

**TT No.232: Justin Holmes** - Tues 24th April 2012; **Staplehurst Monarchs Utd v APM Contrast**; Kent County Prem Division; Venue: Jubilee Sports Ground, Staplehurst; Score: 0-1; Admission: None; Prog: None; Att: 40 (est.); Match rating 3.

The silly season continued for me this evening with an early evening 6.30 kick-off in south-west Kent, for a game which, in all honesty, had precious little reason in itself to pay a visit for. With heavy rain forecast all day, I doubted whether the game would even go ahead, however happily the rain stayed away all day and so it was game on.

The Jubilee Sports Ground is about a twenty-minute walk from Staplehurst rail station, and whilst it is unsurprisingly basic, it is a spacious complex which is well maintained and moderately pleasing on the eye. After entering the ground through the car park, a path leads one to pitch-side behind one of the goals. To the left of the path is a white pavilion constructed three years ago housing the tea bar - not open this evening - and changing rooms. To the right of the path is a much older guides centre. The changing rooms are located behind one corner of the ground, and hard standing stretches out from this corner to just past the dug outs. This hard-standing area is also roped off from the pitch. The rest of the ground is open with no hard standing. Behind the other touchline are three other full-size pitches. Staplehurst have issued programmes in recent seasons, but none were produced for this evening's game.

There was little riding on this evening's game, with Staplehurst one place above the relegation zone, but their safety was confirmed on Saturday without playing as the team below them, Snodland, lost their last game of the season. Tonight, would be Staplehurst's final game of the season, but they were seven points adrift of the next team above them. APM Contrast have had a reasonable season, and found themselves in seventh place in the fourteen-team league, with four games left to play, more than any other team, although fifth is the highest they can hope to finish. When the two teams met in Aylesford back in October, APM Contrast were victorious by five goals to one.

With the very pleasant surprise of blue skies and bright sunshine throughout much of the first half, the home side started the game with ten men and with one of their strikers in goal, as their regular goalkeeper only arrived at the ground ten minutes into the game. Happily, for Staplehurst, the visitors never managed to test the stand-in keeper. The opening half hour was fairly even, competitive but with precious few attacks on goal. On the half hour, APM Contrast took the lead, when a free kick was played low into the box and a defender got the last touch as the ball was judged to have just crept over the line before being cleared. The game remained much as it had before, perhaps with the away team gaining slight ascendancy.

Black clouds and occasional drizzle arrived for the second half, which continued in much the same vein of being reasonably entertaining but with very few goalscoring opportunities, although Staplehurst had two wonderful chances to claim a point. First, on 67 minutes, an APM Contrast defender played a weak short back pass to his keeper but the forward nipped in to poke the ball at the keeper who managed to keep the ball out, and a powerful follow up shot was also saved. On 77 minutes, they had two shots cleared off the line in quick succession, but it was not to be for the home side, and it was APM Contrast who held on for the three points, to lift them up to sixth in the table.

07/20