

TT No.209: Justin Holmes - Tues 3rd April 2012; **Metrogas** v University of Kent; Kent County League Division One; Venue: Marathon Playing Field, Metrogas Sports Ground, New Eltham; Score: 3-1; Admn: None; Programme: None; Attendance: 40 (h-c); Match Rating: 4.

The arrival of April and the clocks having gone forward usually prompts the start of the groundhopping silly season of early evening midweek kick-offs. However unusually consistently mild and dry conditions over the winter resulting in relatively very few postponements has resulted in leagues in the south-east of England having to add supplementary cup competitions to fill the void Saturdays, let alone have to cram in a backlog of fixtures in the midweeks, in the closing month of the season. Therefore, midweek early evening fixtures are proving thin on the ground in the south east this year, and so for my opening silly season game, I made my way to south-east London for a Kent County League Division One game.

The Marathon Playing Field is one of about half a dozen pitches of the Metrogas Sports Ground, located about a ten-minute walk from New Eltham rail station, and was rather a pleasant surprise for the level of football, the location and the basic nature of facilities. As one arrives pitch-side, there is hard standing and railing from the corner flag to the dugout along one touchline, whilst around the rest of the pitch there are no railings or similar barrier nor hard standing. Behind one of the goals, is an attractively built large clubhouse, comfortable on the inside and offering a tea bar and a little shelter outside. Colourful trees around the complex make for a surprisingly rural and peaceful setting, given its location. Obviously, no floodlights are installed here. As is usually - but not always - the case in this league, no programmes were issued.

Metrogas have had a wonderful season. They look hot favourites to win the league and certainly to gain promotion to the Premier Division, as they lead the table by four points with a game in hand, are still unbeaten this season in the league, have only failed to take maximum points on three occasions from the nineteen games played (two of those draws coming in March) and have a goal difference of plus 63. The University of Kent went into this game in eighth place in the fifteen-team league, a deceptively low position as they have played at least five games fewer than every other team in the division - win all of their games in hand and they would be in third position.

On a cool evening with overcast skies that got ever darker and more threatening as the evening wore on, it was Metrogas who unsurprisingly looked the stronger team from the start and carved out some presentable chances, although it wasn't until the half hour mark when they finally took the lead, when a looping, perfectly judged cross from out wide was headed in from close range. For the rest of the half, Metrogas dominated and they really should have gone into the interval with a more commanding lead than one.

After a very short half time interval of less than five minutes, with conditions already becoming rather dark and with rain starting to come down which would become increasingly heavy and persistent, within a couple of minutes of the restart, the University of Kent were suddenly back on level terms when a long low ball forward seemed to have been gathered by the keeper, but he allowed the ball to squirm away, allowing the striker to tuck the ball home. It was a surprising score-line given the dominance of Metrogas up to this point, but after the equaliser, the game became very even and very much in the balance, so much so that one sensed that Metrogas' unbeaten record could be in real danger. Almost out of nothing, Metrogas went back into the lead on 67 minutes, when a low cross into the box was thumped home emphatically from close range. Within a couple of minutes, Metrogas added a third, when a rebound was tucked home after the keeper had saved a shot. With proceedings becoming exceedingly dark, the game rather petered out as Metrogas claimed yet another three points.

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