

TT No.174: *Dean McClean* - Saturday 19th January 2008. Scottish Junior Cup 4th Round; **Auchinleck Talbot** v Bonnyrigg Rose. Res: 1-0; Att: c400; Admission: £5; no programme. FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

After heavy rain in the Midlands during the previous week curtailed a planned trip to Coventry Sphinx, the weather appeared more favourable North of the border in Scotland. So, for once we headed North to avoid the wet weather.

The journey northwards from Preston on the M6 is usually a stress free and relaxing one, and this was no exception as Mid-Annondale services was reached in 2 hours. A quick 'phone call to the intended destination of Auchinleck revealed an early morning pitch inspection had proved successful. With Petershill's plastic pitch as a back-up, the day was always going to end in the visit of a new ground. However, Auchinleck was always the preferred choice.

I have never seen a Scottish Junior Cup fixture and on today's game I wouldn't mind ticking off another junior ground in this competition. This really was a game that carried the tag of "blood and thunder" cup tie, it bore a comparison to the FA Vase match I had seen at St. Ives a few weeks previous. The pitch was visibly heavy and it was clear that it would suffer as the game went on, and so it proved as both teams struggled to find their intended passes in a game that was settled by heart rather than skill.

The first half was a pretty drab affair and the action on the pitch improved dramatically in the second period in a pulsating end-to-end game, won by the home team in controversial circumstances in the dying seconds. A foul on the edge of the area resulted in a free-kick, only for the referee to notice his assistant flagging for a penalty, which was coolly tucked away to send the Talbot into the next round.

The ground is quite impressive overall, if showing its age, a little. The grandstand in particular could do with a little tidying up. That said, you could not complain for the lack of good vantage points, not a poor view across the whole ground. Three sides of terracing and a close proximity to the players made for ample good views of the action. No programme was on sale today, unfortunately, as the feeble excuse of not knowing if the game was going to be on or off was rolled out. Possibly a valid reason, but what would have stopped them from adding an insert if the game had been postponed until next Saturday?

Overall a very enjoyable day out and a trip here comes recommended.