

TT No.147: *Justin Holmes* - Sat 14th January 2012; **St Leonards Social** v Wadhurst Utd; East Sussex League Prem Division; Venue: Tilekiln 2, Hastings; Score: 2-1; Admn/Prog: N/A; Att: 7; Match Rating: 3.

Today I had decided it was time to watch some real grass-roots football again, and so I headed down to the south coast of East Sussex, for a game in the intermediate East Sussex League Premier Division involving the champions of the last three seasons, St Leonards Social.

The Tilekiln Playing Fields is located three miles to the north west of Hastings town centre, with regular buses running from the train station to the nearby Tesco Extra supermarket, a five-minute walk away. The council owned Tilekiln is home to several clubs in the East Sussex League and consists of three football pitches. As one enters the complex from the car park, there is a functional and unattractive building - seemingly built primarily to resist vandalism - housing the changing rooms, with two of the pitches side by side, although separated by a cricket square, stretching away from the changing rooms, with a third pitch set at right angles to and below the second pitch furthest away from the changing rooms. St Leonards Social's home pitch is the middle one, Tilekiln 2. There are no spectator facilities and the pitches are open with no perimeter railing or rope - unsurprisingly it is a rather uninteresting, characterless and bleak venue for football. On the positive side, having the three pitches in close proximity meant that one has a choice of games should one get boring - the few people on the complex appeared to do just that, wandering between the games - and the slightly staggered kick-off times today meant that I was able to watch a little of the action in one of the other games during half time in the game I was focusing on.

Having won the East Sussex League for the last three seasons, although St Leonards Social are currently second in the table this season, there is little prospect of making it four in a row this season, as they are twelve points behind Hollington United - who have won all eleven of their games this season - and have played a game more. Former Sussex County League club Wadhurst United are currently battling against relegation, down in ninth in the eleven-team league, although they are comfortably ahead of the bottom two teams. When the two teams met back in November in the league in Wadhurst, the match ended, in a 0-0 draw.

On a chilly, overcast afternoon, it was not long before the home side opened the scoring, when a fast break allowed a one on one with the keeper, and the forward dinked the ball over the keeper, leaving a tap in from a few yards out for Terry Smith. St Leonards looked the stronger and more assured side as Wadhurst struggled to get a foothold in the game, and it appeared inevitable that St Leonards would increase their lead, although on the half hour Wadhurst had a great chance, when good trickery and patience created space and an opening, but the eventual low shot was cleared off the line. Right on half time Wadhurst did

equalise, when a free kick from about 20 yards out was drilled low and hard by Matt Smith, taking a deflection which wrong footed the keeper.

Wadhurst could consider themselves quite fortunate to go into the interval on level terms, although the second half was much more even from the start, and Wadhurst had a period of about twenty minutes midway through the second half when they were bar far the better side and it looked inevitable that they would take the lead. However, they could not capitalise on their superiority, and it appeared that they would have to settle for a point. It ended up worse than that though, as just three minutes from time, St Leonards went back into the lead when a low cross was tapped in from close range by 44-year-old Keith Miles, formerly of Hastings United and Eastbourne Borough, amongst many other clubs. Wadhurst never really threatened to grab another equaliser and so it was St Leonards who claimed all three points.

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