

**TT No.177: Mike Latham** - Saturday 6 March 2010: Emirates Airlines Scottish Junior Cup Fourth Round Replay - **Rutherglen Glencairn** 2-1 Cambuslang Rangers; Att: 700 (est.); Admission: £5; Prog: 36pp, £1; FGIF Match Rating: 4\*.

Some clubs receive an enormous boost when they move to new grounds and go forward with a renewed sense of purpose, others lose their identity and gradually wither and die - I sense that Rutherglen Glencairn will definitely fall in the former category.

For many years the club laboured under the knowledge that their Southcroft Park home would eventually fall victim to the extension of the M74 motorway which finally became a reality two years ago. They had known about this proposal for twenty years or so and hence could scarcely justify any ground improvements to an ageing ground that looked more and more tired with each passing year.

Rutherglen were formed in 1895 and opened Southcroft Park with a visit from the Ibrox XI (Rangers' junior team). One hundred years later Rangers sent along a team to celebrate the club's centenary. Junior Cup winners in 1902, 1919, 1927 and 1939 they were Glasgow League champions on six occasions before the war. Since then their status has declined and they suffered the indignity of having their football kit destroyed in a fire that burnt down the main stand at Southcroft, just two weeks before their appearance in the 1975 final. Playing in a kit borrowed from neighbouring Queen's Park they suffered defeat, just as they had after reaching the 1967 cup final.

After the stand at Southcroft Park was destroyed the club then discovered the land around the ground was so contaminated (a legacy of Rutherglen's industrial history) they could not rebuild the structure. The club was then served with a compulsory purchase order on their ground to make way for the proposed M74 extension- a proposal that was many years before coming to fruition. Living in a limbo state was never easy and the club did remarkably well to survive with such uncertainty hanging over its head.

Finally, the last match at Southcroft Park took place and the Glens moved to a new ground a good stone's throw away, the other side of the main railway line. Happily, the club's social club on Glasgow Road was unaffected by the development and has survived. Glens supporters can enjoy a pre-match pint and then stroll over the railway bridge and along a path by the side of a housing scheme to the Clyde Gateway Stadium, which has been their new home for 18 months or so.

As new grounds go it is impressive- surrounded by a huge black security fence and with a flat playing surface that has survived the worst ravages of one of the most severe winters on record. There is a small covered standing area on the side where the dug-outs are located, a large changing block at the nearside entrance, an imposing turnstile block and a tea bar. The ground has floodlights, some terracing

on all sides and excellent sightlines. With an elevated location it enjoys some spectacular views beyond the immediate industrial landscape to distant snow-capped hills while high-speed Virgin trains thunder past on the railway line behind the far goal, behind which a huge mound of earth lies where Southcroft Park was once located.

Rutherglen is an ancient burgh, the oldest in Scotland in fact, created by King David I in 1126, making the town 500 years older than Glasgow. With a background of mining and heavy industry, particularly in chemicals, the immediate landscape is hardly pretty but this is real football territory. Hampden Park is a mile or so one way, beyond which lies the fascinating ruin of what was once Cathkin Park, home to Third Lanark, now preserved as an inner-city park with trees and foliage covering the ageing terraces and the playing pitch still used by amateur footballers. Celtic Park and Clyde's old Shawfield ground, now solely used as a greyhound stadium after the club's relocation to Cumbernauld are in close vicinity.

As local derbies go, this one is local- the two towns share not only a fierce but friendly rivalry but a recycling tip on their respective boundaries. Cambuslang once boasted a senior club that contested the 1888 Scottish Cup Final and were founder members of the Scottish League in 1890. Cambuslang Hibs won the Junior Cup in 1896 but both organisations did not survive for long. Cambuslang Rangers, formed in 1892 have been more enduring and their Junior Cup record is impressive- 11 final appearances with five victories. Between 1969 and 1974 they won the cup on four occasions.

The sides had drawn 2-2 at Somervell Park the week before and had a rich history in the competition. They met in the final in 1927 when Glencairn earned local bragging rights after a 2-1 victory before 25,000 spectators at Hampden.

Glencairn went into the game as favourites- they currently top the West Region Super League Division One (level two) while Rangers are fourth in the league below.

A large crowd turned out on a mild afternoon blessed with hazy sunshine - around 700 or so based on a rough headcount, which was more than attended the Scottish League encounter at Hampden between Queen's Park and Berwick Rangers one mile or so away.

The excellent playing surface allowed both teams the opportunity to play some excellent football in a keenly-contested game that was shaded by the home team in the second half after Cambuslang led at the interval. The spectators watched enthralled as an engrossing cup-tie unfolded and this was a simply outstanding footballing occasion.

Glencairn now travel to Irvine Meadow next week with a place in the last eight at stake and a home tie against Largs awaiting the victors. I must admit to having a financial interest in their continuing progress. Having seen them earlier in the season and being suitably impressed I produced a crisp tenner and wagered it an inviting, odds of 33-1 on them winning the competition. Those odds have now

shortened to around 12-1 though I fancy that this speculative investment may not last much longer given Irvine Meadow's redoubtable pedigree.

The ground, which has naming rights from a prominent local sponsor is hugely impressive for this level of football. As well as producing an informative match programme (something of a rarity in Junior circles) the club also have a superb web-site and their match-day experience is enhanced by the announcement of the line-ups and half-time and full-time scores from Junior games. A visit here comes highly recommended.

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