

TT No.183: *Justin Holmes* - Wednesday 11th March 2010; **Waltham Forest v Maldon Town**; Ryman League 1 North; Venue: Cricklefield Stadium, Ilford; Score: 2-1; Admission: £7.50; Programme: £1.50; Attendance: 36; Match Rating: 3*.

A rare midweek football venture took me to east London for this Ryman League encounter. It's fair to say there was nothing particularly appealing about attending this fixture, both sides already having nothing meaningful left to play for this season, and the ground being set firmly in urban surroundings, however, towards the end of the working day I just got bitten by the bug of wanting to watch some football, and this was the only easily accessible game in the south-east.

These days, Waltham Forest groundshare with Ilford at the Cricklefield Stadium, which is located about a five-minute walk from Seven Kings train station. The Cricklefield Stadium is also an athletics stadium, which always brings with it the disadvantages of having a running track between the spectators and the pitch, although here spectators are not too distant from the action apart from behind the goals. There is a small seated stand along one side of the pitch which offers a good and relatively comfortable view of the action, and a small covered area for standing on the other side, and along both sides there is plenty of banked open terracing. Trees lining either length of the ground make this stadium slightly more attractive than may be anticipated. The programme was not the best, with a photocopied paper front cover and although it contained more than enough match and league stats, there were few articles of interest. On the positive side, it contained a below average proportion of adverts.

This game certainly didn't capture the imagination of the fans, with a pitiful crowd of just 36. The Manchester United - AC Milan game being shown live on TV may well have been considerably more tempting for many than watching Ryman League football in person on a bitterly cold evening with a biting, icy wind, although crowds generally have not been much higher than this all season for Waltham Forest, apart from cup games and very local derbies. Indeed, they have the third lowest average attendance out of 132 clubs at non-league step four level.

Going into this game, both teams were sitting in the lower half of the table, with Waltham Forest in 12th place and Maldon in 15th place, but with Waltham Forest 18 points off a play-off place and Maldon 14 points clear of the relegation zone, and so there is little meaningful left to play for this season for both teams.

The game turned out to be an entertaining affair with all three of the goals scored came within a 15-minute period midway through the first half. Waltham Forest took the lead on 20 minutes, when a corner was headed in firmly by Luca Frankis. Maldon were back on level terms within 5 minutes when Jack Jefferies scored with a powerful shot that the Forest keeper got a hand to but not enough to keep the ball out of the net. Forest retook the lead on 33 minutes when a free-kick was powerfully headed home by Danny Gabriel. With chances aplenty at either end,

this game looked certain to yield plenty of goals, but in the end the score-line stayed at 2-1, but credit must go to both teams for producing a very entertaining game of football on a bobbly pitch in perishing, cold conditions.

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