

TT No.236: *Justin Holmes* - Sat 9th April 2011; **AFC Porth** v Caerleon; Welsh League Division 2; Venue: Dinas Park, Dinas; Score: 0-0; Admission incl. programme: £3.00; Attendance: 58 (h-c); Match Rating: 2.

Having booked a coach ticket to Cardiff some time ago, today would be my first taste of football in the Welsh valleys this year. A visit to a Welsh League football ground is more often than not a thoroughly pleasant experience, with absolute gems aplenty. Dinas Park, home of AFC Porth, is no exception, and the experience today was certainly augmented by a gloriously sunny and warm afternoon.

Once I arrived in Cardiff, I headed northwards by train to Dinas (Rhondda), about a 45-minute journey, with Dinas Park about a ten-minute walk from the station. There is nothing to entertain or refresh oneself en route to the ground, no pubs nor shops, but the ground is set in a beautiful location, albeit next to a busy main road, which does detract slightly from a lovely, rural setting.

Dinas Park is situated at the bottom of a valley, with large imposing hillsides forming a very scenic background behind both lengths of the pitch. There is one fairly small covered stand by the half way line containing terrace steps, and the views of the action are excellent wherever one chooses to stand or sit, as the perimeter hard standing is set above the pitch, and with stone steps of grass banking to sit or stand on, as well as several benches.

A refreshments building is located behind one of the goals. The very weathered, tin roof, could certainly do with a lick of paint or similar to make it look as neat as the rest of the ground is. There is little chance of emotions boiling over between the two dugouts - they are on opposite sides of the pitch, and as is fairly common in the Welsh League, Dinas Park does not have floodlights. The programme, which was included with admission, was a reasonable effort, consisting of a 16-page loose insert with plenty of information about the background to today's game inside 36 pages of predominantly, advertising.

Interestingly, considering we are now in mid-April, today was the first meeting between the two sides this season. Both sides may harbour faint hopes of claiming one of the three promotion places, although it would take a superb effort from either team to make it. Going into this game, AFC Porth were in ninth place in the 18-team league, 12 points adrift of third placed Cwmaman Insitute, but with two games in hand. Today's visitors, Caerleon had been on a great run, winning seven out of eight games before losing last time out, and found themselves in fifth place, seven points adrift of Cwmaman having played the same number of games, and so an immediate return to Division 1 after being relegated for the first time in ten years last season looks unlikely.

The fine setting and fine weather were, unfortunately, not matched by a fine game which, whilst not lacking in endeavour, was certainly lacking in quality, with far too many stray passes, swing and misses and long balls hoofed forwards.

Caerleon had the better of the first half, whereas AFC Porth shaded the second period. Half chances came and went sporadically throughout the match, and although a goalless draw was a fair, accurate reflection of the match, and which had seemed inevitable from early on in the game, Caerleon will feel very unlucky not to have claimed all three points in the end, as in the closing minutes, first an easy tap in at the far post was denied brilliantly by a wonderful last gasp tackle from inside the six yard box, followed by Caerleon hitting the bar deep into injury time.

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