

TT No.250: *Justin Holmes* - Sunday 17th April 2011; **Tunbridge Wells** v Erith Town; Kent Senior Trophy Final 2011; Venue: Park View Road, Welling; Score: 1-3; Admission with Programme: £7.00; Attendance: 401; Match Rating: 3.

A second visit in two days to south-east London today, within a few miles of where I went for yesterday's game, to watch the Kent Senior Trophy Final at Park View Road, the shared home of Welling United and Erith and Belvedere. I was hardly going as a neutral observer today, Tunbridge Wells being the club I spent many a Saturday afternoon in my younger years, and so I went very much in the hope that they might put an end to a long, barren run of 23 years without lifting any silverware.

Park View Road, which has tended to be the venue for the Kent Senior Trophy Final in recent years, has always been one of my favourite grounds at non-league level, combining the look and feel of a traditional football ground full of character with a sprinkling of modern facilities. Along one length of the pitch is a low old-fashioned all-seater stand dating from the 1950's which runs virtually for the length of the pitch, with a low roof and plenty of obstructing pillars to obscure one's view. On the other side is a small modern all-seater stand, which was built when Erith and Belvedere moved into Park View Road, with Erith and Belvedere's clubhouse located alongside, with a sloping roof coming almost down to ground level and with hard standing between it and the pitch. Behind both goals are small banks of uncovered terracing. Trees behind one of the goals adds a touch of colour to an otherwise urban ground. A programme was included with admission and was a fairly typical cup final programme at this level - pen-pics of both teams and how each team made it to the final, but a fairly boring programme with little to retain one's interest.

Considering Hythe Town and Herne Bay are the class acts of the Kent League this season, both far ahead of the rest of the league in the chase for the title, two unlikely teams had made today's final. However, these would appear to be two fairly even teams, with fifth placed Erith Town against sixth placed Tunbridge Wells, Erith Town two points better off but have played a game more. Both teams deserved their big day out though, Erith Town having been drawn away in each of the three rounds on the road to the final, which included beating Hythe Town on penalties, and Tunbridge Wells winning 6-1 at Kent County League outfit Phoenix Sports and away at currently third placed VDC Athletic. Neither side came into this game in any kind of form though, Tunbridge Wells had lost their previous three games, whilst Erith Town had not won in their last nine games. Tunbridge Wells received a massive boost ahead of kick off though, when Carl Cornell, second top scorer in the Kent League with 18 goals, who was given almost no chance of recovering from injury, was named in the starting line-up. In the league fixtures this season, Erith Town triumphed 4-3 away, whilst a 0-0 draw was the result at Erith Town.

On a perfect day for a cup final - a warm and sunny afternoon with barely a cloud in the sky - the game started unsurprisingly evenly, with neither side able to dominate early proceedings. Erith Town opened the scoring on 13 minutes, when a long throw-in was flicked on and Alex Tisse headed goal-wards without any real power but with enough to loop into the net past an unsighted Mikele Czanner, the Tunbridge Wells keeper. Tunbridge Wells were back on terms on 29 minutes with a calamitous error by the Erith Town goalkeeper, who took an age to control a back-pass and decide where he wanted to launch the ball - by the time he did finally make his mind up, his clearance hit Tunbridge Wells forward Keelan Mooney on his back and the ball ricocheted into the back of the net. 1-1 was how it stood at half time, which was a fair reflection of proceedings.

Tunbridge Wells, backed by a very impressive turnout of fans, had the better of the match in the second half, carving out plenty of half chances, but they were made to pay for their lack of a clinical finish when Tisse scored his second of the game, after a jinking, mazy run into the box, followed by a cool finish. This was quite harsh of Tunbridge Wells, but they continued to have the better of play, still without managing to score that crucial goal, and the game was put to bed four minutes from time thanks to another excellent finish, a volley from 25 yards out by Peter Smith which flew into the roof of the net. There was no time left for Tunbridge Wells, as Erith Town held out for their first major silverware in their history to send their very small support into celebration and the vast majority of the crowd home disappointed.

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