

TT No.87: *Justin Holmes* - Sat 9th October 2010; **Plymouth Argyle** v Charlton Athletic; Football League Div. One; Venue: Home Park, Plymouth; Score 2-2; Admission: £20.00 (Barn Park End - Away Fans); Programme: £3.00; Attendance: 7,738; Match Rating: 4.

For my first match of the season supporting Charlton Athletic on their travels, I headed down to the most southerly and westerly Football League club in England - Plymouth Argyle. It turned out to be a good choice on my part, with a pleasant trip down, an attractive seafront area to spend a couple of hours in ahead of the game, and a rip-roaring game that could have gone either way.

I planned to attend this game a couple of months previously and took advantage of cheap advance train tickets. This strategy could have backfired as Plymouth could have asked the Football League to postpone this fixture having three players away on international duty. However, their precarious financial situation persuaded them to play the game rather than risk a lower attendance midweek in deepest mid-winter. The section of the train journey between Exeter and Newton Abbott was particularly pleasant, as the train passes right next to the sea for about 20 minutes around Dawlish, quite a spectacular experience to see waves crashing underneath the train as it passes by.

Home Park is located about a 20 minute walk from Plymouth train station, although as I arrived in Plymouth a few hours ahead of kick off, I headed in the opposite direction and into town, also about a 20 minute walk - which it has to be said is not pleasing on the eye, and then to the Plymouth Hoe and seafront area, which is a much nicer area to spend time in - even on a day that was misty and windy. After enjoying a pub lunch in the old town of Plymouth, I walked back to and past the train station, and through Central Park, where all manner of sports games take place, to Home Park.

One continuous, single tier structure spans-around three sides of the stadium, with away fans housed behind one of the goals, and the legroom and views - with no obstructing pillars - are excellent, as one would expect of a structure built in the last decade. The only side not to have been redeveloped in the last decade houses the old-fashioned main stand, which would appear to be the worst area to watch the action from, set some way back from the pitch (with an unused terrace area in front) and with plenty of obstructing pillars to get in the way. But it is always good and makes for an increasingly pleasant surprise to see old-fashioned grandstands still in place in the Football League. The programme would best be described as average - 68 pages containing everything you would expect from a Football League programme but without much remarkable apart from a curious comic book style font.

Going into this game, with ten games played so far, nine places - although just three points - separated the two teams. Curiously, Plymouth's home and Charlton's

away records were identical - won one, drew one and lost three. Both teams have suffered from inconsistency and today's game promised to be a close affair. As for the game itself, Plymouth got off to a dream start, when an unmarked Bradley Wright-Phillips had all the time in the world to place his shot through a crowd of players from 6 yards out after the ball had skimmed off a Charlton defender's head from a long throw in. Plymouth were certainly the stronger side for most of the first half, and it came as something of a surprise when Charlton got back on level terms on 34 minutes with a real route one goal - the Charlton keeper, Rob Elliott punted the ball upfield, and Paul Benson latched on to the ball and toe-poked it past the keeper, going in off the post.

Plymouth might have considered themselves slightly unlucky to not have been leading at half time, but Charlton went on to completely dominate the second half with wave after wave of attacks, wingers Lee Martin and Kyel Reid particularly impressive, and Plymouth having to resort to increasingly illegal and dirty fouls. As so often happens in football, Charlton were made to pay for not taking one of their chances when Plymouth went back in front on 81 minutes. There was a clear foul on a Charlton player in the build-up to the goal which the referee somehow missed, but that shouldn't detract from a wonderful powerful drive across the keeper from 25 yards out by Yannick Bolasie. Unsurprisingly this seemed to knock the stuffing out of Charlton, however just as the fourth official was signalling how much injury time there was to play, Charlton scored their second equaliser, when Gary Doherty headed across goal and Paul Benson turned the ball in from 6 yards out for his second of the game. There the scoring ended with a mixture of feelings in both dressing rooms - Plymouth will surely be disappointed at only gaining a point when they led going into injury time, yet they really were comprehensively outplayed in the second half and Charlton could justifiably also be disappointed at only taking a point back to south-east London.

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