

TT No.71: Mike Latham - Sat 18 October: SFA Regional Cup 3rd Round: **Gretna FC (2008)** 1-3 Edinburgh City; Attendance: 160 (h/c); Admission: £4 incl. 16pp programme; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

Two years ago, as Gretna were continuing their climb through the Scottish Leagues it would have seemed inconceivable that they would be starting out again on the bottom rung of the ladder and playing home games in Annan.

Gretna's demise, after one season of SPL football in 2007/08, has been well documented and needs no repetition here. Fortunately, a supporters' owned side emerged from the ashes, earned inclusion in the East of Scotland League and began the long climb back.

With Raydale Park lying idle, its future uncertain, Gretna FC (2008) play out of an athletics track known as Everholm in Annan. The ground is as basic as you could find for this level of football and is situated just two hundred yards or so from Annan Athletic FC's Galabank ground that now stages Football League games following Gretna's demise.

The afternoon has a double twist as while Gretna are staging only their third home game since being hastily formed in the summer, their cup-tie starting at 2-30pm, Annan Athletic host Cowdenbeath at Galabank in a league fixture with a 3pm kick-off.

Everholm was once apparently used by Steve Overt for training purposes when he lived nearby and is part of a huge recreational space that lies next to the River Annan. The ground is reached by walking down a steeply sloping track from the main road and admission monies are paid at a makeshift entrance where a basic programme, albeit with full colour cover is available.

The ground has no facilities to speak of, save for a refreshment van and spectators gather on either side of the running track that surrounds a pitch that is well-grassed but apparently prone to water-logging. There are not even dug-outs but at least the grass banks provide an elevated view of the game.

By kick-off time, as the teams enter the playing area having walked from the distant dressing rooms, a decent sized crowd, mostly wearing the black and white of Gretna have gathered. The crowd are enthusiastic and keen, no wonder as their side has made an astonishing start to the season, winning all eight of their games so far. But Edinburgh City will provide a stiff test, of that there is no doubt.

Gretna begin brightly- they are a young and vibrant side with the majority apparently having played for Workington's youth team last year and then following manager Stuart Rome across the border. On the balance of play they deserve their 1-0 half-time lead.

The game turns on a 53rd minute incident when the Gretna goalkeeper looks to have been fouled as he challenges for a high ball. The referee fails to give the foul and, in a moment of madness, the home 'keeper kicks out at his opponent and is red-carded.

One of the Gretna outfield players goes in goal and his first job is to pick out the ball from the back of the net after the resulting penalty. Edinburgh City spy their chance and go on to dominate the rest of the tie, scoring two further goals to bring about Gretna's first defeat.

At least, though, Gretna are still functioning and representing the border town resplendent in the famous black and white hoops. Around 160 fans have taken the trouble to journey the eight miles or so to Annan to support them. They hope, one day, to return to Raydale but the ground's future is clouded by uncertainty.

As the referee signals full-time there is the opportunity to walk up the road and sample the last half-hour or so of Annan's game with Cowdenbeath. After a bright start to the campaign Annan went into this game on the back of a three-match losing run and are trailing 1-0 having had two men red-carded.

The Galabank ground is superbly appointed and has recently inaugurated splendid new floodlights while the playing area is immaculate. Annan fail to make much impression on a well organised visiting defence and slide to another defeat. Next week's home cup-tie against Spartans, old adversaries from the East of Scotland League, could be crucial to their season. A crowd of 578 are in attendance but a full report of Galabank, an impressive addition to the Scottish League ranks, will have to wait for another day.

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