

**TT No.32: *Justin Holmes*** - Sat 3rd September 2011; **St Patrick's Athletic v Galway Utd**; League of Ireland Prem Division; Venue: Richmond Park, Dublin; Score: 6-1; Admn: €15.00; Programme: €3.00; Attendance: 649; Match Rating: 4.

For my second trip to the Republic of Ireland of 2011, I had a shortlist of two games to attend - either a visit to arguably the spiritual home of Irish football, Dalymount Park, home of Bohemians, or a visit to Richmond Park, home of St Patrick's Athletic, and I just could not decide between the two. In the end, I set off for the Dalymount, only to change my mind one last time to head west from Dublin city centre to head for Richmond Park, finally swayed by never having previously seen St Patrick's Athletic in action, plus their match against Galway United seemed a certainty to produce some goals.

Richmond Park is located in the Inchicore suburb of Dublin about two and a half miles west from the city centre. I decided to walk to the ground, which took about an hour, walking alongside the River Liffey for about half the way, however trams and buses (the latter option I chose after the match) also ply the route. A couple of attractive murals indicate the entrance down to the ground, which is set below street level, although before proceeding through the turnstiles, one must purchase a ticket from the club shop a short distance away. The main all-seater stand, which stretches along one length of the pitch, is the first thing that one encounters having passed through the turnstiles. Along the opposite length of the pitch is a dozen steps of terracing, although for this evening's match, only one half was in use, with the other half closed off, as was the terrace area behind one of the goals, which has a small covered area to one side of the goal. Behind the other goal is a temporary-looking uncovered all-seater stand. Opened in 1925, one does not really get a feel for the history of the ground, as the vast majority of it has been renovated in the last twenty years. The ground is mostly surrounded by terrace housing, but the length of terracing is lined with trees which makes for a nice background. The glossy programme was professionally designed and easy on the eye, covering all of the essential information, although only consisted of 16 pages, 7 of which were advertising.

Approaching the business end of the football season in Ireland, St Patrick's Athletic lay in fourth place in the league, still with faint hopes of challenging for the title, six points adrift of the current top two in the league, Derry City and Shamrock Rovers. They had a very good run in Europe this season, winning through two Europa League ties, both times having lost the first leg, an excellent and all too rare achievement for a League of Ireland club. Richmond Park has been something of a fortress for St Patrick's this season, having only lost once there in the league, back in March. This season has been a total disaster for tonight's visitors, Galway United. Hit by chronic financial difficulties in the close-season, they were initially denied a licence to play in the League of Ireland this season, a decision they successfully appealed against. However, with hindsight, Galway may wonder why

and wish they hadn't bothered as they are currently anchored at the foot of the table, having gained just five points from their 27 games, have lost their last 21 games on the bounce, have not picked up a point since mid-April and had a goal difference of minus 65. A farcical season plumbed new depths in July when Galway United's management committee unanimously passed a motion of no confidence against manager Sean Connor - yet he remains as manager today. Unsurprisingly, St Patrick's have triumphed in all three previous meetings between the two clubs this season.

If Galway were to have any chance of getting anything from the game, they would have to at least frustrate the home side in the early stages. Therefore, all hope appeared to have been extinguished for Galway with just 80 seconds on the clock, when the home side took the lead. Sean O'Connor was fed the ball about 10 yards out, and had all the time and space in the world to place the ball past the keeper. On 14 minutes, Galway conceded a penalty - maybe harsh, as the ball went to hand rather than the other way round, but as the hand was outstretched above the defender's head, a penalty was probably justified. Stephen Bradley converted high into the corner, sending the keeper the wrong way. On 37 minutes, the home side opened up a three-goal advantage, when a corner wasn't properly cleared and Danny North fired home. Three minutes before half time and St Patrick's scored their fourth, and excellent move culminating in a sweet strike from O'Connor for his second goal of the match, in off the crossbar. The game was clearly already over, and St Patrick's should have scored at least a further two goals with a couple of scarcely believable misses from close range.

With St Patrick's playing some excellent, confident football against a spirited but desperately poor Galway side, one feared Galway could be on the end of another embarrassing score-line. However, St Patrick's made a couple of substitutions at half time, and whether it was related or not, the home side seemed to lose all cohesion and impetus, and to be fair, Galway looked determined to keep the score-line respectable. Just as it was looking as the game may peter out with the 4-0 score-line, Danny North scored his second of the night on 76 minutes when he was played in by O'Connor before scoring in off the keeper's near post. Four minutes later and St Patrick's made it six, Peter Crowley smashing the ball home after yet more good build-up play from O'Connor. Galway did manage to claim a consolation goal a minute later which they just about deserved with the way they kept battling and never let their heads drop. Paul Sinnott, 30 yards out close to the touchline, sent in a fairly tame shot towards goal which the keeper somehow managed to slip through his fingers and into the net. 6-1 was how it finished, a not unsurprisingly one-sided score-line which kept St Patrick's within touch of the leaders whilst also boosting their goal difference. Galway must just wish they could finish their season now, and one fears that they will even struggle in the First Division next season without a major overhaul of the team and possibly the entire club.

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