

TT No.38: Paul Roth - Sun September 11th 2011; Nord Pas de Calais Seniors D'Honneur Division; **Le Touquet AC Football Cote D'Opale** vs. Stade Le Portelois; Res: 2-2; Att: 130; Entry: 5 Euros; Altitude and global positioning: The Complexe Sportif Avenue Jean-Luis Sanguet is 1 m (3.280ft) above sea level, at latitude 50 degrees, 31.1 mins N and longitude 1 degree, 35.9 mins E (position derived from centre circle); Weather: Sunny and warm; Club shop: No; My day's carbon footprint legacy: 13.7.

Our efforts to watch a football match at AC Le Touquet's impressive Complexe Sportif stadium have been continually thwarted over the past few seasons, when the club has irritatingly switched its home Ligue Seniors D'Honneur kick-off times to Saturday evenings, instead of the more customary Sunday afternoons. So, when this rare opportunity to visit the home of 'Les Verts' presented itself on Sunday 11th September, my seismologist friend and I seized it with open arms.

Located 50 miles south of Calais' ferry terminal, Le Touquet-Paris-Plage (to give it its full title) is a chic and fashionable resort on France's Opal Coast. Set between the River Canche and glorious coastline, the seaside town is a playground to the mega-wealthy who pass their balmy summers, and winters, ensconced in the myriad of luxury villas that dot the pine forest that lay behind the chic boutiques, championship golf courses and 5* hotels. Just to emphasise its importance, Le Touquet even possesses an international airport.

Founded originally in 1905, and later in 1939 following a merger with FC L'Olympique Touquettois, AC Le Touquet's splendid stadium lies amidst the town's sporting zone, in front of the previously mentioned Bois, and nearby to the sumptuous Hotel Westminster and renowned casino. The sports facilities hereabouts are world class, with the town hosting many major championships and events. This is indeed borne out as one approaches the urbanization from Etaples on the D939, where signs promoting such happenings line the carriageway. Even the football match we were to watch was thus advertised!

A 650-seater grandstand runs the length of the ground's south-westerly aspect, with extra seating available behind the town-end goal. A jejune, wooden-built Buvette occupies an area to the right upon entry and the arena is illuminated - usually on Saturday evenings(!) - by four towering floodlight pylons, each accommodating 18 lamps apiece, which stand proudly in each corner. Our one and only gripe being that the immaculate playing surface is surrounded in entirety by a sturdy, and totally unnecessary, 2m high olive-green metal fence.

As is our want, we stopped en-route to run the rule over another stadium (AS Etaples' facility is quite unique; we instantly concurred to return soon), and to have a beer in the comfortable Cafe Jean in Le Touquet's Latin quarter.

Actually, you need alcohol beforehand - the more the better to be honest - if you're going to watch French football. Having witnessed in excess of 70 matches in

the country to-date, I can best describe what I've previously encountered football-wise there as ranging from the skilful to the comedic to the hopeless to the sometimes downright dreadful.

Today's game versus newly-promoted and current table-topping Le Portel Stade, from near Boulogne, certainly included each of those elements. Factor in a maniacal one-man drummer and a tone-deaf chanting supporter who parked themselves next door to us in the stand, and you have all the ingredients of a never-to-be-forgotten occasion.

And so, it proved. As entertaining a match as you could ever wish to view had us laughing, shaking our heads, wincing and wishing we'd brought earplugs with us: often, all at the same time! A 2-all draw was about right, with the goal-action coming in the first-half. The latter period of play cannot be connoted descriptively by myself with a strong-enough disparaging adjective. Great stuff though!

Despite a lengthy diversion that took us through never-before-seen hamlets and along narrow byways, and after a drink plus a chinwag on-board the Blighty-bound Spirit of Turkmenistan, we were both indoors enjoying our respective mugs of Horlicks before the 9.30pm watershed.

FGIF Star Rating: 5* (cinq*).

07/20