

TT No. 119: *Paul Roth* - Sat December 17th 2011; Haart Kent County League Division 2 West; **HOLLAND SPORTS FC** vs. **BEXLEY FC**; Res: 1-2; Att: 10; Entry: N/A; Programme: 16-pages, free; Altitude and global location: Holland Sports Social Club, Mill Lane, Hurst Green is 74m (242.782 ft) above sea level: at latitude 51 degrees, 14.4 mins N; 0 degrees 0.0 mins E (position derived from centre circle); SAT NAV:RH8 9DF; Weather: Cold, but dry; Club Shop: No; Local MP: Sam Gyimah (Con); My day's carbon footprint legacy:13.7.

By 8am on this chilly December morning I still hadn't decided where to head for. My shortlist of potential candidates consisted of three; my longlist of two. But with my wife and I hosting a 'Strictly Come Dancing Final' entieme soiree later that evening, somewhere overly-distant was always going to be a non-starter.

Eventually Haart KCL Division 2 West side Holland Sports FC was plumped for, but immediately upon setting out on this busy pre-Christmas shopping day I wondered if live football was going to be a pipe dream. It somehow took me all of 20 minutes to extricate myself from the Isle of Thanet, a distance of no more than a mile and a half from my Garlinge redoubt. Given the Dutch connotation of my destination, I wondered if it mightn't have been quicker had I chosen to travel the 73 miles to Surrey by Trekschuit - alas the Garlinge to Hurst Green Canal has yet to be built!

After a fraught journey, and a well-deserved pint of Skinners Christmas Fairy bitter in the world-famous Diamond public house in the hamlet of Holland, it was then straight on to the Holland Sports Club itself. The much-better-than-you-might-expect facility is situated in Mill Lane, Hurst Green, just across the border from Kent.

The immaculate pitch - despite the heavy snow and rainfall of the past few days - is encircled by a still-used cinder running track, which is in turn ringed by a wire mesh in-filled metal barrier. Behind the pavilion-end goal there's a raised section of grassed banking, affording the spectator excellent views of the action; the undulating, conifer-lined scenery beyond is reminiscent, at least it was to me, of the northern Julian Alpine ski-resort of Kransjska Gora.

The venue is fortunate indeed also to be blessed with a well patronised and comfortable clubhouse that usually sells - but didn't on the day - real ale.

'Hoppers may also be interested to learn that the club produces, and amazingly gives away for free, a 16-page programme: I must quickly add at this juncture that the tome's interior is somewhat akin to my wallet at this festive time of year...there's virtually nothing in it!

On the occasion of my visit to the club it was particularly pleasing to catch up with Upminster-based fellow traveller, Peter Jones. Peter and I are garrulous, likeminded souls who share many common interests, including the pleasantries of a bloody good chinwag! The afternoon thus flew by, but in no way detracted from

our mutual pleasure in witnessing an enjoyable, often feisty, encounter between two clubs that patently have a bit of 'history' between them.

Holland Sports started the brighter, took the lead with a rasping shot on 5 minutes, and looked the more likely to increase their advantage during an eventful opening half-hour. Against the run of play the red-suited Bexley side equalised, and by teatime were a goal to the good courtesy of a well-taken header by their spindly centre-forward.

The latter forty-five-minute period was less captivating.

Bexley had a player dismissed for a second bookable offence; perversely though it was they who looked the more likely to increase their advantage, as the fading homesters ran out of ideas. No further goals confirm the south Londoners' gathering promotion push.

Home by 5.15pm, and in plenty of time to oversee the machinations of the catering company, this KCL game suited me down to the ground. Also, I'm pleased to report, I was greatly enamoured with what I discovered at this well-run club. And ultimately, didn't Harry Judd do well!

All that remains is for me to wish you all a very Happy Christmas, with my special felicitations going out to my great friends Bob and Hilary (Bob, I've latterly heard, was slightly wounded in his left leg by a bullet whilst the couple were robbed at gun point in Santa Ana, El Salvador, on December 6th), who are currently holidaying, and hopefully recovering, in the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa.

FGIF Star Rating: 5*.

07/20