

**TT No.76: *Justin Holmes*** - Sat 22nd December 2012; **Langney Wanderers v Hollington United**; East Sussex League Prem; Venue: Eastbourne Sports Park, Eastbourne; Score: 5-1; Admission and prog: N/A; Att: 12 (h/c); Match Rating: 4.

On a rare occasion in recent months when I had not planned to visit a Football League or Premiership ground, it was rather unfortunate that recent persistent heavy rain severely limited my choice of local non-league games today. Constant torrential rain from the early hours of Saturday morning on already saturated ground put paid to almost every non-league game in the south-east. With the selection further reduced by wanting to avoid a revisit, I headed to the south coast for a game on a synthetic pitch in the East Sussex League.

Langney Wanderers played their early games in their debut season in the East Sussex League at Shinewater Lane in Eastbourne, but have switched their home venue to the Eastbourne Sports Park during the winter months, to make use of the all-weather 3G pitch there. The Eastbourne Sports Park is located on the northern fringes of Eastbourne, about a ten minute walk from Hampden Park train station, and is a large sporting facility consisting of an athletics complex, a tennis centre, eight grass football pitches (several other clubs in the East Sussex League play on these) and the 3G pitch. Although positioned inside a cage, the arena is surprisingly spectator friendly, with plenty of room to stand behind railing along one length of the pitch, and around the rest of the pitch is hard standing albeit without railings. Floodlights are present, although they were not used today. As the pitch is also used for hockey, there is a rather colourful array of coloured lines painted on the turf.

This match would be between two of the stronger teams in the East Sussex League Premier Division. Hollington United have been the dominant force in the league for years. They finished last season with a 100% record, and were unbeaten this season, having won five and drew the other of their six games so far this season, and were in second place in the league, behind St Leonards Social on goal difference but with a game in hand. Langney Wanderers had only played four games of their league season so far, winning three and losing the other. They were in eighth place in the eleven-team league, but with at least two games in hand on all teams above them and seven points behind the top two.

On a truly horrible afternoon of strong winds and persistent rain, together increasing mist, Langney Wanderers were in the ascendancy in the early stages and duly took the lead on 12 minutes, when a cross swirled high above the goalmouth in the wind, before Riki Prodger headed in from close range at the far post. Hollington seemed to be having real difficulty adapting to the difficult conditions and the plastic pitch, and their cause was not helped when their goalkeeper was injured on 35 minutes and had to be replaced by an outfield player. He was beaten within four minutes, when a long low ball was played forward, and Prodger sidefooted the keeper before tapping into the net. On the stroke of half time,

Prodger completed his hat-trick with a free-kick from 25 yards which was drilled into the net through the replacement keeper's hands.

Hollington's long unbeaten league record was now in serious doubt, but within ten minutes of the restart, they got a goal back with a powerful shot on the turn from just outside the penalty area into the top corner by Jake Stiles. Game on, it seemed, however within two minutes, Langney Wanderers restored their three-goal advantage when Paul Rogers hit home from a low cross from 8 yards. Langney Wanderers really should have scored several more, as they adopted a "shoot on sight" policy to test the replacement goalkeeper, their stand-out chances being when the ball was blazed over the bar twice from good positions and struck the post. They finally did add a fifth ten minutes from time when the ball was played neatly around the edge of the box, before Mark Coleman struck the ball powerfully into the net from the edge of the penalty area, beating the keeper at his near post. So, a very convincing win for Langney Wanderers, who adapted to the conditions far better than Hollington who, despite putting in plenty of effort, just looked all at sea and increasingly demoralised in the driving rain on the plastic pitch.

04/20