

TT No.45: *Mike Latham* - Sat 17th September 2011; **Shotts Bon Accord** 2-1 Lanark United; Stagecoach West of Scotland Super League 1; Att: 180 (h/c); Admn: £5; Prog: No; Raffle: £1; FGIF Match rating: 4*.

The start to my football season had been long delayed; the sudden death of my dad in June cast a shadow over everything; for over 40 years I went to countless games with him, chewed the cud over countless more and I knew that life would never be the same again. I came close to calling it a day and spend my Saturdays doing other things; I don't think I'll ever be able to go back to watching Bolton Wanderers because it will bring back too many memories of time spent with my dad.

But time moves on and with the cricket season largely confined to the pages of Wisden and a raging hangover from celebrating Lancashire's first Championship win for 77 years in the Crown having dissipated, I decided to resume my groundhopping, albeit with a heavy heart. It was a day of sunshine and violently heavy showers and I wanted somewhere to properly kick-start my season, albeit belatedly at a proper football ground. I wasn't to be disappointed.

The motorways were eerily quiet and in no time at all I was sampling again the breakfast at one of the country's finest dining establishments, the café in Moffat that has become my base camp for journeys northwards. No more information will be given in case you choose to occupy the cherished window seat one Saturday morning.

The West of Scotland Juniors had a full league programme; and though the weather was threatening the game at Shotts, I was assured would survive. The Hannah Park pitch drains well and sure enough I arrived to find the players warming up in a mixture of bright sunshine and then sudden heavy downpours.

Shotts is a small rural village of around 8,000 inhabitants situated in North Lanarkshire halfway between Glasgow and Edinburgh. Coal-mining was once its major source of employment; around 20 mines were located nearby but the last closed over 40 years ago. Apart from the football team it's perhaps best known for its high security prison, HMP Shotts.

Football has always been popular in the locality and Dykehead FC were, for three seasons members of the Scottish Football League in the interwar years. The location of their ground remains and is now a YMCA facility. Shotts Bon Accord were founded after the end of the Second World War; their Hannah Park ground is simply wonderful, the kind of which is virtually extinct in other parts of the country, and it looks much older than its 60-odd years.

Hannah Park occupies a vast area in the middle of a housing estate with an impressive social club adjoining the gated entrance. Once inside the ground has a real 'wow' factor; a magnificent oval shaped ground with a vast playing area,

reputedly the largest in the juniors. Surrounded by a blaze track, a concrete wall and banked by several rows of terracing, the ground is simply outstanding and the large amounts of grass-banking are lovingly maintained. There is a classic covered terrace on the far side, where most of the spectators chose to watch the action and a pavilion for the players, that was very similar in design to that at Kirkintilloch Rob Roy. It's also the location for the Shotts Highland games, held each year in June.

In the Juniors the players simply get on with things; play started promptly at 2pm the referee blew the half-time whistle after just 12 seconds of injury-time. In the second half he extended the action for just four minutes so the match was finished well before 4pm. It's football as it should be played, neat, constructive, with passing movements encouraged, plenty of wing play and goalmouth incidents, a few controversial incidents that quickly pass with no lingering aftermath. If you are a good player, you'll get chance to play, if you get hacked down occasionally, you'll accept it and then get on with the game. Players' positions are easily defined by their appearance, the bruising central defenders, the tricky wingers, the deft inside forwards are easy to spot in the warm-up.

Shotts were 2-0 up at half-time, the first a splendidly conceived goal, the second due largely to a goalkeeping error from a corner. Lanark came back into the game strongly, pulled a goal back midway through the second half and the home side were glad to hear the final whistle. A well-stocked canteen dispensed a variety of food and hot drinks and sold out of pies and sausages before the end of the half-time interval. I was just pleased to be back at football; it goes without saying that a visit to Hannah Park comes with my warmest recommendation.

07/20