

TT No.51: *Mike Latham* - Sat 27 October 2012- Emirates Scottish Junior Cup Rd 2; **Pumpherstons Juniors** 3-2 Whitehills; Attendance: 70 (h/c); Admission: £4; Raffle ticket: £1; No programme; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

Another Scottish Junior Cup Saturday dawned cold but bright and a glorious drive through the Borders was accompanied with anticipation of another tie in this marvellous competition. But where to go?

After a dry week there were, for once, no issues with postponements and the early morning frost soon disappeared. By the time of my usual café stop in Moffat I had narrowed down my potential fixtures to three and eventually settled on as visit to Pumpherstons, now a small dormitory village near Livingston but with a rich industrial past.

I dropped off a friend at Armadale Thistle's Junior Cup tie, also against opposition from the North Region and passed close to several other homes of the Junior game before reaching Pumpherstons 20 minutes or so later, Whitburn, Bathgate, Stoneyburn, and Fauldhouse among them.

In late Victorian times Pumpherstons adjoined a huge shale mine and works and the football ground was constructed for use by the employees of the company. The original Pumpherstons JFC was formed in 1896 and they played through until 1977, reaching the final of the Junior Cup in 1958 when they lost 2-0 to Shotts Bon Accord before 33,000 spectators. The present Pumpherstons Juniors were formed in 1990 and compete in the third tier of the SJFA East Juniors.

Pumpherstons's ground was always known as Recreation Park and has the reputation of having one of the largest playing surfaces in the Juniors. It's a huge area indeed, especially width-wise when compared to many in the Juniors where there are often only a few yards between the edge of the penalty area and the touchline. The ground is located just off Uphall Station Road, the main road that runs through the village. There are some houses and a few small shops, a pub, a takeaway and an Oriental restaurant and that's about it. Drumshoreland Place, the ground address is a quiet residential area with a junior school and some playing fields nearby and parking is easy.

A new sponsorship deal has re-named the ground Servoca Park, a name on several well-designed signs around the ground. There's a warm welcome from the committee-man at the gate and from the lady in charge of the tea bar. Officials have every reason to be full of pride at the way the club has maintained and renovated a vast ground that could easily go to rack and ruin without the necessary loving care.

A huge iron-roofed shelter provides the main feature of the ground on the side adjoining the main road. On the opposite side is a strange-looking white building that gives the impression it is so solid it could withstand a nuclear explosion. The

dressing rooms are located on the ground floor with steps leading up by the side to a club room on the top storey.

Most of the spectators close to gather on this side or on the grassy bank by the entrance. The playing area is surrounded by a neat metal fence and the pitch and surrounds are all well maintained. The club has suffered from drainage problems in recent years but has worked hard to overcome these. The pitch is well grassed but perfectly playable after last week's postponement. Mature trees surround the outskirts of the ground, helping to give it an enclosed, tranquil feel. We are only a short distance from Livingston town centre but could be miles from anywhere.

One of the beauties of this competition is that it brings together clubs from different areas; for this tie Whitehills, a small village near Banff in Aberdeenshire have had a long journey south. They are at a similar level in the North Juniors and the two sides look, on paper to be well matched. Sure enough, a keen, competitive cup-tie soon unfolds in the glorious autumnal sunshine.

Though Pumpherston, neatly attired in a smart black and amber kit, look the more direct side, Whitehills defend manfully and look dangerous on the break. The home side have an outstanding player in their diminutive no11, a player with great skill and determination but seemingly a fragile temperament. In between some moments of genius, he chunters loudly and attracts the referee's attention for a couple of late challenges. In truth he looks to be playing several levels below his class and clearly holds the key to the home side's chances of progress.

Midway through the first-half Pumpherston are ahead, the no11 jinking inside and unleashing a powerful shot into the corner. But three minutes later the visitors draw level and despite conceding several corners and withstanding lots of pressure they go into the interval on level terms.

Within two minutes of the re-start Pumpherston are back in front, a goal created by the trickery and vision of the no11. But Whitehills are nothing if not determined and once more they equalise, this time through a goalkeeping error. On chances alone Pumpherston are the superior team and their winning goal is one fit to win any game- a soft free-kick conceded just outside the area converted expertly with a curling shot by their no8.

As the sun dips and the wind chill rises there's a stern reminder that winter's icy grip is not far away. But this tie has been completed and Pumpherston survive late alarms to book their place in the last 64 of the competition. For our friend the no11 his afternoon ends prematurely as he limps off in the closing stages after a heavy tackle; his job, though is done and his display the abiding memory of another fine afternoon's entertainment in my favourite competition.

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