

**TT No.92: Stephen Harris - Westfalia Weekend (Fri 1st to Sun 3rd December 2006): Preussen Munster and Sportfreunde Lotte (both Oberliga Westfalen) and DJK TuS Hordel (Verbandsliga Westfalen II).**

Friday 1 December 2006; Oberliga Westfalen; **Preussen Munster 4-1 Wattenscheid.** Attendance: 2,660. Admission: Euro 7; Programme issued; FGIF Match Rating: 4\*.

With British Rail wanting a large number of pounds to take me to Torquay for the weekend to see the big FA Cup game there, and Ryan Air offering to fly me to Niederrhein for just pennies (plus tax), I settled for a non-league weekender in Germany's Westfalia region. Friday night's game was in the lovely city of Munster where Preussen are by far the biggest club in the region's Oberliga (the Oberligas are Germany's fourth level of football). Founder members of the Bundesliga in 1963, they were relegated at the end of the first season and have never been back. The Preussen Stadion dates from 1925 and is a basic ring of open terracing around a narrow track, with a modest, covered, seated stand on the south side. It claims to have retained a capacity of 15,500 but with most of the west curve fenced off as unsafe, I think anything over 10,000 here would be a squeeze. The weekend got off to a great start, with Preussen scoring a from a fantastic free kick within the first minute - a real 'Bend It Like Beckham' effort. They went on to play some superb attacking football and were 4-0 up by half time with the home 'Curva' supporters in full voice. Wattenscheid (themselves in the Bundesliga as recently as 1994) rallied in the second half and pulled a goal back, but overall, this was a commanding performance from Preussen. A reasonable, free, newspaper-format match programme was issued.

Saturday 2 December 2006; Oberliga Westfalen; **Sportfreunde Lotte 2-0 SpVg Emsdetten.** Attendance: 610. Admission: Euro 7; Programme issued; FGIF Match Rating: 3\*.

Today I had planned to make a first visit to Borussia Monchengladbach's fantastic new stadium, but had a late change of heart and decided to stick with the Oberliga Westfalen and travel to Lotte for the rearranged fixture there. In complete contrast to Preussen Munster, Lotte are a little club from a small country village; they are playing very much at the upper level of their expectations. Considering the small size of the place, the Stadion am Lotter Kreuze is quite impressive. It consists really of just two sides and the focus is on the north side which is filled by a newly completed covered stand which has been built in stages over the last couple of seasons. This has ten rows of blue plastic seats in the central section and good steep terracing on each flank. The ends are disused, with overgrown curves of terracing behind a wall of advertising boards at the east end and a children's playground at the west end. There is a much smaller, older stand with wooden bench seating and some open terrace on the south side. This far side was designated for visiting supporters, but only three spectators bothered to walk round there, leaving everyone else - fifty or so away fans included - in the new

main stand. The two coppers who had been allocated the task of keeping an eye on the away stand gave up after five minutes. The game was a bit dull to be honest, especially in comparison with last night's excitement, and Lotte dominated without really having to stretch themselves. We also had a partial floodlight failure to endure just before the end, causing bus travellers like myself to glance anxiously at our watches. There was some very nice cherry cake on sale in the main bar and a decent, English-style match programme was issued free of charge.

Sunday 3 December 2006; Verbandsliga Westfalen II; **DJK TuS Hordel** 0-2 TSG Sprockhovel. Attendance: c.250. Admission: Euro 5; Programme issued; FGIF Match Rating: 4\*

The Ruhr region offers a huge choice of lower league football on a Sunday afternoon and by now I was a bit fed up with over-crowded train travel and fancied a lie-in and a local game close to my digs in Bochum. Even with these criteria I was spoilt for choice, and I eventually decided to drop down a level and take in a Verbandsliga game just a short tram ride away at Hordel, in the Bochum suburbs. Visitors Sprockhovel are top of the league with an impressive plus-23 goal difference and both of these clubs have played at Oberliga level in the recent past. To me it looked like the Match of the Day in this league, although that billing was given in the essential Revier Sport newspaper to a game at Wanne-Eikel, just 20 minutes-walk away from Hordel. The Stadion Hordeler Heide is typical non-league and a very friendly, smart little ground. It is fully enclosed and has a high rail and hard standing all around. The north side has three shallow steps of uncovered terracing and most of the facilities are on the south side, which has seven steps of covered terrace along its full length and a handful of fixed seats in the centre section. German football followers like to watch the game with a sausage in one hand and a beer in the other and they will not go short here. Three different food outlets were in use today in addition to the main clubhouse, and a further kitchen and a barbeque area were standing by to be brought into use for bigger games. The pitch here is artificial, with yellow markings, and played extremely well on an afternoon of constant drizzle. It was the first time I have watched football on plastic for many years, and I have to say I was very impressed - surely this is the way to go for community clubs with busy youth sections and high pitch usage. In fact, it was a very good game, with the visitors looking quite classy and worthy of their table-topping position - the two goals greatly enjoyed by the 100-strong away following. A decent free match programme was issued in the typical A4 size, German-style. Just enough room here I think to mention that Hordel have a player with the outstanding name of Bagdad Ballout.

06/20