

**TT No.127: Justin Holmes** - Fri 30th December 2011; **Cheltenham Town v Rotherham United**; Football League 2; Venue: Whaddon Road, Cheltenham; Score: 1-0; Admn: £15.00; Prog: £3.00; Attendance: 3,582; Match Rating: 3.

Another bargain Travelodge stay of £12 inspired me to tick off another of the 92 Football League grounds, one that has been on my radar for some time, and one that I have heard good reports about, for a match between two of the better sides in League 2. Constant light rain, all afternoon raised concerns that the game may be in doubt, but happily, despite the rain continuing up to and beyond kick off, it was not.

Whaddon Road is located some two miles away from Cheltenham Spa rail station, taking about 45 minutes on foot, or around half of that from the town centre, and it certainly ranks amongst the best football grounds at this level for me, containing a bit of everything that is good about a football league ground in the lower divisions. There is a traditional main stand straddling the halfway line, whilst along the other length and behind one of the goals (which houses the away fans) are matching modern stands with a steep incline of seats and no obstructions. Behind the remaining goal is a small covered terrace, always a very welcome but all too rare feature of a league ground these days, and therefore this is where I chose to watch the game from, for the very reasonable and sensible price of £15.00. The compact stadium is pleasant on the eye, well designed, sensibly built for a club of its size, with a friendly feel to it. The programme was very good too, 76 pages (28 pages of advertising) attractively designed and containing everything one needs to know to gain a background to the game, and with plenty of other interesting material to digest.

It is fair to say that Cheltenham have been one of the surprise packages this season, up in second place going into this evening's encounter and three weeks ago saw off the then leaders Southend United 3-0 at home. They are also unbeaten in the league since late October, have lost just once in their last twelve league games, including eight wins, and have a trip to White Hart Lane to look forward to in a week's time in the FA Cup Third Round. Rotherham United have had a reasonable first half to the season, and went into this game just outside the play-off places in eleventh place, three points off the final play-off place. They had only lost once in their last nine games, that defeat coming against big spending high fliers Crawley Town. Both teams drew 0-0 last time out on Boxing Day - it was to be hoped that both teams had got the goalless draw out of their system for tonight's game.

After an even opening to the match, where both sides mounted attacks, it was the home side who took the lead on ten minutes when a shot by Bagasan Graham was only half cleared by the Rotherham defence, and Marlon Pack hammered home a lovely low finish into the bottom corner from 25 yards. The home side then went on to play some delightful football for the rest of the first half with plenty of craft

and creativity, making it abundantly clear why they have been doing so well this season. Rotherham were playing well too though, carving out some good chances but were let down by some woeful finishing.

The second half saw Cheltenham go off the boil for some reason, as their play became more of the battling, grind-it-out nature. They still managed to create sporadic chances, but in truth, it was Rotherham who shaded the second half in terms of possession and perhaps will feel unlucky to come away from Gloucestershire pointless, but again were let down by the lack of a cutting edge in the final third and very rarely threatened to score despite playing some good football in the middle of the park.

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