

TT No.226: Mike Latham - Sunday 15 April 2012; **Bonnyrigg Rose** 1-1 Auchinleck Talbot; Emirates Airlines Scottish Junior Cup Semi-Final 1st Leg; Att: 2,413; Programme: £2; Admission: £7; FGIF Match rating: 4*.

I made a late decision to head north and watch a semi-final in a competition I've followed closely this year. It's rare for Scottish Juniors games to be played on Sundays but the dry and sunny weather added to the sense of anticipation and the pulse quickened as I reached Bonnyrigg, an old mining town eight miles south west of Edinburgh.

Lots of supporters were walking the streets, some sampling the wares of the local fish and chip shop, others heading to or from the local pubs or the large social club at the Bonnyrigg ground. It was clear that this was an important game, the sense of excitement and tension was apparent.

Bonnyrigg's ground is only a few yards from the town centre, approached up an alleyway from Dundas Street. The club has made great preparations for the game, with a pipe band playing outside the entrance before the game and later during half-time. During the half-time interval when the Scottish 'keepie-uppy' champion also gave an amazing exhibition. £7 admission is ridiculously cheap though the 12-page programme was over-priced at £2.

Bonnyrigg had knocked-out the well fancied Irvine Meadow XI on the way to the last four but knew that Talbot are a redoubtable team with a fine pedigree. Earlier in the season they lost by a single goal to Hearts at Tynecastle in the Scottish Cup; earlier in the afternoon Hearts qualified for the final with a 2-1 win over Celtic to set up a derby meeting with Hibs.

This was Bonnyrigg's first appearance in the last four for 30 years and New Dundas Park was packed for the game, the kick-off delayed until ten past three. The pitch was in superb condition and though the fans were segregated, Talbot bringing at least one-quarter of the crowd they were good natured with lots of banter flying about. There was a small police presence but they had an easy afternoon from what I saw, with no hint of trouble. There is a cover that runs along one half of the pitch on the entrance side, the rest of the ground being a mixture of grass banking and terracing.

It was a typically cagey semi-final that I thought Talbot shaded. They looked a well organised and well-disciplined side. After hitting the post in the first half the visitors took the lead early in the second half when the home side conceded a soft penalty. Rose equalised late on after a rare spell of pressure. Referee Andrew Dallas and his two linesmen worked impressively as a team in a tense match. I'd expect Talbot to win the second leg. Many people I spoke to thought this was a low-key and disappointing game; I thought it was gripping, tense and compelling.

