

TT No.138: Rob Champion - Sat 7th January 2012; **TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR 3-0 CHELTENHAM TOWN**; FA Cup 3rd Round; Venue: White Hart Lane; Admission: £20; Programme: £3.50; Badge: £3; Stadium postcard: £1; Attendance: 35,672.

Sometimes in football cup draws fall the way you like and prior to the draw for the 3rd round of this seasons FA Cup I said to the wife that I hope Cheltenham get Chelsea, Manchester City or Spurs away. Well this prediction and wish came true and as regular readers of the blog know one of my closest friends is a season ticket holder @ Cheltenham. This made getting one of the 5,000 tickets that Spurs released for the visitor's section straight forward as season ticket holders were allowed to purchase two tickets each. An added bonus was that Spurs reduced the admission price to a respectable £20, with the cheapest adult tickets at White Hart Lane this season for league games costing £31 for the lowest category games.

Useless fact alert: This will be the 26th FA Cup that I have seen, yet only the second in the competition proper. This came in the 2005/06 season when I saw Cheltenham host Newcastle United in the 4th round. The rest of the ties were in the qualifying rounds.

My original plan was to drive down to north London and then get the tube and bus to the stadium, but for some unknown reason decided to check how much I could get to the capital and back on the train. I was quoted £31 return but the stipulation was that I had to get a specific train there and back - the train tickets were duly purchased and I was booked on the 1057 from Leicester which got me into St. Pancras International @ 1220. With Colin also arriving in London on the train via Paddington we arranged to meet @ St. Pancras itself at 12.30pm and make our way to White Hart Lane from there. Firstly, there was a tube ride to Seven Sisters which is only three stops away on the Victoria Line and then a mile and a half walk to the ground itself. According to the excellent Transport for London website it should cost £5.20 return using an Oyster card. This was fortunate as I have £7.20 left on my card from my last visit to London at the end of July.

The area between the tube station and the stadium along Tottenham High Road is a cosmopolitan and multi-cultural mix. The High Road consists of plenty of small businesses which range from fast food takeaways to computer repair specialists, as well as two branches of the biggest supermarket chains. Also, for anyone wanting a pre-match drink there are numerous pubs in the vicinity, though a lot of them near the stadium are for home fans only.

The club

As is the case when I went down to fellow North London rivals Arsenal, I will just give a list of the club's first-team honours and records for Spurs. A full detailed history including reserve and youth team honours can be found on their official website. Formed in 1882 as Hotspur FC before changing their name to the current

title two years later. Their first league competition competed in was the Southern Alliance for the 1892/93 season, before joining the Southern League three years later in 1896. I have no idea if they played in any league competition between 1893 and 1896. While in the Southern League before they were elected to the Football League in 1908, they also competed in the United League, London League and Western League.

Football League champions (2) 1950/51; 1960/61

Football League Division 2 winners (2) 1919/20; 1949/50

FA Cup winners (8) 1900/01; 1920/21; 1960/61; 1961/62; 1966/67; 1980/81; 1981/82; 1990/91

Football League Cup winners (4) 1970/71; 1972/73; 1998/99; 2007/08

European Cup-winner's Cup winners (1) 1962/63

UEFA Cup winners (2) 1971/72; 1983/84

FA Charity Shield winners (4 + 3 shared) 1920/21; 1951/52; 1961/62; 1962/63; 1967/68 (shared); 1981/82 (shared); 1991/92 (shared)

Western League champions (1) 1903/04

London League champions (1) 1902/03

Record victory: 13-2 v Crewe Alexandra (H) 03-02-1960 (FA Cup)

Record defeat: 0-8 v 1. FC Koln (A) 22-07-1995 (UEFA Inter-toto Cup)

Most appearances: 854 - Steve Perryman

Top goal scorer: 266 - Jimmy Greaves

Record attendance: 75,038 v Sunderland (05-03-1938)

Highest transfer fee paid: £16.75m for Luke Modric (Dinamo Zagreb) - June 2008

Highest transfer fee received: £30.75m for Dimitar Berbatov (Manchester United) - September 2008.

The Stadium

Stating the obvious here but Spurs play their home games @ White Hart Lane in north London and currently has a capacity of 36,310. When the club were first formed, they played their home games on Tottenham Marshes before moving to Northumberland Park in 1898. The move only lasted a year before they converted a disused nursery owned by brewery chain Charringtons at the present site. The first game on White Hart Lane saw Spurs beat Notts County 4-1 in front of approximately 5,000 spectators.

My impressions of the stadium were just ok. It did not give you the "wow factor" like their north London rivals Arsenal, though I do admit comparing the two is unfair. Also, I felt it did not have an aura about it, like for example Anfield where

you know you are somewhere special and the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. I am struggling to sum up anything else that could be constructive or descriptive to describe the place...maybe "an average medium sized football stadium".

One thing that I was not impressed with was how narrow the concourse was. There was only one entrance and exit for the away fans, which I presume was due to the larger than normal away contingent. This meant that it felt like an awful long time to get out of the stadium and back on to Tottenham High Road.

The food and drink inside and outside the ground consisted of the usual fare - pie, hot dog, burger, beer (Carlsberg only) etc...etc. There were four meal deal options which varied in price between £5 and £7. We ate at one of the many food outlets outside the ground and paid £3 for a hot dog.

The game

This tie pits two teams doing well in their respective league campaigns although they sit three divisions apart. Spurs are third in the Premier League with only the Manchester clubs, United and City above them in the table. Their last game on Tuesday saw them beat West Bromwich Albion 1-0 with the goal coming from Jermaine Defoe. Cheltenham are second in League 2, just one point behind leaders Crawley Town. They are unbeaten in nine games in all competitions, recording a 2-1 victory @ Port Vale in their last match on Monday. Their two FA Cup games so far have both been away from home and recorded victories @ Tranmere Rovers (1-0) and Luton Town (4-2).

What we had was in effect a Spurs 2nd XI that had a comfortable victory against their league two opponents. It should be said that the team that Spurs put out did consist of players that were / are full internationals. For example, Jermaine Defoe, Aaron Lennon, Roman Pavlyuchenko and Niko Kranjcar.

To sum up - well it is nice to visit the bigger stadiums in the country but I could not watch football in that environment every week. It is not because I did not enjoy the football on offer but because of the restrictions you have compared to watching the game at grass roots level.

This was only my fourth ever game of football I have seen in London and the second time this season. As it happens, I am back in London and meeting up with Colin in six weeks' time (February 18th) for Cheltenham's visit to Dagenham & Redbridge for a League 2 encounter.

Despite it taking longer than we (and most of the Cheltenham fans) would have liked getting out of the stadium I got back to St. Pancras without any problems for the 1825 train back to Leicester. Following a detour in Leicester to pick up some theatre tickets which are a 60th birthday present for my dad I arrived back home in Leicester at 8pm.

07/20