playing each other on the same afternoon. Starting brightly enough, Cray tested Town's goalkeeper Kevin Fewell with several long-range shots.

As early as the second minute Michael Power had a half-chance, at the near post, following a Jamie Wood corner but his effort was blocked by a defender. Yet, the shape of things to come manifested itself only two minutes later when Ian Pulman was clean through, forcing an excellent double-save from Glen Knight on the edge of the 18-yard box. Little did Cray realise it at the time, but Pulman was to prove a slippery customer as the game wore on and Whitstable came out of their shell more.



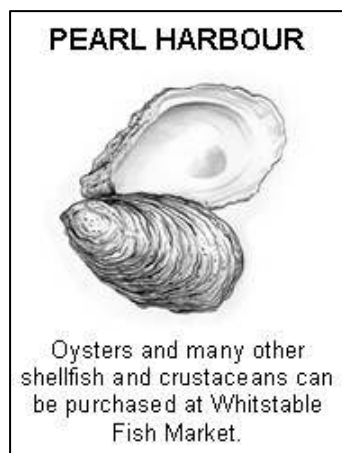
Peter Cushing, seen here in his Hammer big-screen role as Dr Abraham van Helsing, lived for much of his life in Whitstable.

Cray showed several promising moves in the first half and were rewarded for their persistence in the 19th minute. Following an aborted corner kick, Ross Lover managed to cross the ball from the left to Adam Cottrell inside the 6-yard box. His header was blocked on the goal-line but the rebound fell kindly for Steve Aris, who clipped the ball over his shoulder and into the far corner of the net.

Although Cray appeared to be spurred on by the opening goal, it was becoming evident that their hosts would not bury themselves in the sand. Town continued to take the game to Cray and, just before the break, they ensured that Knight was kept busy. On the verge of half-time, two Whitstable players went for the same ball, in what looked like an attempt to land each other in hospital. The game was held up for several minutes whilst physios from both teams dealt with the injuries.

The second-half got under way and Whitstable sensed that they may be able to get something out of this game. Cray did the early running, and a couple of efforts from Lover and Colin Lockett failed to worry Fewell. It was elementary that, as the game wore on, the seashiders were gaining the upper hand. The Cray tide appeared to be ebbing whilst the Whitstable tide was flowing. A 55th minute effort by Power was gratefully palmed over the bar from close range

by Fewell. But, it was Town who were looking dangerous on the counter-attack. Knight was once more given several opportunities to show his worth.



After 65 minutes Cray – and Knight in particular – could count themselves rather fortunate as a harmless-looking through ball was left by the Cray 'keeper, only for Pulman to be lurking and ready to pounce. This chain of events was concluded by Knight making amends when he pushed the ball round the post. In the 72nd minute Knight brought off the save of the match, blocking a point-blank chance when David Cory breached the Wands defence.

An equaliser was always on the cards and it arrived, as if on cue, in the 84th minute. Pulman managed to shake off his marker before rounding Knight and slipping the ball into the unguarded net. The Whitstable players were ecstatic. The Cray players not so. Even with Cray introducing fresh blood late in the second half, victory had escaped them.

It is all too easy to make excuses for Cray on this showing. It must be considered as two points lost rather than one point gained, especially as second-placed Tooting lost to leaders Dover. But, after all is said and done, it was a very lacklustre performance and the Wanderers can consider themselves a bit fortunate that they escaped with a draw.

Cray Wanderers: Knight, Cottrell (Royston, 74), Lockett, L Wood, Willy, Day, Lover, Kempster (Chapman, 70), Aris, Power (Whitnell, 89), J Wood.

Subs Not Used: Morris, Hall

Wands Man of the Match: Glen Knight