

TT No.194: Paul Roth - Saturday 4th March 2006; Championnat De France Amateur 2; CARCASSONNE vs. DRAGUIGNAN; Res: 2-0; Entry: Euros 7; Programme: 4-page A4 size free; Attendance: 250; FGIF rating 4*.

After a bit of a lie in (necessary to recover from the previous day's excesses), it was up and away from our hotel in Sete. Once again using the toll motorways we headed West to the lovely town of Narbonne where we dropped Paul S off at the railway station (he was heading to Perpignan to watch Rugby League: Catalan Dragons vs. Bradford Bulls).

Steve and I then headed North for the 45-mile run up to Carcassonne where we quickly found ourselves a cheap, central hotel for the night. Soon after we headed into the town and relaxed in the main square, watching the local market wind down in front of us over a couple of leisurely wheat beers. A further stroll found us meandering along the world-famous Canal Du Midi and it was then we decided to head up to the old "citie". This is a huge fortified medieval town and a definite highlight if ever visiting this part of France. Hungry now we settled for the local speciality, cassoulet - a sausage and bean stew served scalding hot and with a gravy that gets thicker and thicker as it cools. This, was washed down with a bottle of vin blanc and a cognac. Beats your burger and chips any day!!

After returning to the Hotel "Royal" (a most definite misnomer) and a bit of a lie down to recuperate it was time to head off to the match. This was just ten minutes easy walk away across the river and along a dimly lit street up to the entrance. We paid our 7 euros admission which included an unexpected 4-page A4 size programme. We proceeded to walk round the dinosaur that is Carcassonne's stadium. As we entered, to our right was a huge terrace of steps that could easily hold five thousand spectators in comfort and opposite a seated stand that holds three thousand...we counted every one! With a few minutes to go before kick-off we reckoned there were only 20 souls present, although this grew as the game went on. Behind the town goal is a statue, lit from beneath, of Puig Aubert whom I have now discovered with the aid of my old mate Google, to be one of the greatest Rugby League players France has ever produced and was captain when the French lifted the RL world cup in 1951. He started his playing career at AS Carcassonne when the sport was in its golden era and this must be why the ground is as it is today, enormous. But as that Scottish anthem goes "those days have passed now and, in the past, they must remain"

With Carcassonne in 11th place and Draguignan (some 250 miles away to the East) 8th we didn't expect a thriller but very quickly the home side were one up with a well taken close range volley and just before half-time were two to the good with an even better taken goal. After the break Carcassonne had a man sent off for cynical foul and for a while shut up shop; the final quarter was to be the most entertaining of the game as both teams had a real go at each other and both had numerous chances. In the end 2-0 was the right result.

A beer in the Brasserie next door to the "Royal" was followed by a desperately poor night's sleep and we woke to find howling winds and snow! By 9am we were picking Paul up at Narbonne station where the wind had now reached hurricane proportions (worse than the CML Hop of 2004) and were heading back to Nimes for our respective flights home. Ryanair delivered us back at Luton early and I was easily home before dusk, able to reflect on a super weekend, not only for the sport but for the places we had visited and the food we had eaten. Great stuff.

04/20