

TT No. 102: *Chris Freer* - Saturday February 9th 2013; **Livingston** v Dumbarton; Scottish Division One Score: 2-3; Attendance: 1,170; Entertainment value: 5/5.

With my target list of Scottish league grounds diminishing rapidly, the ones that I can now reach on a day trip I can count on the hands of two fingers! Technically I still need to go back to Hampden Park, as I have yet to see the 'landlord' club Queen's Park play there, and so the only other convenient new tick is Livingston's Almondvale Stadium. The rest - six of them - are scattered north and east of the Forth Valley and would require a 'weekender'. For the future, no doubt....

Travelling to Scotland on a Six Nations rugby weekend is always fun. I recall a Berwick Rangers awayday several years ago, when our post-match tipping took us into Edinburgh city centre and the Guildford Arms. On the TV was the France v England game, and every Scot to a man - and woman - was whooping and hollering for the French. Many had even gone to the trouble of stereotyping up, with stripy tops, berets and stick-on, droopy, moustashes. Oh, how we chortled. So, as I arrive today in the Scottish capital - courtesy of an early morning Virgin Pendolino from Crewe - I'm expecting everywhere to be clogged up by kilt-swirling locals, who will have now eschewed their French berets, at least until Sunday. The kilted ones are there, but not in more dominant numbers than those optimistically sporting Italian colours, they being the visitors to Murrayfield on this occasion.

Fortunately, not many of them have found their way down the bottom end of George Street to the Alexander Graham Bell - Edinburgh's 'other' Wetherspoons - where after brekkie I am joined by the Fife Bobster, who has come down to join me from his new home in Auchtermuchty. After a pint of the lovely, smooth and dark Stewart Brewing No3, we head off across the road and down Young Street to the Oxford Bar, legendary home of the mythical detective Rebus. Last time we were both in here was the same evening we ran the gauntlet in the Guildford. Like that place, the Oxford was packed with Frenchmen-for-the-day and I incurred the wrath of my travelling companions by cheering a solitary England try. The folly of a pint too many....

Today it's rather less noisy, but very smoky, courtesy of a badly-ventilated, coal fire. I enjoy yet another pint of No3 while the Bobster gulps down a quart of Fyne Ales Jarl, the kind of golden hoppy ale I earnestly seek to avoid. We plan to sample another beer near Haymarket station, but slowed by the infernal tram works, and a swarm of punters heading for Murrayfield, we decide to make train tracks for Livingston South, and the promised 25-minute walk to Almondvale. Make that 45! We're positively knackered when we do arrive at the ground, and are happy to take our seats in the main stand, building up our reserves for the return journey, much of which will be uphill!

The stadium is a modern 10,000 all-seater which on this occasion is home to just over a thousand. Livvie will have to await promotion back to the Scottish Premier -

or at least stick around in Division 1 for another couple of seasons until the Rangers show hits town - for some of the other seats to see any backsides again. The pitch looks in reasonable nick for the time of year, and in true Scottish style the players are out and have kicked off before you can catch your breath. The home team are making a better fist of the season than visitors Dumbarton, and are justifiably stunned when their urgent opening burst is cut short by a cracking half volley from Dumbarton No 9 Bryan Prunty. Normal service would seem to have resumed on 22 with a home equaliser, only for the visitors to regain the lead just a minute later.

Just as half-time beckons, the Dumbarton keeper upends the in-on-goal striker - a red card offence for which he receives no card at all - and the resultant penalty makes it 2-2. And what an entertaining first half it has been. Can the second half live up to it? Well it has its moments.

Midway through Dumbarton regain the lead from another penalty, so it's all hands to the pumps as Livingston go for broke. Their task is soon made a tad easier when Dumbarton lose a man to one of the strangest incidents I have ever seen. Visiting midfielder Mark Gilhaney is subbed, and trudges towards the touchline. He is encouraged to do it a little more quickly by the referee. He has words, and if anything goes even more slowly. The linesman offers his own encouragement, at which point Mr Gilhaney - still on the pitch - stops and volleys advice back at said lino. Over comes the ref, consults with his assistant, and sends off Gilhaney for foul and abusive language. The sub, ready to come on, has to sit down again. Hilarious - you couldn't make it up.

There's just time after that for the Dumbarton keeper - lucky to be still on the pitch after his first half misdemeanour - to be carried off, and its game over, three points for the 10-man visitors. Mighty good entertainment all round. Who says Scottish football isn't good value for money?

And even the nation's rugby side record a win - the Italian's put to the sword. By now I have discarded my Super-Mario fancy dress outfit I have rented just for this occasion. Hey, the Scots won, I don't want to look TOO stupid...

There's more on my blog at <http://flynn123.wordpress.com/>

Not Scot-free....

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