

TT No. 200: *Justin Holmes* - Tuesday 23rd March 2010; **SK Rapid Wien v SV Mattersburg**; Austrian Bundesliga; Venue: Austrian Bundesliga; Score: 3-0; Admission: €20.00; Programme: Free; Attendance: 14500; Match Rating: 5.

If ever a game turned out to be the complete opposite in almost every respect to what I had anticipated before kick-off, this was it. I had been expecting not much more than a restrained, reserved support, with the football of moderate quality in one of the more low-keys professional leagues in Europe. How wrong I am pleased to have been, as it is no exaggeration to say that I was treated to one of the best all-round matchday experiences I have encountered, certainly when watching from a neutral point of view.

After watching a couple of games in western Slovakia, I made my way westwards over the Austrian border for the one and a half hour coach trip to the wonderfully historic and elegant city of Vienna, and for the game itself, the Gerhard Hanappi Stadium is located in the western suburbs, about a half hour underground train ride from central Vienna. The stadium is conveniently located almost adjacent to the Hutteldorf station. I had already purchased and printed out my ticket via the Rapid Vienna club website, and so headed straight for the turnstiles to scan my ticket. The downside of this system is not having a proper ticket as a souvenir of the game, but this is probably outweighed by the sheer convenience of buying and printing your ticket from the comfort of your own home. Excellent glossy 20-page programmes were handed out free of charge just inside the turnstiles.

I was seated behind one of the goals in the East Stand, where seating is unreserved and spacious. The opposite stand is reserved exclusively for season ticket holders, and both of these stands are almost identical, fairly shallow, and with a design along the tops of the stands that is very similar to Olympique Lyonnais' stadium. Along either side are much larger grandstands. All in all, a very decent, neat and tidy modern all-seater stadium which still has some character and no obstructing pillars.

As for the game, Rapid Vienna looked strong favourites, in second place in the league although six points behind the big-spending leaders Red Bull Salzburg. Mattersburg were in fifth place in the 10-team league, although a long way distant of the European qualification places. And indeed, the game went according to form, with Rapid Vienna dominating the first half but spurning a host of excellent chances to score, with Mattersburg focused much more on defending than putting together threatening forward moves, and so the score-line somehow was goalless at half time. However, within three minutes of the restart, Rapid took the lead and from this point on, there was only going to be one winner. They added a second on 59 minutes and then made the game safe with a third with twenty minutes remaining, ensuring a very comfortable looking 3-0 victory for the home side. Mattersburg, whilst very limited going forward, did not look such a bad side

as Rapid played excellently, highly motivated, full of attacking endeavour and they simply ground their opponents down.

The most memorable aspect of this match was most certainly the atmosphere, which was absolutely terrific. From start to finish, both ends of the ground never stopped chanting and supporting their team, prompted by an orchestrator at the front of the stand with a megaphone. It made a truly refreshing change to see such passionate, positive and constant support of a team, without any of the negative chanting that is frequently heard at English games. It is true that a 3-0 score-line made it easier for fans to support their side so energetically, but there could have been potential for fans to become frustrated at the goalless half time score-line against a team they expected to beat quite comfortably. I couldn't recommend a visit to watch Rapid Vienna enough, for a thoroughly enjoyable all-round matchday experience.

06/20