

**TT No.32: *Justin Holmes*** - Sat 15th September 2012; **United Services Portsmouth** v Swanage Town and Herston; FA Vase 2nd Qualifying Round; Venue: Victory Stadium, Portsmouth; Score: 0-3; Admission: £4.00; Programme: £1.00; Attendance: 15 (head count); Match rating: 2.

Fancying a trip to the south coast today for the first time in quite a long time, I bought my train ticket to Portsmouth without knowing for sure where I would end up. Portsmouth versus Walsall in Football League One was tempting, although having witnessed Football League action the night before, with Charlton's bitterly disappointing home defeat to Crystal Palace last night, I chose a more tranquil affair instead and pay a visit to a club that has aroused my curiosity for some time.

The Victory Stadium is about a ten minute walk from Portsmouth and Southsea rail station and whilst the vast complex of sports pitches is easy to find - particularly for me, as I had watched county cricket here back in the nineties, access to the football ground within it is not, with no specific signposting and one has to walk past a security hut to enter the complex, walking past various sports buildings, rugby and hockey pitches to finally get to the football ground. Spectators are distant from the action due to an athletics track circling the pitch, with hard standing available around the outside of the track apart from behind one end, although this grassed area is still accessible to spectators. There is a 500-seater main stand that has comfortable seating that is well protected and offers excellent views of the action, although it certainly would not win any design awards. Although the ground is rather open with some rather unattractive, functional buildings close by in the complex, facilities far exceed what one usually encounters in the Wessex League Division One, grass banks with sporadic trees add a nice touch, as does the presence of Landport Gate, the original main entrance gate to the city, to the side of the stand. In the background one can see some of Portsmouth's taller buildings, including, most notably, the Spinnaker Tower. The friendly gateman roves around spectators collecting admission and offering programmes, which were a pretty good effort considering the level of football and perennially, very low quantity of readers.

Today's match would provide the opportunity for a minor giant-killing, with a club from the Dorset Premier League visiting a club from a step above, the Wessex League Division One. Swanage Town and Herston have already successfully overcome a club from the Wessex League Division One in the previous round, beating Andover New Street 3-0 at home, their first win the FA Vase for 21 years. League form has been poor though, picking up just one win and one draw from their opening six games. Today would be United Services Portsmouth's first game in this year's competition, and form would be something difficult to measure, as almost unbelievably, in mid-September, they are yet to begin their league campaign, although they did beat Cowes Sports in the League Cup last week.

On a beautifully warm and sunny afternoon, the game had a quick start, with the visitors opening the scoring with barely a minute on the clock. The ball was floated over from the right, and a defender, in plenty of space, bizarrely chose to chest the ball across his own area, allowing Liam Currell to take a touch before driving low into the corner. That did not seem to wake up the home side, and the first half was quite a tepid affair with few chances, with United Services playing some good passing football without ever really threatening apart from one fierce shot which dipped just over the bar, as Swanage looked comfortable with their lead.

In the second half, although Swanage had an opportunity to double their advantage when they had a shot cleared off the line, United Services looked slightly more threatening than they had in the first half, but it wasn't until the 68th minutes when they came close to scoring, when a player who looked a long way offside strode forward for a one-on-one opportunity, but he delayed and delayed waiting for the keeper to commit, but he took the ball wide and his eventual shot hit the post. Within the next couple of minutes and United Services also had a shot cleared off the line and then when the ball was played inch perfect from wide low into the box, the forward could only scuff his shot, with the ball tamely hitting the goalkeeper from barely six yards out. Swanage still had the odd chance and one felt the game really could go either way, until fourteen minutes from time, when Swanage scored a second. The ball was played to the edge of the box, and Currell took the ball forward, sidestepped the keeper before passing the ball into the net for his second of the game. As the game entered added on time, Swanage really put some gloss on the score-line with a real contender for goal of the season - I doubt I shall witness a better goal at any level of football this season. Paul Best gained possession in his own penalty area, strode forward, jinking past numerous players and evading challenges before bursting into the box for a one-on-one opportunity with the keeper, and he showed terrific composure after such a long run at the end of 90 minutes to shoot the ball past the keeper and into the net. And so, another Wessex League club was emphatically dispatched by Swanage, who now go on to meet yet another Wessex League club, Newport (Isle of Wight), at home in the next round.