

TT No.202: *Justin Holmes* - Thurs 25th March 2010; **Stansted** v Tiptree United; Essex Senior League; Venue: Hargrave Park, Stansted Mountfichet; Score: 9-0; Admission: £5.00; Programme: £1.50; Attendance: 25; Match Rating: 5.

This was a bonus game that I had not intended to watch, but this recently rearranged match on the unusual match day of Thursday coincided well with my flight arriving at Stansted Airport from Bratislava, and so from the airport, I caught the train from Stansted Airport for the short six minute journey to Stansted Mountfichet, from which Stansted's Hargrave Park ground is about a quarter of a ten minute uphill walk. Having flown in from warm, sunny conditions in Slovakia, I was surprised and nervous to discover that it had been raining in the Stansted area for most of the day, and apparently it wouldn't have been any surprise had the game been called off. However, despite the pitch being saturated, there was only a small amount of standing water along one touchline and the pitch was perfectly playable, even though it was clear that the pitch would make ball control difficult.

Hargrave Park is a tidy, intimate rural ground and certainly one of the more attractive grounds in the Essex Senior League, with a fairly charming small white wooden stand, and hard standing around the rest of the ground. A very decent programme was produced and much credit is merited for including updated stats after their game on Tuesday.

This certainly promised to be an interesting game, with Stansted having beaten Clapton 9-2 just two days earlier, which was their fifth win in a row, scoring 25 goals in the process, which took them to the top of the table. One feared for tonight's opposition, Tiptree United, who started their first season back in the Essex Senior League strongly but are now very much a club in crisis, having sold their Chapel Road ground to developers, now share Maldon Town's ground but lost their manager and several players to Maldon at the same time, and apparently Tiptree have notified the Essex Senior League that they may withdraw from the league in the summer, with a merger with Maldon look probable. Before tonight's game, they had lost six of their previous eight games. However, the saturated condition of the pitch, Stansted having to play their second game in three days and the usual convention that senior clubs rarely manage to inflict consecutive hidings meant that this could turn out to be a closer game that may have been imagined.

However, such thoughts soon evaporated, as Stansted raced into a two-goal lead within ten minutes and four by half time, and one really feared for Tiptree when they went down to ten men when a Tiptree defender was sent off for a professional foul as the last man. Tiptree did have their moments coming forward, but their defence was absolutely woeful, as time and again through-balls caught them square and Stansted forwards raced into clear goalscoring opportunities time and again. In the second half, Stansted were absolutely irresistible, taking advantage of a Tiptree team who had seemed to have thrown in the towel at half time. They went 8-0 up with half an hour still left to play, and at that stage it was

really frightening to think what the score could be, particularly when Tiptree were reduced to nine men, but in the end, they only added one further goal. Stansted should easily have made double figures and it could have been several more than that, as they were denied by some excellent saves by the Tiptree goalkeeper and had other narrow misses.

Enormous credit must go to Stansted, for maintaining their hunger and desire to keep attacking when many clubs would "stick" on opening up a four or five goal lead or would start indulging in showboating. Taking their foot off of the gas would have been understandable considering this was their second game in three days on a sodden pitch. At any senior level, to score nine goals in two consecutive games is mightily impressive, and it is a shame that only 25 spectators were present to witness such a feat. Stansted are now very much in the driving seat to win the league now, four points clear with a game in hand, although they cannot be promoted as they have not applied.

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