

TT No.143: Ian Hill - Sat 20 December 2008: Scottish Premier League 'Saturday Double'; Hamilton Academical v Motherwell and Glasgow Rangers v Hibernian.

(A) Saturday 20th December 2009; Hamilton Academical v Motherwell; Scottish Premier League; Attendance 3527; Score 2-0; Entry £22.00; Programme 52pp, £2.50; Match rating: 4 stars.

A Ryanair flight to Glasgow on a Saturday morning should really be renamed "Old Firm Airways". I have done a few of these flights over the last couple of years. You can always tell which of the Old Firm teams are at home by the number of passengers wearing the club's replica shirt. Today it was Rangers and they have a healthy following from the South of England. Rangers was one of my destinations today but thanks to a *Sentanta* early kick off my first game was Hamilton Accies v Motherwell.

With the "Accies" v "Well" game being a local derby it was designated an all ticket game. I contacted Hamilton to purchase my ticket in advance. They don't have "electronic" post so a posted cheque and SAE was in order. Coming towards the end of the week my ticket had not arrived and a frantic call was made to the club. I was reassuringly told "not to worry" and just turn up at the ticket office. Good to their word the ticket was handed over with a "there you are Ian, enjoy the game". This was a very pleasant surprise. I prefer this much more customer orientated approach compared to the "jobsworth" attitude of some people doing this job.

Boarding the Ryanair flight was very eventful. We were asked to proceed to board the aircraft when the following announcement was made: "if you do not line up in an orderly fashion no one will board this aircraft". I say 'made', the announcement was screamed over the tannoy by the female member of staff. Schoolboy giggles ensued as we had our boarding passes checked by her. She was very well presented. It must take some time to get that "just out of bed, hung-over, dragged through a hedge backwards look".

A pleasant flight followed to Prestwick Airport. From here a connecting train takes you to Glasgow Central and if you present your flight ticket you receive half price rail travel. On the way into Glasgow you get the opportunity to do some ground spotting as the train passes Troon FC, Irvine Victoria FC and the new St Mirren Stadium.

A walk across the City Centre was made to Glasgow Queen Street station for the short journey Hamilton West station. The train passes the ground on the way there. A five-minute walk gets you to New Douglas Park. I would class the ground as a two sided one. With two permanent similar looking stands being in place. One runs down the side of the pitch, the Reid Furniture Stand and the other is behind one of the goals. This season a temporary one has been sited opposite the main one. This gives the stadium a capacity of 6000. The other main change at New

Douglas Park this season is the removal of the artificial turf pitch, which was dumped on a grass bank outside of the ground, with natural turf.

Outside of the ground the Reid Furniture Stand has a club shop with the rest of the office space rented out to what looks like a library/crèche.

The Accies of produced a new colour glossy programme this season. It does lack a bit of content but I believe a couple of seasons ago they issued a 16-page programme which consisted of 15 pages of adverts and the team line ups. So, the new issue is a massive improvement. The view from the stands is very good as they are raised above the pitch. I'm not too keen on new grounds but this is a different design with large floodlight pylons and I would recommend a visit.

For a small crowd the atmosphere was great. Mutual loathing exists between both sets of supporters. It was a bit hostile but the Police took a relaxed approach to the occasion so there didn't appear to be the threat of any trouble. This was a typical Scottish game. Lots of blood, thunder and crunching tackles. Great to watch and a surprising result as the Accies pulled off a crucial win against their near neighbours.

This is a nice ground with friendly club officials. The Policing and Stewarding is good plus the banter is excellent. Highly recommended.

It was then an extremely quick trip back to Glasgow to get to Ibrox for the Rangers v Hibs game.

(B) Saturday 20th December 2009; **Glasgow Rangers** v Hibernian; Scottish Premier League; Attendance 49,538; Score 1-0; Entry £22.00; Programme 68pp £2.50; Match rating: 1 star.

It's hard to believe that Rangers and Hamilton are in the same league. The contrasts are vast. Glasgow Rangers is a big club, the approach to Ibrox is full with stalls selling all types of souvenirs. There is also a great Italian fish & chip shop just outside the underground station. Rangers are now using the new "credit card" ticketing system. I booked my ticket in advance and had to collect it at the ground. This went smoothly until I opened the envelope and there was no reference to my seat. I re-joined the queue to find out my seat number, this was very frustrating.

The seat was in the enclosure right on the half way line. A perfect view for a dire game. It was awful but thanks to Hibernian manager Mixu Paatelainen winding the crowd up there were some fantastic one liner's, directed at him. In fact, one was the funniest things I have ever heard at a football match but unfortunately not for family ears. This was my second visit to Ibrox and on both occasions the atmosphere was very subdued. I'm sure things are different for bigger games but it was disappointing.