

TT1011-287

TT No.287: Justin Holmes - Sat 28th May 2011; **Corus Steel** v Pontyclun; Welsh League Division 3; Venue: Corus Sports Ground, Margam; Score: 3-0; Admission: £2.00; Prog: £1.00; Att: 130 (est.); Match Rating: 3.

Although I had planned to take in a game in South Wales on this - finally - the last day of the Welsh League season, it was a fairly last-minute decision to venture as far down as Division Three for a game. But with little riding on any of the games in the top two divisions, a trip to the outskirts of Port Talbot became the most attractive fixture of all with a simple equation for the home team - win, and they would be guaranteed promotion - anything else and they would be consigned to another season in the bottom division of the Welsh League.

The Corus Sports Ground is located just over two miles, or a 45-minute walk, from Port Talbot Parkway station. Prior to arriving at the ground, it was hard to imagine I would be able to describe a pleasant venue, given that the Port Talbot area is infamously saturated with factories pumping all manner of substances into the air - indeed, there was a strong industrial smell throughout the walk to the ground. However, the Corus Sports Ground happily follows the norm of extremely attractive grounds in the Welsh League, with trees mercifully blocking the views of the factories and instead the background is almost entirely rural, including rugged, sweeping hills close by. The football pitch is part of a large sports complex, with cricket and rugby pitches and a golf course all adjacent to the enclosed football pitch. The ground is extremely neat and well maintained, with a small stand for standing room straddling the half way line and a green portacabin behind one of the goals houses the changing rooms. Hard standing is available from the entrance behind a goal to and the far end of the stand, meaning that three quarters of the perimeter of the pitch just has grass standing. Thanks to First Great Western and their delayed train, programmes had already sold out by the time I arrived twenty minutes ahead of kick off - clearly the club had not expected such a high attendance well in excess of 100 today, which was swelled by many groundhoppers.

Going into this game, Corus Steel were in fourth place, but both of the teams immediately above them, Goytre and Pontypridd Town, were only two points ahead having already finished their campaigns. So, Corus Steel would be guaranteed second place and promotion to Division 2 of the Welsh League for the first time in their history if they could win today. Failing to win would mean missing out on promotion and could mean they fall to fifth place in the final standings. They seemed to have got the jitters in May though, having previously been on a fourteen game unbeaten run and suffered just one defeat in 25 league games going back to early October - in May, they claimed just one point from three games before beating former Welsh Premier League side Cwmbran Town last time out. There was nothing left to play for Pontyclun, down in twelfth place in the 18-team league and were on a truly dreadful run, having lost their last six league

games. Way back in early September, Corus Steel triumphed by two goals to one in the corresponding fixture at Pontyclun.

As might have been expected, the home team forced the pace early on and pressured the Pontyclun goal relentlessly in the opening quarter of an hour, a fizzing shot tipped over by the keeper and a shot hitting the crossbar were the stand-out chances to open the scoring. Pontyclun managed to weather the early storm and started to look fairly comfortable, although hardly ever looking threatening going forward. On the stroke of half time, the home team were given the opportunity to steady their nerves when Pontyclun's keeper unnecessarily patted out the ball in front of him, and in racing to retrieve the ball, brought down the onrushing attacker for a penalty, which was duly converted by Matthew Herman, sending the keeper the wrong way.

The second half started similarly to the first, with Pontyclun's goal leading a charmed life, once again the crossbar was hit with a thunderous shot. Just before the hour mark, Corus Steel gave themselves some real breathing space when a cross was finished very well by Rhodri Lewis from 12 yards out and the game was completely put to bed five minutes from time when Craig Baker showed good strength in shaking off a defender en route to goal before poking the ball over the keeper and into the net. Joyous celebrations followed on the final whistle as Corus Steel's promotion was confirmed, a good achievement with this being just their second season in the Welsh League. Whilst the result was predictable, it was harsh on Pontyclun, who played and competed very well whilst very rarely looking like they could score. Incidentally, one must feel slightly sorry for Goytre, who must have been confident of promotion at the start of the day, being in second place and three points ahead of fifth placed Caerau and with a ten goal superior goal difference - only to sit on their hands whilst Caerau won 13-0 to claim the third promotion spot alongside Corus Steel!

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