

**TT No.136: Justin Holmes** - Sat 11th December 2010; **Girona** v Celta de Vigo; Spanish Segunda Division; Venue: Estadi Montilivi, Girona; Score: 1-1; Admission: €20.00; Programme: N/A; Attendance: 8310; Match Rating: 3.

In search of some winter sunshine, it's always something of a lottery which football match(es) you'll end up watching when booking flights to Spain - with games randomly scheduled less than a fortnight beforehand either on Saturday evenings or any time Sunday between lunch time and 10pm. I had harboured hopes of making a visit to the Camp Nou to watch Barcelona, but with their match scheduled for the Sunday evening - after I flew home - I ended up heading for the rather more humble surroundings of the Estadi Montilivi, home of Girona FC and one of the smallest stadia in the Segunda Division.

The Catalan city of Girona is located a half hour coach ride from Girona Costa Brava airport, and the historic, scenic and peaceful city certainly made a pleasant place to spend a weekend. The Estadi Montilivi is a brisk twenty-minute walk from the city centre, and I bought my ticket for a seat behind one of the goals for €20 from the ticket office portacabin outside the main stand. The stadium was only built in 1970, and although is small by Segunda Division standards, with a capacity of just 9,500, is a very neat and easy on the eye stadium. There is a continuous banking of uncovered red coloured seating all around the ground, apart from the main stand, which has been rebuilt in the last couple of years. Large concourses behind the seating made for a good - and tolerated - vantage point for persons preferring to stand. Girona usually only half fill the ground for their matches, however this evening the game was almost full to capacity - virtually the only free space in the ground was an area adjacent to the small corner pocket of away fans for security reasons. Indeed, tonight's attendance turned out to be the new record attendance at the Estadi Montilivi. Quite why there was such a large attendance is something of a mystery to me, with Girona not in good form, this wasn't a local derby, with the visitors coming from the west coast of Spain - but this was the hundredth match Girona have played at this level, maybe this was some of the reason, although I didn't sense that a great deal was made of this.

It could be considered that Girona are punching above their weight somewhat in the Segunda Division, this only being their third season at that level having previously played in the lower leagues right back to 1958. So, it is not surprising that Girona find themselves in the lower half of the table, and were not in good form, with three draws and one defeat in the last four games, although they do have clear breathing space to the relegation places. This evening's visitors, Celta de Vigo, have a much stronger pedigree. They have spent most of their existence in the Primera Division, although since their relegation to the Segunda Division - hindered by financial problems - they have settled in the lower reaches of the Segunda Division. Things are looking much more promising for Celta this season

though, up in second place, just three points behind leaders Real Betis, and had only lost once in their last fourteen games.

The game started with Girona have the better of the early exchanges, although they seemed to lack quality in the final third to open the scoring. The visitors slowly came into the game and took the lead on the half hour, when David Catala just beat the keeper to a cross to head home. Celta de Vigo looked the stronger side for the rest of the first half, and deservedly took a slender lead into half time. After the break, the home side came back into the game and got back on level terms when Luso smashed home from a low cross. There were few real chances for either side for the rest of the game, and a 1-1 draw was a fair reflection on the game. This was an entertaining evening of football - I always enjoy the special atmosphere that one finds at football games in Spain, one which was augmented tonight by a passionate capacity crowd and who were aided by drummers playing a constant beat to add a Mediterranean feel to the atmosphere.

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