

TT No.62: Chris Freer - Scotland Weekender 17th/18th October 2009; **St Johnstone** v Rangers (1-2) Scottish Premier - Ent. value 3/5; **Dundee United** v Hamilton Accies (1-1) Scottish Premier - Ent. value 1/5 and **Edinburgh City U19** v Easthouses Lily U19 (0-2) East of Scotland U19 League - Ent. value 3/5.

I have a few criteria when it comes to adding a new ground to my list. One is that the game has to be a meaningful contest, as in no 'friendlies' - there has to be something at stake, eg. league points or a place in the next round of the cup. That's why, on an otherwise blank Sunday waiting for a flight home, I manage to track down a match that must add a gold anorak award to my distinguished accomplishments! More of that later.

It's a bright Saturday in October and I arrive at Birmingham airport for the 8.50am to Glasgow. Wetherspoon's is open and I avail myself of a breakfast but no beer, as I've got some driving to do later. The airport is alive with be-shirted Villa fans flying in for the big match with Chelsea. My plane has propellers and has the registration mark G-JEDI ... hopefully it'll fare better than the Death Star! There's no queue for Enterprise car rental at Glasgow airport and within 20 minutes of landing I'm speeding up the M8 heading for Perth. A few weeks ago, I wrote to the Managing Director of **St Johnstone** pleading for dispensation when it came to tickets for this game, which happens to be against Rangers. It's a TV match with an early kick-off, and tickets are only being sold to regulars, to avoid infiltration. Mr Duff kindly gave the nod and on arrival at McDiarmid Park I am in possession of two tickets for the game, the other being for Eagle Bobster who meets me at the ground.

The stadium is one of the earliest of the new-builds, and although a fairly unadventurous arrangement of symmetrically-matched stands, has a certain charm with its overhanging trees, and a view of sorts from a hill outside the ground. I'm pleased to see the Macaroni pies on sale and decide to top up my breakfast. The ground is somewhat less than full, despite Rangers having both ends and part of one stand, and the stay-away's miss a lively game in which the home team show the more purpose and deservedly go in front. Kris Boyd is caught offside and a wag behind shouts out "Hey Boyd, your head was onside but your belly was off!" Boyd has the last laugh because, although both he and Rangers look sluggish, he poaches an equaliser and then the usual SPL script kicks in. The lesser team - St Johnstone in this instance - deserve a share of the spoils, but the Auld Firm team - Rangers today - get the late winner. It's a familiar book.

We set off in our hired Twingo to cover the 25 miles to **Dundee** in 40 minutes or so, arriving at Tannadice just as the game kicks off. The stadium is a curious mix of stand architecture, with most of the crowd crammed into two of them. Opposite are 50 or so Hamilton Accies supporters who have much of one side to themselves, save for the patrons of a row of what appear to be garden sheds tacked together to form executive boxes. A big advert for the Samaritans dominates and I consider

calling the number as a generally dreadful game, drifts on. Antoine-Curier, a former Forest trainee, is given time to lace his boots before slotting the visitors in front. Bobster and I look at each other and utter the words 'comedy goal' simultaneously. The crowd are by now resigned to persistently abusing the referee and his assistants, backed by a constant barrage of booing, but in a strangely Scottish sort of way which I can only describe as akin to hearing a cow with a cold. A late United equaliser lifts some of the gloom.

With our sporting day done, we return to Glasgow for an evening on the Shandy. I have plans for the Sunday, which involve either a stadium tour of Hampden, or my coup de grace, a match at the former Scottish League ground once used by Meadowbank Thistle. Admittedly, it's only an East of Scotland Under-19 League match, but as I said at the start of this post, if there's points at stake, that's OK by me. Thus, we brave roadworks on the M8 and Edinburgh's infernal traffic to arrive at the Meadowbank Stadium in good time for the 2.00 kick-off. Bobster and his travelling companion, an amiable chap called John with a modicum of interest in football, don their own anoraks to join me.

We startle the staff at the reception desk by declaring our interest in seeing the game, and after getting lost in the corridors underneath the main stand at Meadowbank, then side-tracked by the cafe overlooking the pitch, we finally find our way out onto the concourse to join the 20 or so mums and dads congregating in the middle of the stand. Both these teams are in the top five in this league. Paradoxically they are also in the bottom five. **Edinburgh** are top and Easthouses Lily (!) bottom. The visitors, however, take an early lead and despite conceding much of the possession, are comfortable until half time, and settle it in the second. Curiously the referee is working with just one linesman, a disinterested chap who shuffles up and down the line making decisions often at odds with his superior, whilst sipping coffee from a cup as he does so. Fergie would no doubt suggest he wasn't fit - the cheek of it!

We head for the airport, our anoraks sporting new campaign medals and a job well done.

06/20