

TT No.91: *Mike Latham* - Sat 12 November 2011; **Belshill Athletic** 4-1 Thornton Hibs; Scottish Junior Cup Round 2; Admission: £4; Raffle ticket: £1; 16pp Programme: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

With the weather set fair after a calm week, the opportunity to watch another game in the Scottish Junior Cup was too good an opportunity to miss, especially as it involved two sides I had never previously seen play.

Though the scheduled ties at Lesmahagow and Saltcoats again fell foul, of waterlogged pitches, and Sauchie had to switch their replay to Alloa, this tie, postponed twice previously, went ahead with no problems.

Modern communications are a boon to followers of the junior game; the website Pie and Bovril provides an excellent resource and Belshill, in common with many other clubs have a Twitter feed which confirmed that the match had passed a 9.30am inspection.

Bellshill Athletic are a club with a long and proud history, founded in 1897, but they have had their difficulties of late and are currently ground-sharing at Vale of Clyde's Fullarton Park ground in the Tollcross area of Glasgow. A new committee was formed to save the club from folding in October 2007 and it was pleasing to see that they still have the basis of a substantial support. They produce an informative 16pp programme and there were several officials dispensing raffle tickets and manning the tea bar.

Fullarton Park is a traditional ground, located just off London Road close to Parkhead and within easy reach of the M74 motorway. The ground is bordered by a mixture of housing and light industrial units and builders' yards and there is plenty of street-parking close-by. Tollcross was once an area of industrial activity, centred around the Fullarton steel works.

The ground is of the traditional oval shape, with old-style concrete terracing down one side and steep grass banking on the three other sides. The far side is dominated by a traditional blue-painted covered. The nearside by the entrance is has an assortment of portable buildings and other structures that house the changing rooms, tea bar and a large bar for supporters.

Part tree-lined, the ground has an open feel though it's not difficult to understand why the pitch, with its slight slope gets waterlogged on occasions. Despite the relatively dry weather it was still heavy in places and a substantial downpour that morning would have put the game in doubt.

The tie pitted Belshill against Thornton from Fife, two clubs from the third tier of the respective West and East regions. The opening exchanges were evenly fought and Thornton, if anything looked the better side. Belshill took the lead but the visitors equalised with a header from a corner. The game turned on a penalty decision just before half-time, a Thornton defender earning a straight red for

hand-balling on the line. Not only did Belshill go into half-time with a 2-1 lead they also had an extra man advantage.

Belshill deserved their victory but the final margin was a little flattering. The visitors ended with nine men after another player was red-carded for dissent. The referee sadly began to take over centre-stage, booking players with regularity and also turning his attention to the benches, with several substitutes and management staff earning yellow cards for comments made.

Being forced to play home games on a neutral venue can be disheartening but I was pleased that Belshill obviously retain a hard core of committed helpers and supporters and they are determined to return to the town in the foreseeable future. It was a lovely winter's afternoon and the game was interesting and well fought, though ultimately dominated by the referee.

The Scottish Junior Cup is a simply outstanding competition and I intend to follow it round by round this season. Next week's third round draw will doubtless throw up many intriguing ties. For background an excellent newly published book, *The Scottish Junior Cup 1946-1975* by Tom Purdie (Amberley Publishing) provides an invaluable historical record of the halcyon days of the competition.

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