

TT No.168: Paul Roth - Sun February 12th 2012; **ESTRELLA CLUB de FUTBOL v UNION DEPORTIVA LAS ZOCAS**; La Liga Tercera Division, Group 12; Res: 3-0; Att: 300; Playing surface: 3G.

I had great difficulty locating the nondescript town of Sardina-del-Sur, let alone Estrella Club de Futbol's Las Palmitas (The Palm Leaves) stadium on this, the final Sunday of our winter break. Situated behind the larger town of Vecindario, on Gran Canaria's industrial coastal plain, my trouble began when I realised the topography of my pre-printed map meant the turn-off, I needed to take was 100 ft above me. When I did arrive in Sardina (not to be confused with the township of the same situated on the island's north-westerly tip), every road I wanted to turn into, at its junction, defiantly annotated 'NO ENTRY'. Eventually, after a lot of toing and froing, I achieved my goal.

Las Palmitas' imposing white and green walls house an atmospheric arena, that's somehow all the better for its slightly faded facade. A thousand bleached bleachers occupy its north side, that are patently insufficiently covered by a roof that stretches three quarters away along this seating's length. There's the ubiquitous canteen of course, resplendent with old team photos, that again served up everything I'd by now come to expect - surprisingly though no Sunday Luncheon of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding! Behind an imposing 20ft wall at its western end, is where the changing rooms are located and on the opposite side to the grandstand, a press box presides over proceedings. Six floodlight pylons, three on each flank, that have in total 32 bulbs, illuminate The Palm Leaves as and when required.

The backdrop of brooding mountains captures the idyllic scene.

I paid 6 Euros to get in: for this small fee I received the most decorous of entry tickets. This colourful piece of ephemera is something I wouldn't normally preserve, but on this occasion have. The fellow whom I had handed my monies to was the same gentleman who then popped out of his kiosk to tear the stub from the ticket he'd just furnished me with. Explaining that I wanted to take photographs of the encampment, he allowed me onto the playing area (I almost came a cropper here, as two more steps towards the centre-circle would have had me soaked by powerful water cannon that suddenly popped up to pre-wet the surface). He also granted permission for me to watch the match with the sun at my back, sitting alongside TV cameramen and members of the press.

After 51 minutes of deadlock the home side were awarded a penalty, duly converted by No. 10 Eneko. From that moment on the assembled were treated to a demonstration as to exactly why Estrella top the Tercera Division.

Admittedly the Tenerife side contributed to their own downfall by having a player sent-off later, but the homesters' incisive play was a joy to behold. They twice

more augmented their tally, creating plenty more goal-scoring opportunities besides.

Back-to-back promotions look to be on the cards if they can just maintain this breath-taking form.

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