

TT No. 138: *Chris Freer* - Saturday January 16th 2010; **Kilmarnock v Motherwell**; Scottish Premier League; Score: 0-3; Attendance: 5,354; Entertainment value: 3/5.

Like most blokes of a certain age, some of my mis-spent early teenage years were, erm well, mis-spent flicking plastic figures around the velvety-blaize of a Subbuteo pitch. This wasn't just a passing fancy for me, however. I'd go at it the whole hog, cycle miles to the nearest stockist and salivate at the rows of green boxes stacked high on the shelves, hoping against hope that the team I wanted today would be there. And I had no interest in the Leeds United's, Liverpool's, Spurs and other teams of the era. I only wanted the ones with the unusual club colours.

I started a league in my street. I was the oldest and thus dictated the terms. Whilst my junior friends would turn up with their Arsenals and their Manchester United's, I would take them on with a Crystal Palace (red & blue stripes) or a Plymouth Argyle (green & white). They would marvel at my stadium, complete with its stands built from empty cereal boxes, and populated by marbles cherry-picked from the pack to represent the relevant club strip. When I took them all on in the colours of Motherwell (orange and yellow) the sold-out crowd was entirely comprised of orange and yellow specimens. Needless to say, I always won the league. Men against boys in effect.

My mind is recalling those times as my Virgin Pendolino speeds through flood-ravaged Cumbria on its way to Scotland. For it is Motherwell I propose to be watching today, albeit at nearby Kilmarnock. Perhaps the orange and yellow marbles won't be quite so much in evidence. When I arrive in Glasgow the sun is shining. I've been following the various club Message-boards for the last few days and it looks like the game at Rugby Park is a definite starter, but I have my eye on the situation at Stenhousemuir and even Queens Park, just in case. As usual my stomach is urging me to consider a breakfast stop but at my first port-of-call, The Crystal Palace, there's a long line of hen-partyers clucking away at the bar. They all want to order and pay for their brekkie and drink separately and given the usual shortage of staff behind a Wetherspoons bar, I decide to try elsewhere. A couple of hundred yards away the Edward Wylie is virtually deserted and I enjoy my repast washed down with an excellent pint of Titanic Black Ice.

By this time, I'm confident that my first-choice game will be going ahead so I catch the Kilmarnock train at Central Station, pausing only to switch carriages as a booze-laden boisterous crowd of Motherwell fans invades my space. Between Kilmarnock Station and Rugby Park is the excellent Brass & Granite pub. It's one of those Sixties mock-beam style hostelries that you know would be boarded up by now if it hadn't re-discovered real ale and Sky TV. There are several Scottish beers on tap and the numerous screens are showing not only the lunchtime Scottish Premier clash (in which Rangers get the late goal to win the game, you know the script) but also the English Premier match at Stoke. My eyes dart betwixt the two.

As I make the five-minute walk to the ground, I can see the stands towering imposingly above the rows of neat houses. Around the stadium are several bars which are well patronised. I can't say if any decent beer is the attraction, as I'm unable to get anywhere near the bar. So, I pay my £20 on the gate and make my way to the snack shop where I'm implored by abundant signage to purchase a Killey Pie. Suspecting this may well contain the processed equivalent of half a side of some poor Highland beast, I make do with the ubiquitous (at Scottish grounds anyway) Macaroni Pie which fills a hole.

Only two stands are open for today's game, and I select a seat in an empty bank of the main stand. I'm slightly nonplussed when a bloke and his wee grandson ask me to get up and let them past, given that there's nobody on any of the seats for several rows around. The ground eventually fills up and I find myself only a few yards away from a roped off section occupied by orange and yellow marbles... err, sorry, Motherwell fans. They're a lively bunch - all 678 of them - and I anticipate a noisy game. For much of the first half they don't have a lot to shout about. The lowly home team - new manager freshly installed - take the game to 'Well and with a bit more composure could be in front at the break. In ex-Sunderland man Kevin Kyle, they have the archetypical target man but seem to want to play it on the deck. I liken this to buying a hammer, then deciding to do the job with screws.

After the break they resort to type, Kyle gets the ball on his head a lot more, and does sod all with it. In the mean-time Motherwell realise that the playing surface has been vacated and they can start to play their own game. It doesn't take long for the rewards to come and they begin to score at will, waltzing through a token defensive effort to notch three without reply. The orange and yellow marbles go berserk. Another case of men against boys, in effect.

There's more on my blog at <http://flynn123.wordpress.com>

Footy for the real-ale swilling veggie....

06/20