

**TT No.77: Leon Gladwell - Prague Seven Match Hopping Weekend Special** (31st Oct - 1st Nov 2009) feat. **FK Dukla Praha** (Druhá Liga); **SK Sparta Krč** (Krajské Přebory Praha); **SK Victorie Jirny** (Divize Skupina B); **AC Sparta Praha** (Gambrinus Liga); **FK Meteor Praha VIII** (Divize Skupina B); **SK Benešov** (Divize Skupina A) and **FC Bohemians Praha 1905** (Gambrinus Liga).

**MATCH 1** - Friday 30th October; 5pm; Druhá Liga; at Stadion Na Julisce, Na Julisce, Dejvice, Praha 6; **FK Dukla Praha** (0) 0 **FC Hradec Kralove** (0) 0; Admission: 50 Kc; Programme: 10 Kc; Attendance: 532.

Arriving in the Mother of Cities on Thursday evening, by Friday afternoon I was ready get away into the outer districts as the sheer number of people milling around the old town had begun to induce a sense of claustrophobia in me. Lucky then that I had my first game of the weekend lined up in Dejvice in Praha 6, the largest of all Prague's numerical districts.

Before this I took a brief trip up Petrin Hill on the funicular railway for a look at the monstrous Strahov stadium. When built in the thirties, it was the largest stadium in the world capable of seating 220,000. Now nature is reclaiming the vast terraces and it's looking pretty shabby. That said, three of the eight pitches or so squeezed into the arena were in use for youth matches and training this afternoon and it remains an important part of the Prague sporting landscape.

From here it was a bus trip back down to Dejvicka then a tram #20 up to Podbaba from where Stadion Julisca is just a short walk away. *Andysanktpauli* mentioned the incredulous scale of Julisca's stand but truly nothing can prepare you until you see it in all its glory. Over 100 steps take you up to the top seats and from here, the views down the Vltava towards the zoo, Liben and beyond are simply breathtaking, especially with the sun setting on what was becoming an increasing cold evening. Admission was just 50 Kc (£2) and a nice square-shaped programme just 10 Kc complete with back page piece on former Dukla great Josef Masopust. Whilst the links between the current Dukla and their legendary predecessors are tenuous at best, it's great to see the history being woven into the current Dukla set-up with so much pride. That famous club badge which seemed so exotic to me when I was a kid adorns the entrance to the old club buildings and again on the face of an old clock next to the giant modern scoreboard. And the gold and maroon theme is continued in extraordinary fashion with the giant DUKLA spelled out on the benches in the stand. Opposite are areas of newish terracing plus the club offices from where I picked up a team sheet. The 100 or so visitors from high-flying Hradec stood on a section of terracing here and were vocal throughout and although a few seemed a little tanked-up, the only trouble I witnessed was handbags at dawn moment between two of their own fans.

As for the game itself, it was truly woeful and was without a shadow of doubt, the worst I have seen this season. An ex-pat I was speaking to on Sunday was at the

previous Dukla home game and said that game was even worse than Friday's. Yikes. Maybe this explains why just 532 turned up for this second division game against second in the table Hradec Kralove. The only chance of any note fell to Hradec near the death when their centre forward hammered the ball high over the bar and into the Prague night from six yards. Great stadium, great old club...just a shame about the football.

MATCH 2 - Saturday 31st October; 10.15am; Krajské Přebory Praha; at Stadion Sparty Krč, Pálkařská, Krč, Praha 4; **SK Sparta Kre** (0) 1 FSC Libus (1) 2; Admission: 30 Kc; Programme: 10 Kc; Attendance: 51.

