

**TT No.162: *Justin Holmes*** - Sat 22nd January 2011; **Newport County** v **Rushden & Diamonds**; Blue Square Premier; Venue: Spytty Park, Newport; Score: 1-3; Admn: £14.00; Programme: £2.80; Attendance: 1743; Match Rating: 3.

After enjoying a very rare rugby match the night before during my weekend in Newport, I was rather indecisive as to whether to go to the bigger game at Newport County, or a more tranquil and intimate game in the Welsh League at nearby Caerleon. In the end, I plumped for Caerleon, swayed by being able to visit beforehand the impressive Roman remains that are to be found in this charming village. However, upon arriving at the Cold Bath Lane home of Caerleon, not even the goalposts being in situ indicated that this game had been postponed, and so I headed back to Newport and made the 40-minute walk to the west of the City to Spytty Park, also known as Newport Stadium.

It is difficult to develop any kind of affection for a football ground which doubles up as an athletics venue, and Spytty Park is no different, as spectators are, for the most part, distant from the action with a running track in between the fans and the pitch and the ground has a very open feel to it - particularly unwelcome on a bitterly cold day with a biting wind, as today. Covered stands are to be found along either length of the pitch, one all seater, one all standing. Behind one of the goals, a limited number of spectators were able to watch from close to the touchline. Away supporters were allocated a shallow uncovered terrace far behind the other goal, behind the running track. The programme was a very reasonable effort, with plenty of interesting articles to digest as well as the necessary stats and facts of both teams.

On paper, Newport would have appeared to have been favourites for this game, as they found themselves just one point and one place away from the play-off places after being promoted as champions from the Blue Square South last season. However, they are winless since the turn of the year and have lost four of their last five games, drawing the other, and have suffered the disruption of losing their manager, Dean Holdsworth. Rushden and Diamonds appear to be heading for a rather uneventful season, currently in 13th place in the league, well clear of the relegation places but also well adrift of the promotion play-off positions. They came into this game in even worse form than Newport though, having not won in 11 games since 30th October.

Rushden and Diamonds looked the better side right from the start and it was no surprise when they took the lead on 19 minutes when Michael Gash turned in from close range after an Aaron O'Connor cross was played back across goal by Ryan Charles. Seven minutes later and Newport were given the chance of an equaliser when a rash tackle from Curtis Osano brought down Craig Reid almost on the touchline when there seemed to be no immediate danger. Danny Rose scored with a confidently taken penalty high into the net for an equaliser they barely deserved. So, it was little surprise when Rushden went back into the lead on 40

minutes when Aaron O'Connor rounded the keeper and tapped into an empty net, and the 1-2 half time score-line was a reasonable reflection on the first half. The second half was quite an even affair with chances thin on the ground, but just as it looked like Rushden would hold out for a deserved win, Newport were awarded a second penalty for handball by Luke Prosser. After his excellently taken first penalty, Rose unfortunately struck a rather tame shot at a good height to the keeper's left, which was comfortably saved by Joe Day. The miss proved to be extremely costly, as on the counter attack, Rushden scored at the other end through Matt Johnson, to give Rushden a two-goal lead which they held onto for a deserved and long overdue victory.

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