

TT No.90: Ian Hill - Belgian Weekend Travels (Saturday 6th and Sunday 7th October 2007).

Match 1 - Saturday 6th October 2007: **Royal Antwerp** v KVSK Overpelt - Lommel; Belgian Division 2; Res: 2-1; Att: 3500 (approx.); Admission: 10 euros; Programme: (40-pp A4), 1 euro; Match Rating: 2*.

I was quite lucky to be able to attend a game at De Bosuil as the original game against Beveran was postponed due to a dispute over club licenses in the Belgian second division. Quite a long story but I won't bore you with it. Luckily my guide for the day, Lieven, found out that the club had a rearranged fixture on the same day against KVSK United so the visit was back on.

De Bosuil is located in Duerne and can be reached by tram or underground. Royal Antwerp are a proud old club and I believe are the oldest in Belgium as they hold Matricula/number 1. It is sad to see them playing in this division as they are clearly a Jupiler League club but unfortunately their performances on the pitch mean they are not. Their English Manager Warren Joyce seems to be unpopular with the home supporters and after watching the game it is easy to see why. They play a very negative form of football and it is not easy to watch. The club still has a link up with Manchester United where the club are loaned some of United's younger players but they do not receive any financial assistance.

De Bosuil has two fantastic old grandstands. Very much in an English or Scottish style and is very atmospheric. Unfortunately, an ugly VIP stand has been built behind one goal and a bland family stand behind the other. This gives the ground an unbalanced feel to it. Despite this it is well worth a visit as this is a true traditional club that is crying out for success.

Royal got a 2-1 win in this game and hopefully their form will improve as the season progresses.

A very good club programme is available in the club-shop along with a small range of clothing items. It's a large 40-page programme for 1 euro and has lots of features and information inside.

Match 2 - Sunday 7th October 2007; **Royal Union Saint Gilloise** v KVK Tienen; Belgian Division 2; Res: 1-2; Att: 1000 (approx.); Admission: 15 euros; Programme: (24-pp A4), 1 euro; Match Rating: 3*.

Stade Joseph Marien is probably one of the most visited grounds on the "must do" groundhopping circuit. From Brussels Midi/zuid station it is an easy one-line tram journey on the 82-line getting off at the "Union" stop.

Programmes are available inside and outside the ground. A large A4 issue was priced at 1 euro. The cover is very unusual and eye catching but the inside was plain black and white. It was also the first bilingual programme I have seen at a

club game (Flemish and French). No complaints though as last time I visited the ground only team sheets were available.

Pre match refreshments were taken in the Union Clubhouse under the main grandstand. Buying a drink was slightly unusual as you had to pay the clubhouse "DJ" for a drink. He then handed over a ticket which you had to take to the bar. The barman then passed the ticket to the people actually pouring the drinks who were behind a bar behind his bar. They then passed the drink onto him who then passed it on to me. A bit longwinded but we got there in the end. This is obviously a well visited ground by foreign visitors as there are number of scarves on display from clubs outside of Belgium.

Seats were purchased for the only grandstand for 15 euros if you wanted to stand it was 10. One rule they have here is that you cannot take food into the grandstand. The large terrace opposite the grandstand has been refurbished but disappointingly the overgrown terraces behind both goals have disappeared under the vegetation. There is also a new club-shop inside the ground which was quite small and had a few items on sale. The old shop outside the ground has now been converted into a ticket office.

On a gloriously sunny day Union huffed and puffed against a useful Tienen side. It was very much a strange Sunday afternoon feeling to the game. Apart from when the Tienen supporters decided to make some noise only the voices of the players could be heard. At half time the scores were level at 1-1. Tienen were given a penalty due to a terrible refereeing decision which they converted. The referee tried to even things up with 10 minutes to go and awarded another debatable penalty. Unfortunately for Union they missed theirs.

The game ended 2-1 to Tienen and the crowd drifted quietly into the distance. A great old ground a well worth a visit.

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