

TT No.43: *Mike Latham* - Sat 3rd October 2009; Active Nation Scottish Cup 1st Round Replay: **Wigtown & Bladnoch** 0-3 Whitehill Welfare; Admission: £5; Attendance: 190 (h/c); No programmes.

The decision of the Scottish FA to open up their challenge cup competition in 2007 and make it more accessible to senior non-league teams and the top junior ones was an inspired one.

Proof of the pudding came in an intriguing first round replay between Wigtown & Bladnoch from the South of Scotland league and Whitehill Welfare, an established East of Scotland League side whose Scottish Cup pedigree includes a tie against Celtic played at Easter Road.

The sides had drawn 1-1 in Rosewell the week before, a tie apparently not without incident. Both goals came from penalties, the equaliser from the home side also seeing the visiting goalkeeper dismissed.

The replay in Wigtown was not the biggest event in the town on the day- styled as Scotland's 'Book Town' a festival had been arranged and attracted large crowds thronging the market square.

A pre-match lunch at the excellent Café Cree in Newton Stewart highlighted the thinking in these parts. 'Are you here for the book festival?' enquired the chef, who looked nonplussed when the reply came, 'No, the football.'

Wigtown is situated about six miles south of Newton Stewart in glorious rolling countryside. An agricultural town of around one thousand inhabitants, Wigtown has a long and interesting history. Trammondford Park looked at its best in the strong autumnal sunshine and around 200 spectators, including a good following from Rosewell looked forward to an interesting tie with a second-round date against South of Scotland League leaders Threave Rovers the prize for the winners.

One thing that has struck me about games in Scotland is how excellent are the referees and linesmen compared to their English counterparts. The referee for this game looked young and had two experienced men running the line- they proved a superb combination and any hint of rancour left over from the first game soon disappeared.

As the game progressed, Whitehill's superior skill, fitness and organisation began to show and in the end the score-line was a fair reflection on the difference between the teams. But Wigtown may contend the game would have finished differently had their best spell, early in the second half, been rewarded with a goal.

Trammondford Park is situated in open countryside midway between Wigtown and Bladnoch. I was informed that a pub and distillery, which welcomes visitors has been making an outstanding single malt whisky since 1817, 'Spirit of the Lowlands' is located in Bladnoch but sadly did not get the chance to visit.

Located next to the town's nine-hole golf course there is plenty of parking within the ground and the only problem was seeking out someone to proffer the admission charge. Enquires about a programme were met with an air of incredulity.

The only spectator cover is a small enclosure on the halfway line. Opposite that the impressive dug-outs are located. The ground was in excellent order with a sturdy post and rail fence around the pitch, though the playing area has the look of meadow land and may be prone to flooding in the winter months. Refreshments appeared to be available from a structure by the side of the dressing rooms but it was initially unclear whether this was for officials only or for everyone.

A friend of mine, far better versed in the league than me, reckons that Wigtown's ground is arguably the most pleasing of the South of Scotland's 'Scottish Cup' grounds. I certainly enjoyed my afternoon there.

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