

TT No. 105: *Justin Holmes* - Saturday 28th November 2009; **Midhurst and Easebourne** v Rustington; Venue: The Rotherfield, Easebourne; Score 2-0; Admission: £3.50 (including programme); Att: 51; Match Rating: 4*.

This game did not appear to have the makings of a classic. Having lost most of their players and their management team over the summer, it's fair to say that Midhurst has been a club in turmoil this season, and that has been reflected in their results so far, with the unenviable record of having lost every one of the 11 league games so far, having scored just six goals and conceding 53, and exiting all four cup competitions they entered at the first hurdle. There would have been a hint of optimism given today's opponents, Rustington, who were fifth bottom having played more games than all teams below them, but still it was hard to look beyond an away win from this game.

The Rotherfield is a ground I've wanted to visit for some time, given that is situated amongst some beautiful Sussex countryside, and with the old-fashioned and peaceful local towns and villages a real joy to spend time in. The ground is situated in Easebourne, about a half a mile north of Midhurst, although it is not one that is easily accessed by public transport - the nearest train station being seven miles away in Haslemere. The Rotherfield is a pleasant, old-fashioned ground with a small stand providing covered seating and standing, and a new wooden clubhouse is situated some way from the pitch, with the old changing rooms laying derelict much closer to the pitch. Another noteworthy feature is the undulating nature of the pitch. No floodlights are in place, meaning that Midhurst's future in senior football would appear to be in fairly imminent danger even if they made a remarkable on the pitch transformation to avoid the relegation places this season. A programme is included with the £3.50 entrance fee, although it was just a 4 page insert of information inside a glossy publication of adverts.

The game itself was very different from what would have been expected, as Midhurst took an early lead with an excellent strike from outside the box on 7 minutes. For the rest of the half, it was quite remarkable what a strong, cohesive unit Midhurst looked, carving out a number of good chances, and allowing Rustington only a very occasional sniff at goal. The second half was much the same, although with just a one goal lead, there was always a chance that Midhurst could have been denied a thoroughly deserved first win of the season. However, finally Midhurst did make sure of the victory with a very well taken goal on the break five minutes from time, a second goal of the game by Ashley Holloway, as he sprinted clear of the last defender and coolly slotted the ball under the onrushing goalkeeper.

On the evidence of this game, things are surely looking brighter for Midhurst, although they are still in a desperate position, some 7 points behind the next team in the table. It also looks like being a tough battle against relegation to intermediate football for Rustington, who offered very, very little today and were

outplayed by a team who had previously lost every game they have played in the last four months.

At the conclusion of this game, I made a swift exit and then drove the twelve-mile journey down to Chichester, to catch the second half of the Sussex County League Division 1 game between **Chichester City** and Three Bridges. Having recently been redeveloped, the facilities at Oaklands Park are now very good, with two small covered standing areas and an all-seated stand with cushioned seating, not dissimilar to that found at the Emirates Stadium. The ground improvements are still ongoing, with a new clubhouse and changing rooms in the process of being built and due to be completed next summer.

Soon after I arrived, Chichester scored the first goal of the game, with an excellently directed header floating over the keeper and into the net. For most of the second half, the match was a scrappy affair in conditions that were made increasingly difficult and slippery by heavy, consistent rain, with Chichester having the better of the few chances they fashioned for themselves. A 1-0 home win looked a fair outcome of the second half. However, Chichester won the game with the last movement of the game, James Temple scoring his second with a glancing header from a corner. And so, Chichester stay in third place in the league, but are now within 5 points of the league leaders, Whitehawk. As for Three Bridges, they remain deep inside the lower half of the table, although it would be surprising if they were to become involved in a real relegation scrap by the end of the season.

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