

TT No.222: Mike Latham - Saturday 14 April 2007: South of Scotland League: **Dumfries FC 2-4 Nithsdale Wanderers**. Attendance: 40 (h/c); admission: £2; No programme; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

It's a glorious April afternoon and there are a host of mouth-watering clashes in the South of Scotland League as the heavy rain and dreadful winter weather of not long ago becomes a distant memory. Better, as my friend Rupert says, to attend a game with something at stake at this time of the season and so with the roads heavy with traffic the easier option of a trip to see Dumfries FC is taken rather than risk another 50 miles towards Stranraer to witness the Wigton & Bladnoch-Threave Rovers encounter.

League leaders Nithsdale Wanderers went into this game one point ahead of Threave but with only two games to play against their rivals' four. Dumfries are lagging behind with fixtures, caused by frequent postponements at their Norfolk Park ground and still have eight games to fit in before the first week in May.

Dumfries FC don't play in Dumfries- instead, their home is in Glencapel, a delightful village on the banks of the River Nith about five miles to the south. The club was formed as recently as 2000 after an amalgamation of Dumfries Amateurs FC and Dumfries High School Former Pupils.

Their enclosed ground is situated on Church Street and had glorious views across rolling farmland on one side and across the Nith to the imposing 1,800 feet summit of the Criffel on the other. There are a number of temporary buildings, one housing a well-stocked tea bar and the players change in the memorial hall at the nearside corner.

The club fields two teams, one in the Dumfries Amateur League and the other in the South League but as they do not qualify for full membership of the Scottish FA, due to ground gradings, they miss out on any seasonal hand-outs from the governing body. And, though their first team is classed as a senior, professional club, whereas in fact all the players are not paid, they cannot field players from their reserve team in the local league due to registration rules.

Run by ten committee members, all attired neatly in blue shirts and black trousers, and another five, coaching staff, Dumfries are a friendly club and a warm welcome awaits the intrepid traveller. With spring well underway the water-logging problems are long behind them and the game takes place on a well-grassed though hard and undulating surface.

Nithsdale look anything but title contenders in a tight first-half that comes to life in the last five minutes as the sun beats down. The visitors miss a penalty, concede the opening goal and then equalise on the stroke of half-time.

After a coffee and scotch pie at the hut it's time for the second half and Dumfries, fielding four 16-year-olds, taker a deserved lead with a splendid goal only for this

to serve as the catalyst for a Nithsdale revival. Three quick-fire goals, including a penalty and an unfortunate own goal, see the visitors to a hard-earned victory but news of Threave's win at Wigtown dulls their after-match celebrations.

Norfolk Park is a beautiful, rural venue to watch football, especially in weather like this and a visit here comes highly recommended. And take a tip from one of the committee- travel back to Gretna along the B road through Annan rather than going back through Dumfries and along the A75. The views across the Solway are simply stunning with a couple of decent GBG pubs thrown in.

Dumfries FC also has a web-site. A visit to this friendly club set in glorious scenery in a wonderful part of the country is not to be missed.

The ever-faithful Solway Press Services site had the results to hand by the time I returned home and a few more trips are planned to games in this league before the season's end.

06/20