

**TT No.239: Justin Holmes** - Sat 28th April 2012; **Three Bridges** v Rye United; Sussex County League Division 1; Venue: Jubilee Field, Three Bridges; Score: 1-0; Admission including Programme: £6.00; Att: 688; Match rating: 2.

Not normally one to like revisits with so many new grounds to explore, all the more so considering I have visited the home of Three Bridges several times in the past, it was purely the game which was of huge significance, a final day title decider, which led me to the outskirts of Gatwick Airport for today's action.

The Jubilee Field is conveniently about a five-minute walk from Three Bridges rail station, and whilst the ground is nothing to write home about in terms of character or setting - bland would be a better way to describe both here, facilities are very good for the level of football. As one enters the ground behind one of the goals, on the touchline to the right is a small all-seater stand, with a few steps of terracing stretching out to both corner flags, whilst on the opposite side is a long brick building housing the clubhouse, changing rooms and tea bar. The tea bar would certainly win any award for the slowest service possible at any football ground, with just one person on duty and cooking all food to order, customer by customer, at a very gentle pace. This building also provides some shelter with an overhanging roof. A fairly recent addition to the ground is a further small all-seater stand next to the clubhouse building, and behind both goals is hard standing. The programme consisted of 16 black and white pages of information about today's game woven into a glossy advertising publication. Considering that it was free with admission, it would be harsh to criticise the programme too much.

There are not too many occasions when the league title is decided between the only two teams in contention on the final day of the season, but that is how it has panned out this season in the Sussex County League Division One, in what has certainly been the closest title race in many a year. Up until last Tuesday, a third team, Lancing, still had hopes of clinching the title, however Three Bridges' draw at home to Peacehaven meant that Lancing would now be out of the running. It also meant that today's visitors, Rye United, were handed the opportunity of playing for the title today, as if Three Bridges had won on Tuesday, the title would already be theirs. With Three Bridges leading the table by two points, Rye United had to win today - any other result and Three Bridges would claim the title and achieve promotion to the Ryman League. Today would be the fifth time the two teams have met this season. In the league encounter, Rye won 3-0 back in September, and Rye were also triumphant when the teams met on neutral territory in the Sussex RUR Cup Semi-Final - and Rye went onto lift that Cup. In the FA Vase, Three Bridges won 2-1 at Rye, after Rye had two players sent off, and in the John O'Hara (League) Cup Semi Final, Three Bridges won on neutral territory 1-0, and went on to win that competition. So, all the ingredients were in place for a fascinating final day shoot-out between the best two teams in the league with plenty of history this season.

On a damp, chilly overcast afternoon, the first half was, perhaps unsurprisingly, a rather dour affair, with both sides looking nervous and there were very few chances at either end. Three Bridges always looked the better side, as Rye struggled to muster any efforts on goal, although it was the visitors who came closest to open the scoring, when a low cross cannoned off a defender towards goal just a few yards out, but to his good fortune the ball went straight into the keeper's arms.

With the weather becoming decidedly wintry in the second half, with bitterly cold driving rain intensifying as the half wore on, Three Bridges continued in the ascendancy and on 53 minutes, they took the lead when a powerful shot by Frenchman Wiliams Peauroux took a deflection and the ball ended up in the net. That appeared to be that in terms of the destiny of the Championship, although Rye certainly are not goal shy this season, having racked up 99 goals from their 37 league games this season. However, Three Bridges completely dominated the remainder of the game and they always looked the more likely scorers. The game turned rather ugly as the second half wore on as some Rye players appeared to be in danger of losing their composure, making rather reckless tackles and engaging in fisticuffs, and they had Paul Watson sent off for a second yellow card. Credit to the referee for keeping a lid on proceedings though as the Rye players calmed down, and although they did apply some more pressure in the closing ten minutes, they never really convinced that they could equalise, and so it was Three Bridges who, on the day at least, thoroughly deserved the victory to claim the three points, to provoke wild celebrations from the Three Bridges players on the final whistle, and at the presentation of the trophy soon afterwards. Disappointment for Rye missing out on the title would be compounded by Lancing winning 6-0 away at AFC Uckfield, meaning that Rye had to make do with a third placed finish.

07/20