

TT No.62: *Justin Holmes* - Sat 1st October 2011; **IFK Gothenburg** v Mjällby AIF; Swedish Allsvenskan; Venue: Gamla Ullevi, Gothenburg; Score: 0-1; Admn: 130 SEK; Programme: Free; Attendance: 7,407; Match Rating: 2.

With Gothenburg currently being one of the bargain Ryanair destinations, this was my second visit to the city of the year, and to Sweden inside two weeks, for a top tier, Allsvenskan game, at the home of one of the biggest names and most successful teams in Swedish football. Despite buying my tickets in advance, it did look like I might not make this game, as my destination airport, Gothenburg City, was closed due to fog. An alternative airport of Skavsta, near Stockholm, was mentioned, but happily the plane was able to land at the alternative Landvetter airport the other side of Gothenburg, happily with minimal disruption to my plans.

The Gamla Ullevi, which is located just a five-minute walk northwards from the city centre and very close to the much larger and impressive looking Ullevi stadium, is a rather interesting stadium despite its rather bland modern appearance. The name translates to "Old Ullevi", which is rather misleading, as the current stadium was only opened in 2008, built on the site of the stadium it replaced - which was also called Gamla Ullevi. There cannot be many stadia in the world that host as many as four different teams, with club sides IFK Gothenburg, GAIS and Örgryte IS all calling the Gamla Ullevi home, as do the Swedish national women's football team. The stadium has a nice uniform, continuous look about it, with seating along both lengths of the pitch and in all four corners. Behind both goals, there is a small area of terracing in the lower tier, and in the upper tier is a "dual purpose" area, with seating installed but handrails installed along each row for those who prefer to stand - as most do in this area. One of these areas - where I was located - is where the hard-core support of IFK Gothenburg gathers. Views are excellent and obstructed from everywhere in the stadium, and with the whole stadium wrapped closely to the pitch, it is a very good arena to watch football in. A small sized 12-page programme was given out free of charge around the stadium - indeed, the distributors almost chased people to give them a programme, even persons cycling or driving past clearly not going to the match. It had squad lists but that was about the limit of interest to a non-Swedish speaker, no results list nor league table.

For the home side, there was little left to play for with just three games left of the season, as they cannot qualify for European football. They were in sixth place in the league, and they will have to settle for a mid-table finish - following on from last year's seventh place, which surely cannot be considered acceptable considering the club's status. Things are a little more interesting for Mjällby as the Allsvenskan season draws to a close, in twelfth place in the sixteen league, six points clear of the relegation zone and only three points clear of the relegation play-off position. When the two teams met at Mjällby earlier in the season, IFK triumphed 2-0.

Although this was a match played at a higher tempo than the average Scandinavian game, it was desperately short on quality and ideas, as both teams looked exactly what they are - a "big" club going through the motions against a limited team battling against relegation. Although the home side looked slightly the better side, neither side really looked like scoring, and the score-line remained goalless at half time. I just had a feeling throughout that things were building up to the visitors claiming a scrappy win, and that is pretty how much how it panned out. Mjällby started to carve out the few half chances that there were, most notably on the hour mark when a long kick from the goalkeeper presented a one-on-one, which Erton Fejzullahu completely fluffed having down all the hard work holding off a defender when he miskicked tamely straight to the keeper from close range. However, they did score what turned out to be the winner when David Löfquist worked some space before unleashing a 25-yard screamer into the top corner which gave the keeper no chance. A wonderful goal not in keeping with a mostly dull game and to which one could say, "take a bow, son", and Löfquist duly obliged in his celebrations in front of the IFK hard core support. The home side could not muster a threat of an equaliser in the few minutes that remained and so Mjällby secured a vital three points to almost certainly guarantee survival in the Allsvenskan - only a freak swing in goal difference could see them slip into the relegation play-off position, with their two remaining games against the bottom two clubs in the league. Special mention must be made of the IFK Gothenburg fans today, who were absolutely superb in their support, from before kick off when the crowd sang along to the club anthem with scarves aloft, right through the game with singing and chanting despite the fairly dire fare on offer on the pitch. At the final whistle, their boos were deafening - which was exactly how it should be from supporters, superb support of their team during the match, but register their justified discontent with the dreadful performance once the game had ended. English fans at league games could learn a lot from this....

07/20