

TT No.230: *Justin Holmes* - Wednesday 6th April 2011; **Clymping** v Lancing; Sussex County League Division 2; Venue: Clymping Village PF, Clymping; Score: 1-3; Admn: £5.00; Prog: £1.00; Att: 47; Match Rating: 3.

Motivated by a gloriously sunny day more akin to July than early April and an early evening fixture, I decided to take the afternoon off of work at the last minute and head to the West Sussex coast for an interesting looking game between two teams at opposite ends of the league table - Lancing having been the class act in the division all season, and Clymping's wretched season recently having hit rock bottom, prompting an almost total regrouping of their first team.

Clymping is located a couple of miles west of Littlehampton, and being such a sunny afternoon, I got off the train at Ford station and walked along the River Arun to Littlehampton, about a half hour walk which, with the South Downs and Arundel Castle forming pleasant scenery, was most enjoyable. The tiny village of Clymping was about another half hour walk from central Littlehampton, with the ground conveniently located adjacent to the man Littlehampton to Bognor Regis road - one which I managed to avoid walking along, using quiet country roads instead.

The name of the ground, the Clymping Village Playing Fields, gives the game away somewhat as to what kind of ground this is. It has the feel and look of a tranquil, rural ground that is, in truth, above its station with hosting senior football - indeed, should Clymping get relegated back to the intermediate level Division 3 of the Sussex League this season as is looking extremely likely, it's hard to imagine that their ground would pass current ground gradings to allow them to be promoted back into Senior football without significant improvements being undertaken. The ground has two small covered areas either side of dugouts and hard standing along this length of the pitch, and there is a clubhouse behind one corner of the pitch where spectators enter the ground - these are the only facilities the ground has, with no seating nor floodlights (hence tonight's 6pm kick-off), the ground is not fully enclosed and the pitch is shared with the cricket club. The programme, frankly, was an embarrassment, possibly the worst I have ever encountered in following football, with a badly copied photocopied front cover and absolutely nothing contained within it apart from adverts and the centre fold containing team-sheets with no names - all for £1. A rather cynical "effort" to avoid a possible league fine for not producing a programme, I would speculate.

As suggested previously, this has been a season of wildly contrasting fortunes for Clymping and Lancing. Lancing currently top the league, as they have done for most of the season and, with a ground that is one of the best in the whole Sussex League, are destined for promotion to Division 1, as they are eight points clear of fourth placed Bexhill United, with three games in hand. Clymping have certainly hit the buffers this season after a quite remarkable rise from the West Sussex League to Division 2 of the Sussex County League after consecutive promotions, and finishing in sixth place in their first season in Senior football. This season has

been calamitous though, bottom of the table for most of the season, have shipped 112 goals so far and lost 23 from 29 league games, and hadn't won a game until 27th December. Shame was heaped on to a miserable season a fortnight ago, when their game at home to Storrington had to be abandoned when a Clymping forward headbutted the referee, resulting in a hospital stay for the official. This sorry affair prompted a clearing of the decks for Clymping, who parted company with their manager and most of their team with mostly more local youngsters. Lancing triumphed 7-1 when the two teams met earlier in the season in late January.

On a lovely sunny and warm evening, Lancing would have been expected to run up a convincing victory, however the game was surprisingly even, and if anything, Clymping perhaps just edged possession without ever really looking like they would score. Lancing took the lead however on 20 minutes, when Richard Hudson struck a perfectly placed freekick from 25 yards out giving the keeper no chance. 0-1 was how it stayed at half time, with the score-line slightly harsh on Clymping. It was even harsher on the home side when Lancing doubled their lead three minutes after the break, with another excellent free kick, almost identical to their first, this time struck by Lee Garnham. Clymping got back into the match with an hour on the clock, when a powerful shot was gathered by the Lancing keeper Alex McCarthy, but he somehow allowed the ball to spill out of his hands, allowing Scott Towers to tap in from a couple of yards out. A much more deserved score-line for Clymping, and the match in no way reflected the vast gulf between the teams in their league placings, however, Clymping's hopes of getting something from the game were virtually extinguished on 74 minutes when a Lancing forward was brought down in the box with a clumsy lunge, and Daniel Turner sent the keeper the wrong way from the penalty spot. One felt that this would kill the game off and this is how it proved, and Lancing had a couple of presentable chances to extend their lead further, but in the end, the result was predictable although Clymping deserve credit for making a real game of it, and meant that Lancing require just one more point from their remaining six league games whilst Clymping would appear doomed to relegation bar insufficient clubs being eligible for promotion.

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