

TT No.289: Justin Holmes - Sat 11th June 2011; **BK Häcken** v IFK Norrköping; Allsvenskan (Swedish Premier League); Venue: Rambergsvallen, Gothenburg; Score: 2-2; Admn: 140 SEK; Team Sheet: Free; Att: 2517; Match Rating: 3.

A desire to eke out football watching just a little bit further into the summer inspired me to plan a daytrip to Gothenburg, made relatively easy by Ryanair's cheap flights with favourable timings, and flying into Gothenburg City airport, which is only twenty minutes away from the city centre by coach. In an ideal world, I would have taken in a visit to the Gamla Ullevi, to visit one of the best and most modern stadia in Sweden. However, with only the odd game played on a Saturday afternoon in the Allsvenskan, beggars can't be choosers and I had to settle for a visit to the Rambergsvallen, the humble home of BK Häcken, very much the poor footballing relations of Gothenburg in almost every respect.

After spending several hours taking in the sights of Gothenburg, I then made my way on foot north-westwards from the city centre and onto Hisingen island, where the Rambergsvallen is located. The walk took about 40 minutes along a busy dual carriageway (although pleasant views can be seen looking back to the city waterfront when walking across the bridge to the island). Regular buses and trams also ply the route. The stadium is set in a suburban commuter area, and inside is, in all honesty, a rather unappealing arena for football. It has the dreaded running track around the pitch, so has an open and distant from the action feel to it. There are two fairly low grandstands running along each length, one stand by the dugouts having for the most part bench seating with a small section in the centre having more conventional plastic seats, the other stand has bench seating in the middle third, with standing areas either side, one of which was for away fans, although plenty of away fans were interspersed in all other areas of the ground. Behind one of the goals is a metallic terrace which was not in use today, a marquee for VIP guests, as well as a large screen which always seems to be present at all Allsvenskan matches showing interviews and match action. Behind the other goal was just hand standing, which a handful of people chose to watch the action from despite the distance from the action. Although it wasn't necessary, I bought my ticket in advance on the internet which I collected from a supermarket in the morning - it's a very simple system of purchasing and collecting tickets for games in Sweden. The issuing of programmes always seems to be a complete lottery in Sweden - here, an A5 double-sided sheet was handed out free of charge on entering the ground, containing the current league table and squad lists for each team - for a non-Swedish speaker, this was perfectly adequate.

Today's encounter was between two teams struggling in the bottom half of the table after ten games played, with BK Häcken in twelfth place in the 16-team league and just one point above the relegation play-off position of 14th, whilst IFK Norrköping, newly promoted to the Allsvenskan, one position and one point better off. BK Häcken's form has been nothing to write home about, gaining just one point

from their last three games, although that included a narrow 0-1 defeat at city rivals GAIS and a very creditable 1-1 draw at home to reigning champions at Malmö. IFK Norrköping have been in worse recent form, gaining just one point from their last five games after winning their previous three.

On a very warm, sunny day, the match started at a fairly slow pace as is often the way in Scandinavian football, although the visitors had the upper hand and could easily have taken the lead with a quarter of an hour on the clock when Häcken's goalkeeper, Christopher Källqvist, tried to dribble the ball wide outside the penalty area and was dispossessed, but luckily by the time Shpetim Hasani had managed to line up the shot from 20 yards out, Källqvist just managed to retreat in time to collect the ball. Another defensive error was punished at the other end on 25 minutes when the Norrköping defender Bobby Friberg inexplicably tried to dribble the ball deep inside his own penalty area but was dispossessed by Rene Makondele, who then had the simple task of firing home past the keeper from about 8 yards out. The home side went on to control proceedings for the rest of the first half, missing some decent chances to equalise, including hitting the crossbar direct from a corner, however on the stroke of half time, the away side were back on level terms out of the blue, when Astrit Ajdarevic fired a low shot from 25 yards through a crowd of players which presumably unsighted the keeper.

IFK Norrköping were slightly fortunate to be on level terms at the break, and there was little sign in the second half that they could score a winner, as the game became rather pedestrian with the home side looking comfortable and the more likely to score, indeed, IFK Norrköping had their goalkeeper, Abbas Hassan, to thank for several excellent saves to keep them in the game. However, just as the game entered added-on time at the end of the match, BK Häcken scored what surely would prove to be the winner when a corner was met with a bullet header at the near post by Matthias Ranegie from eight yards out. However, to their credit it was clear that IFK Norrköping's players had not allowed their heads to drop, which would have been understandable after such a devastating blow so late in the game, as they had an aggressive look about them as they restarted the game, and indeed they got their reward deep into added on time, when a long ball pumped forward was allowed to bounce by two defenders, and Gunnar Thorvaldsson, who I had seen on trial for Charlton Athletic in a pre-season game at AFC Wimbledon last July, just beat the keeper to poke the ball home to spark wild celebrations amongst the visiting players and disbelieving fans and stun the home fans into silence. A very dramatic end to what had been quite a dull second half, and surely was a point won by the visitors and two lost by the home side, not just in view of the last gasp equaliser but how BK Häcken had by far the better chances to put the game to bed.

07/20