

TT No.040: 03/03/05 Ground/Club Focus: *Dennis Woods* - Kallithea and Panathinaikos (Athens/Greece)

Eddie Cook and I travelled to Athens last weekend to see some football in Greece. Our first game was a 7:30 kick off at **Kallithea** v AEK Athens in the Greek first division.

Kallithea Stadium is a strange stadium as it has been built into a disused quarry. The stadium has a running track and has just two stands although a third stand is currently being built, very slowly, behind the east goal, this will add around 2,500 extra seats. The main stand covers the length of one side and has modern seats with a roof that covers around half of the seats, this is the only cover at the stadium. The second stand is much smaller and is built into the side of the quarry and gives the impression that there is a cliff behind the stand. This stand is situated in one corner along the side of the pitch, with most of the seats being past the actual playing surface. This stand is allocated to away fans.

Our ticket for the game cost 20 euros and was for an unreserved seat in the main stand. Entrance to the stadium was through a small gate where your match ticket is ripped in half, although I asked for only a small rip which the guy checking the tickets obliged, Eddie wasn't so lucky and ended up with half a ticket which no longer had any of the match details on it. A large crowd gathered behind the entrance gate and I thought at the time this could be very dangerous. As we entered the entrance to the stand our tickets were checked once more, then another guy was just about to rip my ticket in half, but again I managed to stop him. Then a surprise a 16-page glossy A5 programme was handed to us. Although there didn't seem to be many programmes about, as those entered the stand were arriving empty handed. Of course, the whole programme was in Greek, but the pictures are worth looking at and it's of course nice to have a souvenir of the game. We were able to grab a seat under the cover of the stand. I think we took our seat well over an hour before the game and the stadium was fairly full with 45 minutes to go before kick-off. Having unreserved seats in a game that is likely to sell out was a big mistake and fans were soon standing in the aisle in front on the seats. Plus, around 30% of the fans in the home end were AEK fans, although to their credit they were fantastic for the whole of the game. Stewards moved the fans standing at the front before the kick off.

AEK were 2-0 up within 10 minutes on a very wet pitch which stopped the flow of the ball on a number of occasions. Kallithea pulled a goal back in the second half, but AEK hung on for a 2-1 win. The attendance was 2,439. To get to the stadium take the Metro (line 2) to Syngrou-Fix and then take bus 910 which takes around 5 to 10 minutes to reach the stadium. After the game we walked back to the Metro station due to the crowd and the traffic.

Our second game in Athens required us to become members of **Panathinaikos** to obtain tickets. Tickets are only sold to members but it doesn't seem to be a problem to join. The application form is in Greek so we asked a helpful member of the staff to help us with completing the form. Please note you will also need your passport as they keep a photo copy of it. Once completed our details were fed into a computer and we were asked which price of seat we would like, we chose a 35-euro ticket, but prices ranged from 15 to 40 euros. If you require tickets please ensure that you buy them in advance of the game.

The Apostolos Nikolaidis stadium is covered in graffiti on the outside walls of the stadium and even on some of the walls on the inside. To reach the stadium take the Metro (line 3) to Ambelokipi station which is then 200m walk away.

The stadium is of a bowl design and has a stand with cover along both sides of the pitch although the stand we sat in only had 12 rows of seats. Both of the open ends are much larger. Panathinaikos were very disappointing and scored a late goal to win against the bottom side 1-0 in front of an even poorer 6,103 fans, although the crowd seemed nearer 10,000 to me. An excellent 52-page glossy A5 programme, with welcome pictures was left only on the front 3 rows of the seats so arrive early or you may miss out.

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