

TT No. 131: *Justin Holmes* - Monday 28th December 2009; **Brentford** v Charlton Athletic; Football League One; Venue: Griffin Park; Score 1-1; Admission: £21.00 (Bill Axbey Stand); Prog: £3.00; Attendance: 8,387; Match Rating: 4*.

Due to the waterlogged/icy conditions that are putting paid to countless non-league matches in the south-east of England at the moment, I decided to play safe today and head to West London to watch the team I support, Charlton Athletic, at Griffin Park, home of Brentford. I was hoping to be able to watch a game in the morning at Bedfont Sports which is located just a couple of miles west of Griffin Park, but this was one of the many non-league games called off.

Griffin Park is located about a ten-minute walk from Brentford train station. Before entering the ground, I wandered around its perimeter, to view the four pubs on each corner of the ground which is an interesting and unique feature of Griffin Park. Unfortunately, I was not able to get a ticket in the away end before they had quickly sold out, and so was faced with the rather uncomfortable experience of being in "the wrong end" watching the team I support. I had the choice between seating on either side of the pitch, or terracing behind the goal opposite the Charlton end. Normally, as someone who very much mourns the loss of being able to stand at the vast majority football league games, I would have chosen to stand on the terrace. However, I considered charging £20 for a terrace place behind the goal to be extortionate and so opted to pay an extra pound to sit in the Bill Axbey Stand, which was unreserved seating today but I chose to sit close to the halfway line, a couple of rows from the front and so had unimpeded views of the pitch. Small supporting pillars would slightly impede your view if you were sitting further back than I did. As a whole, the stadium certainly earns plus points for being quite individual and unique. Certainly, showing signs of ageing and having four different stands not at all fitting in with each other may not be aesthetically pleasing, but give me a stadium like this compared with the modern identikit any day. The 68-page programme was everything that would be expected of a Football League programme, with more than enough reading matter to keep one interested.

Going into this game, an away win may have been expected considering Charlton were flying high in second place and Brentford stuck firmly in mid-table. However, Brentford had won their previous two games and Charlton were ravaged by injury in defence, with all four of their first-choice back-line unavailable. A further factor would surely be that Charlton had to play 50 minutes with just 9 men just two days previously. Throw in this being a London festive derby and all things considered it would be difficult to predict the result of this game.

On an afternoon that was becoming ever colder, the first half was a competitive affair which Charlton probably edged and spurning several chances, most notably when Chris Dickson, out on the wing, found the home keeper inexplicably charging out of his area to challenge, and was unlucky to see his lob drift wide of the empty

goal. Overall, a goalless score-line at half time was probably a fair reflection on a mostly even first half.

The game exploded into life just three minutes after the restart, when sub Carl Cort turned in a cross shot at the far post. Charlton soon took the game to Brentford after conceding and within ten minutes, they were awarded a penalty when Dickson raced clear of the defence and as he tried to take the ball around the keeper, the keeper clipped Dickson's ankles, resulting in a stonewall penalty and a yellow card for the keeper. Charlton's captain, Nicky Bailey, stepped forward to hammer home the penalty high into the net, despite the keeper Lewis Price getting a hand to the ball. From this point on, the game became a real end-to-end affair, and Charlton had a lucky escape ten minutes from the end when a wonderful free kick from Sam Saunders from 20 yards out flew past Rob Elliott but smacked across the underside of the bar. Some fairly desperate defending by Charlton helped ensure the points would be shared, a very fair result on a very entertaining game with chances aplenty at either end, and both sides will surely be happy with a point from the game.

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