

TT No. 1: *Justin Holmes* - Friday 15th June 2011; **Bray Wanderers v Derry City**; League of Ireland, Premier Division; Venue: Carlisle Grounds, Bray; Score: 1-2; Admn: €15.00; Prog: €3.00; Att: 1000 (estimate); Match Rating: 3.

Wishing to catch some competitive action in July rather than endless meaningless friendlies, I decided to book a trip to Dublin this weekend. The original stand-out fixture for me was one of the big Dublin derbies, St Patrick's Athletic against Bohemians, however as this game was postponed due to both clubs being involved in long away trips to Eastern Europe in the Europa League, the only realistic option left was a trip down the coast to the seaside resort of Bray for Bray Wanderers' match against the sole team from Northern Ireland plying their trade in the League of Ireland, Derry City.

Having taken the DART train from Dublin Connolly station to Bray - a distance of only 11 miles yet taking some 45 minutes, but on the plus side only costing €4.90 return - the Carlisle Grounds are located literally a stone's throw from the station, although it is certainly worth arriving a couple of hours ahead of kick off to enjoy the very pleasant and tranquil seafront of Bray with its Victorian promenade. Ireland, both sides of the border, contains some fantastic grounds considering the relative low level of support - some grounds very old-fashioned and in a state of disrepair but just ooze character, others boast modern facilities that would not look out of place in the English Football League. The Carlisle Grounds is, according to the club's official website, the oldest sporting venue of all clubs in the League of Ireland. So, it came as a disappointment to find a ground that, whilst is neat and functional, lacks any character and is rather unmemorable. Tickets must be purchased from a ticket office before entering the adjacent turnstiles, and spectators enter the ground behind one of the goals, where there is hard standing with a small grass bank behind. Along one length of the pitch is the only covered area in the ground, a temporary looking all-seater stand with a green roof and with obstructing pillars along the front. Along the other length is terracing, with seats bolted onto the front half and four floodlight pylons between the spectators and the pitch. Behind the other goal is a very recently installed temporary all-seater uncovered stand, which was not in use today. Changing rooms and club offices are housed in portacabins at one corner of the ground. As for the programme, this was a major disappointment, being a double issue combined with Bray's match against Sligo Rovers two weeks previously. As a result, the programme was out of this date for this match, contained no statistics or season's results and whilst it was of modest interest to the occasional visitor, looking good and printed all in colour, it would be a pointless purchase for the regular visitor.

Bray Wanderers started the season fairly well but have very much been a team stuck in runs of form on either end of the spectrum in recent months. They won four games in a row before losing four in a row, before winning last time out at UCD and found themselves in sixth place in the ten team league with 22 games

played, although they were only 9 points behind leaders Sligo Rovers and 16 points clear of third bottom UCD, 23 points clear of Drogheda United, currently occupying the relegation play-off spot in ninth. Derry City, newly promoted to the Premier Division, have had a very solid season so far, winning their previous three games, including a win against then-leaders Shamrock Rovers and were unbeaten in their previous eight games. Going into this game, they were in fourth place, just two points behind leaders Sligo. In their encounters so far this season, Derry triumphed 2-1 at Bray in April, whereas the match at Derry ended 1-1 in May.

This match started off with the home side very much in the ascendancy, and after just two minutes, Chris Shields forced a point blank save from Gerard Doherty from six yards out - he really should have scored. Regularly pumping the ball upfield for forwards to chase, Bray looked the likelier to score throughout the first half, with Derry's defence looking somewhat shaky and their forwards only sporadically threatening, and Bray were slightly unfortunate not to lead at half time.

The second half looked like it was shaping up to be a dull affair with both teams cancelling each other out. However, just as a goalless draw was looming on the horizon, James McClean, whose time in the League of Ireland is surely coming to an end with several English clubs taking a very keen interest in him, turned the game in Derry's favour with two assists. First, on 65 minutes, he turned Bray's right back inside out on the touchline before sending over a perfectly judged cross which top scorer and former Bray man Eamon Zayed headed home at the far post in off the crossbar. Eight minutes later and Daniel Lafferty doubled Derry's lead with a firm header from a McClean corner. That seemed to be enough to seal all three points for the visitors, as Bray had seemed to have run out of ideas in the second half, barely threatening Derry's goal until three minutes from time, when an excellent free kick by Dan McGuinness bound for the top corner was well tipped onto the crossbar by Doherty in the Derry goal. However, he was beaten in the first minute of added on time at the end of the game, when John Mulroy headed home a McGuinness corner from six yards off the crossbar. Bray suddenly sensed they could sneak a point from the final couple of minutes of added on time, but it was Derry who came closest to scoring, when a long range piledriver was gathered at the second attempt by Matt Gregg, the former Torquay and Crystal Palace goalkeeper. So, a deserved away win, which sees Derry rise to third place, whilst Bray drop a place to seventh.

07/20