

TT No.205: *Justin Holmes* - Sat 3rd April 2010; **Whitstable Town** v Godalming Town; Ryman League Division 1 South; Venue: Belmont Ground, Whitstable; Score: 0-3; Admission: Free; Programme: £1.00; Attendance: 285; Match Rating: 2.

I had a distinct feeling of *deja-vu* whilst making my way to this game today, as it was an almost identical long train journey that I made yesterday to Faversham, except for the last ten minutes. However, I was persuaded to make the trip back to north-east Kent for this Ryman League Division 1 South game by Whitstable's decision to follow one of the latest trends of clubs throwing open their doors and allowing free admission to all. Such brave initiatives very much deserve to be supported. Indeed, today's attendance was more than double the average attendance for the season and by far the biggest. Hopefully the club will have attracted some new regular fans through the turnstiles in future, although a more successful team on the pitch would certainly help, as it's been a pretty desperate season for Whitstable.

The Belmont Ground is located about a ten-minute walk from the railway station, and is certainly one of the better grounds at this level, combining plenty of character with very good facilities. Along one side of the ground is a small old-fashioned grandstand providing bench seating, whilst on the opposite side is a large clubhouse, changing rooms, with standing room also available along the length of the pitch. Behind both goals there is covered terracing. Mention should be made of a very good playing surface, considering the frequent heavy rain in this part of the world during the last week. To continue the very positive impression of the club so far, programmes sold for the bargain price (at this level) of £1, and was an excellent read - full of interesting articles, information from the league and of Kentish clubs, as well as a couple of interesting groundhopping and historical articles, and with few adverts. An excellent effort.

Part of the rationale behind allowing free entry to supporters today was an attempt to swell the attendance to cheer on the Whitstable to a very much needed win, as they lie in a precarious position in the league, second bottom of the table and firmly in the relegation zone, although they do have games in hand compared with most of the teams around them. Getting the necessary three points from today's game would be a tough proposition though, as they were playing Godalming, currently in the play-off places in fifth place, although Whitstable did win at Godalming back in December.

On a surprisingly dry and sunny day - considering recent days and the forecast for today - the first half of this game was a competitive affair but with very few chances at either end. Whitstable probably shaded possession, without ever really looking like scoring, indeed, it had 0-0 written all over this game at half time. The second half started in a similar vein, until Godalming took the lead on 55 minutes when the ball was played across goal and was firmly struck into the net with the goalkeeper drawn away from goal. This was slightly harsh on Whitstable, and they

should have had the opportunity to get back on level terms just a few minutes later when the referee failed to award a blatant looking penalty when a Whitstable forward was pulled back in the area. Shortly afterwards, Godalming were awarded a penalty, which again looked clear-cut and was struck home firmly to seemingly give the visitors an unassailable lead considering Whitstable's lack of a cutting edge. The result was put beyond all doubt with about a quarter of an hour remaining, when a Whitstable defender struck firmly into his own net, before a lurking Godalming forward would have done. This goal seemed to totally deflate Whitstable, and as they stopped chasing back and putting tackles in, could count themselves lucky to have not conceded more by the final whistle.

And so, with this result, Godalming keep themselves very much in the play-off frame and indeed rise a place to fourth after today's matches, whilst this could be a major blow to Whitstable's survival chances, as Whitstable fell to the bottom of the table and have considerably the worst goal difference in the league. As mentioned they do have games in hand, but of course they're only useful if you build up a good run of form and they have a tough looking run in of fixtures, with only Ashford Town away against a team near the bottom of the league as well as entertaining (currently) second placed Folkestone and third placed Worthing. Certainly, the football on show, which was not lacking in effort but was considerably in creativity and a cutting edge, would have done little to tempt any "new" supporters back to pay £8 at the turnstiles in future, which is a shame for a friendly and well-organised club such as Whitstable.

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