

TT No.235: *Mike Latham* - Thursday 17 April 2008: Welsh Alliance; **Llanrug** 5-7 Nantlle Vale. Admission: £2; Programme: 60pp, £1; FGIF Match Rating: 5*.

Llanrug is an old slate-mining village, with a population of less than one thousand situated about two miles west of Caernarfon on the road to Llanberis. It is a rural predominantly Welsh speaking area, dominated by the imposing snow-covered mountain of Snowdon in the distance.

Llanrug United compete in the Welsh Alliance Football League, effectively level three of the Welsh pyramid. Formed in 1924, they moved to their present ground, known as Eithin Duon (Welsh for 'black gorse' which formerly covered the site), forty years ago and have moved steadily up the leagues to their present status. This is their fifth season in the Alliance after many years in the Gwynned League.

The ground is a neat enclosure with a slope that runs from the road side down towards the clubhouse, which is situated several feet below the pitch level behind the nearside goal. There are two covered standing areas either side of the goal at the road end of the ground and several benches along the nearside touchline. The dug-outs are positioned either side of the halfway line and the views across rolling hills towards Snowdonia are only spoiled by a massive electricity pylon that is positioned virtually next to the far touchline.

The clubhouse has dressing rooms for the teams and officials and a small committee room while two extremely friendly ladies manned a refreshment hut alongside that served hot drinks from pot mugs and delicious hot dogs. To cap a distinctly wonderful evening the programme is simply outstanding - a 60-page production packed with information, statistics, background and photographs and clearly a labour of love for its compiler who also is responsible for the club's superb website.

The committee members made me extremely welcome and there was clearly a huge amount of pride at being associated with such a well-run and friendly club that provides a tremendous community asset. The players are all locals and pay £5 per match subscriptions to play for the first team.

In short, it's an idyllic, peaceful spot to watch a good level of football and the 6-30pm kick-off allowed the luxury of getting back to the A55 coast road near Bangor while it was still light.

The game itself, a local derby against Nantlle Vale, was simply sensational. Playing with the benefit of the strong wind, Llanrug were 5-1 up after little more than half-an-hour of frantic, high paced football. But then came the turning-point as Vale were awarded a controversial goal on the intervention of a linesman on the far side who was squinting into the bright, setting sun. He ruled that a fierce shot that had rebounded off the bar had crossed the line and despite protestations from the home players and spectators positioned behind the goal, the goal stood.

Vale pulled back another goal in first-half injury time and completed a stunning fight-back with four unopposed second half goals, though the home side were awarded two penalties, both of which were superbly saved by the visiting goalkeeper. The final 18 minutes of a breathless game were scoreless.

With both teams predominantly Welsh speaking and the referee, well-known in these parts, a tall, imposing figure of German origin this was an interesting game for sure. The referee, though, was certainly multi-lingual and understood Welsh oaths as he booked several players in what was generally a sporting encounter for muttering dissent.

I have visited most of the Welsh Alliance grounds this season and would heartily recommend this league for the quality of the football, warmth of the welcome and the generally stunning location of the grounds. The Welsh Alliance league website has all the necessary details regarding fixtures, contact details, league tables and results- in fact everything a league website should provide.

A visit to Llanrug comes highly recommended.

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