Saturday morning and it was obvious it was getting colder by the day. A tram from outside my hotel in Vysehrad to Vrsovice station followed by a Cercany bound train to the southern high-rise district of Krc and I was on my way to the first of my two Czech triple-headers. Sparta Krc played as high as the second tier of Czech football only a few seasons ago although then they hosted their games at the Evzena Rosickeho stadium next to Strahov. Since then, financial difficulties have seen them tumble down into the regional leagues and luckily for me, back to their original home in Krc. This place is wonderful and had all the ingredients I was looking for on my quest to seek out a couple of the more traditional Czech football homes. From the main Branicka road, a leafy track (Palkarska) leads you down to the ground and on to Prague's baseball stadium. Stadion Sparty Krc is at first a simple affair: no cover and just a cluster of dilapidated buildings tucked away in one corner. On closer inspection however, steep banks of crumbling terracing run both lengths of the pitch whilst partly obscured by trees behind the far goal, the most fantastic scoreboard I have ever seen in the form of a giant football. I was frankly shocked when an old boy clambered up the steps and into this rusting edifice to crank the thing up and set it in motion.

From the tea bar, grog was on sale at just a few crowns per mug and a couple of those warmed me up nicely as the temperature struggled to get up above a few degrees. Also being handed out were team sheets whilst a simple programme sold for 10 Kc.

Krc had lost all eleven of their matches thus far and managed to persuade just one substitute to get himself out of bed for the visit of second placed Libus. This is the fifth division of the Czech football system which is split into regional groups, this being the Prazsky Prebor or Prague group. The standard was similar to step 5 in England - both sides tried to pass it around and build from the defence but sometimes it just seemed easier to hoof it in the general direction on the centre forwards. This worked for Libus who scored through Pavlu just before half time. The visitors had dominated from the off spending nigh on the entire match inside Krc's half. So, when Holub scored for Krc with a rare breakaway goal just three minutes from time, a major surprise seemed on the cards. However, deep into stoppage time, Libus scored through Pavlu again to save their blushes and break Krc hearts.

**MATCH 3** - 2pm; Divize Skupina B; at Pražská, Jirny, Praha-východ; **SK Victorie Jirny** (3) 5 **FC Predni Kopanina** (2) 2; Admission: 30 Kc; Programme: Free; Attendance: 97.

From Krc I huffed my way up the hill to Kacerov metro station and then back into the city centre. A metro out to Cerny Most, the last stop on line B and from here a Sadska bound 398 bus to Jirny. I used the excellent idos.cz website to plan my journey but failed to notice a Jirny bus a little later which stopped in the village centre - my bus stopped at the 'Logisticky Park' a good mile and a half away and left me to find my way back to civilisation through ploughed fields, industrial units and roads that would be better described as tracks.

Victorie Jirny play in the fourth level - the 'Divize' which is again split into groups, Jirny playing in Group B. Although essentially just a small village side, Jirny have made a name for themselves at this level in recent years, winning the division two years ago but not taking promotion as their tiny little stadium was not up to scratch. Fast forward to this season and nothing much has changed with Jirny miles ahead at the top of the table and the ground still not much more than a field with just a small bank of temporary seating now installed. However, the rural setting makes up for the lack of facilities as indeed did the replica shirt-clad fans today who beat drums throughout and carried their side to a comprehensive win over Predni Kopanina. Admission was again just 30 Kc and a smart programme was thrown in.

With a few players on loan from top-flight Bohemians Praha (the 'fake' Bohemians), plus the current Bohemians coach and former pro Jaromir Jindracek playing up front for them today, it was perhaps no surprise that they were so far ahead of their visitors, going three up inside the first half hour and playing some outstandingly creative football. Then Kopanina hit back with two long distance wonder goals from five-foot nothing left back Gerstner and it was game on again. Jirny scored early in the second half and the game was effectively ended when the visitor's number 8 was dismissed with half an hour still to play. A really decent game with good flowing football from both sides and some cracking goals.

Well worth the effort and highly recommended to anyone looking for that elusive Saturday afternoon game in Prague.

**MATCH 4** - 6.15pm; Gambrinus Liga; at The Generali Arena, Milady Horákové, Letná, Praha 7; **AC Sparta Praha** (0) 1 **FC Banik Ostrava** (0) 1; Admission: 180 Kc; Programme: 35 Kc; Attendance: 9,715.

