

**TT No. 102: Mike Latham** - Sat 26 November 2011: **Carluke Rovers** 2-1 Broughty Athletic; Emirates Airline Scottish Junior Cup Third Round; Att: 110 (h/c); Admn: £4; No programme; FGIF Match Rating: 4\*.

It was Max Boyce who sang of the pithead baths being supermarkets now; in the case of Carluke Rovers it's their old Loch Park Stadium, obliterated from memory and now the site of a new Tesco supermarket. I visited the ground two years ago, a vast athletics stadium that could have been spawned in the old East Germany with its grey, functional buildings; it was strange and soulless but did have its own atmosphere.

In its place Carluke have a new £3.5m ground that is simply inspirational. It's a like-for-like replacement in that there is still a running track but it is clean, modern, attractively designed and a real focal point for the town.

On a day of heavy rain and strong winds in the west of Scotland matches were being called-off with regularity through waterlogged pitches. But there was never any chance that this would affect the game at Carluke where the superb 3g pitch was immaculate. The only concern was the strength of the wind, especially as the new ground is in an elevated location above the town. There was a late postponement of the cup- tie at Broxburn, who also have an artificial surface because of this problem but thankfully this game went ahead as planned.

Carluke is a town of around 13,000 inhabitants, located five miles or so north-west of Lanark. The journey from the M74 at Abington takes the traveller past the haunting site of the old Lanark racecourse and then later past Tesco where Loch Park was once located and which held a crowd of 10,113 for a Junior Cup-tie against Cambuslang in 1971. The new Carluke ground is east of the town centre on the A721 Carnwath Road.

John Cumming, as Douglas Lamming's invaluable *A Scottish Internationalists' Who's Who, 1872-1986* informs was a native of Carluke who played 607 first-team games for Hearts between 1948 and 1967 'showing great anticipation and dazzling dribbling ability.' The left-half, who later served as Hearts' trainer, won nine caps for Scotland and was known as the 'Iron Man.' His club career with Heart of Midlothian included winning two league championship medals, one Scottish cup medal and four Scottish League Cup medals.

Cumming passed away in December 2008 aged 78 and sadly did not live to see the magnificent stadium that has been named in his honour. He was known as a man who did all he could to encourage the local people to be involved in sport and would have enjoyed what was another fine afternoon's entertainment in the Scottish Junior Cup.

The John Cumming Stadium is built alongside the impressive new high school. It boasts a substantial pavilion and enclosure on the entrance side and sweeping

views across to wooded hills. It is a superb facility for the community and looked even more impressive during the second half when the floodlights were switched on to counteract the fading light on a dark and stormy afternoon. This did not find favour with all, one visiting spectator on my right remarking, good humouredly that the home club had switched on 'the Devil's Candles,' a reference that very few junior games are played under artificial light.

Carlukie went into the game proudly sitting top of the West Region Second Division (Pyramid Level Four) and so visitors Broughty from Level Two of the East Pyramid were very much the pre-match favourites. But Carlukie played the conditions impressively and have clearly soon adapted to their immaculate pitch. They favoured an intricate passing game played mainly on the ground and had several nippy and skilful ball players. At times during the first-half Broughty looked likely to gain command of the game- they favoured a more direct approach, but Carlukie held firm. A fascinating contest looked likely to be deadlocked until Carlukie, opened the scoring midway through the second half, defender David Gray converting a free-kick. But Broughty were back on level terms within three minutes, their vastly experienced defender Steven Tweed heading home a corner kick that hung in the wind. The winning goal, ten minutes from time, was converted by the stretching Darren Hamilton from a right-wing cross.

Some people have their reservations over football played on 3g pitches in athletics stadiums; but a visit to Carlukie dispels many such negative emotions. The pitch is simply superb and you soon forget it's not grass; the facilities for the spectator are excellent, an elevated, covered standing area and other hard standing all around the ground with atmospheric grass banking on three sides helping create a more intimate atmosphere. The pie stall and toilet facilities are way above most junior club standards and there is ample parking. It's just a shame that Carlukie, who have an informative club website, do not produce a programme.

A crowd of around 110, including a sizeable party from Broughty and several neutrals were royally entertained by a match that embodied the true spirit of the Scottish Junior Cup.

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