

**TT No.4: Justin Holmes** - Sat 11th August 2012; **Sporting Bengal United v Cockfosters**; Saturday 11th August 2012; Venue: Chalk Lane, Cockfosters; Score: 1-3; Admission: £4.00; Programme: £1.00; Attendance: 78; Match rating: 4.

For my first competitive domestic game of the season, I headed to north London today for the opening day of this season's FA Cup competition. When the draw was made, Sporting Bengal United were drawn as the home team for this tie, however with their ground, the Mile End Stadium, being unavailable due to the Olympics, the fixture was played at Cockfosters, although technically it remained a home game for Sporting Bengal United.

Chalk Lane is very conveniently located a couple of minutes-walk, from Cockfosters underground station, which is the last stop northbound on the Piccadilly Line. As may be expected of a club in the Spartan South Midland League Division One, facilities are rather basic, but the ground is neat, very well maintained, and has a surprisingly rural feel to it - at least visually, unfortunately a busy road adjacent to the ground provides constant loud traffic noise. The clubhouse is between the entrance to the ground and the corner flag, and a little overhang is provided for some standing room cover. To the other side of the entrance more cover is provided above some fairly randomly placed rows of seats. Hard standing is available along this length and behind one of the goals, along the other length is just grass to stand on, whilst the area behind the other goal is inaccessible. Trees or hedges line the entire ground, with cricket pitched behind both goals and a bowling green behind one of the lengths. The 22- page programme was excellent considering the level of football the club plays at, with interesting articles to read and more than enough stats and facts to digest about both teams and their histories in the FA Cup.

Today's tie would have the potential for a minor upset, with Cockfosters from the Spartan South Midland League Division One, a tier below the Essex Senior League Premier Division, in which Sporting Bengal ply their trade. Today would also be the first competitive game of the season for both teams. Last season, Cockfosters finished in ninth place. After struggling (and often failing) to achieve a respectable league placing during their time in the Kent League, the switch to the Essex Senior League last season prompted an upturn in their fortunes, finishing in tenth place in the 18-team division.

On a warm summer's day, it was Sporting Bengal who drew first blood with eight minutes on the clock with a very good goal, when Shaheed Ahmed twisted and turned, making space for himself before firing in a powerful low shot just inside the far post. In an entertaining half of football, it was Cockfosters who then had the best chances to score, although it was in the final five minutes of the first half when the game completely changed on its head. Firstly on 41 minutes, Cockfosters equalised with a well taken free-kick by Dean Barker which was bent around the wall and although the keeper got his hand to the ball, he could only palm the ball

into the net. A couple of minutes later and Cockfosters took the lead when a Bengal defender tried to shepherd the ball out for a goal kick, a Cockfosters forward stole possession, crossed into the box, and after a couple of blocked shots, the ball was drilled low into the net by Lorenzo Ferrari. On the stroke of half time, Sporting Bengal were reduced to ten men, when they had a player sent off for contesting the award of a throw-in rather too vigorously with the female assistant referee.

For most of the second half, there was little sign of Sporting Bengal getting an equaliser, apart from when one of their forwards unbelievably headed wide of an open goal on 57 minutes. On 78 minutes, Cockfosters made the game safe by scoring a third when the ball was played into the box, before being struck home via the post on the turn by Emond Protain. That really was game over, as Cockfosters always looked the more likely to score for the remainder of the game, but they claimed the minor giant-killing and progress to the next round where they will travel to AFC Kempston Rovers of the United Counties League Premier Division.

04/20