

**TT No. 176: Ian Hill** - Sunday 31st January 2010; Valenciennes FC v FC Sochaux; French Ligue 1; Res: 1- 1; Att: 11,323; Admission: 15 euros; Programme: 12 pages - free; FGIF Match Rating: \*\*\*.

I'd eyed up a trip to Valenciennes FC for quite a while. A change of fixture from a Saturday evening to a 5.00pm kick off made it an appealing choice as it was possible to do a trip using the Eurotunnel crossing. The other incentive is that VAFC, as they are also known, are having a new stadium built close by to their current Nungesser stadium. This stadium may not be around for too long as the new Nungesser 2 is taking shape.

The current stadium has a capacity of 16,500 and is great old ground. It has an English feel about it as it is tucked in amongst terraced houses. It is now a bit outdated for the modern game but it's a real shame another fine venue will soon be lost.

The town of Valenciennes in the Nord department of France. The journey took about two hours from Calais but that was due to getting lost in Lille. I have now travelled on every dual carriageway in Lille and even went past the stadium of the local OSC Lille. The club was founded in 1913 and in 2006, they returned to the top flight after more than a decade's exile and maintained their Ligue 1 status at the end of this season. They are probably more famous for being involved in the Olympique Marseille match fixing scandal which saw the club plummet down the league.

I translated the stadium directions from the Valenciennes website but once again got lost on the outskirts of town. Luckily, I parked in an out of town shopping complex and was able to catch a tram at the nearby stop. Ticket machines are located on the platforms and it a very easy way to get to the stadium. A few Valenciennes fans were waiting on the same platform so I knew I was going in the right direction. After I had bought my tram ticket a Valenciennes supporter told me that the trams were free if you had a ticket for the game. I'd bought mine and printed my ticket out from the club's website so that was a few euros wasted. The Nungesser has its own stop. Just follow the crowd and you will end up at the stadium. At one side of the ground are a few bars which were packed out. It is also at this end of the ground that there is a small club shop stand. This was the only shop I saw at the ground and it is also the place where programmes are given away free of charge. It's a nice 12-page A4 glossy issue so I was quite happy with that.

I was a bit worried that the game might be off. On the journey to Valenciennes my car thermometer was reading in the minus numbers for most of the journey. No need to worry as this was a live TV game so the pitch was playable. Lots of snow was packed inside the stands and this led to one of the biggest snow ball fights I have ever seen with around 200 people taking part. It was great fun and everybody involved did it in the right spirit even the stewards!

The game itself was quite good. VAFC held a half time lead through Johan Vaudel with Sochaux hitting back in the second half with a goal from Damien Perquis.

The Nungesser is basic but homely. The concrete construction can make the ground seem a bit harsh but it has bags of character. Two new identical stands sit behind the goals, a small scratching type shed terrace runs down one side of the pitch and is set a little way back. The ground is completed by a large concrete stand which also provided accommodation for VIP's.

Overall, despite getting lost, a really enjoyable day and a ground that will be sadly missed when it is gone.

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