

TT No. 102: *Mike Latham* - Sat 29 Nov 2008; Welsh Alliance League; **Llanwrst Utd** 9-1 Barmouth & Dyffryn United; Attendance: 80 (h/c); Admission: £2.50; No programme; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

It was a bitterly cold November day and the fog was as thick as the frost as I weighed up my options on my daily dog walk around the frozen wastes of Rivington. I had originally planned to take the train to Edinburgh for the cup-tie involving Edinburgh City and Brechin City but that tie was to fall to the weather. Option two was to meet up with my friend Rupert at Desborough but the threat of lingering frozen fog patches on the long journey through the Midlands put paid to that thought.

So, I consulted the best person in the circumstances- a groundhopping meteorologist who had the same idea as me- Wales appeared to have escaped the worst of the icy grip and he had decided to go to Llanwrst. He was getting there early anyway, just in case, so it sounded like a good plan.

Llanwrst is a small market town up the Conwy Valley from the coast, found by following the A470 13 miles inland from Conwy. The football ground is approached by crossing the narrow and ancient three-arch stone bridge, Pont Fawr over the river and is spectacularly located in the valley bottom surrounded by steep wooded hills, in a simply stunning rural setting.

The river regularly floods its banks and indeed, as several locals told me, had done so less than a fortnight before this game, the lapping waters rising up to the top of the perimeter fences surrounding the pitch. But fortunately, the pitch drains well and after the early morning frost had disappeared with the help of a watery winter sun any fears of a postponement went with it.

I had rung the Llanwrst secretary before setting off but though he was away he helpfully gave me another number to try. It turned out to be that of the club manager, who was pleased to assist. "We're very hopeful," he told me. "The pitch should be fine but do be aware that the club no longer produces programmes. I know how keen groundhoppers are to get a programme from their visit."

My friend was also in situ as I made my way along the North Wales coast, the fog disappearing after I passed Holywell and after chatting to the referee was happy to impart the news that the game would definitely take place- good news indeed as I negotiated the final miles, passing the frozen ground of Glan Conwy as I made my way up the picturesque Conwy Valley in anticipation of a good game.

Barmouth & Dyffryn, having gained promotion to the Welsh Alliance this season, were in splendid form, so splendid indeed that a league official, Ron Bridges, was on hand to present their manager, Brian Harvey with the Manager of the Month award just after my arrival.

Sadly, as so often happens, the award appeared to be cursed as the home side dominated a one-sided match and recorded an emphatic victory.

Gwydir Park is an impressive venue with the covered stand on the far side providing the focal point of a ground that looked well capable of meeting the requirements for a step-up to the Cymru Alliance should the opportunity arise. The rest of the ground is surrounded by a neat white fence and the players change in a well-appointed building that also doubles as the cricket pavilion to the overlapping cricket ground. Welcome hot drinks were being dispensed long before kick-off and hot dogs were also available.

The visitors had won a recent game 14-1 against hapless Amlwch but they looked very much second best despite their impressively smart appearance in a sponsored black and white kit. Llanrwst made full use of the exceptionally wide pitch and coped better with the cloying conditions underfoot.

By half-time it was 4-1 to Llanrwst and the second half was virtually one-way traffic. The visitors' goalkeeper, hopelessly exposed on occasions, even saved a penalty. By my reckoning the home no.9 scored four times, their nos.10 and 7 two apiece and the no.8 once with just a penalty from the visitors' no.7 in reply.

"Don't worry they've still to come to our place," bellowed out the Barmouth manager who then engaged in what began as a good-natured debate with the home goalkeeper over the likely result of the return game.

Formed as a result of the merger between Llanrwst Town and Athletic in 1983, Llanrwst United recently celebrated their 25-year anniversary. They are a friendly club in a scenic location with good facilities and appear to get reasonable support from the locals, around 80 spectators braving the wintry weather to watch the game.

The Welsh Alliance, level three of the game in Wales, has a decent website and some interesting grounds to explore and this was one of the best.

06/20