

TT No.261: *Justin Holmes* - Mon 25th April 2011; **Ascot United** v Bracknell Town; Hellenic League Premier Division; Venue: Ascot Racecourse, Ascot; Score: 1-1; Admn: £5.00; Programme: £1.00; Attendance: 124; Match Rating: 3.

At the conclusion of my first Bank Holiday Monday game at Egham, I hopped on the train for the 15-minute journey over the Berkshire border to Ascot, for my first ever taste of Hellenic League action. The match would be a local derby, with Ascot and Bracknell separated by just three miles, although there is hardly history between the two sides, this season is the first that the two teams have met in the league, this being only the second season Ascot have played at this level of football since promotion, whereas Bracknell have spent the last 25 seasons playing Isthmian League and Southern League football, although an horrendous last season saw them relegated having lost 40, out of 42 games and conceded a whopping 187 goals in the process.

Ascot United's home ground is about a twenty-minutes' walk from Ascot rail station, passing Ascot Racecourse's imposing grandstand and walking under a section of the racecourse en route. As its name suggests, the ground is located adjacent to the racecourse and is certainly one of the neatest, most immaculately kept football grounds I have encountered, and has an extremely attractive location. As one enters the ground, there is a modern, spacious clubhouse which has a balcony offering a small area of covered standing, and to the other side as one enters is a small modern all-seater stand, both of which are located along one length of the pitch. This is the extent of the facilities on offer, with hard standing along the other length and behind one of the goals, and just grass standing behind the other goal. Behind this goal the racecourse passes close by, with the main grandstand visible in the distance. Colourful trees all around the ground complete a very pleasant, tranquil and rural setting for football. Indeed, all in all, I was left with the impression of a very friendly, sensibly ambitious football club with plenty of people behind the scenes who care a great deal for their club. The programme was the only slight disappointment, consisting for the most part of adverts and club notices, although it did have teams, league table, a potted history of Ascot United, plus club and player information of today's visitors.

On this, the final day of the league season (bar one stray inconsequential match), there was nothing much for either side to play for today, with Ascot United guaranteed at least 12th place in the 22-team league, although a win may move them up to 11th. Bracknell Town found themselves in 15th place, which was as high as they could finish, but surely, they will just be happy to have had a season of consolidation. Earlier in the season, Ascot United triumphed 3-0 at Bracknell.

On a hot and sunny afternoon with the pitch unsurprisingly hard and dusty, the first half was quite a dull affair very much with an end-of-season feel about it, with neither side really testing the goalkeeper. However, just a few minutes after the restart and Bracknell were awarded a penalty after poor defending allowed the

Bracknell striker to advance towards goal close to the touchline before being brought down. The penalty was duly converted by Harry Swabey as he sent the keeper the wrong way. However, it was not long until the home side were back on level terms, when the ball fell to Jon Bennett close to the touchline and he smashed it in off the underside of the bar from a tight angle. The game had certainly become much more entertaining than in the first half, played at a higher tempo with both sides carving out reasonable chances, but in the end, the points were shared, confirming Ascot's best ever league placing of 12th, whilst Bracknell finished in 16th place.

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