

**30/08/05 TT No.29: Stephen Harris - a trip to Aarhus (Denmark)**

The advent of relatively cheap, daily flights from Stansted to Aarhus has opened up easy access to football clubs in an area of Denmark rather remote from the usual tourist hub of Copenhagen. Having enjoyed a long weekend here in 2003 - Aarhus is a nice place - I felt it was time for another visit, albeit a brief one this time. We arrived at around midday on Saturday 27 August in time for a quick pint in the town centre before taking a bus to the outer suburb of Brabrand. The local side **Brabrand IF** were playing Kolding FC in a league match at the second level of Danish football, both clubs having been promoted at the end of last season. The Brabrand Stadion is astonishingly basic for football of this status, having no floodlights and few facilities. The pitch is surrounded by a wooden post and rail fence and there is no hard standing for spectators at pitch level, just grass. On the main side there is a grass bank up from the pitch to a wide paved concourse in front of the dressing room and clubhouse block. A small overhang from this building would provide the only cover on a wet day. Along the whole length of the concourse is a line of tables and benches, from which almost the entire crowd of around 400 watched the match. A series of kiosks provided beer and food and a token effort free programme was available on entry. Both teams played a skilful passing game with the home team winning 1-0.

The following day we took a 30-minute train ride to the small town of Horsens to see **AC Horsens** play Aalborg BK in the top division. Horsens were promoted at the end of last year after a long time out of the top level and seemed to have the enthusiastic backing of most of the town. Aalborg are an established top side in Denmark and brought with them a rather dubious looking following. Horsens play at a nice, old-fashioned ground on the edge of town which could probably hold about 6,000 at a squeeze. A modern stand runs the full length of one side, whilst an older stand fills most of the other and has a terraced paddock in front. The home end has a fairly substantial open terrace and away fans get the raw deal with just a small patch of uncovered seating at the far end. Just before kick-off we spotted that the home side were second from bottom of the table, having managed just one goal so far in 7 games. So, the 0-0 draw we witnessed was not entirely surprising. But it was actually a good quality game played in a good-natured atmosphere in front of a 3,658 crowd. A flashy looking, but advert filled, match programme sold for around £1.

On the final whistle we hurried back to the station to return to Aarhus for our evening game. This was the big match of the trip and featured bottom placed **Aarhus GF** against top placed Brøndby. We didn't have advance tickets and joined a long, slow queue, eventually getting into the stadium with ten minutes to spare. The Aarhus Stadion is modern and is dominated by a continuous two-tier horseshoe of grey seats around three sides of the ground. The fourth side has the main stand and this is a smaller, separate, single-tier construction with a lot of corporate

boxes. The capacity is 21,000 and we estimated that there were a good 10,000 present, including around 600 away supporters. Right from the start the match was played in a tremendous atmosphere, with both sets of fans providing loud and continuous vocal backing. The home supporters were jubilant at the end as their team defied all the odds and won 3-0. A very smart and informative match programme sold for around £1. We were quickly away to the airport at the end and I was home in London by 1am - a very odd feeling to get home so quickly from an evening game so far away.

These were three very enjoyable matches, although with fewer goals overall than we might be used to at home. Most noticeable was the fact that physical contact is still allowed in Danish football. My personal view is that English football has reached the point where every tackle is penalised by a free kick and every foul led to a yellow card; and that this has gone too far. It was very refreshing to see the referees save the whistle for real fouls, allowing for games which were a more physical battle but also for games which flowed and were enjoyable to watch - considerably better I have to say than the awful League 2 match I returned to see at Brisbane Road on Monday.

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