

TT No.72: Justin Holmes - Saturday 15th October 2011; **Racing FC Union Luxembourg** v Union 05 FC Kayl-Tétange; Luxembourg Division Nationale Venue: Stade Achille Hammerel, Luxembourg City; Score: 3-3; Admission: €8.00; Programme: Free; Attendance: 203; Match Rating: 4.

When I had originally booked my trip to Luxembourg (via Frankfurt-Hahn airport) for a long weekend, it would be something of a gamble which game I would be able to watch on the Saturday evening, as all but one of the games are scheduled for Sunday afternoons, and only at fairly short notice is usually just one of the games moved to the Saturday evening. It was something of a disappointment when that game turned out to be CS Pétange and Progrès Niedercorn, not only two of the strugglers in the league, but I had also seen the reverse fixture just last season. So, it was a relief when an additional game was subsequently moved to the Saturday, at a venue I had not been to previously, nor had I before watched either team in action.

The Stade Achille Hammerel is located just a five-minute walk north-eastwards from Luxembourg (City) train station, and without having any kind of "wow" factor, it is a very pleasant venue to watch football at. There is one modern all-seater stand straddling the half-way line with no obstructing pillars, and either side are large uncovered terraces as tall as the stand. Attached to one of these terraces, behind a corner, is the clubhouse on the first floor, with a tea bar and grill directly underneath. Along the opposite length of the pitch are six uncovered terrace steps, and behind both goals is flat uncovered standing. Neat hedgerows along three sides of the pitch, as well as the immaculately maintained nature of the ground, give the ground a very smart feel. The programme, which is given away free on entering the ground, is a full colour A4 sized publication, designed to cover the first half of the season but with an 8-page black and white insert specific for tonight's match, with articles in three different languages - French, German, and Luxembourgish.

Tonight's match would be between two of the surprise packages of the Division Nationale so far this season. Racing FC Union Luxembourg finished just one place and three points clear of a relegation play-off place last season, whilst Union 05 FC Kayl-Tétange were promoted as champions of the second tier Promotion d'Honneur last season. Clubs promoted to the top league usually seem to struggle in Luxembourg - last season, both of the promoted clubs went straight back down - in the case of FC Wiltz, this despite having the league's top goal-scorer! However, going into tonight's game, the clubs were in fifth and sixth places, having won four, drawn two and lost two games so far, Racing one place better off than Tétange with a goal difference superior by one goal. Therefore, the omens pointed towards a close game between two evenly matched sides playing with confidence.

Considering that the two games I had watched in Luxembourg previously were desperately poor affairs, it is fair to say that I did not have high expectation of this

game. However, it turned out to be one of the most entertaining games that I have witnessed for a long time, with plenty of twists and turns, lots of attacking intent, some controversy, and containing both pieces of great skill as well as calamitous errors. The game was just four minutes old when the first goal was scored, a rather fortunate one at that, which gave the visitors the lead. Spotting the keeper slightly off his line, Toni Lopes fired a long range shot towards goal, and the keeper made it back across in time to cover the shot, but presumably had lost his bearings as he patted the ball down - over the line, according to the linesman - before gathering the ball. The Racing team protested furiously, and this seemed to really affect the home side, as Tétange went on to completely dominate the first half. They had a goal disallowed on 20 minutes for offside - the general consensus seemed to be that this was a poor decision - but on 36 minutes they did open up a two goal lead with a wonderful goal, starting with a beautifully judged curling ball forward to Lopes just wide outside of the box, who turned and unleashed a stunning shot over the keeper and into the net. Tétange continued to carve out good chances, and the only question appeared to be how much they would win by. However, on the stroke of half time, Racing got back into the game when the ball was spread wide and then played low into the box, which a defender missed allowing an easy tap-in by Nicolas Romero from six yards.

Whether it was this late first half goal providing inspiration or some choice words from the manager, Racing were utterly transformed in the second half, as it was their turn to completely dominate the game in the second half. They had chance after chance after chance to equalise, most notably on 58 minutes when a header struck the bar after a very weak punch by the goalkeeper, but finally they did get on level terms on 66 minutes when the ball was played across goal from the by-line and Levy Rougeaux slotted home from 12 yards out. There now only seemed to be one winner but then suddenly Tétange, completely against the run of play, went back into the lead on 74 minutes, when the ball was crossed high into the box and the keeper, a half time substitute, went up for the ball with Idir Mokrani, but he couldn't claim the ball and it spilled away for a simple tap in by Mokrani. This was harsh on Racing, and they eventually got the equaliser they deserved two minutes from time, when a free kick was played into the box, dropping for Thomas Fullenwarth to nudge the ball home from close range. 3-3 was how it ended, which was overall probably a fair and accurate reflection of an open game very much of two halves and full of endeavour.

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