

**TT No.58: *Mike Latham*** - Sat 1 October 2011: Emirates Scottish Junior Cup Round 1; **Shettleston** 2-3 Dunbar United; Admission: £4; No programme; FGIF Match Rating: 4\*.

The country is basking in a heat wave, temperatures have reached 28 degrees in Lancashire and people are heading the coast to top up their tans; time for a reality check, it's first round day in the Scottish Junior Cup, one of the best days in the calendar so where better to head than Glasgow where it's 12 degrees with heavy rain and flash floods?

The weather heading north is fine; balmy in fact and even so after breakfast in Moffat; though the motorway signs are warning of flooding, the weather is calm. Then, just before Motherwell, the weather turns; dramatically so. Dark, scudding and threatening clouds bringing intermittent rain on the windscreen, there is lots of standing water and the temperature gauge dips dramatically; in other words, perfect football weather.

So, to the east end of Glasgow, via a diversion that is caused by flooding; several games are already postponed but Shettleston's game against Dunbar United goes ahead, a fascinating clash of east against west, the bookies calling it as one of the tightest games in the round.

Like many of the city's suburbs, Shettleston was originally a small village that later was engulfed by the growing urbanisation; it is described as being one of the most deprived areas in the UK with a high crime rate. But Old Shettleston Road, where the Juniors play is peaceful and quiet, and there is considerable evidence of new housing and regeneration. The area has good transport links with a railway station and a regular bus service and a huge Tesco Extra appears to be doing good business. Despite its reputation I've been to many far worse places and the bonus is that here there is an atmospheric old ground to explore. And the locals are friendly, a warm welcome at the gate and the atmosphere of a proper football ground on a big day in the season.

Shettleston Football and Athletic Club was founded in 1903; they originally played in the Glasgow Junior League at Well Park. Their move to Greenfield Park, their present home came in 1933 after the old ground was purchased for housing. Their best-known former player is the charismatic Tommy Docherty, who played for Celtic, Preston North End, Arsenal and Scotland and had a long and varied managerial career.

The ground itself is atmospheric and memorable; its main features being two covered terraces backing onto Old Shettleston Road that are separated by a dressing room block and tea bar. Sadly, the latter does not open for business during the afternoon and so the tradition of tasting a pie and Bovril at every junior ground visit is lost.

The Shettleston club house is behind the far end goal; a half-time visit reveals it to be remarkably plush and well-appointed with immaculate fittings and a number of flat screen televisions; they also have an award-winning chef in situ and meals there are recommended, as I am informed. In front of the club house are several rows of terracing, so effectively this is a two-sided ground. The far side is a wilderness backing on to the railway line and with a mechanical digger parked up ready for use. The area behind the near-side goal is also rapidly reverting to nature. A huge white-painted wall backs onto the housing and the railway line.

The pitch is heavy and waterlogged in places and a vast puddle has formed in front of the visitors' dug-out. But the action is fast, unrelenting and makes for compelling viewing. Shettleston, all in white, play neat, constructive football, the visitors, slightly more direct look a respectable outfit with a couple of outstanding players; it's a great match to watch.

The last ten minutes are full of drama with the visiting goalkeeper pulling off two superb saves then being beaten by an equaliser that makes the score 2-2; Dunbar's impressive substitute the grabbed what proved to be the winner with a clinical finish from his 'keeper's long punt. As the home side press for an equaliser one of their subs is red-carded for dissent after receiving a yellow for alleged simulation on the penalty area. The young referee, fit, agile and on top of everything had a fine game to my mind so I wouldn't argue with his decision, though at first sight it looked harsh.

It was a great game, with the visitors jubilant at the end, the home side despondent. A visit to Shettleston comes with my warmest recommendation. Back home they were still basking in the warmth of the hottest October day on record in Bolton; as I joined them at the Crown for a well-deserved pint of the finest Joseph Holt Mild, I basked in the memory of another great footballing occasion in a competition that has become my favourite of all.

07/20