

TT No.86: Ian Hill - Czech Republic Six Match Hopping Weekend Special (6th - 8th Nov 2009) feat. **FC Vysocina Jihlava** (Czech Ligi II); **Loko Vltavin** (Czech Ligi CFL); **FK Teplice** (Czech Grambrinus Liga); **FK Viktoria Zizkov** (Czech Ligi II); **Bohemians Prague** (Czech Grambrinus Liga) and **Bohemians 1905** (Czech Grambrinus Liga).

Czech Republic Weekend.

Despite being based in Prague for the weekend, I would class this visit as a Czech Republic one rather than a Prague one. I arrived in Prague on the Friday morning thanks to Easyjet. This was mainly by luck as the early morning start left me just a touch tired and I went to the opposite end of Stansted Airport to where I should be. Thus, nearly missing the flight!

When I arrived in Prague, I had the problem of no change to buy a ticket, for the airport shuttle, from the machines located outside the terminal. So, after buying a bottle a coke I was on my way to the Dejvicka Metro station for the short journey into the Centre of Prague. Unfortunately, my hotel would not let me check in before 2.00pm so it meant lugging my rucksack to my first game of the day at Jihlava.

The plane ticket was booked well in advance before the Czech League fixtures were confirmed. I had hoped for a Dukla Prague game on the Friday night. Dukla were playing on that evening but unfortunately at Jihlava. The only other game I could find on the Friday evening was at Zlin which is over 4 hours from Prague so Jihlava it was.

MATCH 1 - Fri 6 November 2009; FC Vysocina Jihlava 3, Dukla Prague 4; Czech Ligi II; Admission: 60 KC; Programme: 12pp, free; Attendance: 1150.

The two-and-half-hour journey dragged a bit but I arrived in Jihlava with an hour to spare. Unfortunately, there is more than one railway station and I picked the wrong one. Armed with a map off the club website I somehow found my way through the outskirts of this deserted town and arrived at Stadion v Jiráskova ulici with 5 minutes to spare. Admission tickets are sold from a wooden shed outside the ground with programmes free on a shelf in front of it. The programme was a bit disappointing even though it was free. It consisted of a glossy colour cover with 8 pages inside and photocopied in black and white.

I then had to get past the very large stewards who wanted to search my rucksack. This lasted all of one second and I was into the stadium. The ground itself is a bit unusual as it has many contrasts. Jihlava play in yellow and blue and the colours predominate on three sides of the ground. A low-slung seated stand runs along the side of the pitch while the opposite side is not open to spectators. This side is dominated by a long row of club buildings with a VIP grandstand perched on top. The stand is quite exposed and must be freezing in winter. Behind one goal is a

small area of open terracing for the away supporters with the rest of the area closed down. The contrast comes at the other end of the ground with a massive fairly new seated stand decked out in red and white. This stand also has corporate boxes in the side wings. Looking at the club website it looks like the club has plans to rebuild the rest of the ground in the same style. Why? I don't know as they don't appear to be well supported. Jihlava do have one of the best mascots you will see in the form of a multi coloured hedgehog and he/she dispensed sweets out to the younger supporters.

The game was quite entertaining with both sides having difficulty defending. When Jihlava took the lead, it looked like they would comfortably take control of the game but Dukla hit back to lead 2-1 in the first half before Jihlava drew level just before half time. Dukla wearing their "famous" away kit - actually it looked like a "job lot" of Real Madrid away shirts took control in the second half to win 4-3.

A good opener to the weekend but I then had the dreaded walk back to the station.

MATCH 2 - Sat 7th November 2009; Loko Vltavin 1, Slovan Varnsdorf 0; Czech Ligi CFL; Admission: 40KC; Programme: 20pp, free; Attendance: 130 (HC).

A Saturday morning 10.15am kick off at Loko Vltavin for the third division game in the Holesovice district of Prague opened the day. Once again armed with directions I got completely lost coming out the Nadrazi Holesovice Metro station. Fortunately, once again I arrived 5 minutes before kick-off. Loko Vltavin was previously called Lokomotiva Prague and at the entrance of the ground the old club sign is still in place. Entrance is by the turnstiles at a garden table where admission tickets can be bought along with match programmes, lapel badges and pennants which depict the club's various crests over the years. The programme is a 20-page black and white photocopied issue. The stadium appears to be quite old and run down - just as I like them. Once again down one side of the pitch club buildings dominate with a few rows of seats in front. In front of the seats is a hedge which is quite unusual. Behind one goal is a small strip of hard standing with the opposite end closed. A new 3G pitch has been built at end with the hard standing. This is floodlit but the main pitch isn't.

