

TT No.262: Justin Holmes - Wednesday 27th April 2011; **Rustington** v Loxwood; Sussex County League Division 2; Venue: Recreation Ground, Rustington; Score: 1-0; Admn and Programme: Donation; Att: 34; Match Rating: 2.

With the season drawing to a close and neither team having much left to play for this season, attending this game certainly fell into the category of the day out to a pleasant location and ticking off one of my few remaining unvisited Sussex League grounds rather than the game itself being particularly appealing. And so, for what may well turn out to be my last senior game of this season in England, I headed down to the West Sussex coast to the eastern fringes of Littlehampton.

The home of Rustington is located about a twenty minute walk from Angmering rail station, and is another of the football grounds in the Sussex League Division 2 that, however nice and tranquil the setting, is, with all due respect, not really fit for purpose in hosting Senior football these days, so basic are the facilities. Certainly, should Rustington be relegated, one cannot imagine how they would ever be promoted back into this Division without considerable ground improvements. The ground has hard standing around most (but not all) of the pitch, which is railed off, but this is the extent of the facilities, no cover nor seating is present. The ground is not enclosed, nor does it have floodlights. One imagines it would be problematic carrying out extensive improvements due to this being a recreation ground, it is shared with the cricket club, and with residential housing all around. The clubhouse, which is quite close to the pitch, has quite a unique building block type design and is homely inside, although does have a rather seventies feel to it. Credit for an excellent looking pitch which was grassy throughout, no mean feat considering the very prolonged dry and warm weather there has been in this part of the world in recent weeks. Since entering the Sussex County League, Rustington had the reputation of producing excellent programmes - either this is no longer the case or I caught the club on a bad evening, as all the offering was tonight was eight pages printed on paper, three of which containing solely advertising and the only remotely informative information being the likely line-up of the home team and the next home game. But it should be pointed out that this was given away free by a gentleman walking around asking for a donation for admission - more evidence of a club not really taking their senior status very seriously, although this may be an isolated occurrence due to this being an end of season midweek fixture.

It is fair to say that there was not too much riding on this match, although Loxwood would finish the season in fourth place, which would be their highest ever placing, should they gain one win from their remaining two league games - before tonight's match, they lay in fifth place. They have been in terrific form of late too, winning their last five games, scoring five times on two occasions. Rustington found themselves down in 12th place in the 18-team league, although one win from their remaining two games would guarantee a top ten finish, two in two may earn them ninth. They have not been in great form though - they won two days ago

at home to East Preston, but lost their previous four games. Rustington have won both times the two teams have met so far this season, both at Loxwood - by two goals to nil in the league back in August, and by three goals to one in the John O'Hara (League) Cup.

On yet another sunny evening with clear skies but with much cooler temperatures than of late, the first half was a rather forgettable affair, with neither side creating real chances and there was a fair amount of niggles amongst the players. The second half was more entertaining, but the match had 0-0 written all over it, as players kept trying long range shots, missing the target by some distance on each occasion. Rustington probably had more of the chances, although Loxwood did have a shot cannon off the post after a terrific run from far out, but in the end it was Rustington who managed to score the only goal of the game 12 minutes from time, when a completely unmarked Jack Sunderland stooped to head in at the far post. So, perhaps a surprising score-line, but one that Rustington just about deserved on the balance of play to complete a hat-trick of wins against Loxwood this season.

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