

TT No.36: *Justin Holmes* - Sat 28 August 2010; Deal Town v Hythe Town; FA Cup Extra Preliminary Round; Result: 2-4; Attendance: Admission: £5.00; Programme: £1.50.

My first taste of FA Cup action this season took me to the south-east Kent coast for an all Kent League clash. When contemplating FA Cup matches to watch, I usually try to seek ties, between clubs from different leagues, finding that this adds an interesting added dimension to a cup tie between clubs not used to playing each other. However, there was more than enough about this game to attract me. This would be a local derby, between two teams tipped to be in contention for the Kent League title this season. Finally, Deal is one of those elusive grounds that I have wanted to visit for a long time, but circumstances have always seemed to prevent a visit at the last minute.

As it turned out, I had not been missing out on too much, with the Charles Sports Ground being a very average, unremarkable county league ground in an urban setting. Facilities are reasonable, with one side containing a small, narrow covered standing area directly in front of the clubhouse. A new clubhouse is being built on the opposite side. However, completion has been put on hold due to money being pulled from the grant that was funding it. Also, on this side is a reasonably sized modern all-seater stand. Behind one of the goals is a small covered area for standing, with hard standing available around the rest of the ground. One attractive feature of the ground is an old-fashioned building housing the changing rooms in one corner of the ground. The ground has a spacious feel about it but could certainly do with a little tidying up, and is situated about a 15-minute walk away from Deal train station. The programme has an attractive hardened cover, but that is about as good as it gets with little interesting to read inside although it did contain plenty of statistics. But the overriding feeling was of an excessive price of £1.50 for a very average programme.

Hythe certainly mean to get promoted this season, strengthening their team significantly over the summer, the highlight being persuading Brendon Cass to trade Ryman League Premier Division football with Folkestone Invicta where he was a first team player for Kent League football at Hythe. Ambitions are probably a lot more-humble for Deal, who became the only club from Kent to win the FA Vase in the last final at the old Wembley at the turn of the millennium. However, they have certainly made an excellent start to the season, having won all three of their games so far this season and had yet to concede a goal. Hythe had won two of their opening games, losing the other. Both teams comfortably won their extra preliminary round games to qualify for today's game - Deal dispatching Sandhurst Town 3-0, and Hythe beating Bookham even more convincingly, 4-0.

On a grey, overcast afternoon, the game itself turned out to be the definitive game of two halves - certainly in terms of goals, although for the most part, possession and chances were fairly evenly shared. Deal took the lead on 13

minutes thanks to a well taken goal by Andy Hadden from just outside of the penalty area, who showed tremendous composure and control to rifle home a shot through a crowd of players. Hythe were level on the half hour with an even better goal, when Lee Winfield curled a fabulous free-kick around the wall and just inside the post giving the keeper no chance. Within four minutes Deal went back in front thanks to a close ranger header by Aaron Robinson and so took a narrow but just about deserved lead into half-time. Whatever the Hythe manager said at half time worked to perfection, as Hythe took the game by the scruff of the neck right from the restart. They equalised ten minutes into the second half through Dave Cook, and then took the lead for the first time within a couple of further minutes with another wonderfully skilful goal, Craig Thompson chipping the keeper from a tight angle by the edge of the penalty area. This was slightly harsh on Deal but at this stage the game could have still gone either way, until Hythe opened up a two-goal lead with ten minutes remaining through Brendon Cass. This completely deflated Deal and the game was up, and so Hythe proceed to a home tie against Epsom & Ewell in the 1st Qualifying Round.

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