

TT No.241: Ian Hill - Sat 17th April 2010; **New York Red Bulls** v FC Dallas; MLS; Venue: Red Bull Arena, Harrison, New Jersey; Res: 1-2; Admission: \$35; Prog: Free 48 pp A5; Att: 13,667; Match Rating: 2.

With a week's holiday to New York booked before the MLS fixtures were released, I was very happy that the New York Red Bulls were at home during my stay. Although the club uses the New York name they play in Harrison, New Jersey so a train journey was required from Manhattan where our hotel was located. The directions on the Red Bulls website were very good. I was a bit concerned that it might be a difficult trip but everything went very smoothly. We caught a PATH train from the World Trade Centre station in downtown Manhattan. 9/11 is still very prominent in the area as building work takes place to replace the Twin Towers. The train takes you to the Harrison Station in about 20 minutes on one of the most un-scenic train journeys you will ever take. Desolate rail tracks and derelict industrial areas are the order of the day. The Red Bull Arena is futuristic looking as it rises out of the industrial waste land and that is all that surrounds it. There are plans to build around the stadium so it will be interesting to see if that takes place in the current economic climate. The station is small but ideally located, with a couple of pizza takeaways the only businesses nearby.

The Red Bulls used to play in the former Giants Stadium from 1996 until the end of the 2009 season. The stadium was located in East Rutherford, New Jersey. As we flew into Newark Airport the new Meadowlands Stadium can be viewed with the old Giants Stadium, which was in the early stages of demolition, next door.

In November 2007, Red Bull announced that it had purchased full ownership of the project of building a new stadium for the club in Harrison. Red Bull built the stadium without taxpayer money. The team moved to the new stadium located directly across the Passaic River from Newark, New Jersey for the 2010 season. The new stadium has a 25,189-seating capacity. On March 20, 2010 the Red Bull team played an exhibition game against Santos FC in a 3-1 inaugural win. The first MLS league game took place in the new venue on March 27, 2010 with a 1-0 win over the Chicago Fire. We purchased tickets on the day of the game and despite plenty of seats being available there were still touts (scalpers in the US) trying to off load tickets. Pre match entertainment is supplied outside the stadium with various football challenges for children, a large BBQ, and an open-air bar with a DJ. There is also a very small club shop which was surprising as we expected something far larger. The quality of the merchandise was very good but also expensive.

The stadium itself has a bit of a MK Arena feel to it. Similar in design the ground is complete but there are no facilities under the stands only tables where match programmes are provided free of charge. It's a nice colourful issue consisting of 48 A5 pages on glossy paper. After you climb a flight of steps you enter a concourse by which (as with the MK Arena) you can walk all the way around the ground.

There was no segregation with the FC Dallas supporters, numbering round 30, located in an upper corner behind one of the goals. I purchased expensive tickets on the day but I found that the stewards are far more relaxed (unlike their counterparts at New Yankees or Mets Baseball Arenas) and basically you could sit wherever you wanted to when the game started. The major plus regarding this ground is that the views are excellent and you feel close to the pitch. It is a very good ground. I thought the club would have built a bigger stadium around the 40,000-capacity region but with the crowd only near the 13,000 number it looks adequate. The club had an attendance recently of 1,935 for a mid-week league cup game against Boston which is worrying but at least things should improve with upcoming friendlies against Juventus and Spurs.

The Red Bull supporters are trying to create an “ultras” type of support behind one of the goals. It is a very mixed crowd with a lot of English Premier League shirts on display along with various National Shirts and Tracksuit tops worn by people of South American origin.

I had only heard of two Red Bulls players before the start of the game and they were from the opposite ends of the football spectrum. Former Aston Villa player Juan Pablo Angel is the Red Bulls star player and also in their line-up is Carl Robinson signed from Walsall. They were in the process of trying to sign a player from Notts County so it sort-of, shows the strength of the MLS. The game itself was not of a high standard and it looks like Juan Pablo’s legs “have gone”.

FC Dallas appeared to be the much better side as they squandered at least four very easy chances in the first 8 minutes until Dax Johnson opened the scoring for them. Juan Pablo still knows where the goal is and he scored the equaliser before missing a penalty and then converting one in the 89th minute to give the Red Bulls a fortunate win.

The MLS is still a very young league and attending a game is something like you would expect at a ground in Germany or France. They have certainly moved on from the American razzmatazz I was expecting. I don’t agree with the Red Bull naming of the club. There was an article in the programme about the 3 other Red Bull sides. I didn’t know there is now Red Bull Brazil along with their counterparts in Salzburg and Leipzig. It may not help the club to gain an identity as they started off as the New York/New Jersey Metrostars then changed to the Metrostars until they were purchased by Red Bull in 2006.

Soccer has an extremely low profile in New York with no coverage in the local New York Times with Baseball very much the “King”. You will not see any Red Bulls merchandise on sale in New York but you will read about the English Premiership in the NYT. Due to the volcano disruption our scheduled 5-night stay in New York became 12 and luckily the fixture schedule also allowed us to take in the Red Bulls v Philadelphia Fury game. We also went to two New York Mets and a New York Yankees baseball games. Both clubs have new stadiums and they are fantastic. They are certainly the best stadiums I ever been to and make the new Wembley look very poor. Soccer will probably never catch Baseball and American Football up

but it is still a good day out and hopeful I'll be able to take in another Red Bulls game.

06/20