

TT No.73: Justin Holmes - Sun 16th October 2011; **FC Differdange 03** v F91 Dudelange; Luxembourg Div Nationale; Venue: Stade du Thillenber, Differdange; Score: 3-1; Admn: €8.00; Programme: Free; Att: 821 Match Rating: 2.

The second match of my weekend stay in Luxembourg was one I had eagerly anticipated, given that I had received many recommendations of the venue to be the stand-out, must-visit stadium in Luxembourg, the Stade du Thillenber. A further attraction to the fixture would be that it was between two of the strongest sides in the Luxembourg league.

The Stade du Thillenber is located in the town of Differdange, a 40-minute train ride south-west from Luxembourg city and very close to the border with France, with the stadium about a ten-minute walk from the train station. As one approaches the area, it is hard to imagine that there could be a pleasant football ground hidden away in an industrial area harsh on the eye. However, as one leaves Differdange town centre and into woodland as one approaches the stadium, it indeed becomes apparent that this will be a very attractive location for a football ground. If one is looking for a really pleasant stadium, a scenic backdrop and/or a traditional feel are essential - this stadium has both in abundance. It is set at the foot of steep wooded hills packed close by all around the ground, giving a very scenic and atmospheric feel. Straddling the halfway line is a small, rather uniquely designed traditional all-seater stand, and along the other length is a vast uncovered terrace - with its steep incline of steps, the top step would not be a place for anyone not keen on heights. Behind both goals is just flat standing. Apparently Differdange are looking to relocate to a new stadium in the relatively near future, and the loss of the Stade du Thillenber would be a crying shame indeed. On entering the stadium, an A4 sized paper club magazine is handed out of free of charge, but is of little interest, containing mostly advertising and a minimum of information that may have been relevant at the start of the season. But at least the club produces something, not always the case in Luxembourg.

This afternoon's match would see the reigning league champions visit the home of the cup holders for the last two seasons, and both teams could boast the very rare distinction for a Luxembourg club side of progressing through a round in a European competition this season, and there was certainly no disgrace in going out to Maribor (in the case of Dudelange) and Paris St Germain (in the case of Differdange). Both clubs have made solid in unspectacular starts to their league campaigns, with Differdange in seventh place, having won three and lost two of their eight games so far, whilst Dudelange were in third place, winning four and drawing three of their eight games. If Differdange were to beat the league champions today, they would have to break a record of Dudelange winning in each of the last five seasons at the Stade du Thillenber, quite a surprising statistic given that Differdange are one of the stronger teams in the league.

On a bright, sunny afternoon, with just eight minutes on the clock, Differdange opened the scoring following a corner, when a rather undignified scramble across the six-yard box ended with Janisch poking home from 6 yards. The hosts were clearly buoyed by this and looked the better side, and it was no surprise when they doubled their advantage on 31 minutes with a bit of a goalkeeping howler. Janisch spotted the keeper slightly off his line and fired a long range shot from 25 yards, and the Luxembourg international goalkeeper Jonathan Joubert inexplicably just patted out the ball in front of him, allowing an easy tap in for the onrushing Er Rafik. A real goalkeeping howler, but he was not helped one iota by his defence who made little effort to track back. Differdange comfortably held on to their two-goal advantage which they fully deserved.

Within three minutes of the restart, suddenly Dudelange were back in the match, when a long curling cross was met at the far post with a header from close range by Bensi. The game now looked really in the balance, although for the most part the match remained a midfield battle with few clear-cut chances for either side - which, with the score-line at 3-1, suited the home side. On 63 minutes, Differdange restored their two-goal advantage, when a corner was met with a powerful header from Bukvic. This really seemed to knock the stuffing out of Dudelange who did not really threaten until the last minute of the game when they had a shot cleared off the line.

This was a slightly disappointing game to watch, where Differdange set themselves up solidly and to be difficult to break down whilst Dudelange surprisingly lacked the creativity or inspiration to open up the home team regularly enough. However, this was an important win for Differdange, which lifted them one place but more importantly brings them closer to the leading pack, most of whom failed to win today and are now just two points behind second place - other results meant that Dudelange remain in third place.

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