

TT No.47: *Mike Latham* - Sat 10th October 2009; Emirates Scottish Junior Cup First Round: **Newmains United 1 Banchory St Ternan 3**; Attendance: 50 (h/c); Admission: £5.

The Scottish Junior Cup throws up many intriguing fixtures, especially in the early rounds and this tie, postponed seven days previously due to waterlogging, stood out as one not to miss. It brought together Banchory from Royal Deeside about 18 miles west of Aberdeen and Newmains, a club with a long history in the juniors located in an old mining village in industrial Lanarkshire.

Banchory only joined the juniors in 1993 and their home pitch, at Milton Park, Crathes, looks perfectly manicured from photographs on the club's excellent website. It must have been a culture shock, therefore, for their players to set eyes on Victoria Park. The pitch is in poor condition, with rough grass and parts sanded in areas and many of the surrounds were very boggy.

Victoria Park has clearly seen better days but it still retains the atmosphere of a proper football ground. Located in an area of largely derelict industrial land between several villages on the eastern fringe of Wishaw and a few miles north of Lanark, there are no houses, shops or pubs within close vicinity.

There are no signs to the ground but it is easy to find, on the Overtown Road to the south of Newmains sign-posted Waterloo. Entrance is through some heavily fortified gates opposite a garage where two club officials were on hand to collect admission. I was informed that under cup rules Newmains had to pay the visitors a guarantee of £275, and clearly the club would not have recovered the costs of staging the game from the 50 or so spectators that gathered on a bright autumnal afternoon.

Newmains United Community Football Club, to give the club its official title, were formed in 2006 and after taking a year out of the juniors to re-group stage all their games at Victoria Park after ground-sharing at Wishaw. They were previously known as Coltness United (formed 1934), taking many of their players from the local ironworks which only recently closed.

Coltness United was perhaps best known for nurturing the talents of a young full-back called Tommy Gemmell, who hailed from nearby Craigneuk. Gemmell, renowned for his thunderous shot, went on to become a Celtic legend and two of the 64 goals he scored in 418 Celtic appearances came in European Cup finals. Andrew Wilson, who won 12 caps for Scotland between 1920 and 1923 and played predominantly for Chelsea was born in Newmains. He later represented England at bowls.

There was plenty of car-parking using the old blaes pitch and some good elevated viewing from both sides of the pitch. The players emerged from an old changing room block with a distinctive design that sadly had been heavily vandalised.

Behind the far goal was a group of trees and shrubs with the goal nets secured by ropes to one of the tree branches. There was no cover and so the ground would not be recommended on a wet afternoon.

Banchory, resplendent in an all-white kit, looked all at sea in the opening stages and fell behind in only the second minute. The game was played at 100 miles an hour with both side's intent on attack and the referee, superbly mobile, controlled the game well despite only having club linesmen to signal for 'ball out.' The Banchory official was a most distinguished gentleman who took the flag while wearing a smart blazer, collar and tie- a throwback to the days of yesteryear when it was customary for officials to wear blazers.

Play was hard but fair and there were no bookings, quite a rarity for a junior cup tie I was informed. Though the visitors looked superior in terms of fitness and organisation, the attitude of the home players was excellent and their spirit something to admire. One of their number, an experienced midfielder, suffered what looked like a broken nose and then a bad ankle injury within minutes of each other but carried on playing to the end.

Gradually Banchory adjusted to the conditions and they came back strongly to seal the tie in the second half though Newmains only gave up the hope of a replay when the third goal went in deep into injury time. Handshakes all round as the weary players dragged themselves off the pitch with Banchory looking forward to another adventure in round two of this wonderful competition.

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