MARCH 1982— THE WORST EVER MATCH!
Halifax Town 0-0 Rochdale

HALIFAX TOWN	
1	Lee Smelt
2	Keith Nobbs
3	Everton Carr
4	Malcolm Goodman
5	Tony Smith
6	Jimmy Hallybone
7	David Wilkes
8	Steve Spooner
9	Vernon Allatt
10	Steve Ward
11	Paul Kendall
12	Martin Greenaway

Venue	Shay Ground, Halifax
Date	Friday 4th March 1983
Competition	Football League— Division 4
Referee	Mr H Taylor (Oadby)
Attendance	2,218

Match Details			
	0-0		

ROCHDALE	
1	Chris Pearce
2	Bill Williams
3	Eric Snookes
4	Roy Greaves
5	Gerry McElhinney
6	Brian Taylor
7	David Thompson
8	Stuart Thompson
9	Micky French
10	Mark Hilditch
11	Paul Comstive
12	Eugene Martinez

THIS was an interesting match, albeit for the wrong reasons. From the diverse opposites of watching matches on park pitches to some great stadia, each game of football develops its own story. Most of my memorable games are for good reasons—excellent play, great goals, talisman players etc.—however, there is the occasional one that is memorable because it wasn't very good. For the level—Football League Division 4—the fourth tier of English football (the equivalent of today's League 2) this was, quite frankly, appalling!!

Rochdale were desperate not to finish in the bottom four for the second successive season, this being back in the days of the dreaded re-election process where if you go cap in hand for votes from other Football League (now EFL) representatives they tended to give an established club the 'nod'. But, as Southport found out five years before, you don't always make it (they had to apply three years in succession). Dale themselves had a scare in 1980, where they tied with Altrincham and would have lost their place had two votes been made that were too late to be cast. They then won a rerun. Back in those days if a club lost its Football League place then they seldom had a chance to get it back and it was a good four years until automatic promotion and relegation was put into place with the Alliance Premier League (now National League).

Rochdale had been in a poor run of form, having collected just three points from their last six games, including a 1-0 defeat at fellow strugglers Blackpool last time out. Halifax, no strangers to the bottom places themselves, were having a much better season and were looking for a top half finish. It was early March and getting towards which is irksomely known as the 'business end' of the season (what is the rest of it called then?)

Our vehicle arrived in Halifax from the south coast in early afternoon. There was plenty of time to relax and enjoy the early March sunshine in the town. However, it was soon evident that the local paper, the Halifax Evening Courier, had a headline "Why Town Had to Back Down" along with "The on-off saga of Town's game with Rochdale". The paper was immediately purchased.

It transpired that Town had contacted the Football League on the previous day (Thursday) requesting a postponement as the club was down to just six fit players. Seven players were injured and three others had flu. Early on Friday, the day of the match, the club was told to play. Town now faced a dilemma. Being mindful that Exeter City had been fined £5,000 for not fulfilling a match with Scunthorpe United in 1973/74, Town potentially faced an even bigger fine and three points awarded to their opponents had they followed suit.

So, much to our travelling party's relief, the game was on.

The game, well if statistics were gathered as they are today the number of shots would be one-nil; on target, well, that would be blank for both sides and the xG (whatever that is) probably 0.1 to 0.05 (a team must surely get the 0.05 by merely being present on the pitch?) The reason for these low numbers was there was only one shot in the game and that came from the home side as a promising looking opening degenerated into one side battling and the other offering very little. Dale's substitute Eugene Martinez warmed up for about half-an-hour and still didn't get to play.

Needless to say the locals gave their players a much deserved standing ovation at the end of the game as, against all the odds, they collected a point.

This turned out to be Rochdale boss Peter Madden's final game as their manager and he was replaced by former Manchester United player Jimmy Greenhoff who immediately signed his brother Brian. Another early signing by Greenhoff was Everton Carr, who had been playing against Dale for Town in this game (he'd obviously recovered sufficiently on the night having been one of those flu victims).

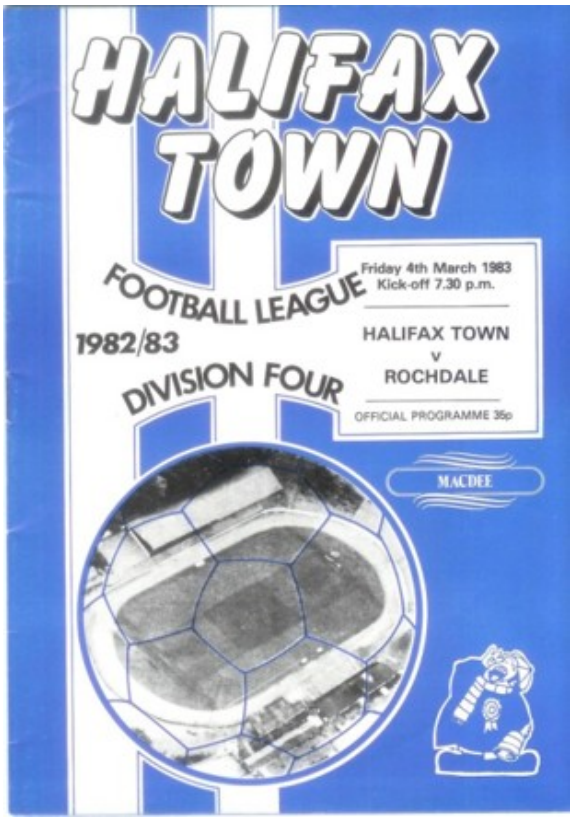
Come the end of the season Town finished eleventh whilst Dale survived relegation by the skin of their teeth as they finished 20th and edged out Blackpool who had the same number of points (49). It was close in two respects as the Tangerines had two points deducted and they and Dale had both scored 55 goals in the league season, Dale conceding 73 and Blackpool 74—so the margin was just a single goal!

Hartlepool United, Crewe Alexandra and bottom-placed Hereford United were, along with Blackpool, re-elected.

For this small party from the south it was back to the car and head on home, making it indoors during the small hours of Saturday morning. It didn't seem to be a particularly good choice of match but, to look at the positive, it was one more ground ticked off on the ninety-two quest at that time. There was, of course, another positive … the game took place and better than not watching one at all.

Yes, taking into account the level of football, this was the worst match the writer had ever seen! It was an evening where Rochdale were unable to beat a cobbled together Halifax team. It was a point that was heralded as a great one by the Halifax followers on the night but for Dale a point that proved to be a most vital one once the 'business' of season 1982/83 had closed.

(Right) The front cover of the programme.



(Below) The Courier sports section headline on the day.

