

TT No.203: Justin Holmes - Sat 31st March 2012; **Taff's Well** v Goytre United; Welsh League Division One; Venue: Rhiw Dda'r, Taff's Well; Score: 2-3; Admn: £5.00; Programme: £1.00; Att: 100 (estimate); Match Rating: 4.

With a bargain £2.00 return Megabus coach ticket from London to Cardiff booked months ago with the aim of exploring another potential treat, of a ground, in the Welsh League, options turned out to be fairly limited in the end, with a trip 7 miles north of Cardiff appealing the most, to take in an almost top of the table clash.

Having arrived in Cardiff little more than an hour before kick-off, I hastily caught a train from Cardiff Queen's Street rail station for the 15-minute ride north to Taff's Well. Rhiw Dda'r is a pleasant ten- minute walk from the station, via a rural cycle path, and if one puts in ear plugs, is a very pleasant place to watch football at. The facilities themselves are currently basic and not particularly charming. As one enters the ground at one corner of the ground, to the right and behind the goal is a long unattractive windowless building in club colours of yellow housing the changing rooms and clubhouse. On one of the touchlines is a small stand, about a third of which hosts standing, the other two thirds have seating, but views from here are not good, with little inclination between the three rows of seating, set at pitch level and some way back from pitch. Around the rest of the ground is hard standing, although on the opposite touchline, a new stand will be installed within the next week. Typically for a Welsh League ground, dramatic hills surround the ground, which make for an attractive backdrop, but the busy A470 dual carriageway which passes right alongside the ground produces constant loud traffic noise. The ground has floodlights, and it is possible to watch the game for free from the road lining the ground - which unfortunately several people chose to do. The programme was fair, with only an eight page insert relevant for today's game inside a shell used throughout the season. The shell did have some interesting reading material about the club and other articles of interest, although it was rather dated considering it was written before the start of the season.

Today's match would pitch the second and fourth placed teams together. Taff's Well are the second placed team and look well placed to challenge for the title, four points behind leaders Cambrian and Clydach, but with a game in hand. They had a disappointing 1-4 defeat at struggling Cardiff Corinthians in midweek, although before that they had won four games in a row. Goytre United were three points behind Taff's Well, but had played three games more. They had disappointingly lost their previous two games, both at home against bottom half of the table teams, although before that they had won four and drawn two of their previous six games, a run which included beating today's opponents Taff's Wells 3-1 at the start of the month.

On an overcast afternoon and on an undulating, bobbly pitch, the game started off quite poorly, with both teams struggling to settle and play cohesive football. The

pattern quickly emerged though of the home team always looking to play the long ball, which did not add to the entertainment value of the game but in fairness the long balls were usually accurate and looked threatening. The hosts thought they had taken the lead on the quarter hour mark, when a corner was headed home from close range, but the goal was disallowed for pushing. On 36 minutes, it was the visitors who took the lead though, when the keeper came charging out of his box to deal with a long ball but was beaten to the ball by Craig Stiens, who had the simple task of knocking the ball to the side of the keeper before shooting low into the empty net from about 25 yards. Five minutes later and Goytre United doubled their advantage, when a scruffy cross was tucked home from close range by Richard French.

Into the second half and there was little sign that Taff's Well would get back into the game, and indeed on 65 minutes, Goytre United seemingly put the game to bed with a third goal, when a shot by French from just inside the penalty area went into the net despite taking a deflection off of the keeper. There was plenty of huff and puff from Taff's Well for the rest of the game but they rarely convinced they could get back in the game, although ten minutes from time, they did score what appeared to be a consolation goal when a penalty was confidently converted into the top left hand corner just out of the keeper's reach. Two minutes from time and suddenly Taff's Well were right back in the game when a shot from a very tight angle took a deflection and looped over the keeper and into the net. After Goytre United looking so comfortable for most of the second half, suddenly they were holding on quite desperately for the three points as it was all Taff's Well in the closing minutes as they mounted sustained pressure on the Goytre United goal, forcing a succession of corners. In the end, time ran out and it was Goytre United who claimed the victory, as they rose to third place in the table, leapfrogging Taff's Well, who dropped to fourth.

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