

**TT No.121: *Justin Holmes*** - Mon 26th December 2011; **East Grinstead Town v Crowborough Athletic**; Sussex County League Div. 1; Venue: East Court, East Grinstead; Score: 2-0; Admission incl. programme: £6.00; Att: 130 (estimate); Match Rating: 2.

For my Boxing Day fare, I ventured to a ground I regularly visited many years ago prior to my groundhopping days, but had not for many years, for the north Sussex derby between East Grinstead Town and Crowborough Athletic, another team I regularly followed all those years ago.

East Court is about a twenty-minute walk from the town's train station - although with no trains running today, I had to drive to the game today, with the ground located on the approach to the town along the A264 from Tunbridge Wells. I always considered East Court to be one of my favourite grounds at this level, and it was pleasing to discover that the necessary improvements have given the ground a very neat and attractive feel without detracting from its pleasant setting. The ground is located down a narrow access road, and on entering the ground, one walks up a bank to reach the main stand, which was standing room only the last time I visited, but now has seats installed. A small covered stand of terracing is now located between the main stand and the entrance, and around the rest of the ground is just hard standing. Changing rooms and the clubhouse are located behind one of the goals. There is a naturally enclosed feel with trees all around and the location is quiet. The ground is very well maintained with stands and buildings freshly and brightly painted in club colours, and it would certainly not look out of place in the Isthmian league. I recalled that East Grinstead always used to produce excellent programmes, and their standards certainly have not dropped. Included with admission, it is remarkably well produced with a very professional design, 20 pages in full colour, although half of those contain just advertising.

Today's match would be between two teams stuck firmly in mid-table, with East Grinstead in ninth place in the twenty-team league, and Crowborough three places and two points behind them. After a tricky November, when they lost consecutive league games by 0-7, 0-5 and 2-4, East Grinstead then proceeded to win four of their last five league games. Crowborough have been very inconsistent this season, and since I witnessed a very limp display at out of form Selsey earlier in the month, they have gained a win and a draw in their two league games.

The first half of this match was rather dull, with the only event of note being the referee pulling up with an injury which required lengthy attention, and he would eventually be forced to admit defeat at half time and was replaced in the middle for the second half. It was no surprise that the score-line was goalless at half time, with almost all of the action confined to the middle of the park with few attacks mounted by either side.

The second half threatened to continue in a similar vein, until the home side took the lead on 58 minutes, The keeper Mark Fox pumped the ball forward from a free kick, and the ball was then curled into the box from the left and Aaron Watson glanced his header past the keeper and into the net. Thirteen minutes later and East Grinstead doubled their lead, when a through ball was played which Tony Reid latched onto, before racing towards goal for a one-on-one with the keeper, and Reid stroked the ball calmly into the net under the keeper. The score-line was a fair reflection on second half proceedings, where the home side certainly upped the ante, whilst the visitors huffed and puffed without ever being able to carve out real chances on goal. As the game entered stoppage time, East Grinstead hit the post, and so East Grinstead claimed a comfortable derby victory and so rose two places in the league to seventh, whilst Crowborough remain in twelfth.

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