

TT No.215: *Justin Holmes* - Sat 10th April 2010; **Hassocks** v Crowborough Athletic; Sussex County League Division 1; Venue: The Beacon, Hassocks; Score: 2-0; Admission: £5.00; Programme: £1.00; Attendance: 120 (estimate); Match Rating: 2.

With a warm and sunny day forecast, the first one on a non-working day of the year in the south-east, I decided against going to support my team, Charlton Athletic, at Southampton (a wise move as it turned out as they lost 0-1) and instead looked for a scenic ground to make the most of the first taste of summer, and Hassocks fitted the bill perfectly. It's a ground I've wanted to visit for some years now, located as it is at the foot of the South Downs, but it has never worked out before now, partly because I have wanted to save my visit for a warm, sunny day.

The Beacon is located about a 15 minute walk from the town's railway station, just off of the A273 between Burgess Hill and Brighton, and from the time I entered the ground through the turnstile, where I was met with a cheery welcome, my overall impression was one of a friendly, well-organised club. As you enter the ground, there is a smart, tastefully constructed clubhouse, with toilet and refreshment facilities well above what would be expected at this level. Hard standing is available along the length of this side of the pitch. On the other side, there is a modern all-seater stand, again with hard standing for the rest of the length of the pitch. In the background of this stand are the rolling South Downs, with a couple of windmills also visible, which helps make The Beacon a picturesque ground with a very pleasant rural feel to it. Behind one of the goals, there is a grass bank which offers an excellent view of the action. Behind the other goal, there is just hard standing. There are also around a dozen wooden benches sprinkled around the ground. The programme was a reasonable effort, giving all the information about the home team, away team and the league that spectators need to know.

Surprisingly, given the awful winter we have endured in the south-east which has caused an horrendous fixture backlog for most clubs at this level, this was Hassocks' last home game of the season, with their one remaining away game in a fortnight's time. Given that a couple of other clubs in this league still have eight games to play, Hassocks must have had a combination of good fortune and an excellently prepared and cared for pitch to be so far advanced with their schedule. As for the teams, Hassocks have little left to play for this season other than pride, sitting firmly in mid table.

There was more riding on this game for Crowborough, who were only six points clear of the relegation zone. However, to be in this position now would have been quite unthinkable a few months ago. When I last watched Crowborough in November, they were in a truly desperate and seemingly hopeless position, having gained just eight points from their opening 14 games, lost the game I watched 1-4 at home against perennial strugglers East Grinstead, and didn't gain any points from their next five games, shipping 28 goals in the process and they looked

destined for a second successive relegation. However, on replacing their manager with their long-serving player, Dave Adams, Crowborough had an immediate absolutely astonishing upturn in fortunes, as they secured eight wins and a draw from nine games to not only catch up the other teams but indeed put clear daylight between themselves and the relegation zone. Losing their last two games before today has ensured that they still have some work to do to ensure Division One survival on the pitch (although their excellent Ryman League standard Alderbrook ground will probably ensure that they will remain in the division no matter where they finish in the league due to several other clubs failing inspection visits).

Unfortunately, the game itself had a rather end of season feel to it, played in a reasonably competitive spirit, but with neither side managing to carve out clear chances, apart from when Hassocks hit the bar with a speculative lob. It was little surprise that the score-line was goalless at half time. Whereas Crowborough possibly had the better of the first half, Hassocks came out looking the stronger team, and it wasn't a surprise that they went on to win the game, thanks, it has to be said, to two contentious goals. The first goal was via a penalty, given for a handball but it did appear that the forceful shove the Crowborough defender received when going up for a header played a large part in it. The second was scored in somewhat confusing circumstances, when a ball was lobbed towards goal and was hacked away by a defender. The Hassocks players celebrated a goal, but the linesman didn't indicate a goal and the Crowborough players played on. After quite some time, the referee finally indicated a goal. For the rest of the game, Crowborough barely threatened as the game was played out mostly in the middle of the pitch.

So, Hassocks signed off their league campaign at home with a comfortable win, whilst Crowborough will look nervously over their shoulder and will probably need a couple of wins from their remaining four games to stay clear of the relegation zone.

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