

**TT No.211: Justin Holmes** - Sat 26th March 2011; **Horsham** v Hastings United; Ryman League Premier Division; Venue: Gorings Mead, Horsham; Score: 1-1; Admission: £10.00; Programme: £2.00; Attendance: 251; Match Rating: 2.

The ridiculous timing of England's match against Wales in Cardiff at 3pm on Saturday did not remotely tempt me into missing a non-league game, although where I ended up was not even on my radar when setting out. Severe disruption to trains meant my original plan to visit Fareham Town or one of the Littlehampton clubs was scuppered, leaving a Sussex derby in the Ryman League as the best of the remaining options.

Horsham currently play at Gorings Mead, home of Horsham YMCA, after leaving their delightfully traditional Queen's Street ground and a season at Worthing's Woodside Road ground. Horsham have been lucky to be able to play at a ground almost adjacent to their old ground - although the sight of new houses where their ground was located was sad to see - but presumably things will get tricky next season as the landlords of Gorings Mead, Horsham YMCA, are almost certain of relegation to the Sussex County League, a league which does not allow groundshares and which meant that Horsham had to play at Worthing when YMCA were last in the Sussex League a couple of years ago. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the traditionally lowly status of Horsham YMCA, Gorings Mead, which is located on the outskirts of Horsham and about a 20-minute walk from the train station, is very basic with a strong County League standard feel to the place, although it does have a nice rural, unpretentious feel. Along one side of the ground is a small all-seater stand, with two very small portable type stands, one offering seating, the other standing, On the opposite side is a small, old fashioned stand offering terrace steps set some way back from the pitch. The rest of the ground just has hard standing. The 64-page programme was of a very good standard, plenty to read and digest, printed on good quality paper, attractively designed with lots of colour - including recent match photos, the only downside would be the high proportion of adverts - 31 pages exclusively containing adverts, not including player sponsorship.

When the two teams met earlier this season in Hastings, Horsham had three players sent off but still somehow managed to hold on to win 3-2. This was just about the only factor pointing away from a drab tussle between two struggling teams, in 17th and 18th place in the 22-team league, both having played the same number of games and with Horsham a point better off. With four teams relegated, both teams are in real danger, Hastings five points clear of fourth from bottom and six points clear of third bottom Folkestone Invicta, but both of these teams have two games in hand. After a calamitous middle third of the season which saw Hastings part company with their manager and many of their players and went on a run of 10 straight league defeats - and one point from 13 games - around Christmas, their form has picked up recently with three wins in their last five

games, but Horsham have been in poor form, picking us just three points from draws from their last six games and haven't won in the league since late January.

On a rather misty and muggy afternoon on what was an awful pitch - hard, bobbly with unpredictable bounce - the first half of this game was a rather forgettable affair, with Hastings in particular lacking any cohesion and playing far too many stray passes. Horsham looked the stronger team and they took the lead on 11 minutes when a long ball was flicked on and Ashley Robinson showed good composure to lob the ball past the keeper and into the net from just outside the penalty area. The rest of the half was a drab affair, except for Horsham's Ben Andrews forcing a wonderful point-blank save from the Hastings keeper, Seb Barton.

In the second half, Hastings showed much more urgency and application than they had in the first, although they still seemed to lack the quality needed to get back into the game as Horsham looked quite comfortable. However, the game changed midway through the second half when Horsham's captain Ben Andrews, who was playing his first game in six weeks due to injury, was shown a yellow card for handball just outside the penalty area. Excessive verbals to the assistant referee earned Andrews an early bath, the fourth Horsham to be sent off against Hastings this season, and from this point on, Hastings took total control of the match. After a couple of gilt-edged chances, Hastings did get back on level terms on 75 minutes when Ross Sutton played in a superbly judged cross deep into the box and Ollie Rowe firmly headed home from 8 yards out. From looking desperately poor in the first half, Hastings really should have claimed the win with several more excellent chances to score, but in the end, it was a point apiece, which became a better result on learning that both Aveley and Folkestone had lost today.

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