

**TT No.114: Ian Hill** - Fri 5th Nov 2010: Dutch Jupiler Eerste League - **Sparta Rotterdam** 1-1 Helmond Sports; Attendance: 10.156; Admission: 10 Euros; Programme: 24 Pages - 90 Cents; FGIF Match Rating: 3\*.

#### The Club - Sparta Rotterdam

Sparta was first founded in 1887. This club was disbanded shortly afterwards. On April 1, 1888, several ex-members of the old Sparta founded a cricket club called Sparta. In July 1888, a football branch of the club was established. In 1890 Sparta played its first real football match, and in 1892 Sparta disbanded the cricket branch. Sparta was promoted to the highest league of Dutch football on April 23, 1893. In 1897, Sparta withdrew from the competition after continuous dubious arbitration of Sparta matches. However, the club continued to exist, and in 1899, the board of Sparta visited a match of Sunderland AFC. Impressed with the red-white jersey of the English club, the board decided that Sunderland's colours would henceforth be the colours of Sparta.

In 1905, Sparta initiated and organised the first home match of the Dutch national team, against Belgium. The match, won 4-0 by the Netherlands, was a rematch of a game two weeks prior, when the Netherlands beat Belgium 4-1 in Antwerp.

The first match at Sparta's new stadium, Het Kasteel (The Castle), in the Spangen area of west Rotterdam, was played on October 14, 1916. The stadium was renovated in 1999 and is still Sparta's stadium.

Until the 2002/2003 season Sparta Rotterdam had always played at the highest level, but they were relegated from the top-level Eredivisie in 2002. Sparta returned to the Eredivisie for the 2005-06 season. They were relegated again in 2010. On 20 August 2010 they equalled Ajax's Dutch league record win when they defeated Almere City FC 12-1, Johan Voskamp scoring an Eerste Divisie record 8 goals on his debut.

Sparta has won six national titles - 1909, 1911, 1912, 1913, 1915 and 1959 and three national cups - 1958, 1962 and 1966.

#### Getting There

The easiest way to get to The Castle is by tram from Rotterdam Central Station. Currently the Central Station area is being redeveloped but there are lots of signs to direct you to the tram stops. Travel is by PET card which must be purchased before you get on a tram or the Metro system. The cards can be purchased from ticket machines but with coins only or by credit card although visa was not accepted. The tickets cost 7.50 Euros from the machines but there is a small wooden shop that specifically sells them. I bought one here and it cost 5 Euros. As far as I am aware, they cannot be purchased on trams and every tram I travelled on had a conductor that checked everyone's ticket.

Tram 8 in the direction of Spangden drops you off right outside The Castle. It is also the same stop to get you back to the centre of Rotterdam. As you get off the tram your first view of the stadium is very atmospheric as you face the imposing front entrance. I read it described as looking like a haunted house out of a Scooby Do cartoon and the dim street lighting does give it a spooky feel.

### The Stadium

Next to the "spooky" entrance is a small club-shop which has a nice range of souvenirs. There is also an external hatch that is used to sell tickets. Sparta had a deal on for this game with tickets costing a bargain 10 Euros. The lady selling the tickets was very friendly and hoped I "enjoyed the game". Entrance is on the four corners of the ground and next to turnstiles are the floodlight columns which are located outside of the stadium.

The inside of the stadium is a typical Dutch design except for the "back" of the castle which contains hospitality facilities that face out onto the pitch. The capacity is 11,026 although the attendance for the game looked much less than the reported 10,156.

### Programmes

Programmes are on sale outside the ground next to the turnstile entrances. It's a nice 24-page A5 issue but as it's designed and produced by a company called Z Press, who seem to do a lot of work in the Dutch football league, its similar to the issues at Willem II, Roosendaal and Den Bosch. The club have a novel way of selling programmes and a smile goes a long way to persuade the locals to part with their cash.

### The Game

Most of the game was played in a torrential downpour so the quality was not good at times. I expected a Sparta win but they're in a poor run of form in the last few weeks. On this performance alone it looks like they will struggle to get back into the top division.

### Overall Impression

I really enjoyed this visit. It's a really friendly club with a great history and tradition. Well worth a visit.

07/20