

TT No.66: *Justin Holmes* - Saturday 24th October 2009; **Notts County** v Crewe Alexandra; Football League 2; Venue: Meadow Lane, Nottingham; Score: 2-0; Att: 6545; Admission: £18.00 (home Kop Stand); Prog: £3.00; Match Rating: 3.

There was truthfully little to attract me to this game, apart from a curiosity to visit a club that recently went from being heavily in debt and seemingly constantly on the brink of administration to one that is swimming in money thanks to mysterious Middle Eastern investment and with the man who will go anywhere if the price is right - Sven Goran Eriksson - featuring prominently behind the scenes. Another feature of visiting Notts County is visiting the world's oldest league club. If you didn't already know that, you certainly would upon visiting Meadow Lane, with the fact repeated literally dozens of times around the stadium and in the matchday programme.

A day trip to Nottingham is certainly recommended, as Nottingham is a very pleasant city to spend a few hours in. Meadow Lane is conveniently located about a ten-minute walk away from Nottingham train station, with one of the more bizarre sights of having the City Ground (home of Nottingham Forest) and Trent Bridge (home of Nottinghamshire County Cricket Club and an England Test venue) almost literally a stone's throw away. I can't think of anywhere else where three major separate sports stadia are located so closely together.

The stadium itself and its facilities are excellent by League 2 standards with a 20,000 capacity. It is, however, quite unremarkable as may be expected with all stands being relatively new. I decided to sit in the Kop, behind one of the goals with Nottingham Forest's City Ground clearly visible behind the other goal. The content of the 64-page programme was very informative, however it was slightly disappointing that the cover was of the same paper as the rest of the programme - for league programmes, I would expect a glossy, hardened cover for my £3.

As for the game itself, it won't last too long in the memory. Notts County were by far the better side in the first half, not that they looked particularly good, more that Crewe were poor. After somehow failing to convert a goalmouth scramble from a couple of yards out, Notts County did take the lead on 27 minutes when Luke Rodgers placed the ball excellently past the goalkeeper and into the top corner by Luke Rodgers having been played in excellently with a precise ball forward. In the second half, Crewe were the better side throughout with some good chances, but Notts County scored their second on 66 minutes thanks to some real parting of the red sea defending by Crewe - as Craig Westcarr strode forward with the ball, the Crewe defenders inexplicably moved out of the way, allowing Westcarr to thump in an excellent strike wide of the goalkeeper and into the bottom corner from 25 yards out. Crewe should have clawed a goal back on 75 minutes with a softly awarded penalty for pushing - Kasper Schmeichel pulled off an excellent save low down to his right to deny Steven Schumacher. That unsurprisingly seemed to deflate Crewe and Notts County coasted to a comfortable

2-0 win in front of their lowest home attendance of the season. What was quite surprising was the very low-key support of the home fans, particularly in the first half, which made for quite a flat atmosphere to this game. But with this win, Notts County rise to fourth place, with Crewe now down to 18th place having now lost seven out of their last eight games. I for one very much hope that Dario Gradi, who has recently found himself back in the hotseat at least temporarily, manages to bring about an upturn in Crewe's fortunes. I personally have never felt he has received anywhere near enough credit for his achievements over so many years in lifting a small club with very small resources to Championship level and keeping them there for several years, not to mention the famed youth academy there.

06/20