

TT No.117: *Justin Holmes* - Sunday 6th December 2009; **RCD Espanyol** v Racing Santander; La Liga BBVA; Venue: Estadi Cornellà-El Prat, Barcelona; Score: 0-4; Admission: €45.00; Prog: Free; Attendance: 25180; Match Rating: 4*.

For the second Espanyol game of the day, I took the underground train from Verneda across Barcelona to the south-western suburb of Cornellà and then a twenty-minute walk to the Estadio Cornellà-El Prat, the brand-new home stadium of RCD Espanyol, which was only opened in August. I bought my ticket from the ticket office for 45 euros for a seat in one corner of the ground. This was the cheapest part of the ground - a seat along either touchline would have set me back some 75 euros. These prices seemed somewhat inflated for an average La Liga club, making even English Premier League admission prices seem reasonable by comparison. Outside of the ground, 16-page A4 sized match programmes were handed out free of charge, as well as a more informative magazine previewing the weekend's La Liga football.

On entering the stadium, unfortunately but predictably, and to voice a familiar complaint, there was little to distinguish this stadium from most other newly built stadia across Europe, including England. Roomy, comfortable and with good facilities, but little character. Neither team were coming into this game in any kind of form. Espanyol had lost their previous three league games without scoring and losing their last game 0-4 at Atletico Madrid. Racing Santander were in even worse form, losing their last four games, and found themselves second from bottom of the league having won just one game all season. Familiar names appeared on the team-sheets, with Ben Sahar starting up front for Espanyol with Shunsuke Nakamura on the bench, and Luis Garcia, the former Liverpool midfielder, on the bench for Santander.

Espanyol started the game the brighter, having several good chances during the first quarter of the game. Santander came back into the game as the half wore on and incredibly missed the chance to take the lead when Mohammed Tchite ballooned the ball over the bar from inside the six-yard box with the goalkeeper out of position. Honours even at half time was a fair reflection of the first half, but there was no sign of the quite extraordinary direction this game would take in the second half.

Racing took the lead within a couple of minutes of the restart with a completely free header from Henrique from a free kick, and five minutes later Racing doubled their lead when Sergio Madrazo had all the time in the world to take the ball under control just inside the box, turn and rifle a shot low past the keeper. Suddenly, Racing were comfortably in control of this game, and on 68 minutes, were correctly awarded a penalty for a plain daft challenge on the edge of the box. Tchite coolly converted to make it 0-3 to the visitors, which was the cue for the Espanyol supporters to head for the exits in their droves. However, worse was still to come, when 18-year old Madrazo scored his second and Racing's fourth. For a

team coming into the game in such poor form, it was becoming an astonishing performance by Racing, who could and should have scored at least a couple of more goals as Espanyol seemed to lose all heart and confidence.

At the final whistle, a thoroughly shocking performance by the home side provoked an angry reaction from the crowd, who waved white handkerchiefs and protested vehemently against the management and board. Whilst it is difficult to judge a team on one game, despite their respective league positions, the future would appear to be a lot brighter for Racing Santander than Espanyol. Indeed, one certainly fears for Espanyol in their next game, when they will be faced with the little matter of a trip across the city to take on Barcelona at the Camp Nou.

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