

TT No.103: *Justin Holmes* - Sun 22nd November 2009; **US Marignane** v SC Bastia; Coupe de France 7th Round; Venue: Stade St Exupery, Marignane (Provence, France); Result: 1-0; Admission: €10; Programme: None; Attendance: 1000; Match Rating: 4*.

The original plan on my travel itinerary to Marseille was a visit to the home of Olympique Marseille, the Stade Velodrome, a vast and unique sports arena which is the home of arguably the biggest club and the most passionate supporters in France. However a late rearrangement of fixtures by the French league meant this was not possible and so instead I made my way to the rather more modest surroundings of the Stade St Exupery in Marignane, home of US Marignane, who ply their trade in the CFA (fourth regional tier of French football) and with a capacity of just over 1000. This was Marignane's day in the spotlight in the 7th round of the French Cup, as they were hosting the Corsican club SC Bastia, of the French Second Division and previous winners of the Coupe de France and the UEFA Cup. However, all the ingredients were in place for a potential giant-killing today - the minnows at home against a team struggling two leagues above them, marooned at the bottom with just 9 points from their opening 14 games.

The Saint Exupery stadium is located in the town centre of Marignane, which lies adjacent to Marseille Provence airport, and although it is a neat and tidy stadium, has very limited facilities, with only one side of the pitch open to spectators which has a covered stand without seats. Admission was €10 for this game, which was presumably raised from what would be charged for a CFA league encounter, and as is common in France, no programmes or the like are issued. The stadium was packed to capacity for this match, with a sprinkling of fans making their way over from Corsica for the game.

The game was an entertaining affair, with Marignane always looking the better side in spite of some slightly panic defending at times, which was understandable on such a big day for them. It was of little surprise when Marignane took the lead on 27 minutes with a wonderful goal that would have graced any game in Europe, when the ball was played across from a wide position, and Florian Raspentino hit a superb volley from just inside the penalty area past the keeper. Bastia barely threatened for the rest of the half as Marignane looked comfortable in the lead at half time and a shock looked very much on the cards. This continued throughout much of the second half, until finally Bastia seemed to spring into life in the final quarter of an hour, and Marignane had to rely on some great saves from their goalkeeper to preserve their lead and to eventually claim a famous giant-killing victory and to become the sole representative from Provence to make it through to the 8th Round.

No matter where you are in the world, nothing quite beats witnessing a giant-killing and to see the joy on the faces of the victorious underdogs, although it is true that, for some reason, giant-killings do appear more common in France. In

this round alone, two clubs from the league below Marignane also claimed the scalps of Second Division clubs, and lower division clubs make it to the Cup Final fairly frequently in France - most famously Calais as a fourth-tier club back in 2000.

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