

TT No.54: Ian Hill - Sat 3rd October 2009; **Frankfurter FC Viktoria 91** v FC Stahl Brandenburg; Brandenburg - Liga; Score 1-0; Admission: 5 Euros; Programme: 1 euro 20 pages A5; Att: 105; Match Rating: 3.

Viktoria Frankfurt are based in the former East German town of Frankfurt (Oder) which is right on the Polish border. So close to the border that I was able to walk over a bridge in the town centre and into Poland. Remnants of the old border crossing are still in place on the East German side of the bridge but on the Polish side, in the town of Slubice, you are met with endless cigarette shops. Many Germans were crossing the bridge to pick up cheap fags so my brief excursion over the border was very disappointing. Frankfurt (Oder) is a bit of a non-descript town. The architecture is typical East German although some tidying up seems to have been done in recent years. The day of the game was the German re unification day and there was a half-hearted attempt to put on some activities in the main town square which were very low key. Most of the shops were closed and the place was a bit of a ghost town.

It appeared to me that the place was stuck in a bit of a time warp. This was illustrated by a sports museum near the border crossing which celebrated the achievements of former East German sports people of the past who came from the town.

The club itself was originally founded as the army club KVP Vorwärts Leipzig in 1951. One of the characteristics of East German football after World War II, under the Russian occupation and socialist German regime, was the willingness of the ruling authorities to manipulate teams in various ways for political or other reasons. In 1953, the club was picked up and moved to Berlin to play as ZSK Vorwärts Berlin. In October 1956 they were re-named ZASK Vorwärts Berlin, in February 1957 ASK Vorwärts Berlin. The season 1954 led to the club enjoying a run of success that included a DDR Cup in 1954, DDR championships in 1958, 1960, 1962, and 1965, as well as losing appearances in the 1956 DDR Cup, and the 1957 and 1959 national finals. Their success continued after the club was again re-named, this time as FC Vorwärts Berlin, one of the new football clubs formed to increase the level of performance in the DDR-Oberliga. They won another pair of championships in 1966 and 1969, and in 1970 took the DDR Cup, but made a losing appearance in the national final. Throughout the entire period from 1951-1971 the side played in the East German Oberliga (I).

In 1971, the club picked up and moved again - this time to Frankfurt (Oder) - to replace the local secret police sponsored side, SG Dynamo, which was then disbanded. Vorwärts then enjoyed another decent run in the 1980s, going to the UEFA Cup four times (where they were twice knocked out by West German clubs, (Werder Bremen and VfB Stuttgart). In 1983 they finished second nationally.

After German re-unification in 1990, the club dropped its affiliation with the army and became FC Victoria Frankfurt/Oder. After financial problems and re-organization in 1993 the side emerged as Frankfurter FC Viktoria 91 (FFC Viktoria 91). In the early 90s, they played a couple of seasons in tier III before slipping to division IV and V level play. The side currently plays in Brandenburg - Liga.

Despite the moves and the name changes the club has retained in red and yellow colours which were typical of army sponsored sides in the former DDR.

Many years ago, I picked a programme for the Nottingham Forest v Vorwarts Frankfurt UEFA Cup Game. A few years later I sent a letter to Vorwarts trying to scrounge some programmes from the mysterious (to me) East Germany. The club duly obliged by sending me some programmes and a club badge. A weekend in Berlin offered the chance to travel to Frankfurt and take in one of their games against another former major East German club Stahl Brandenburg. Stahl are another re-formed club after the former club went bankrupt after re unification.

Viktoria play at the Stadion Freundschaft. Unfortunately, they do not use the main stadium which is a 12,000-seater Eastern European style bowl. They make do with a small training pitch behind the former. The facilities are very basic but adequate as the club struggle to attract three figure crowds. A railed off pitch has three steps of terracing on one side with hard standing on two other sides. Behind one goal is a large net fence which prevents spectator access. The ground does have some strange street light type floodlights which have three "arms" coming off the top of each post. Finally, there is a small portacabin selling drinks and sausages.

The complex is quite large but very run down. The players change in a pre fab building outside the ground which looks like it could fall down at one end at any moment. The main stadium itself is a relic of former times. Weeds are starting to infest the steps on the terracing, some seating is broken and the bulbs are missing from the tall floodlight pylons. There is a small covered stand in which are VIP padded seats that look like something you would find in a cinema. It's a really sad sight but nearly every spectator who came into the complex had a walk around the old place. I don't know what the local authorities have planned for the future but it would be a real shame if it were to disappear. Viktoria themselves appear to be looking only to survive and the locals appear to have no interest so things do not look promising for football in this town.

With Stahl coming to town I thought that the game may be moved to the main stadium but unfortunately it wasn't. Stahl brought about 50 skin head supporters who were penned into the corner of the ground by riot Police. They were boisterous but there was no trouble as Viktoria are supported mainly by old men. I arrived at the ground early and thought I had got my times wrong as a game had already started on the pitch. This was a reserve game between Viktoria and FSV Union Furstenwalde. About twenty minutes before kick off two ladies appeared, with a table, to take admission money and sell programmes. You could, if you wanted to, still walk in for free via the main stadium but I felt obliged to pay as this is a club in need.

The football wasn't of the highest standard but it was enjoyable and Viktoria were aided by the sending off of a Stahl player after 20 minutes for a terrible tackle. It took them until the 89th minute to score a last-minute goal to win the game. I really enjoyed the day out. It will be interesting to see what happens to these two clubs in the future but on this evidence things don't look promising.

06/20