

TT No.116: *Justin Holmes* - Sun 6th December 2009; **RCD Espanyol B v UE Sant Andreu**; Segunda Division B, Group 3; Venue: Ciutat Esportiva de Sant Adria, Barcelona; Score: 0-1; Admission: €10.00; Prog: N/A; Att: 1,000; Match Rating: 3*.

This promised to be an interesting day of football during my brief visit to Barcelona, watching Espanyol's reserve team play at midday followed by the Espanyol first team in the evening. For the first game, I took the half hour underground train ride from central Barcelona to Verneda, in the eastern outskirts of Barcelona, with the Ciutat Esportiva de Sant Adrià, the home stadium of RCD Espanyol B, a five-minute walk from the underground station.

The ground is fairly small but neat and tidy, with one main covered seated stand along one touchline, an uncovered seated stand along the opposite touchline, and with standing room around the rest of the pitch. The ground is set amongst several other pitches in a large sporting complex where Espanyol's youth teams also play. I paid 10 euros for a standing ticket from a ticket window outside of the ground (as is customary in Spain).

This game, from the regional third tier of Spanish football, pitted the Espanyol reserve team, newly promoted into this league this season but struggling in the lower reaches, against a UE Sant Andreu team who were flying high in second place in the league having lost just one game all season. Given their successful run and that their team is based just a mile away, it was perhaps unsurprising that Sant Andreu brought a sizeable contingent of fans, who provided passionate and vocal support which made for a surprisingly good atmosphere.

On a gloriously sunny day, which contrasted wonderfully with the wet England I had left behind the day before, the first half was very even, with Espanyol B perhaps slightly edging possession and half chances, but there were precious few goalscoring opportunities for either side and it was little surprise that it was goalless at half time and seemed to have all the makings of a goalless draw. In the second half, Sant Andreu became much the better side and they deserved the lead they took midway through the second half when a corner was headed towards goal, and Májor struck the ball past the keeper. For the rest of the game, Sant Andreu held on fairly comfortably as Espanyol B resorted to ever dirtier tactics, and so all three points went to the away side, which took Sant Andreu to the top of the table by the end of the day, and left Espanyol B down in 16th place in the league.

In my opinion, British football could certainly learn from Spanish (and other countries) football allowing the reserve teams of top professional clubs to play in competitive leagues against predominantly first teams. There is little doubt that reserve team football in the United Kingdom is not fit for purpose in preparing young English players for top flight football, and so a system where the reserve

team can play competitive football week in week out as in Spain could only be beneficial.

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