

TT No.132: *Justin Holmes* - Mon 2nd January 2012; **Carshalton Athletic** v Cray Wands; Isthmian League Prem Division; Venue: War Memorial Sports Ground, Carshalton; Score: 2-3; Admn: £10.00; Prog: £2.00; Att: 208; Match Rating: 4.

What was my first game of 2012 should actually have been my second, however after a day of heavy rain the previous day, I allowed myself to be swayed by the doom and gloom merchants on various forums to write off getting up early for a morning kick-off today. Frustrations were in abundance, when most games survived the weather. So, in the end I had to make do with the 3pm kick-off I had planned to take in anyway in south London.

The War Memorial Sports Ground is located just five minutes' walk away from Carshalton rail station, and is quite an intriguing stadium. It certainly would not win any beauty contests, but it does have some unique character. The turnstiles are housed in modified portacabins; with similar buildings housing the tea bar, club shop and bar. Along one length of the pitch are further various small buildings, as well as an old-fashioned all-seater stand, not in a particularly good state and about half of the seats are wooden, some of which have been removed. Along the other length is about a dozen steps of covered terracing. Behind one of the goals is a couple of terrace steps with basic cover, and behind the other goal is another basic corrugated iron structure covering the standing area immediately behind the goal. The programme was a very good effort, with an attractive, professional design and plenty of interesting information to read - even if much of it was out of date as the programme went to press before Christmas.

Coming into this game, Carshalton were stuck in mid table, in twelfth place in the 22-team league, 10 points adrift of both the play-off and relegation positions. They are not in good recent form, picking up just one point from their last three games. Cray are having a better season, occupying sixth place, just one place and two points off a play-off position, although they lost both of their festive games at home 2-4, after winning their previous three games.

On a bright, sunny but cold day with barely a cloud in the sky, it was the visitors who took the lead with just six minutes on the clock when Tommy Whitnell fired home after a couple of shots had been saved. Cray completely dominated the opening half hour and there only really looked like being one winner, as Carshalton struggled to get any kind of foothold in the game. Gradually they did come into the game towards the end of the half, and they equalised with what was pretty much their first shot at goal, when Billy Crook nodded the ball forward in the penalty area and poked the ball home past the onrushing keeper.

1-1 was how it stood at half time, a relative travesty considering how dominant Cray had been, but in the second half, Carshalton were completely transformed, as they grabbed the initiative, and it was actually quite deserved when they went into the lead on 58 minutes, when Laurent Hamici made some room for himself

before unleashing a lovely low curling shot from just outside the penalty area into the net. They looked ever more likely to hold out for an important win, until Cray equalised on 71 minutes with a clever free-kick by Whitnell when he fired into the top right-hand corner. Eight minutes from time and Carshalton had the opportunity to retake the lead when they were awarded a penalty for a lunging tackle. The keeper, Sam Walker, clearly won the psychological battle as he “chatted” to the penalty taker and stood by the penalty spot for ages before retreating to his line, and the penalty was struck poorly by Hamici and was comfortably saved. Almost immediately, Cray had a shot saved on the line, but Carshalton did pay the ultimate price for missing the penalty when Leigh Bremner scored after a free kick into the box was not dealt with. With the last kick of the game, the home side had a great chance to equalise, but a powerful shot was slammed just wide of the post. So, a deserved three points for Cray, as they looked the better side throughout the game, although Carshalton, despite their poor first half performance, will feel unlucky not to have gotten anything from the game after a much-improved performance after the break and a missed penalty.

07/20