Along the opposite length of the pitch is terracing which looks like it had once had bench seating along it that has been removed. The ground graders in England would have a fit about it but good on the Czech's for letting their grounds have some character.

Another thing that would have the authorities spluttering in England was the Varnsdorf supporter who had what looked like the largest wooden rattle in the world. It was so big I don't know how he turned it round. A very strong supporter indeed!

This game was poor with woeful finishing by both sides. It could easily have been 6-6 but the game was won by Loko with a penalty in the second half. Other facilities at the ground include a shabby clubhouse with obligatory sausage BBQ

outside. There is though something very special about this ground - a derelict volley ball "mini stadium" behind the main stand. Built in a bowl shape and armed with leaning floodlights it is a remarkable sight as it has high banked terracing all round but unfortunately is now being taken over by vegetation. Well worth a visit just to see this relic never mind a football match.

MATCH 3 - Sat 7th November 2009; **FK Teplice 1**, FC Baumeit Jablonec 0; Czech Grambrinus Liga; Admission: 120kr; Programme: 20pp, 20KC; Attendance: 6085.

After an afternoon in Prague I was on the train again for the one and half hour journey to Teplice. This time I was using a Google earth picture to find Stadion FK Teplice. I was quite worried that I was in for another long walk but fortunately I followed some Jablonec supporters who were on the same train and got there in 15 minutes. Tickets and programmes are sold from booths outside the stadium. The price on my ticket said 80 KC but I was charged 120. The programme was 20 pages full colour glossy but unfortunately A4 in size.

The ground is partly set on the top of a hill but looks like it has been built into the side of it. A reasonably new refurb, the old-style design makes it look older than it is and the acoustics are great. The remarkable thing about this ground is the food. I've never seen such a different array on offer compared to the rubbish served up in England. Yes, there were sausages but also noodles, fried rice, fried onions and potatoes, candy floss, fresh popcorn, sweets, corn on the cob, Georgian pies (a thick type of bread pizza), kebabs and finally spit roast whole chickens - absolutely fantastic.

The game itself was a top of the table clash and it proved to be a tight one. Once again, the finishing was awful and Teplice won the game with a fortunate goal. A shot was tipped onto the crossbar by Jablonec keeper; the ball rebounded and hit the back of his legs only to cross the line for the opener. Teplice should have won the game more comfortably but their Centre Forward spooned over from one yard out. The result was very harsh on Jablonec who were the better team on the day.

MATCH 4 - Sun 8th November 2009; **FK Viktoria Zizkov 2**, Slezsky FC Opava 2; Czech Ligi II; Admission: £5; Programme: 20pp, 10 KC; Attendance: 1280.

This was my second visit to Prague and I'd always wanted to watch a game here. On my first trip I watched Viktoria play at Bohemians Prague (the real Bohemians) so the Sunday morning 10.15am kick off was ideal. This ground is quite close to the centre of Prague. I caught a Metro to Hlavni Nadrazi (the main railway station) then tram 5 which goes under the railway line. Unfortunately, you cannot walk under this bridge so walking would take a long detour. The ground is a couple of minutes from the station in the slightly run down Zizkov area.

Prague has some fantastic old stadiums and even when they have been modernised, they still look run down and old. This ground is one of them and it is fantastic. Hemmed in on two sides by various large buildings the atmosphere inside the ground must be fantastic when it is full. Even with a Sunday morning kick off

the ultras behind the goal put on a bit of a display but the rest of the crowd was quite subdued. When Zizkov scored there was only a murmur of acknowledgement.

Entrance is by ticket from some booths at the front of the ground where you can also buy the nice 20-page full colour A5 programme. Programmes are also on sale inside the club shop which is in front of you as you enter the ground. A temporary stand is behind one goal with a combination of seats and terracing at the other. This is where the away supporters are located.

A small stand is located along one side of the pitch. This stand has been refurbished but looks quite old when you get inside it. Opposite is the former steep sided terrace which is now seated. Most of the locals preferred to stand at the top of this open stand.

Various sausages and (what look's-like) bread and raw onion were on sale throughout the game. Along with the hard to resist beer on sale at 90p per pint.

