

TT No.167: Justin Holmes - Saturday 20th February 2010; **Beckenham Town v Tunbridge Wells**; Kent League Premier Division; Venue: Eden Park Road, Beckenham; Score: 2-1; Admission: £6.00; Programme: N/A; Attendance: 78; Match Rating: 4*.

After the currently customary pre-match concerns that if I were not careful, I could encounter a dreaded blank Saturday, after heavy rain during the week and a very hard frost this morning, I headed off to South London for this Kent League encounter between two teams stuck firmly in mid-table, Beckenham Town and Tunbridge Wells after confirmation that this game was definitely on, for what would be my last Saturday game in England for at least four weeks.

Eden Park Road is located about a half hour walk from Beckenham Junction train station, although Eden Park station is almost adjacent to the ground. On paying my £6 admission at the turnstile, I was extremely disappointed to hear that no programmes had been printed for this game. Apparently, the printers were to blame, but according to the locals, it is certainly not the first time this has happened at Beckenham this season and there really can be no excuse in my opinion for a Senior club not being able to produce a programme, not even an emergency team sheet. Combined with the fact that team line-ups were not announced nor were they written on a whiteboard, and at a time when County League football is struggling to attract sufficient numbers of paying spectators through the turnstiles, I trust that the Kent League will suitably punish Beckenham.

Happily, the lack of programme was the last disappointment of the day. The ground is neat and very well maintained, although its location in deepest suburbia ensures that it certainly wasn't the most scenic ground, I have visited this season. The ground has only one small covered stand, with cushion seats left unsecured on top of benches. A novel idea for a seated stand, and not a bad one I would say! An attractive wooden clubhouse is located behind the goal, as is a tea bar, however I didn't use either as I refused to spend any more money in light of the lack of programme.

Going into this game, both teams were sitting comfortably in mid-table, with already seemingly nothing to play for, as is often the case in a league where there is no relegation and in the case of this year, the top two sides are running away with the league. Beckenham were in fifth place, some twenty points off the leaders Faversham Town, and Tunbridge Wells down in tenth place, only 5 points behind Beckenham, although they were on a bad run of form, having lost by four and three clear goals in their last two games, and lost four of their last six games.

The game itself was an entertaining and very even affair, with both sides freely carving out chances for themselves, and both sides missed a wonderful opportunity to open the scoring inside the first 20 minutes, first Tunbridge Wells when the

keeper made an awful mess of a back-pass, to leave the forward with practically an open goal, but he could only hit the post, admittedly from a tight angle. A worse miss followed for Beckenham shortly afterwards, when the ball was pulled back to the edge of the area and with the keeper already committed, the Beckenham player ballooned the ball over the bar. Beckenham did take the lead halfway through the first half however, thanks to a well taken penalty after a defender was adjudged to have pulled back the forward. Tunbridge Wells deservedly got back on level terms on the stroke of half term.

The second half, continued similar to the first, played in a competitive spirit and with chances aplenty at either end, although as the game wore on, the pitch cut up badly and by the end of the game this clearly had taken its toll on the players, some of whom looked dead on their feet. Beckenham scored what turned out to be the winner ten minutes from the end, and defeat was harsh on Tunbridge Wells, who contributed fully to an open and enjoyable game.

06/20