

TT No.208: *Mike Latham* - Tues 4 Apr 2006: Huws Gray-Fitlock Cymru Alliance, Bala Town 1-1 Ruthin Town; Attendance: 140; Admission: £3; 20pp programme: 70 pence; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

With the wet weather of late relenting and a Monday evening call to the friendly Bala secretary giving the necessary assurance that the game was on, an easy road trip through beautiful scenery and ironically passing through Ruthin ended up at Bala Town's Maes Tegid ground in the heart of Wales.

Bala is a small town best known for its large lake and attracts tourists by the thousand in the summer months. The main street has a variety of interesting shops and the Somerfield supermarket was a cut above the norm, selling all the necessary provisions for a hungry traveller.

The Bala Town FC ground is located just off the main street, adjoining the town's senior and junior schools and a large all-weather floodlit complex. Welsh is the main language spoken in these parts though strangers, especially those coming from afar to watch the local football team are welcomed with a level of hospitality and kindness rarely experienced. Right from the outset there were a number of club supporters and officials eager to dispense news of their club and chat about football.

With the Ruthin secretary equally friendly and hospitable the team news was gathered with a minimum of fuss and an excellent coffee was enjoyed in the refreshment bar prior to the game. The sausage rolls are to be savoured. Admission was only £3 and a splendid up-to-date programme with full colour photographs and a huge amount of interesting information, some of it written in Welsh, was a bargain at 70 pence.

The complex is an impressive one, the wooden pavilion housing the dressing rooms and tea bar also doubling up as a cricket pavilion in the summer for the adjoining cricket field and a toddlers' playgroup during the week. The football field is surrounded by a smart white post and rail fence and has a small seated covered stand on the clubhouse side. The rest of the ground is open standing with a large tree-lined bank behind the far goal giving perhaps the best view of the action. The pitch, said to be under water on the Saturday, was flat and had been rolled and was in excellent condition.

With this being a local derby and with the players seeming to know one another very well the action was tight and well contested. Beginning in sunshine at the end of a dry but cold day the game kicked-off at 6.30pm and, with a short half-time interval, ended in near darkness at 8-15pm. All the action goals-wise came in the opening minutes, Bala taking the lead with a miscued clearance by the Ruthin centre-back for an own goal only for a 25-yard free-kick to restore parity. A draw was a fair result for a game that always held the interest.

A good-sized crowd, numbering about 140 on a first-half head count, watched the action intently. Bala is an idyllic place to watch football with the surrounding scenery simply stunning and the friendliness of the locals to a stranger immediately making him feel at home. Highly recommended.

04/20