The stand out feature of this game was the performance of the Zizkov player Martin Pulkert. A real comedy performance as this bloke was awful. How he was not substituted I will never know. Zizkov took the lead half way through the first half but were undone with two goals either side of half time for Opava. Luckily, we had a happy ending as Viktoria hit back with a last-minute equaliser.

This was a really enjoyable visit and definitely on the "to do" list if you visit Prague.

MATCH 5 - Sun 8th November 2009; Bohemians Prague 2, 1.FC Brno 0; Czech Grambrinus Liga; Admission: 100 KR; Programme: 20pp, 20 KR; Attendance: 952 (official attendance - I don't think so).

The Bohemians saga where do you start? Two clubs using the Bohemians name in the same city. They play in the same coloured kits home and away. They both use the kangaroo in their club badges and both claim to be the Bohemians Prague football club. I could write for hours on this very complicated issue which still isn't resolved but I'll try and explain simply: -

Bohemians 1905 are a fantastic football club with a great history and a stadium in the Dolicek. The Dolicek is a great ground to watch football. It's a vibrant place and it makes a great day out.

Bohemians Prague were set up by the former owner of the Bohemians Prague 1905 club now known as Bohemians 1905. He previously took (I am told) the club into administration with the aim of liquidating it to wipe out the debts. The supporters wanted to keep the original club alive and pay off a proportion of the debts. This they did but not before the previous owner had registered the Bohemians Prague name for his new club.

1905 have retained the use of Dolicek even though the local authority wants them to move in with Slavia Prague. 1905 want to stay put and are trying to get funding from the authority to improve Dolicek. Bohemians Prague now play at the Strahov

Stadium which used to be the home of the Czech National side. Last season they played at Viktoria Zizkovs ground.

Bohemians Prague are the real impostor and should be known as their previous club name of Strizkov unfortunately it looks like there are going to be a lot of complex legal battles until this issue is resolved. The football public class 1905 as the real Bohemians as do, their former players.

Unfortunately, both sides were at home on the same time and day of my visit. I chose to go to Strahov as I had never seen a game there and out of curiosity. What a mistake. The trip up to Strahov was an arduous one. First by the funicular then walking up a very steep hill in the dark. As I approached the ground it looked like the game had been cancelled. With 10 minutes before kick-off I did not meet another person, it was deathly quiet and only the shining floodlights confirmed that the game was on. I paid 100 KC at the ticket both and picked up the 20-page A5 full colour programme for 20 KC here as well. The ground was deserted inside as I made my way into the stand after passing numerous tough looking stewards. They really did look up for a fight. I then found out I was in the away end with the pot smoking Brno supporters - all 8 of them. The main stand was open for the home supporters. It would be generous to say that there were 200 people in this stand which makes the official attendance of 952 a complete joke.

The running track at the ground makes watching not the best and with no atmosphere except for the Bohemians band I'd had enough. To be fair the band was quite good and could teach the England band a thing or two but that wouldn't be hard. So, I decided I was off to the Dolicek to see a real club play. Down the funicular and on tram 22 to Vrsovice I caught the last 30 minutes of the game.

MATCH 6 - Sun 8th November 2009; Bohemians 1905 1, 1.FK Pribram 0; Czech Grambrinus Liga; Admission: 120 KR; Programme: 48pp, 30 KR; Attendance: 5428.

The game was tense, the atmosphere electric and two 1905 players sent off. Bohemians 1905 helped their cause with a win which keeps them away from the relegation zone. I'm so glad I got to see some of the game as it was a great way to end the trip.

After the game I went to the Bohemians 1905 museum which is under the main stand. It's only small but they have some nice exhibits especially the stuffed kangaroo they brought back from Australia (it was alive at the time). Luckily, I spoke to the man in charge and had a really interesting conversation with him regarding what was happening at the club. He is looking to expand the museum in the future but the club is struggling for funding. If you do go to a game here pop in a make a donation because I know it will be appreciated and he is also looking to provide an information sheet for English visitors. The Bohemians 1905 programme is sold outside the ground before games and is a very good 48-page B4 colour glossy issue. PDF's of their programmes from this season can be viewed on their website. Back issues are also on sale in the club shop under the main stand.

Prague has a great selection of grounds and I would highly recommend that you invest in a street guide, if you visit, as most of the grounds throughout the Prague area are highlighted as is the name of the club that plays there. I also bought a three-day public transport pass at a metro station which covers trams, buses and the Metro. If you want to take in a game in Prague then visit Viktoria or the “real” Bohemians as they should not be missed even better visit both.

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