

TT No. 105: *Justin Holmes* - Sat 30th October 2010; **Motherwell** v Hamilton Academical; Scottish Premier League; Venue: Fir Park, Motherwell; Score: 0-1; Admission: £18.00; Programme: £3.00; Attendance: 4,865; Match Rating: 2.

A second trip to southern Scotland in a fortnight posed a choice between visits to St Mirren, Dumbarton, Partick Thistle or Motherwell. In the end, I chose the latter, partially as I like to reward clubs that choose reasonable ticket prices, and £18.00 for a seat right on the midway line for a game in the Scottish Premier League certainly fell into that category, even though it meant a rather long journey from Prestwick airport. The train journey from Prestwick to Glasgow is always one I savour, as it passes along the scenic Ayrshire coast with views of the Isle of Arran in the distance and full views of the unenclosed football grounds of Troon and Irvine Victoria, both of the Ayrshire League, as the train passes above. After changing trains at Glasgow Central (and taking advantage of a quick tour of the city centre), Motherwell is about half hour train ride south-west.

Fir Park is located about a twenty-minute walk from Motherwell station, via the town centre which, it has to be said, is instantly forgettable with little to entertain. I purchased my ticket for the game in advance on-line in order to choose my seat in the East Stand, which is an old-fashioned stand with seats bolted onto what used to be terracing. The views are very good, with only a couple of narrow pillars potentially obstructing views and this is where the most passionate of Motherwell fans congregate. Opposite is the Main Stand, again of the traditional variety but much narrower and taller than the East Stand. Behind one of the goals is a plain, unattractive but functional stand, and behind the other goal is the most impressive stand and of the two-tiered variety, which looks somewhat out of the place as it towers over the much smaller other stands. Rather bizarrely, this stand, seemingly the best of the stadium, is allocated to the usually small following of away fans. Indeed, Fir Park is a mix of irregular stands, which is absolutely not a criticism, it adds to the character of the ground. The programme was an impressive effort, designed well with plenty of information to digest about both teams.

Today's match was a Lanarkshire derby between two clubs a couple of miles apart and separated by the M74, but who have enjoyed very different fortunes so far this season. Motherwell can currently boast the best of the rest tag after the Old Firm, flying high in third place and reaching the league cup semi-finals in midweek after their second victory against Dundee United at home within four days in midweek. With just one win and six points from their opening nine games, today's visitors, Hamilton Academical, are finding life much more difficult, as they usually do, unsurprisingly for a club of very limited resources, for whom being in the Premier League is an achievement. A difficult task for Hamilton became all the more apparent when it is considered that they haven't won at Motherwell in the league for 30 seasons, and not in the top-flight since 1938.

The game started off quite evenly, and quite typically for a local derby was, for the most part, a midfield battle. The gulf between the two clubs according to league positions was not apparent and it was not undeserved when Hamilton took the lead through a wonderful goal from Nigel Hasselbaink - nephew of Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink - as he worked himself into space along the edge of the penalty area before unleashing a beautifully judged curling low shot in off the post. Motherwell increasingly did not look a side who were flying high in the table, showing little cohesion in their play with players guilty of poor touches and passes. Motherwell were given a chance to equalise a couple of minutes before half time when they were awarded a penalty when Nick Blackman was prevented from tucking the ball into an empty net by a barge from Martin Canning. Amazingly, the referee decided not to even book a player who denied a clear goalscoring opportunity and unfortunately, in a week where a lack of respect towards officials has been much in the Scottish news recently, this was just one example of a poor, bizarre performance by the referee. Much to Craig Brown's credit, he refused to criticise the referee's performance after the match, testament to the thoroughly decent man that he is. To compound the situation, Tomas Cerny easily saved a softly struck penalty from Tom Hateley low to his right. So, a shock result was on the cards at half time. Motherwell unsurprisingly dominated the second half but despite the odd half chance, never really looked like scoring as Hamilton set themselves up as a very strong unit who battled hard and, in the end, deserved to hold out for the win. This was not a game that was easy on the eye, but that suited Hamilton perfectly and full credit to them for grinding out a much-needed victory.

07/20