

TT No. 15: *Justin Holmes* - Sun 14th August 2011; **Vikingur Gøta** v HB Tórshavn; Meistaradeildin (Faroes Premier League); Venue: Sarpugerði, Norðragøta; Score: 3-1; Admission with programme: 80 DKK; Attendance: 400; Match Rating: 3.

After a false start the previous day on my trip to the Faroe Islands, when I had planned to watch a second tier game at Skala only to find that the visiting team, the reserve team of 07 Vestur, were unable to field a team, leading to a walkover 3-0 victory for the home team, I set off to Klaksvik on the north-eastern island of Borðoy hoping for more luck at the top flight game, between KI Klaksvik and EB/Streymur. However, during the bus journey to Klaksvik, I noticed a football ground set in such a beautifully dramatic location that, although I continued to Klaksvik to spend some time visiting the town, including a tour around the Djúpumýra stadium, home of KI - another beautifully set location with mountains all around - I decided to abort my plan to stay in Klaksvik to watch my planned game and instead head back to Norðragøta, home of Vikingur Gøta.

The Sarpugerði stadium is located on the north-eastern coast of Eysturoy island, just outside the very small village of Norðragøta, and boasts one of the most dramatic settings for football I have encountered. Behind one corner waves of the Atlantic Ocean come crashing in, whilst behind the rest of the ground are mountains at various proximities. The stadium has one main, modern all-seater grandstand which provides an excellent, elevated and unobstructed view of the action straddling the half way line, whilst on the opposite side is the clubhouse, with covered standing in front. Hard standing is available around the rest of the ground. The ground has a really rugged, wild feel to it, a feeling which was much enhanced by a misty atmosphere and an incredibly strong wind today, which made for a very choppy sea in the background. As with all club football grounds in the Faroe Islands, the pitch is artificial. A pleasant surprise was that programmes are issued at games in the Faroe Islands, included with admission. It has the same size and format as the standard variety found in England, consists of 32 pages, 23 pages of which are solely advertising, but for anyone like me who doesn't understand the Faroese language, team line-ups and league table were sufficient.

Midway through the season and Vikingur are flying high in second place in the league table and look like the only realistic title challengers to current unbeaten leaders B36 Tórshavn, trailing the leaders by two points but nine points clear of EB/Streymur. They are certainly in terrific form winning their last five games, and have won nine of their last ten games, with a defeat at B36 in the middle. Today's visitors, HB Tórshavn, have been the dominant force in Faroese league football in recent seasons, champions in the last two seasons and finishing runners up the season before. This season has seen a rather amazing transformation of fortunes though, as they currently occupy a relegation place, in ninth place in the ten-team league. They have been on an awful run in recent months, picking up just eight points from their last 11 games, although they came close to a spectacular result

in the Champions League, when they were leading Malmo 1-0 on the night in the second leg in Tórshavn, losing just 1-2 overall, before a late equaliser on the night for Malmo finally ensured progress for the Swedes. Earlier in the season, Vikingur triumphed 2-1 in Tórshavn.

In some of the windiest conditions I have ever experienced at a football game - making difficult for even spectators to walk around the ground, let alone play a game of football in, the game was something of a lottery. The ball couldn't be placed for set-pieces, meaning that goal kicks had to be taken hurriedly with the ball rolling in the wind, and free kicks had to be held until the last second by a colleague. It was impossible to play any kind of measured football, although credit to both teams for having the intelligence to mostly play the ball along the ground, and to use the wind for long distance speculative drives. HB had the very strong wind behind them in the first half, so it was little surprise that they dominated proceedings, nor when they took the lead on 23 minutes, when Rogvi Holm poked in at the far post when the ball was played across the box following a corner. Two minutes before half time and the home side were back on level terms though when good composure was shown in playing the ball across the box for Sam Jacobsen to fire home from 12 yards. Scoring against the wind was to prove crucial for the home side.

In the second half, it was Vikingur's turn to have the advantage of the wind behind them and so had the upper hand. They took the lead on 63 minutes when Erling Jacobsen stabbed home from close range after a powerful header was saved. The rest of the match was played almost exclusively in HB's half, but the one goal lead always looked a little shaky, and the game was not put to bed until virtually the last kick of the game, when a free kick was looped into the box and Finnur Justinsson scored with a firm header from the edge of the box.

07/20