

TT No.217: *Mike Latham* - Easter Monday 9 April 2012; **Llanfair United** 5-1 Bont; Spar Mid Wales League; Attendance: 50 (h/c); Admission: £2; No programme; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

The roads in mid Wales were busy, most it seemed with holiday makers beating a hasty exit homewards on a day of scudding low clouds and persistent rain. I allowed myself plenty of time to get to my game, the third attempt I'd made to watch Llanfair United, the previous two being ruled out by postponements.

Llanfair United are still in contention for promotion from the Division Two of the Spar Mid Wales League, especially as all but one of their remaining six fixtures are at home. This game promised goals with Bont second from bottom but as I arrived an hour before kick-off, I thought the curse had struck me again.

After journeying through Welshpool and heading westwards I found the Mount Field easily enough, just up the road from the town of Llanfair Caereinion which nestles in a spectacularly scenic valley. The rain was pouring down but the pitch looked perfectly playable- trouble was, there was no-one around. I made a panic 'phone call to the home secretary and he kindly reassured me. The teams, he explained, change in the nearby leisure centre and make their way to the football ground by car. They'd be along shortly.

Sure enough, footballers, ready dressed for the fray started arriving in dribs and drabs, the home team first, the away team, in a nice light blue and white striped kit with ten minutes to go, along with a young referee who turned out to be excellent. At 2-15pm the Mount Field pitch was relatively deserted but fifteen minutes later it was a hive of activity, the teams ready for the fray and with a crowd of around fifty locals who had seemingly appeared from nowhere.

Llanfair Caereinion lies upon the River Banwy (also known as the River Einion), and had has a population of around 1,600. An agricultural town founded upon the woollen industry, it is most famous for being a terminus of the Welshpool and Llanfair Light Railway, first opened in 1903. There was a great fire here in 1758 which destroyed many medieval timbered buildings. The steeple of the church was cased with wood also took fire but happily, though not without great difficulty, the church was preserved and remains as a significant landmark on the landscape.

Llanfair United moved out of the local Montgomeryshire League into the Mid Wales League and clearly have the support of the local community. Their ground is fast developing, with the steep banking along the far side cut away during the summer to provide a means of extending the width of the pitch. They also plan to install a 50-seater stand on the banking and some toilet facilities, necessary to ensure they meet the ground criteria should they succeed in getting promotion.

At the moment the facilities at Mount Field are rather rudimentary, the only cover provided by the two dug-outs. No wonder many locals chose to watch the game

from the comfort of their cars. The playing pitch is also far from a perfect surface for football, being uneven and well grassed but there are plans to improve this over the summer.

The game itself was terrific, well refereed and played in a good spirit. Bont belied their lowly league position to give a good account of themselves but twice conceded two goals in a two-minute spell; the first just before half-time when they had restricted the home side to a single goal, the second around the hour-mark just after they had clawed their way back to 3-1 with a good goal. As Llanfair also missed a penalty, they finished worthy winners and they are certainly worth watching. They have some skilful players and a really good team spirit. During the second half the manager wandered from his dug-out and, recalling my 'phone call to the secretary earlier, welcomed me warmly to the club and explained their plans for the future.

I had to decline offers to join the locals in the pub after the game as I wanted to rush back to Wrexham where a historic Rugby League game was taking place at 5pm, the first meeting between two professional Welsh sides for 101 years. Happily, the roads were much quieter and I arrived at the Racecourse Ground just in time to see the kick-off, North Wales Crusaders beating South Wales 34-22 after a really good game.

So, a terrific double in Wales again and it goes without saying I'd recommend a trip to Llanfair United unreservedly.

07/20