

TT No. 108: Ian Hill - Sun 7th Dec 2008; France Division Honneur - Languedoc Roussillon; **AS Perpignan Mediterannee** vs. Ales Olympique; Res: 2-0; Att: 50 (HC); Entry: 5 Euro's; Programme: None.

The Stade Jean Laffon is located in a residential/light industrial area of Perpignan. The floodlights stand out in the distance but it is one of those grounds that is hemmed in by buildings and there is only one entrance into the ground. A high outer fence keeps unwelcome visitors out but various gates along the perimeter give you a view inside.

I've got to say that although the stadium does have some character it is quite a depressing place. Entrance is by ticket which can be purchased from a "hole in the wall" next to a large set of gates. A steward then opens a closed gate to allow you to enter the stadium after tearing your ticket in half. Why he needs to keep the gate closed all the time is one of life's mysteries. You are met with a large area of concrete and tarmac which leads to a concrete running track around the pitch. This looks like it has not been used for quite a while. It's not possible to run around it as the three seated stands on one side of the ground are fenced off. There is also a large fence that surrounds the pitch.

The three stands are the only spectator facilities available. The oldest and smallest stand is built out of concrete while the two stands either side of it are constructed out of metal. A lot of seats in the stands are broken or worn. At the back of the stand are some very primitive executive boxes that probably haven't been used for a very long time. There is also a large scoreboard behind one of the goals but this was not in action. Advertisements have been painted onto the walls of some of the buildings that back onto the stadium. With time they have faded and add to the air of neglect that prevails.

Jean Laffon was a famous Rugby League player and inside the ground is a war memorial to the players of XIII Catalan who were killed during the war. There is also a portacabin type bar behind the stands that has XIII Catalans name on it. I would imagine that it is sometime since Rugby League was played here as XIII Catalan merged with St Esteve a few years ago to form UTC who then became Catalans Dragons and play at the Stade Gilbert Brutus in the north of the City. Just to confuse things UTC still play in the French Rugby League Championship and are the Dragons reserve team. They play their games at St Esteve's old ground the Stade Municipal, St Esteve. This is a cracking old-style ground and well worth a visit.

Perpignan is a Rugby mad town and it looks like there is very little interest in football. The crowd was about 50, there was no programme and a small wooden building served refreshments and sold a few souvenirs.

The standard of football was poor with Perpignan winning an average game with two second half goals. Overall an uninspiring day.

