

TT No.209: *Justin Holmes* - Mon 5th April 2010; **Chertsey Town** v Egham Town; Combined Counties League Prem Division; Venue: Alwyns Lane, Chertsey; Admission: £6.00; Programme: £1.50; Attendance: 200 (estimate); Match Rating: 4.

When contemplating a Bank Holiday double-header, the Combined Counties League (as well as the Sussex League) is always a safe bet to provide morning kick-offs. and indeed, for this Easter Monday I headed off to the outermost fringes of south-west London for my first game of the day, with an 11.30 kick off. Alwyns Lane, the home ground of Chertsey Town, is located about a 15-minute walk away from the town's train station, via a walk through the moderately attractive town centre.

Alwyns Lane is certainly one of the better grounds in the Combined Counties League, some of which are quite woeful, particularly those clubs who have never been in a higher league. But this is testament to the 25 years that Chertsey played in the Isthmian League, but the ground is certainly showing signs of its age since those relative glory days. There is a main grandstand offering excellent views of the action, a long-covered terrace along most of the opposite length of the pitch, and with covered terracing behind one of the goals, uncovered terracing behind the other. Trees lining the length of the pitch with the covered terracing ensures a pleasant, charmingly non-league feel to the ground, whilst retaining excellent facilities that would not look out of place at Ryman League level. The programme produced was of a good standard considering this was a Bank Holiday fixture (and again considering some of the abysmal, not even half-hearted efforts that I've encountered in the Combined Counties league. With informative welcome messages, recent match report and plenty of stats, there was more than enough to fully inform the neutral visitor about both teams and the league in general.

As well as being a Bank Holiday local derby, this was even more a must-win game for Chertsey were they to harbour realistic hopes of winning the league and getting promoted. They lay in second place in the table, four points behind North Greenford United and having played a game more, whilst Camberley Town were three points behind but having two games in hand on Chertsey. This would be a tough game for Chertsey though. Egham are a long way off the pace in terms of being in contention for the title, in seventh place, but were in excellent recent form. Having said all of that, of course league positioning and form tends to go out of the window in a local derby, particularly one like today which was well supported and with a strong and vocal contingent following the away team.

The match started off quite evenly, but it didn't take too long for the game to explode into life, sadly in a negative way. With just ten minutes on the clock, a goalmouth scramble almost of the goal line ended with a Chertsey forward stretching for the ball, but instead kicked the Egham keeper, which sparked a mass brawl involving just about everyone on the pitch, including the Chertsey goalkeeper who ran the length of the pitch to get involved. It should be stated here that the referee, Jim Patterson, did an excellent job in the circumstances to

diffuse the situation, taking his time before handing out five yellow cards and not seeing fit to send anybody off. This strategy worked well, as tempers barely flared up again and the remaining 80 minutes of the game was played with the full complement of players.

Chertsey took the lead seven minutes later, when Dean Papali glanced a good cross past the keeper and into the net. It only took seven minutes for Egham to get back on level terms though, when Matt Graves took advantage of some uncertainty between the Chertsey keeper and defender to poke the ball home. For the rest of the half, Chertsey were very much in the ascendancy, but spurned some good chances that they managed to carve out.

Right at the start of the second half, Chertsey had a glorious chance to equalise, after which point Egham came much more into the game and it was difficult to see which way the game might go. Just as it was beginning to look like the spoils would be shared, Egham took the lead with a quite wonderful goal by Jamie Houghton, who powered an unstoppable shot into the top corner from outside the box. Egham then won the game with ten minutes remaining when Charlie McCarthy converted a low cross into the box.

As a result of this game, it looks like being another season of Combined Counties League football for Chertsey next season, particularly as both North Greenford and Camberley both won today. As for Egham, things are looking bright, and if they keep together the squad and make a couple of quality additions, they look well placed to make a stronger challenge at the top of the league next season.

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