

TT No.55: *Mike Latham* - Saturday 17 October 2009; West of Scotland Cup First Round: **Kello Rovers 0-0 Larkhall Thistle**; (Larkhall won 5-4 on kicks taken from the penalty mark); Attendance: 140 (h/c); Admission: £4; No programmes.

Another glorious autumnal afternoon after days of dry weather brought with it the chance to visit another outpost of Scottish football with no fears about being stranded by a late postponement due to a waterlogged or frozen pitch- a recurring threat in the deepest of the winter months.

Kello Rovers JFC were formed in 1903 and play in the small former mining community of Kirkconnel, a few miles north of Sanquhar on the A76 towards Kilmarnock on the Dumfriesshire side of the border with Ayrshire. The junior footballing hotbeds of New Cumnock, Auchinleck and Cumnock are not too far away. The quiet and enjoyable drive northwards from Dumfries passing through Thornhill was easily negotiated and the scene was set for an exciting cup-tie against Larkhall Thistle.

Kello had been in good form, reeling off a string of victories in the Ayrshire District League and they were confident of making progress against their opponents from the West Junior ranks, generally recognised as the oldest junior club in Scotland.

Nithside Park is easily found, just off the main road through the village and close to the station. The ground is immaculately kept and a tribute to the hard-working officials at this friendly club. There is a small covered terrace on the main road side and the roof had been recently painted in the club colours of black and white.

Opposite is a small club house incorporating the dressing rooms, a small tea bar (from where hot pies, homemade lentil soup and hot drinks were cheerfully dispensed) and the committee room. The post and rail fence around the pitch had recently been painted and all the surrounds were mown and neat.

Set amidst glorious scenery of rolling hills there could have been few better places to watch football. By the 2pm kick-off the crowd had swelled towards the 140-mark, many seemingly magically materialising out of nowhere in the minute or two before the game started. Play was fast, committed and skilful and despite the lack of goalmouth incident the match made for compelling viewing. The visitors twice hit the post early in the second half but over the 90 minutes the teams proved a good match for one another.

The game was decided from kicks taken from the penalty mark, a disappointing end to a good afternoon's entertainment. The visitors' goalkeeper continually encroached before his opponents kicked the ball and having been booked once was fortunate to escape being dismissed from the field as he gave dissent to the referee and also engaged in some less than humorous banter with home supporters.

The home side hit one penalty wide, all the other attempts went in and the tie went the way of the visitors by a 5-4 verdict. But after all that had gone on before there was an air of anti-climax and I half-wished I had followed the dictum of a groundhopping friend of mine who steadfastly refuses to stay for penalties that decide cup-ties.

On the journey back south to Sanquhar the road passes the long derelict former Crawick Holm home of Nithsdale Wanderers, briefly a Scottish Football League ground in the 1920s. The outline of the ground can still be clearly made out. The re-formed Nithsdale Wanderers now play elsewhere in the town and the opportunity was taken to watch the last 20 minutes of the South of Scotland Cup-tie against Glasgow University.

The unnecessary antics of the visiting goalkeeper apart the Kello game confirmed my recent findings that Scottish junior football never ceases to entertain. The attitude of the players is commendable- they are here to play football and just get on with it without any histrionics or agendas. There is respect for the referee and the players do not appear to take advantage of the referee having to rule on offsides, only having club linesmen to signal 'ball out.' A visit to Kello Rovers comes highly recommended.

06/20