

**TT No.49: *Justin Holmes*** - Sun 4th October 2009; **Louletano D.C.** v C.F. Uniao Maderia; Second Division South (Third tier of Portuguese football); Venue: Estadio do Algarve, Score: 0-1; Admission: €7.50; Programme: None; Attendance: 500 (guessed); Match Rating: 3.

My second game of the day took me from Portimao back along the motorway to the outskirts of Faro to the Algarve Stadium, which is conveniently located right alongside the motorway, where it meets the dual carriageway which leads to Faro airport. It is also possible to reach the stadium by train.

The Algarve Stadium is an impressive, modern facility which was only built in 2004 and hosted three matches in the European Championships of that year, with a unique design and a capacity of around 30,000. However, for this game in the third tier of Portuguese football and with only around 500 spectators present, only the main stand was open, which made for a similarly strange atmosphere to the one when Queen's Park play at Hampden Park in the Scottish League. But I don't think anything can feel quite as strange as the Hampden/Queen's Park experience! For the record, Louletano are based in nearby Loule but share the Algarve stadium with SC Farense, who are based in Faro and play in the league below.

As for the game itself, although Louletano started reasonably well, the islanders from Madeira took more and more control of the game, although a goalless halftime score was of no surprise. The second half was a much livelier affair but for all the wrong reasons, with the more cynical side of the game that south European sides are famed for becoming more and more apparent and the referee losing control with increasingly baffling decisions that did seem to favour the away side. But at least it did make the crowd much more animated which made for a better atmosphere in the second half.

Madeira took the lead with a well taken penalty after a clear handball by a Louletano defender. It surely won't come as any surprise that the only celebrating came from the Madeira players - you can surely forgive their fans being unable to make most of their away games on the 500 miles distant mainland! This seemed to knock the stuffing out of Louletano who struggled to fashion a chance for the rest of the game and they also had a player sent off for a second yellow card. And so, Madeira's long trip to the mainland proved fruitful as they rose to third in the table with this win, whilst Louletano dropped down to 11th out of the 16 teams. The Algarve stadium is well worth a visit for its unique and pleasing on the eye design, together with the typically Mediterranean hilly landscape in the background. Just don't go expecting top quality Portuguese football though for a league game at least.