

**TT No.101: *Justin Holmes*** - Sat 19th November 2011; **Chatham Town** v Enfield Town; Ryman League Division 1 N; Venue: Maidstone Road, Chatham; Score: 2-3; Admn: £8.00; Prog: £2.00; Att: 203; Match Rating: 4.

Visiting the home ground of Chatham Town has proved incredibly elusive for me over the years, having been thwarted by weather conditions and late trains on previous attempts. But today would finally be the day when I would tick off my final senior football ground in Kent.

The Maidstone Road ground is about a twenty-minute walk south from the town's train station, with a slight incline all the way, and it turned out to be quite a pleasant surprise considering Chatham would be far from considered my favourite Kentish town. It has a mixture of old and new, and with trees lining three sides of the pitch, the colours from which in the autumnal sunshine made for a very pleasant background. Straddling the half way line is an old-fashioned stand with bench seating throughout, whilst on the opposite side is a much smaller all-seater stand. Behind one of the goals is a large modern white building housing the bar and changing rooms, with just a few terrace steps for spectators to watch the action from. Behind the other goal is just hard standing, although with plenty of rubble and loose bricks scattered around that a keen health and safety officer may raise an eyebrow at. The 40-page programme covered the basics and was typical fare for the level of football, but with half the pages containing solely advertising, could hardly be considered value for money at £2.00.

Going into this game, Chatham were firmly anchored in the middle of the table, in 13th place in the 22-team league, although they are closer to the play-off places than the relegation zone. Their recent form has been quite poor, picking up just a win and a draw from their last from their last eight games. The visitors, buoyed by opening their new stadium in their home borough within the last week, are up in fourth place, four points off the leaders and have lost just two of their 15 games so far. They were unbeaten in their previous seven games, with five wins.

On a bright sunny day without a cloud in the sky, it was the visitors who settled the quickest, playing good football with some delightful touches in the opening minutes. So, it was something of a surprise when it was the home side who opened the scoring on 20 minutes. Moments after they had a header cleared off the line, the ball was in the back of the net via a header off the underside of the bar - whether it was a Chatham forward or an own goal was much debated. On 31 minutes, Enfield Town were back on level terms when a quick attack was finished by Leon Osei, beating the keeper at his near post. Parity lasted just three minutes however, as Chatham went back into the lead, when a header by Jason Barton looped over the keeper and into the net. It was pretty much all Chatham now, and they had two fantastic chances to give themselves a more comfortable half time lead.

Similar to how the first half started, again it was the visitors who were in the ascendancy in the early stages of the second half, rarely looking like they could score though. However, on the hour mark came arguably the game changing moment, when an excellent through ball resulted on a run towards goal, only terminated by a desperate lunge from a defender as the two entered the penalty area. A penalty was duly awarded, along with the mandatory red card for the defender, although bizarrely no action was taken against an Enfield Town player who pushed a Chatham player to the ground in the ensuing melee. The penalty was coolly converted by Liam Hope, shooting low to the left as the keeper dived the other way. 2-2, and very much game on. On 70 minutes, the visitors thought they had scored when the ball was tapped in following a tremendous point-blank save by the keeper, but the goal was ruled out for off-side. However, on 81 minutes, Enfield Town did take the lead for the first time in the match, when a free kick from close to the corner flag was headed home by Daniel Ailey. Both teams had chances to score in the remainder of the game, but in the end it was Enfield Town who took all three points back to North London, and credit to them for coming from behind twice to eventually win the game, although the home side will kick themselves as they could and perhaps should have taken a more comfortable lead into the half-time interval.

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