

TT No.162: Paul Roth - GRAN CANARIA 'MEGA HOP' (Introduction & Itinerary) - 03-12 FEBRUARY 2012.

Our fourth holiday to Gran Canaria, the third largest of the seven islands that form the Canarian archipelago, came at an auspicious time, as the erstwhile mild winter weather in the UK took a decidedly cold turn. Wall-to-wall sun, and health-giving warmth is what my wife and I 'endured' during our fortnight's stay at the Taurito Princess Hotel, in the tourist resort of Playa Taurito. The accommodation was, it has to be said, not the most luxurious we've ever encountered, but its location at the mouth of a narrow, steeping Barranco (canyon), overlooking a glorious black-sanded beach with views round to the harbour's mouth of idyllic Puerto de Mogan from its landscaped garden, made it undoubtedly the most dramatic.

The volcanic, almost circular, island is a major tourist destination, and has all the northerly European countries providing charter holidays to its warm climes. But there's so much more to Gran Canaria than just lazing around a swimming pool and soaking up the rays. The 330 hectares of protected Sahara Desert-like sand dunes at Maspalomas; postcard-perfect mountain-top villages, at this time of year awash with clouds of almond blossom; vast outcrops of strangely-formed black basalt rock; Las Palmas, Gran Canaria's historical and captivating capital; botanical gardens containing plants both smooth and dangerously prickly; golden (and black), child-safe sandy beaches; spectacular golf courses lined with every conceivable shade of vibrant bougainvillea; pine forests that defy gravity by clinging to the sides of near-vertical slopes; shimmering lakes formed by dams and flora and fauna so diverse you could be forgiven for thinking you were 20,000 miles from Blighty, not just 1,800. These are but a small selection of its wonders that for so many years now have made Gran Canaria a must-visit destination.

But it's the island's legion of footballing opportunities that I'm going to tell you about. Gran Canaria has one representative competing in La Liga 2nd Division and one in Division 2B, Group 1; the Tercera (3rd) Division, Group 12 - the Canary Island section - has 6 representatives; below this level comes the Las Palmas Preferente section, that includes clubs from the nearby islands of Fuerteventura and Lanzarote, and consists of 14 Gran Canarian sides (Vecindario's 'B' side included).

Finally, 2 Aficionados (Regional) leagues, that comprise two regionalised groups containing a further 69 teams (3 'B' sides along with UD Las Palmas 'C' are included in the competition), fulfil the island's complement of 87 teams.

Even Las Palmas Atletico - UD Las Palmas' reserve side in everything but name - play in their own purpose-built stadium, next door to the relatively new Estadio de Gran Canaria. Joyously, not one team groundshares! During our stay I could have attended one more match than the five that I did. The reason I didn't will be explained later: each of the five though were a mini adventure in themselves.

An invaluable aid to my travels was the ever-reliable www.futbolme.com website. Don't forget, if ever using it, that this is a Spanish website, and quoted matchday kick-off times are always one hour ahead of Canary Island time.

ITINERARY

(Detailed TT reports can be found by clicking on the match links below).

MATCH 1 - Friday, February 3rd 2012; **CLUB de FUTBOL MOGAN** vs. CLUB de FUTBOL UNION PEDRO HIDALGO; Gran Canaria Regional League, 2nd Division, Group 2; Result: 0-2; Att: 100; Playing surface: 3G. [see TT163-view report];

MATCH 2 - Saturday, February 4th 2012; **UNION DEPORTIVA VILLA de SANTA BRIGIDA** vs. SOCIDAD DEPORTIVA TENISCA; La Liga Tercera Division, Group 12; Res: 2-0; Att: 150; Playing surface: 4G. [see TT164-view report];

MATCH 3 - Sunday, February 5th 2012; **UNION DEPORTIVA TEROR BALOMPIE** vs. CLUB UNION DEPORTIVO UNION SUR YAIZA; Las Palmas Preferente Division; Res: 2-2; Att: 250; Playing surface: 3G. [see TT165-view report];

MATCH 4 Friday, February 10th 2012; **CLUB de FUTBOL VENEGUERA** vs. UNION DEPORTIVA LAS REMUDAS; Gran Canaria Regional League, Second Division, Group 2; Res: 5-3; Att: 70; Playing surface: 3G. [see TT166-view report];

MATCH 5 - Saturday, February 11th 2012; **CLUB DEPORTIVA ARTENARA** vs. UNION DEPORTIVA ATALAYA; Gran Canaria Region Division, 2nd Division, Group 1; Res: 3-2; Att: Unknown; Playing surface: 3G. [see TT167-view report] and

MATCH 6 - Sunday, February 12th 2012; **ESTRELLA CLUB de FUTBOL** vs. UNION DEPORTIVA LAS ZOCAS; La Liga Tercera Division, Group 12; Res: 3-0; Att: 300; Playing surface: 3G. [see TT168-view report].

A FEW BIG 'THANK YOUS'

I would finally like to say a few 'Thankyous'.

To all the officials at each and every club that welcomed me with open arms.

To the numerous people I also fell into conversation with regarding groundhopping, who embraced the concept and who genuinely seemed interested in it.

To the wonderful, hospitable and generous peoples of Gran Canaria itself - go off the beaten track and you will be afforded every conceivable consideration.

Last, but by no means least, to my ever-supportive wife, who allowed me time off to enjoy the thing I like doing fourth best in my life.

07/20