

TT No.112: Justin Holmes - Tuesday 26th February 2013; **Bexhill United** v Eastbourne United Association; Sussex County League Division 2; Venue: The Polegrove, Bexhill-on-Sea; Score: 1-2; Admission: £4.00; Programme: £1.00; Attendance: 44; Match rating: 3.

Fancying a midweek game in relatively clement weather conditions compared to recent weeks I headed to the south-coast for a Sussex League Division Two game. Although I had visited the venue previously, that was before the recent addition of floodlights to the ground.

The Polegrove is located close to the west of Bexhill town centre, and is located about a five-minute walk from Collington train station - which is visible from the ground. Located very close to the seafront, there is little protection from cold winds blowing across the ground. The ground is as spacious as one would expect with it being shared with the cricket club, which is also why all of the facilities and the only stretch of hard standing are along one length of the pitch. From the corner that one enters the ground, there is a functional but not particularly attractive or inviting clubhouse. Straddling the half way line is by far the most attractive aspect of the ground, a large mock Tudor wooden grandstand painted in black and white which dates back to 1929. Excellent views are available from inside the stand. The other three sides of the ground are accessible to spectators, albeit with grass standing. The programme was attractively laid out, on glossy paper but in black and white and is certainly - as is usually the case at this level - overpriced at £1.

This evening's game would be something of a local derby between two clubs from neighbouring towns who are in the top half of the table. Bexhill United had an excellent start to the season. They were unbeaten in their first twelve league and cup games, and were unbeaten in the league until December spanning twelve games. Twelve points from their following ten games has meant they have slipped back into midtable, in seventh place, and seven points shy of third place - officially sufficient for promotion until ground gradings complicate matters. Eastbourne United Association were up in third place going into this game and have had a curious neat pattern of win-lose-win-lose over their last ten games, culminating in a very disappointing 0-4 defeat at mid table Steyning Town. When the two sides met in Eastbourne back in August, the match finished 2-2.

On a dry evening that felt colder than it might have done thanks to a keen wind coming off the sea, the game had an electric start when Bexhill's Jordan Woodley hit a speculative shot from fully 40yards and although the keeper got hands to the shot the ball looped up and into the net. The home side didn't push on from there, and Eastbourne United equalised on 12 minutes, when the ball was crossed from wide and headed in from close range by Jamie Bunn. Things got better for the visitors just three minutes later, when an excellently judge low diagonal ball played between defender and keeper caused confusion and Nick Barden poked the

ball home. Although Eastbourne were marginally the better side in the first half, it was Bexhill who had by far the best chances to score, having two shots cleared off the line in quite succession midway through the first half, and then having a goal disallowed for offside. It was something of a surprise therefore that there was no further score in the final half hour of the first half.

The second half followed a very similar pattern to the first. Clear goalscoring opportunities were thinner on the ground, although on the hour mark Bexhill's Will Dunstall hit the ball wide from 6 yards out, and towards the end of the game, Eastbourne had a shot hit the post and a header went narrowly over the bar from close range. As the second half wore on, there was an increasingly ugly feel to the game, with the officials not clamping down on blatant and loud dissent, and the bad tempers finally exploded as the game entered added on time. After a free kick was bizarrely given Bexhill's way, the linesman seemed to want to correct the error for flagging just as bizarrely for offside shortly before Bexhill put the ball in the net. Aggressive swearing and gesticulating ensued, with Bexhill's Steve Morris being sent off as the worst culprit and he did himself no credit at all when he approached the linesman who had flagged offside and screamed obscenities in his face. A member of the Bexhill management team was also dismissed for racing down the touchline screaming obscenities too. After several minutes of ugly scenes when most of the Bexhill players completely lost their composure, the game resumed and Eastbourne held on for an important three points. So, a very unsavoury and disappointing end to what previously had been a most entertaining game of football.

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