

TT No.93: Steve Hardy - Tuesday 14th January 2020; **AFC Stoneham v Sholing**; Hampshire Senior Cup 3rd Round; Kick-Off: 7.45pm; Result: 1-1 (4-5 on pens); Admission: £3; Programme: £1; Attendance: 226

Only a complete idiot would have ventured out this evening! The weather was dreadful, with high winds lashing horizontal rain across Hampshire, and just about every other fixture off that evening. However, as it was only four miles from where I was staying, and on a 4G pitch, I really couldn't turn the opportunity to see the first Stoneham match at their new ground, now could I?

The new set up is a 4G pitch, although not in a cage which was a bonus. There is a sizeable stand down one side of the pitch which had its back to the hurricane, so quickly filled up with spectators looking for some relief from the elements. Entry is gained by firstly going through some turnstiles in the reception area of the changing room block, and then paying your entrance fee at a normal set of turnstiles outside the ground itself. The first set of turnstiles require entry by using a QR code only. I discovered when trying to register for this code the day before the match, that it is exactly the same as the ones introduced at similar projects in Sheffield and Liverpool, so if you have one of these already, you don't need to register again.

On the pitch, the last thing any of us wanted was a draw. Naturally, that is what we got, as Sholing took the lead on 43 minutes through a goal that the poor old ref didn't see in the gloom. Luckily his Linesman had seen it, so the goal was awarded and Sholing went in 1-0 up at the break. After much huffing and puffing, Stoneham deservedly equalised on 79 minutes and that is how it finished. Thank goodness we missed out on extra time and went straight to penalties where Sholing eventually won 5-4. I am not sure what sort of team they put out but I understand there were quite a few first teamers included, so well done to Stoneham for holding them.

There was then just the simple matter of swimming back out to the car and driving the four miles back to base on flooded roads in a howling gale. Idiocy!