

TT No.104: *Stephen Harris* - Saturday 30 December 2006; Conference South; **Braintree Town** 3-1 **Bishops Stortford**. Attendance: 1,012. Admission: £10; Programme issued; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

After a family Christmas in football-free Bavaria I was desperate for a game on my return to Blighty. For a few years now I have had just one senior ground left to visit in Essex, Halstead Town, and today was to be the big day when I finally went there. TV weather forecasters were advising people to stay indoors, but when the day dawned bright and sunny, I decided to go for it. In fact, so nice was the weather that I opted for a long country walk, only arriving at the ground at 2.30. Disaster! A small hand-written note at the gate advised "No Match. Pitch too wet" (sic).

Fortune was on my side however and I caught the bus back to Braintree with a minute to spare and was inside the Cressing Road ground by five past three - not a bad effort in the circumstances. By now it was suddenly pouring with rain and the big crowd was grateful for the fact that this ground has cover on all four sides. The smallish, modern stand was packed and the sheds at either end contained vociferous followings for each team. I squeezed into the main covered terrace opposite the stand. Whilst spacious, much of this terrace is unusable as the view is blocked by poorly-sited dugouts. Finally finding a good vantage point, I settled down to watch what proved to be a very good game. The programme mentioned that unspecified "developments" are planned for the ground if it looks like promotion might be a possibility - and on this form I would think that play-offs at least should be anticipated.

Stortford took the lead with a good long-range shot, but the Iron quickly followed this with two goals of their own, and again both were from outside the penalty area. The fourth and final goal was another good 'un, this time from a well-worked free kick. Fortunately, the football ground occupies what must be the highest point in Braintree and it drains very well, as by the final whistle the weather had become truly ghastly. Despite the conditions, I would rate this as one of the most entertaining games I have seen this season at any level. It's the fifth or sixth time I have been to Braintree in the past few years and I haven't seen a dud game there yet. I am in danger of becoming a supporter, I think.

A glossy, colour, Football League-style programme sold for £2 at the turnstiles.