Waiting for the bus back in the village centre after the match I met a Scottish ex-pat groundhopper who proved to be a great source of information on all things Ceske fotbal. We travelled back to Sparta together and then met up at the following morning's game at Meteor where incidentally a few other ex-pat hoppers were present. Cheers Iain for giving me some valuable transport tips not to mention pronunciation pointers! We split at the Sparta stadium where Iain, a Banik Ostrava fan, went into the rocking away end whilst I went into the rather quieter Sparta end having bought my ticket on Friday.

The Generali Arena, formerly Letna of course, has been modernised beyond all recognition in recent years and whilst it offers up excellent sight lines and smart colour contrast in the seats, it is, in my opinion just another typically bland modern European stadium. Tonight, it was just under half full (47%) but still noisy and those inside were treated to an excellent game of football between two decent sides. Both goals came within a minute of each other, Banik scoring with a tremendous scissor-kick volley from Tchur then Zofcak scoring with his first touch from a penalty a minute later. My thoughts were that Banik were slightly the better side but it could have gone either way. Thomas Repka was outstanding in defence for Sparta whilst their 17-year-old wonder kid Kadlec looks a fantastic prospect.

After the match I made my way back into the old town where I took in a film at the wonderfully grandiose Lucerna cinema - a must for anyone interested in film.

MATCH 5 - Sunday 1st November; 10.15pm; Divize Skupina B; at Stadion Kopané, U Meteoru, Libeň, Praha 8; **FK Meteor Praha VIII** (0) 1 FK Tabor (0) 0; Admission: 30 Kc; Programme: 10 Kc; Attendance: 125.

On Sunday morning I stepped out of my hotel, straight onto a number 24 tram and some 20-odd stops later, I was dropped off a hundred yards from the entrance to Stadion Kopane. I think that sums up just how good the Prague transport system can be - the tram network in particular is by far and away the best I have ever used.

Now Meteor Prague really is a very special place indeed. The fourth oldest club in the Czech Republic having formed in 1896, this place just oozes history. Tucked away in behind the beautiful Svataho Vojtecha church in the historic Liben district on the banks of the Vltava, this is one of the most well-preserved grounds I have been to in a long time. The astonishing low-slung wooden stand, decked out in British racing green and white, is in remarkable nick considering it was put up in the twenties. The wavy-warped roof carries the club name right across the fascia from left to right whilst to the right of the stand, another great Czech scoreboard/clock system. Opposite the stand, mature trees stand atop a bank from where the majority stood this morning - from here splendid views can be had of the Liben industrial chimneys behind one goal and the leafy parks of Strizkov beyond the other.

Inside the fragrant clubhouse before the match, team-sheets were readily available as was delicious rum and the ubiquitous sausage, bread, mustard and horseradish which was sold at all the matches I attended this weekend.

The game was excellent and one of the best of the weekend. End to end from the off and with chances galore as both sides shook off any hangovers with a 100% committed performance. Ficek scored for Meteor on 62 minutes and it proved the only goal as Meteor moved closer to the top of the table. One thing that did surprise me this weekend was the number of other groundhoppers at the games. Not only did I meet up with Iain here and another ex-pat, David, originally from

Doncaster, but there were a group of other young guys, possibly German, who made it the 60 kilometres or so to my next game in Benesov.

MATCH 6 - 2pm; Divize Skupina A; at Městský Stadion, Ke Stadionu, Benešov, Středočeském Kraji; **FK Benesov** (1) 1 SK Stakonice 1908 (0) 2; Admission: 30 Kc; Programme: None; Attendance: 133.

With a few thousand Krowns left and only a day left in the city, I decided to throw caution to the wind and booked a taxi to take me to the town of Benesov, situated directly south of Prague in beautiful forests of Central Bohemia. Trains do travel to Benesov but not at the time I needed one although on returning, I picked one up at 15.55 and this dropped me off at Vrsovice station in Prague at 16.35, a few hundred metres from my final game at Bohemians 1905.

