

TT No.244: *Justin Holmes* - Tues 12th April 2011; **Hurstpierpoint** v Uckfield Town; Sussex County League Division 3; Venue: Fairfield Recreation Ground, Hurstpierpoint; Score: 3-0; Admn: Nil; Prog: £1.00; Att:14; Match Rating: 4.

Fine weather and an early evening kick off once again tempted me to a midweek fixture this evening, and although Burgess Hill Town throwing open their doors with free admission for their Ryman League Division 1 South game against Leatherhead was a serious last minute temptation, the lure of visiting a new ground in the Sussex County League swayed my vote.

Hurstpierpoint's home ground, the Fairfield Recreation Ground, is located about a 40-minute walk westwards from Hassocks rail station, via the moderately charming village of Hurstpierpoint. The ground, which is shared with the cricket and stoolball clubs, is extremely basic - but certainly sufficient for their level of support and for the intermediate division of the Sussex County League. All the ground consists of is railing and semi-hard standing along one length and behind one of the goals. The ground is open with a nice rural feel to it - although one imagines it would be rather bleak and windswept in the middle of winter, and the pitch has a considerable slope towards one of the goals. The clubhouse, which is set some way away from the pitch but en route from the main road to the pitch, would not win any awards for design inside or out, but certainly has a friendly feel. Programmes can be purchased from the bar, and tonight's offering was, considering the level, superb. Consisting of 24 pages, it is printed in colour with a very attractive design and all of the essential information and stats - it's a programme that puts certain Division 1 and 2 clubs to shame. Indeed, I have found many clubs in Division 3 to produce surprisingly excellent programmes.

Hurstpierpoint have had a rather remarkable transformation this season. Always having been the Steady-Eddies of the Sussex County League Division 3, having entered the division in its inaugural season in 1983/4, they have remained there ever since, although they finished seven points adrift at the bottom of the division last season, only reprieved as there was to be no relegation last season. This season however, they are flying high in second place. Although they cannot be champions - runaway leaders Dorking Wanderers have already been crowned Champions, and surely, they will not be eligible for promotion that a top two place would usually be sufficient for due to their very basic facilities, this will go down as the most successful season in Hurstpierpoint's history. They have already gained more points in a season than ever before, and are well on course to beat their best league placing of fifth. They have experienced a little wobble of late, losing three of their last four league games. There is little left for Uckfield Town to play for this season, down in 12th place in the sixteen-team league, although with the two teams below them having games in hand, a finish as low as third bottom is on the cards. However, earlier in the season, Uckfield triumphed by 3-2.

On a pleasant sunny evening, and Hurstpierpoint's last home game of the season before four away games to close the season with, this was a surprisingly even match, with Uckfield having as much possession as the home side, although Hurstpierpoint always seemed to have that little bit of extra class. They went ahead on 5 minutes with a fierce strike that seemed to go straight through the goalkeeper, who was possibly blinded by the low sun. They doubled their lead about ten minutes later, and two-nil was how it remained at half time, but there was never a feeling that that would be sufficient to win the game, with Uckfield looking lively and determined. Hurstpierpoint did finally put the game to bed midway through the second half, and then Uckfield faded in tandem with the daylight as Hurstpierpoint secured a deserved win but with a very flattering score-line.

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