

TT No.128: Mike Latham - Saturday 17 January 2009: Citylink Scottish Junior Cup 4th Round: **Penicuik Athletic** 0-0 Lanark United; Attendance: 450 (est.); Admission: £5; 48pp programme: £1.

The Scottish Junior Cup had reached the last 32 stage and there were many mouth-watering ties and grounds from which to choose as the day dawns sunny and fine. My first choice was to visit one of the oldest clubs in the juniors- Ashfield in Glasgow but the closure of the M74 northbound in Lanarkshire due to an accident put paid to that ambition and necessitated a swift re-think while enjoying a magnificent Scottish breakfast in the Café Ariete in Moffat.

So instead it was a case of following the high road from Moffat towards Edinburgh- one of my favourite road journeys and containing some simply stunning scenic views. In what seemed no time at all I was rolling up at Penicuik, about ten miles south of Edinburgh, and the tasty prospect of a fourth-round tie between two in-form teams.

Overlooked by the Pentland Hills on the banks of the River North Esk, Penicuik grew as a planned town in the late 18th century around its papermaking mills, the last of which closed in 2005 and coal-mines. The town has an interesting and varied history- the first papermaking mill was set up in 1709; it was once a base for French prisoners in the Napoleonic Wars and was established as the home for the Edinburgh Crystal works. The Royal Highland Fusiliers, 2nd Battalion, are garrisoned in Glencorse Barracks in the town while close by is the Glencorse Parish Kirk, which formed part of the inspiration for Robert Louis Stevenson's novel *Kidnapped* written in 1886.

Football in the town has had an equally varied history and seemed to have been ended forever when the local side, Penicuik Athletic, formed in 1888 folded in 1991 and their Eastfield Park ground sold for a supermarket development. Athletic's greatest achievement was reaching the Scottish Junior Cup Final in 1970 at Hampden Park when they lost to Blantyre Victoria after a replay.

Fortunately, the club retained a committee and after over a decade in abeyance the club was re-formed in 2002. With admirable help from Midlothian Council, a part of the town's public park was set aside for a new ground. Named, simply, Penicuik Park the ground is surrounded by a security fence and has a large covered standing area along one side. With spectacular views across to the Pentland Hills it makes for a fine place to watch a game, especially on such a fine, if chilly, afternoon as this one.

Penicuik Athletic FC give every appearance of being a well-organised and supported junior club with an active committee engaged in all sorts of fundraising schemes. After a steady rise through the ranks such they are challenging for a place in the East Super League for next season. The club has an excellent website and produces a magnificent colour programme for home games that amply

demonstrates the support they receive from local businesses in the town. Over 70 local businesses have adverts in the programme and the players and management are individually sponsored while there is a match and ball sponsor and a mascot for the tie this afternoon.

Lanark United are in-form as well. Occupying a promotion place in the third tier of the West Region, they are a well-organised side that looks more than capable of acquitting themselves well on their first visit to Penicuik. By kick-off time a large crowd has built up, most spectators taking cover from the chill wind under the nearside cover.

The game was fast, fluid and highly watchable with Lanark dealing effectively with Penicuik's early assault and growing in confidence as the game progressed. Well refereed, this was a superb advert for junior football in Scotland and a draw was the fairest result from a game that always held the interest. The sides will replay at Lanark next Saturday with a place in the last sixteen of the competition still up for grabs. A visit to this friendly and progressive club, comes highly recommended.

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