

TT No. 100: Ian Hill - Saturday 16th October 2010; **AIK Solna** v Gefle IF; Swedish Allsvenskan; Score: 2-0; Attendance: 10,449; Admission: 200 SEK; Programme: 20 SEK, 40 pages.

Another new Ryanair destination was in order to take in a game at the fantastic Rasunda Stadion on the outskirts of Stockholm City. Technically it's in the county of Solna but it's more like a suburb of Stockholm. AIK Solna are the current Swedish League and Cup winners but have fallen on hard times this season due to money troubles and an exodus from last season's squad. The Rasunda, which is also the home to the Swedish National side, will disappear in the 2012 as it will be replaced by the Swedbank Arena which is also located in Solna.

I flew into Stockholm Skavsta airport which is about 1 ½ hours by coach from Stockholm. The only public transport from the airport is by coach. Tickets must be purchased in advance inside the airport or on the internet. You can pay on the coach but it's by credit card only. It's also "first come first served" and that is a bit worrying as there was only one coach available.

Stockholm is a marvellous city and a sight-seeing tour was the order of the day before the fixture which had a 4.00pm kick off. I travelled to the Rasunda by taxi from the city centre which cost 150 SEK, which is around £15.00. Arriving 45 minutes before kick-off it was quite quiet and the ground looks more like an office complex from the outside than a football stadium. Tickets can be purchased from various ticket booths with the most expensive tickets 250 SEK down to 150 SEK behind the goals. I found Stockholm to be quite expensive so the prices were quite reasonable. AIK have two club shops selling the usually array of souvenirs but the prices were very expensive. Match programmes are on sale in the shop and it's a nice issue. B4 in size it consists of 40 pages on full colour glossy paper. Programmes are also on sale inside the ground but the sellers do not stand out.

I sat opposite the main stand which has a bit of an art deco look to it. The tall identical steep stands behind both goals really enclose the ground which has a 1930's feel to it. Unusually the floodlight masts are lower than the two stands behind the goals and are tucked into the corners. The main stand also has floodlights along the length of its roof. The sightlines where I sat were excellent and it's a real shame that this ground will disappear.

Despite the crowd being around 10,000, the AIK supporters really made some noise and created a real atmosphere for the duration of the game. The highlight was before the start as everyone (except me and the 30 Gefle supporters) stood up with their scarves raised to sing the club song "A vie e AIK". This was sung with some real gusto and it must be even better when the ground is full. The song is a reworking of the Roger Whittaker (come on you must remember him?) classic - "The Last Farewell".

The game itself was a relegation battle between second (Gefle) and third bottom (AIK). For this scrappy encounter AIK were led by their talisman centre forward Mohammed Bangura, unusually they have a Scottish Manager, Alex Miller, formerly assistant manager to Rafa Benitez at Liverpool. Miller's CV also includes the Managers job at Aberdeen, Jef United (Japan), Morton, St Mirren and Hibernian. Let's just say he's not very popular with the AIK supporters. Also, in the AIK squad is former Millwall player Kenny Pavey who was voted "Sweden's Dirtiest Player" last season and Antonio Flavio who certainly disproves the theory that all Brazilians are great footballers. AIK secured a 2-0 win to ease their relegation worries but it looks like the relegation places will not be decided until the final game of the season.

Despite their money worries AIK will have to decide where they will move to for the 2012 season. They have an option of buying the Rasunda for £50 million pounds, sharing the Swedbank Arena, building their own 30,000 capacity stadium or moving to the Stockholmsarenan stadium in Stockholm. The ideal solution would be the purchase of the Rasunda but the money issues will probably rule that one out.

07/20