

TT0809-90

**TT No.90: Ian Hill** - Sat 8th November 2008; **Fortuna Düsseldorf** v Wuppertaler SV; Germany 3 Liga; Res: 2-1; Att: 16,663; Admission: 22 euros; Programme: 36-page newspaper 1 euro; FGIF Match Rating: \*\*\*.

Thanks to a very nice Ryanair deal I managed to secure a cheap "day return" ticket from Stansted to Düsseldorf (Weeze). This was my first visit to this part of Germany but a 2.00pm kick off at Fortuna allowed a one-day drip. Weeze airport is one hour from Düsseldorf but there is a direct train service there to the main hauptbahnhof station. Unfortunately, things didn't go to plan as my scheduled train never arrived so a half hour delay led to a wander around the town of Weeze. There is nothing to see. What was interesting is that Weeze airport used to be a RAF base - RAF Laarbruch. In fact, it looked like the RAF had only just moved out. Housing is still in place as is the NAAFI shop, a cinema (although a bit vandalised) and even the main sign. I was surprised to find out that the base was actually vacated in 1999.

The train journey was straight forward apart from a delay in Krefeld. I hadn't realised that KFC Uerdingen 05, who are the former Bundesliga side Bayer Uerdingen, are based here. They have fallen on hard times but still play at the 34,500 capacity Grotenburg Stadium in the Verbandsliga Niederrhein. So, a return visit could be in order.

When I arrived in Düsseldorf there was a very strong Police presence in the station due to the game against Wuppertaler being a local derby. I lost my bearings completely in the station. I couldn't work out which ticket to buy for the U Bahn, then I couldn't find the correct platform. Eventually I followed the crowd and had a simple journey to the LUT arena. The stadium has its own dedicated stop at the end of the line. The stadium itself is quite surprising. From the outside it looks like a cross between a multi storey car park and a shopping centre. Even the concourse under the stands is extremely well fitted out. The toilets were absolutely spotless, food very good (especially the kebab meat roles) and it is was like being inside an airport terminal.

I had purchased my ticket in advance on the Fortuna website. They don't post tickets outside of Germany so I had to collect it from a booth outside the ground. What was disappointing was the 6 euros booking fee on top of the standard price of 16 euros. On entry to the ground one of the club's supporter's groups were handing out a 4-page photocopied black and white programme free of charge. The clubs official programme was on sale inside for 1 euro. This was the biggest let down of the day. A dreaded newspaper-programme. It's a shame because the content was very good. Everything about this stadium is quality, unfortunately this programme falls way below the rest of the experience.

I'm not a big fan of new stadiums but this one is superb. Once inside the view is great, seats are comfortable and there is plenty of leg room. Two large video

screens dominate and show action replays of goals from four different angles. The crowd of 16,000+ (the stadium holds 51,500) was not lost and made lots of noise. Due to the seats being multi coloured the ground looked fuller than it was.

The game itself was not brilliant but Wuppertaler came with a game plan - "dive, dive, dive". They were niggly, nasty, whinging - a horrible team. They took a first half lead as Fortuna struggled to cope. The turning point came with 30 minutes gone when the referee decided to take the sides off the field of play due to the Wuppertaler supporters constantly throwing flares onto the pitch. The break worked wonders for Fortuna as they came back into the game. There was also had a piece of divine intervention as, Christ, scored on half time.

The second half set off at a frantic pace. The referee eventually tiring of Wuppertalers antics which resulted in 5 of their side receiving a yellow card and one a red in the 57th minute. Christ scored a second in the 76th minute and a final goal in the 90th minute secured the win for Düsseldorf.

A great stadium to visit although I didn't see much of Düsseldorf itself. I would like to make a return visit one day but only when they get a proper matchday programme.

06/20