

TT No.272: Mike Latham - Wednesday 30 May 2007: North Ayrshire Cup Rd 1; **Irvine Victoria** 1-5 Kilwinning Rangers. Attendance: 180 (h/c); Admission: £5; No programme; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

History records that Mary I of Scotland, Napoleon III of France, Frederick II of Prussia, William Wallace and Daniel Defoe have all visited the Ayrshire coastal town of Irvine so, on a mild but showery late May evening I was in good company.

And I also had one up on all those notables for none could have seen the 'Wee Vics' in action, as they were only formed in 1904.

There are two junior sides in Irvine, Irvine Meadow XI (formed 1897), with their impressive ground and having enjoyed a successful season holding sway. But the Vic's battle on and they attracted a decent attendance as the North Ayrshire Cup, a competition I must admit that had previously passed me by, entered the first-round stage with just two days left in May.

Kilwinning Rangers, local rivals and further up the junior pyramid, provided stern opposition and eventually ran out convincing winners of an interesting game, despite fielding, so I was informed, a number of reserve players and two players on trial.

Victoria Park is to be found at the end of Boyle Street, close to the railway station and harbour. The local newspaper reported that a man had been robbed at knifepoint there earlier in the month but all was civilised as the spectators made their way to the turnstile where an impressive sign welcomes the visitor to Victoria Park.

Admission was £5 and raffle tickets were on offer by the turnstile, £1 securing a white and blue one. In the keeping of tradition two ball boys walk around the side of the pitch at half-time, displaying the winning numbers chalked up on a board. Sadly, there was no programme and as no announcements were made the identity of the players remained coated in mystery.

Victoria Park is effectively a two-sided ground, the far side being hemmed in by the grassed railway embankment and the area behind the far goal being flat grass with spectacular views of distant hills.

On the nearside terraced steps there are two substantial covers, which came in handy as squally showers developed. Behind the nearside goal, where the dressing rooms and a tea bar is situated are some more crumbling terraces.

A decent crowd had turned up by the 7-15pm kick-off and they watched the action intently, occasionally offering words of advice to the players and officials. A headcount revealed that around 180 people had been tempted away from watching Scotland's friendly in Austria, their allegiances split roughly 50-50 between the competing teams.

The playing area was flat and covered in lush grass though was one of the narrowest I had ever seen, the distance from the corner flag to the edge of the penalty area by the dead-ball line being covered in eight paces.

Play was fast, furious and competitive with no quarter asked or given. There were no histrionics from the players after a foul, they simply got on with the game and a fluent spectacle always held the interest even though the visitors' class told in the end.

The tea bar did a roaring trade and dispensed a wide range of fayre, hot drinks, hot dogs, pies and burgers all being devoured. While it was obvious, I was an interloper into an essentially local affair, spectators from both sides were friendly and eager to talk and they enjoyed their evening watching a very decent game of football.

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