

27/02/06 TT No.189: Mike Latham: Dunfermline Athletic (Scottish Premier League) and Brodsworth Welfare (Northern Counties East League Premier Division)

Sun 19 Feb 2006: SPL. **Dunfermline Athletic** 1-8 Celtic. Attendance: 9,015. Admission: £22. 48pp programme: £2.50; FGIF match rating: 5*.

Once in a while you are lucky to go to an exceptional game and this was certainly in that category. Celtic's finishing was awesome- the Press Association statistics revealed that they only had nine goal attempts on target yet scored eight times- an SPL record. The display of Polish striker Maciej Zurawski will live long in the memory, as will the quality of Celtic's passing game. Zurawski scored four times and there was even one for Neil Lennon, his first for five years- he later jokingly described it as a 'JFK moment' that everyone present would remember.

Scottish football gets a lot of stick, mostly from people who don't watch it. But having watched over 30 English Premier League games this season, and endured many of them, there is no comparison. There is very little of the play-acting and cynical time wasting that mars so many PL games. The passionate Scottish paying public simply would not tolerate that. Even in the 90th minute Celtic were still hurrying to take throw-ins and free-kicks and go for goal. Many an English team would have shut up shop at 3-1. Under Gordon Strachan some of their football is exceptional. They are well worth watching and it is surprisingly easy to get tickets for their away games with a friendly lady at Dunfermline answering the phone promptly and despatching the tickets by first class post for the desired seats.

Another good thing about the SPL is its good value with ticket prices about two-thirds of those in England and the modernised yet compact stadiums. East End Park was extensively developed in the late 1990s but is a terrific, intimate stadium that affords a superb view of the action.

The main stand, on the south side and backing onto the main A907 road, is two tiered while the two ends are one tiered and also steeply sloping, giving a superb view. The far side north stand that rather disconcertingly backs onto a cemetery is much shallower. The pitch, briefly converted to an artificial surface, is now back to grass though looked in poor condition.

Easily reached off J3 of the M90 motorway a few minutes' drive from the Forth Road Bridge, East End Park is located in a quiet residential area to the east of the town and there is plenty of parking. The locals are friendly and knowledgeable about their football. The programme is fantastic- one of the best I have seen this season. Superbly designed with a host of interesting current and historical articles and some stunning photographs and excellent statistics, quite clearly a lot of thought has gone into its production. There is a particularly good section on the details of the home players- too often this is ignored and it is a valuable source of information for neutrals.

As a curtain-raiser to the forthcoming League Cup Final between the teams this was far from ideal for the Pars and their supporters. But they bore the defeat with good grace and there were no crowd problems inside or outside the ground. Quite the opposite- supporters from both sides that I spoke to were friendly and welcoming to an English visitor. A visit to Dunfermline comes highly recommended.

Tuesday 21 Feb 2006. Northern Counties East League Premier Division. **Brodsworth Welfare** 0-3 Buxton. Admission: £4; no programme; FGIF match rating: 1*.

An experienced ground-hopping friend of mine once told me that the NCEL could be something of a twilight world at times and his words came back to me on an evening that was endured rather than enjoyed.

Brodsworth Welfare play at the Welfare ground on the outskirts of Doncaster. Coming off the A1 onto the A638 road into the town, the ground is located close to the Woodlands public house down Welfare Road. There is some parking outside the main entrance and players and officials took their cars inside. Latecomers had to settle for a place on the neighbouring housing estate.

Sadly, no programme was produced for this game which must have cost the host club a pretty penny as the visitors are the best supported away side in the league. With no PA announcements there was no chance of getting the line-ups. The Welfare ground backs on to an adjoining sports centre and the playing pitch is flat and well grassed and the floodlights excellent. There is a small cover behind the far goal and a small covered stand straddles the halfway line behind the dug-outs on the entrance side. The rest of the viewing is from flat standing areas. There is a small tea bar manned by a very pleasant lady and serves standard fare but no club house.

Brodsworth have clearly struggled along in recent years and are dependent upon a hard-working committee. They have also suffered from vandalism at their ground. On more than one occasion when I have seen them in recent season's they have struggled to put out a full complement of substitutes but had a full team on duty against the league leaders.

Considering they went into the game on top Buxton were far from impressive though their victory margin was ultimately decisive. The former Bolton and Carlisle striker, David Reeves, is in his late 30s by now but clearly still a class act as he led the Buxton line with aplomb but this was poor fare.

A number of groundhoppers, including a contingent from Sheffield, attended but we all reached the opinion that would not go down as the best evening spent watching the beautiful game. My groundhopping sage had said once that for every five games you watch there would be one good one, three average ones and one bad one- this definitely fell into the latter category. Another tick, but little else to inspire.