

TT No.50: *Justin Holmes* - Sat 11th September 2010; **Bognor Regis Town v Hastings United**; FA Cup 1st Qualifying Rd; Venue: Nyewood Lane, Bognor Regis; Score: 3-2; Admission: £8.00; Prog: £2.00; Attendance: 374; Match Rating: 4.

FA Cup action again today for an attractive looking tie between two clubs in good form in their respective Ryman leagues, with the lower division team at home against a club from a division above. This was also a tie between two clubs from the Sussex coast, although the match couldn't really be described as a derby, with the towns as far as apart as you can get along the Sussex coast, separated by over 50 miles.

Nyewood Lane is located about a 10-minute walk from the train station, and is an all-round very pleasant stadium that manages to combine very good facilities (a reflection on their recent higher league status), a spacious yet close-knit feel to it, and plenty of character. Along one length of the pitch is a small all-seater stand in the centre, with a further small stand providing covered terracing, and uncovered hard standing the other side of the seated stand. Along the other length is covered terracing, behind one of the goals is open banked terracing and behind the other goal is a covered hard standing area. The ground also has an electronic scoreboard - a rare feature of a ground at this level of football. The 30-page programme was fairly standard fare for the Ryman League, unexceptional but with enough to read to gain a good background to the match ahead.

After two successive relegations from the Blue Square South - a price worth paying from Bognor's point of view, considering that they were punching above their weight at least in the Blue Square South was unsustainable for them - they have started this season in the Ryman League Division 1 South well with mostly local players, and have gleaned 10 points from their opening five games, with a 100% record at home, together with a narrow 1-0 home win against Sussex League side Ringmer in the previous round of the FA Cup. Hastings United, a settled Ryman League Premier Division side these days, have gleaned 11 points from their first six games, losing their first game of the season midweek at home to Sutton, when they came back from three goals down to be denied an equaliser deep into injury time thanks to an apparently hugely contentious linesman's flag.

With half an hour on the clock, it looked like the higher ranked team, Hastings, would coast to a comfortable passage into the next round in this Cup tie. Bognor played reasonably well in the middle of the park, but it was Hastings who carried the greater threat, Bognor having their keeper to thank for keeping his side in the game. Unfortunate for him then that Hastings would score a quick fire double just before the half hour mark with two very avoidable goals, Russell Eldridge firing in a shot through a crowd of players that the keeper presumably thought would have been cleared by one of his defenders before it would have reached him, and then Jono Richardson firing a fairly tame looking low shot which took a very unfortunate bounce off a divot, into bounce over the keeper's dive. Game over, and the game

would peter out for a comfortable away win. Not at all, so it turned out. As the first half drew to a close, Bognor suddenly became irresistible, pulling a goal back via simple tap in from Jason Prior after excellent work from James Fraser, and a minute before half time they were level when Phil Turner coolly slotted the ball under the keeper. Bognor would not have wanted the half time whistle to come, so much in the ascendancy they were at that time, and after a hugely entertaining first half, the second half failed to live up to those heights, mostly being a midfield scrap with regular long punts up field, although both sides continue to carve out reasonable chances. A replay at Hastings was looking inevitable though, from which Hastings would surely have had to have been red hot favourites to progress, until deep into injury time, a horrendous back pass by John Beales gave the on-rushing Jason Prior a one-on-one with the keeper, and he showed fantastic composure to slot the ball past the keeper from fully 25 yards. Considering the level of football and with so much at stake and in injury time at the end of the game, it was a terrific finish. Hastings barely had time to restart the match when the referee blew for full-time to spark wild celebrations amongst Bognor's players and supporters, whilst the Hastings players slumped to the floor no doubt reflecting on how they could have lost a game they were cruising to victory in but inexplicably - and fatally - took their foot off the gas having opened up a two goal lead.

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