

TT No.62: *Mike Latham* - Sat 25th September 2010: Scottish FA Cup First Round-**Selkirk 1-6 Bo'ness United**; Attendance: 600 (est.); Admission: £6; 32pp programme: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

The first round of the Scottish Cup is one of my favourite days in the football calendar. Since opening up the competition to include the top junior sides, the Scottish FA have breathed new life into the early rounds with intriguing clashes between clubs that would never otherwise have met one another.

A case in point was provided by this tie, one of several in the Borders on a gloriously sunny afternoon with a nip in the air. Selkirk, with four wins out of five in the East of Scotland League Premier Division were pitched up against Bo'ness United, one of the best supported of the junior teams and proud reigning champions of the East Region Super League. Last season Irvine Meadow FC battled hard through the early rounds with their reward a cup-tie against SPL opponents Hibs at Easter Road where they acquitted themselves admirably and earned several thousand pounds into the bargain. The incentive for these two clubs was clear and there was expectancy in the air as spectators filed into Yarrow Park, Selkirk's modest but immaculately maintained ground on the outskirts of town.

The Selkirk sporting community had prepared admirably for the tie with the neighbouring rugby club, whose Philiphaugh ground boasts an impressive old-style grandstand and a large club house taking advantage of not having a home fixture by throwing open their doors for the visiting hordes. Parking around the ground was provided free of charge and the club house open for pre-match and post-match refreshments with all supporters, welcome. The adjoining cricket club, formed way back in 1851 before moving to Philiphaugh in 1872 and the oldest sporting club in town by some way was also open for business. Selkirk FC's formation is given as 1880 and they are the oldest football club in the Borders. Though rugby was played in Selkirk long before hand, the rugby club's official formation date is 1907. The rugby club played on the cricket field until establishing their own ground in 1926. Selkirk FC only moved to the site relatively recently, leaving behind their old Ettrick Park ground in the 1990s to set up base at what has become known as Yarrow Park.

Many spectators arrived early including a huge support- at least 500-strong and probably more from Bo'ness. They enjoyed the sunshine, had a few drinks and looked forward to the game. By way of an appetiser there was a Border Amateur League game taking place on an adjoining field. Selkirk Victoria were taking on Tweedmouth Amateurs Colts with an early kick-off and before perhaps their best-ever crowd went on to win 3-1.

Victoria played an important part in Selkirk's history, forming the side that represented the town in the FA Cup in 1984. At the time the senior Selkirk FC side

was in abeyance and rather than lose their hard-earned place in the competition went ahead with a tie against Stirling Albion, losing 20-0.

Ettrick Water, a tributary of the River Tweed flows nearby and with steeply wooded hills rising on all sides from the ground and the town of Selkirk in the distance the views were glorious. Once, way back in 1971 the visiting Pakistan team played Scotland in a three-day cricket match at Philiphaugh including luminaries such as Sadiq Mohammad, Zaheer Abbas, Wasim Bari and Imran Khan in their side. The ground, with its modest pavilion and scoreboard and a bench seat dating back to the 1880s and procured from the old Mound Stand at Lord's prior to its redevelopment looked a picture and it was easy to imagine top class cricketers playing here such as Keith Miller with the Royal Australian Air Force in 1945 and the touring New Zealanders in 1958.

So, the main event: entry to Yarrow Park through a gate at a corner of the wooden fence that encloses the ground. Selkirk had produced a superb 32-page programme to mark the occasion with full histories of both sides and several other interesting features. The main feature of the ground is a small building encompassing changing rooms, clubhouse and a committee room along the far side where there is a banking offering an elevated view of play. The rest of the ground is flat standing behind a post and rail fence.

Bo'ness went into the game hot favourites but fell behind in the 17th minute to a curling shot from the edge of the area by Des Sutherland. Ross Hamilton equalised with a fine header from a superbly delivered free-kick but the 1-1 score-line at the interval was a fair reflection of an open, even contest. But the visitors raised their game considerably after the break scoring twice within four minutes of the re-start and going on to win 6-1. The tie was superbly controlled by Euan Anderson with help from his officials, including the estimable Rev Frank Campbell, who I last saw running the line in a Northern League game at Stokesley. I have long held the view that Scottish officials are way ahead of their English counterparts in their firm but undemonstrative approach and this game merely underlined my beliefs.

The tie was superbly arranged by the host club, the visiting supporters were treated to some great Borders hospitality and this was a simply wonderful occasion. As I say, one of the best days in the football calendar. And if heading up the A7 to the Borders through Langholm try the Pelosi Corner café on the Market Place, simply outstanding.

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