

**TT No.192: *Justin Holmes*** - Sat 5th March 2011; **FC Clacton** v Kirkley & Pakefield; Eastern Counties League Prem Division; Venue: Rush Green Bowl, Clacton-on-Sea; Score: 3-0; Admn: £6.00; Prog: £1.20; Att: 87; Match Rating: 3.

Continuing my recent unintentional trend of visiting seaside towns which would be far more pleasant during the summer months than on the dank, drizzly early Spring days I chose, during my weekend's stay in Clacton-on-Sea I took in the Eastern Counties League Premier Division match between FC Clacton and Lowestoft based Kirkley and Pakefield - the first ever match between the two clubs in Clacton.

The Rush Green Bowl is located about a half hour walk west of Clacton rail station, and is a surprisingly pleasant venue - surprising in that it's not a scenic ground nor has any particular traditional charm, but it is spacious, located in a bowl with grass banks around two thirds of the pitch and has some unique character about the place. It was slightly surprising to note the roadside board advertising the match still states Clacton Town - FC Clacton's predecessor club which ceased to exist in 2007 - as do various other signs around the ground including the entrance sign to the clubhouse.

As one enters the ground from a corner behind one of the goals, there is a modern bricked clubhouse to the right set beneath the pitch. Between the clubhouse and the pitch, there is just hard standing. Behind the other goal is a modern metallic stand covering flat standing area, along one side of the pitch is a stand offering three wooden steps for seating. Along the other length of the pitch is mostly hard standing, except for an interesting little stand called the Bus Shelter - needless to say, that's what the stand resembles - and the authentic bus stop sign attached to the stand is a nice little touch. Just the unique bit of character which can make County League grounds interesting to visit. This stand is also where the passionate fans of FC Clacton congregate, and indeed, their regular vociferous chanting support of the team was mightily impressive for a County League game. The grass banks also make for a good, elevated view of the action.

FC Clacton won the Eastern Counties League Programme of the Year award last season, and they certainly seem to have maintained those standards this season. At £1.20, it costs more than the average County League programme, but with a minimum of advertising and all the information you could want - pen-pics of both teams, extensive current news and history of the club, plenty of interesting articles to read and all of the required stats and facts, this was a very good programme which was excellent value for money, both for regular and occasional spectators.

It's fair to say there's not much left to play for either side this season, with FC Clacton in 13th place in the 22-team league, with Kirkley and Pakefield five places better off, but by only five points and with Clacton having played a game less, so these were two seemingly evenly matched teams. FC Clacton were in pretty poor

form though, having only claimed a win and a draw from their last six league games. Today's visitors had won their last two games, but lost their two previous games. Coincidentally, both FC Clacton and Kirkley & Pakefield had both lost away to Leiston in their last league game - although there's no shame in that, considering Leiston are running away with the Eastern Counties League this season. When the two teams met in Suffolk in the league back in November, FC Clacton secured a 2-0 win.

On a cold, overcast day with occasional misty rain, with this match attracting FC Clacton's second lowest attendance this season, the home side started the game very much on the front foot and fully deserved to take an early lead on three minutes when a cross was headed towards goal by Ray Turner and Luke Coleman headed past the keeper with his back to goal from 8 yards. The home side continued to look the more threatening throughout the first half and missed some glorious chances to extend their lead, whilst the visitors barely posed a threat, and it was something of a surprise that FC Clacton went into the interval with just a one goal lead.

In the second half, the game was much more even, and although FC Clacton started off the second half quite strongly - fluffing two one-on-one situations in quick succession, one screwed horribly wide and the other unluckily hitting the post, Kirkley and Pakefield then became the more dominant force for about 20 minutes, for the most part without really looking like scoring although Clacton's keeper needed to stay alert with several routine saves, and they were left to rue not being able to create chances when Clacton scored a second goal on 85 minutes when Luke Coleman calmly lifted the ball over the keeper in a one-on-one situation for his second goal on his home debut after being put through by Lee Peacock after he drove forward from deep inside his own half. A couple of minutes later and the visitors had an excellent chance to pull a goal back but an excellent strike by Toby Kerlake from outside the penalty area struck the crossbar, and then with just about the last kick of the game, Clacton secured a hugely flattering 3-0 score-line as well as the league double over Kirkley and Pakefield when Martin Calver displayed good composure to control the ball and then loop it over the keeper and into the net from the edge of the penalty area.

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