

TT No. 121: 24/05/05 Club/Ground Focus: *Stephen Harris* - Hamburg non-league weekend.

Hamburg non-league weekend, 20 to 22 May 2005.

Although I regularly used to attend the things at Wembley, these days I find myself quite allergic to FA Cup Finals and for the past 10 years or more have sought my football action abroad on Cup Final day. This year it was Hamburg in Germany and a non-league weekend, with four games in three days.

Hamburg is an ideal destination for the non-league enthusiast, with lots of clubs, stadiums of all types large and small and a wide range of kick-off times allowing 4 or 5 fixtures to be taken in between Friday and Sunday of any weekend.

I started on Friday evening in the Oberliga Nord at **Concordia Hamburg** for their game against top of the table SV Meppen. Concordia play at the wonderful old Stadion Marienthal in the eastern suburbs of Hamburg. They are an historic club and the venue has seen crowds in excess of 20,000 back in their glory days. Those days are long gone and the crowd was 420 on Friday, above average for the season. The ground is marvelously decayed and if you are a fan of undulating, overgrown, ancient terracing then this is the place for you. There was a very pleasant bar for al fresco dinking on a sunny evening, the club issued both a free match programme and a free club magazine for the occasion and Concordia overturned the form book by winning 2-1. A great start to the weekend.

The next morning saw a two-hour train ride out into the sticks and a drop of one level in the leagues to see **SV Husum** play TSV Bargteheide in the Verbandsliga Schleswig-Holstein. The fixture was chosen more because it happened to be on in a town I wanted to visit, than for any other reason. Husum play at a rather basic ground with no cover but a very comfortable clubhouse. Oddly, their second pitch, next door, has a fairly large stand but is mainly used for youth games. Husum are a bit down on their luck in recent years and the crowd was just 261 for this midtable end of season game; but almost everybody went home happy following a last-minute winner, 1-0. An attractive, free programme was issued and the club publishes each programme in full on their website, which is a nice touch which I wish a few English clubs would adopt.

On Sunday I was joined by a friend for two games. We had a choice of 10.45 kick-offs in the Verbandsliga Hamburg and opted for **SC Condor** vs Lurup, again in the eastern suburbs of Hamburg. I had shied away from this ground in the past as I knew it had an athletics-track and no raised terrace or cover. In fact, viewing was surprisingly good? and you could always watch from the shade of the beer tent and barbeque, busy from before kick-off. An estimated 200 saw a convincing 0-4 win by second-placed Lurup. Again, there was a free programme and separate club magazine available at the ground. Following the final whistle, we moved to the

shade of the beer garden of Condor's excellent modern clubhouse nearby for a couple of well-earned pints.

With some reluctance we transferred three stops down the metro line for the afternoon game, back up a step to the Oberliga Nord. We had a wide choice of games that afternoon, but had opted for **Barmbek-Uhlenhorst** against Kickers Emden. I'm a bit of a Barmbek fan on the quiet and it was my second time there this season. They are in their first season after promotion, but are in danger of going straight back down. Losing this one 1-3 will not have helped their cause. They play at a typical, tight non-league ground with around 800 uncovered seats on one side and an open terrace for perhaps 3,000 opposite and not much at each end. Home fans congregate around the various beer outlets and there was a good atmosphere generated by the 700-odd present, including many away fans. The quality of the programme has deteriorated a little since my last visit, but at least remains freely available.

German non-league football has many similarities with our home-grown version and anyone who gives it a try will quickly feel at home. Hamburg is an easy place to start, with good public transport, pleasant venues to visit, easily available details on kick-off times, ground addresses etc., and good catering facilities at the grounds. Worth a try for anyone who wishes to expand their horizons and every weekend offers either a Hamburg SV or a St Pauli home game for those who yearn for the big time.

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