Mestsky Stadion, situated on Ke Stadionu in the south western end of town is another splendid old ground which has seen better days and is all the better for having seen better days, if you see what I mean! A wonderful old stand with wooden bench seating and wooden fascia sits above the dressing rooms and club offices and is decked out in the club colours of blue and yellow. The pitch is surrounded by a high blue fence/cage and sits in the middle of a large oval, itself surrounded by lichen covered, crumbling terracing. Opposite the stand is a bank of open seating with runs the length of the pitch and affords great views of the action.

A great setting then for the game which saw Strakonice 1908 pinch the points in the fourth minute of injury time following the sending off of Benesov's captain. Although this is the same division as the Meteor game I saw earlier, the football was noticeably not as good and I would guess that both sides, currently in the wrong half of the table, will struggle this season. For the record this was the only game I failed to get a programme at although Iain was here a few weeks back and got one. Team sheets were handed out beneath the stand however. One final word about Benesov; this really did feel like it was a million miles away from the cosmopolitan capital I had left behind. The spectators were noticeably a little rougher round the edges, a few adopting that stereotypical east European 80's mullet-with headband look, although their passion and support for their team never wavered throughout. When the teams came out to Europe's 'The Final Countdown', that song never seemed more apt. The referee and linesmen suffered a torrid time at the hands of a few old boys sat in the open seating section who hollered and screamed throughout.

MATCH 7 - 5pm; Gambrinus Liga; at Ďolíček Stadion, Vršovická, Vrsovice, Praha 10, Czech Republic; **FC Bohemians 1905** (0) 0 FC Slovan Liberec (0) 1; Admission: 200 Kc; Programme: 35 Kc; Attendance: 5,847.

So, back in Prague for my final game of the weekend and the one I had perhaps been looking forward to most. Depending on who you believe, this was the 'Real Bohemians', not the 'fakes' from Strizkov or the 'new' Bohemians currently down in the regionals although all three are currently locked in battle fighting tooth and nail for the name and the iconic kangaroo logo. It would take a much more

knowledgeable man than myself to try and explain the exact situation behind the three Bohemians clubs so Mishi...it's over to you!

Here at Dolicek however, the small museum beneath the stand has all the information and artefacts from the club's proud club history and for nostalgia hunter like myself it was a dream. Photos from of the stadium, packed to the rafters decades ago adorn the walls as do concise lists of all Bohemians European adventures over the years, complete with attendances both home and away (13,000 here for the visit of Ipswich in the 80's). Don't miss it if your ever here as it's a splendid little place.

As for the fans tonight, they surpassed my expectations and were the noisiest, most colourful and passionate of the entire weekend (sorry Iain - you did a great job in the Banik end but these boys were outstanding!). Even though their team had gone the season serving up defensive 0-0's and 1-0 defeats, they never stopped singing throughout, even when Blazek scored a wonderful goal to win it for Liberec.

I had visited the stadium on Friday to pick up my ticket and was allowed in to watch the first team training. A single covered stand decked out with green seats runs the length of the pitch whilst the rest is open with Vrsovice apartment buildings towering above and looking down into the ground. The ultras stand behind the left-hand goal where there is a bank of seats whilst the 100 or so from Liberec were housed in a more open stand opposite. I loved this place as apart from the stand, it looks barely changed from those old photos of the glory days in the museum.

A visit to Prague's third club is a must if you are here for a football weekend.

So, seven games of varying quality over three days played in some atmospheric old stadiums, the kind which have long gone from the English game, this was a weekend that will live long in the memory. I spent around £300 which included flight, cheap accommodation, a travel-pass for 5 days (500 Kc) and all that football. Prague is not as inexpensive as people may lead you to believe, in fact it's rapidly catching up with other European cities, but if it's football you want, it has to be one of the cheaper countries in Europe in which to watch.

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