

TT No.6: *Dean McClean* - Saturday 28th July 2007; **Fleet Star** v Annan Athletic (South of Scotland League); Result: 2-4; Att: 40ish (plus a few dogs); Admission: N/A; Programme: No; FGIF Rating: 4*.

I must confess that when my traveller friend mentioned that we should take in a match at Gatehouse of Fleet, I wasn't exactly sure where that was, nor what team played in this town. And quite frankly, I know little about Fleet Star now, then what I did yesterday. For, the club has no website and, whilst the league is covered by the excellent Solway Press website, there is no information on Fleet there. Whilst the locals were not exactly forthcoming with enlightening me on the finer points of the club's history.

Gatehouse of Fleet is around 14 miles west of Dumfries, and about 2 miles north of the main A75 road to Stranraer. A trip along this road can often be a nightmare, as one is often held up by a litany of slow-moving caravans and freight lorries. With few passing points, the journey can be very tedious.

The town is popular with tourists and offers scenic views of the nearby forest, whilst it is split by the River Fleet. A grand lunch at the Bank of Fleet Hotel, at least revealed we weren't the only ones with an interest in the match, as the hotel happened to be club's kit sponsor and they had today's game advertised behind the bar. Though the barmaid gave us a quizzical look when we mentioned we were attending the match...maybe it's the accent!

The club's home ground (I use the word ground loosely) is in the nearby Garrie's Park. The venue, like many in the South of Scotland League, or so I am told, could best be described as basic. But the setting is scenic and a glorious July day make the venue even more pleasing on the eye. The playing area is enclosed by a rope tied to the surrounding concrete posts. Changing facilities for players and officials are in circular shaped wooded structure close to the entrance. No gate money was taken, but a raffle was sold for a pound-a-strip. The prize being, amazingly for Scotland, not a bottle of cheap Whisky!

The match was officiated (poorly) by just one official, as is common practice even in the supposed higher East of Scotland League, whilst he was "assisted" by two club officials on the line. Thankfully, this league has let common sense prevail, as the two club-men are only there to give offsides. A system that should be applied in all other leagues of similar standing. I personally, have had many a game spoiled by one (sometimes two) jumped-up club linesman waving their flag continuously, as though they were stranded at sea waving a flag, in a desperate attempt to be rescued.

Today's visitors, Annan Athletic, are basically Annan Athletic 'A', as the more senior team compete in the higher placed East of Scotland. But that didn't put me off. On an immaculate surface (so it should be in July), the game started at a furious pace and the visitors took a 2nd minute lead virtue of a coolly taken penalty. This didn't

affect the homesters and they played some good football therein, creating some excellent opportunities in an even first half, before taking the lead with a superb header from 18 yards, that looped into the top corner stanchion, just before half-time. A similar goal-only this time from the foot, gave Fleet a lead just after half-time. But a galvanised Annan struck twice in a short space of time, to swing the match in their favour and despite the home team carving out some good chances, they left themselves open at the back and a swift Annan counter-attack gave them the points late-on.

A superb a game, played at break-neck speed and despite the best efforts of an over officious referee to ruin the game, this match was a terrific advert for the South of Scotland league.

06/20