

**TT No.8: *Stephen Harris* - Berlin Weekend (3-5 August 2007) feat. Hertha 03 Zehlendorf (P-S F); BFC Dynamo (P-S F) and TSG Neustrelitz (German Cup).**

I've slipped into a habit of going to Berlin for the first weekend of August each year and this year was no different. Unfortunately, this time around the local leagues had not yet started and it was the weekend of the German Cup first round, with rather limited options for competitive football in the area. I'm not a great fan of friendly fixtures, especially when I am not partial to either of the sides playing, but on this occasion, we had little option if we were to see games.

Friday 3 August 2007; Friendly; **Hertha 03 Zehlendorf** 1-3 Hansa Rostock II. Att: c.120. Admission free; No Programme issued; FGIF Match rating: 2\*.

This very low-key friendly took place at the Ernst-Reuter Sportfeld, a pleasant sports complex way out in the south-east suburbs of Berlin. The main pitch has a reasonable block of terracing along one side and a long stretch of uncovered bench seating on the other. Unfortunately, this game did not take place on the main pitch, but on 'Platz 2', one of seven outer pitches. The only spectator facilities here were two park benches behind one of the goals, which had rather restricted views behind a fence. This pitch has no rail and was not even roped-off for the game, leaving us sprawled on the luxurious grass close to the action. It was quite entertaining, with the young professionals from Rostock proving fitter and more accomplished in the end than the locals, who are favourites to win this season's Verbandsliga Berlin. But the surroundings were not really to my liking.

Saturday 4 August 2007; Friendly; **BFC Dynamo** 2-0 Eilenburg FC. Att: c.250. Admission Euro 5; Team-sheet issued; FGIF Match rating: 3\*.

Saturday's friendly was altogether more satisfying, being played in a proper stadium under normal matchday circumstances. BFC Dynamo were perennial East German champions and much favoured by the DDR establishment in their heyday, but have fallen on hard times since. They retain a fierce-looking, hardcore support and ply their trade these days in the Oberliga Nord-Ost Nord. Crowd problems have meant that many of their games are switched to larger and more secure stadia, so this friendly game presented a comparatively rare opportunity to see a game at their own Sportforum ground. The Sportforum consists of a fairly shallow bowl of terracing, made up into a seated stand along one side with a small section of cover in the centre. Only this seated side was opened for the game and rather too little of it had been weeded in time for the match, leaving many spectators surrounded by rampant vegetation. The game was won quite easily by Dynamo, who scored in each half without exerting themselves too much on a hot day. The club normally issues a reasonable match programme, but not today - although we managed to scrounge a team-sheet. Although around 250 were present, the official attendance was given as just 109.

Sunday 4 August 2007; German Cup; **TSG Neustrelitz** 0-2 **Karlsruher SC**. Att: 5,000. Admission Euro 13; Programme issued; FGIF Match rating: 5\*.

The weekend's entertainment was saved by a highly enjoyable cup game on the Sunday which pitted small town Oberliga side TSG Neustrelitz against big-time Bundesliga opponents Karlsruhe. The gulf in class between these levels in Germany is enormous and the little clubs usually let in a heap of goals and cheerfully bank the cash from fixtures like this - but on this occasion Neustrelitz gave it a real go and nearly caused an upset.

The home club's website advised getting there early to get a decent view and we were glad to take this advice as by kick-off the ground was absolutely full to bursting. The Parkstadion is basically a bowl of grass banking around a narrow athletics track. The west side is concreted-over into seating and standing sections and the rest has been allowed to become overgrown. Trees and vegetation in two of the corners and one end had been roughly hacked back for this game leaving spectators standing in conditions which would never be tolerated in the UK. Quite a bit more unofficial deforestation before the kick-off further expanded the spectator options. What looked like a temporary, scaffold stand had been erected above the terracing in the middle of the west side.

It was a very hot day indeed and the beer stands and ice-cream cart were severely over-subscribed. Karlsruhe had brought around 500 noisy supporters on the very long journey and the locals were up for quite a bit of shouting too, so there was a raucous atmosphere. It was immediately obvious that the home side were going to make a game of it and they held out (in part due to some superb home goalkeeping) at 0-0 for 115 minutes before being caught napping at a corner and finally conceding at the beginning of the second period of extra time. This prompted even more frantic attacking by the home team, but to no avail and it was cruel for them to concede a second on the break at the very death. All in all, a classic David and Goliath cup tie. A simple, free match programme was available, together with a nice souvenir ticket.

06/20