

**TT No.210: *Justin Holmes*** - Monday 5th April 2010; **Ashford Town (Middlesex) v Horsham**; Ryman League Prem Division; Venue: Short Lane, Stanwell; Score: 0-2; Admission: £9.00; Programme: £1.50; Attendance: 113; Match Rating: 3.

For the second game of my Easter Monday fare, I made the 25-minute journey from Chertsey to Ashford (Middlesex) for this Ryman League Premier Division match. Short Lane, located very close to the south side of Heathrow Airport, is about a half hour brisk walk from Ashford train station. For those less able or less keen on the long walk and negotiating the busy A30 dual carriageway en route, there are regular buses which stop close to the ground.

To give an honest assessment, everything about the set-up at Short Lane smacks of an average County League standard ground. As you enter the ground, there is quite a bizarre stand providing three rows of seating with barely any inclination between the rows. Along the same side is a similar sized stand providing cover for a standing area. On the opposite side, there is one seemingly newish small stand with seating, and apart from that, the rest of the ground just offers hard standing. It's an arena that doesn't really seem to fit in with Ryman Premier League football, but perhaps this is a reflection that the club is punching well above its weight by being as high as it is in the pyramid. The facilities are certainly well-maintained and probably perfectly adequate for a club that attracts a relatively low level of support. However, plans are apparently being worked upon to transform the ground over the next ten years.

An interesting feature of the ground is the very low level at which the floodlights are set, due to the very close proximity of Heathrow Airport, and a fairly unique feature of the ground is having large cylindrical fuel tanks close behind one of the goals. If your two main passions in life are groundhopping and plane-spotting, you would be in paradise at Short Lane, watching planes rise into the air close up every couple of minutes from Heathrow airport.

The programme was a disappointment, it has to be said. An introductory message explained that this was a reduced effort due to printing deadlines and keeping out much information that would be out of date on the day of the match. Maybe I'm being harsh in saying that this doesn't really wash, not when just earlier the same day I found a Combined Counties club managing to produce a very interesting and informative programme under identical circumstances.

A glance at the league tables before the match (which was not possible from the programme) would have hinted at a standard mid-table encounter. However, Ashford are currently in truly alarming form, having lost seven of their last eight league games before this one. In most leagues there seems to be a team that drops like a stone as the season enters its final couple of months, and Ashford Town (Middlesex) certainly seem to fit the bill in the Ryman League Premier Division this season. Not so long ago they were challenging for a play-off berth. Only five points

now separated them and the relegation places, so they will have to arrest the slide urgently if they are not to be sucked through the trap door. Things look altogether more comfortable for Horsham under the wily and vastly experienced management of John Maggs, comfortably in mid-table but with a play-off berth not completely out of the question.

On a dry, occasionally sunny but always very windy afternoon, the tone for this game was set in the very first minute, when the Ashford goalkeeper had to pull off an excellent save to deny Horsham's top scorer, Pat Harding. Horsham fashioned some excellent chances to take the lead, with Ashford barely looking a threat. On the half hour, Horsham finally took a deserved lead with a well taken shot by Hassan Nyang, who drove powerfully home from the edge of the penalty area. Horsham continued to dominate and have most of the chances, and it was only a surprise that it took until first half stoppage time for them to double their lead, with another excellent taken goal, driven low into the corner from 18 yards out.

In the second half, Ashford came much more into the game and spent more time venturing into the Horsham half, without ever really looking like they would score. As the second half wore on, Horsham regained more and more control, and the final twenty minutes, the game turned into something of a stalemate - Horsham happy with their two goal lead, Ashford not really seeming to have enough of a cutting edge to claw a goal back, apart from the odd decent half chance. In added on time at the end of the game, Ashford were reduced to ten men when Brett Cooper pulled back Steve Davies just outside the penalty area to deny a one-on-one with the goalkeeper. A silly sending off for the Ashford defender with the game lost, for which he will now serve a suspension, but I suppose such things are instinctive reactions to such situations.

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