

TT No.68: *Mike Latham* - Sat 15 Oct 2011; **Forth Wanderers** 2-1 Lesmahagow Juniors; West of Scotland Cup 1st Rd: Attendance: 100 (h/c); Admission £4; Raffle ticket: £1; No programme; FGIF Match Rating: 5*.

Perched high on the Lanarkshire hills, around one thousand feet above sea level is the old mining village of Forth, a relatively remote outpost of the Juniors despite its close proximity to Lanark and with many junior rivals within half-an-hour's drive away.

Forth lies west of Wilsontown, once home to one of the world's largest ironworks, and was also the centre of the local agricultural community.

Forth Wanderers were founded in the early 1900s and played at the Pleasure Grounds and Hie Dyke before the current Kingshill Park ground was opened in 1934. It's located next to the main road that runs through Forth, behind some wooden fencing and has spectacular views southwards across moorland and rolling hills.

In the worst of the winter months the Wanderers ground suffers more than most with postponements due to water-logging or frost and, despite a week of relatively calm weather this game only went ahead after a morning pitch inspection.

The ground is accessed via an ageing turnstile block and those wishing to do so can take their cars into the ground and watch the action from the high banking behind the nearside goal; even on a relatively mild afternoon several supporters took advantage of this vantage point.

Backing onto woodland down one side the ground has high grassed banks around the playing area. On the nearside, closest to the village centre and the Forth Sports Centre is the changing room block and a portable building housing the tea bar and committee room. Behind the far goal the area appears to have been given over to nature and there are sweeping views southwards that take the breath away.

Today's game pits Forth against Lesmahagow, two rivals from the same division at the lowest tier of the game in the West juniors. After disappointing seasons last time around both clubs are experiencing something of a revival and the cup-tie is eagerly awaited; the visitors have brought a sizeable following along with them.

Forth's famous alumni include Rangers legend Willie Waddell and former Scottish goalkeepers George Wood and Rab Douglas. These days Jamie McKenzie, a player with vast experience of league football in Scotland despite his relatively tender age of 30 and a former caretaker manager of Elgin City, manages the team. His charges include Chris McGroarty, once an SPL midfield player with Dunfermline Athletic who looks a class apart at times.

The pitch, though well grassed is cloying and heavy in parts, energy-sapping for the players in an important cup-tie. No wonder the tempo falls after a bright and breezy opening. It's a highly competitive game, with goalmouth chances at both ends and the action is fast and furious.

Forth score early on, a dipping swerving shot from distance that deceives the goalkeeper and McGroarty adds a second with a sublime finish late in the half. Gowrie several missed chances but grab a lifeline midway through the second half - despite a frantic finish Forth hold on to record a valuable win.

Great game, full of passion and commitment with the referee overworked as ever: as well as making decisions on offsidess and keeping both benches in check he also has to administer the substitutions and hand out at least ten yellow cards and one red to a visiting defender. As ever the final whistle acts as a massive calming influence; passions have run high but immediately the result is accepted and both benches shake hands and the opposing players do likewise. Just about the best game I've seen in Scotland, and that's saying a lot; simply outstanding.

07/20