

TT No.58: Andy Gallon - Sat 10th November 2012; **Bonnyrigg Rose** v Brechin City; Scottish Cup Third Round Replay; Res: 0-6; Att: 1,092; Admission: £12; Programme: £1 (12pp); FGIF Match Rating: **.

Half-an-hour before kick-off at New Dundas Park, I overheard one Scottish hopper say to another: "It's not a new ground for me today, but I couldn't miss this one." Clearly, I was not the only spectator who had travelled with great expectations to this post-industrial corner of Midlothian. Twenty minutes into the game, however, most in the crowd were wishing they'd gone elsewhere for their Saturday afternoon entertainment. Brechin City were 3-0 up and the contest was over. I gather a good number left at half-time - a few to catch the start of an East of Scotland League fixture at nearby Whitehill Welfare.

Well, what a disappointment. By all accounts, Bonnyrigg, the reigning Scottish Junior FA East Superleague champions, should have won the original tie at Glebe Park. They led 2-0 before their SFL Second Division hosts took advantage of tiring legs to salvage a 2-2 draw. Not sure what happened in the replay. With a 'glamour' trip to Premier League strugglers St Mirren awaiting the winner, perhaps Bonnyrigg simply froze on their big occasion. Whatever the reason, they were clueless: incompetent in goal; a Shambles at the back; lightweight in midfield and non-existent up front. Brechin, way more streetwise and with several speedy, skilful players in their line-up, tore apart the Junior club time and time again. The visitors should have rattled up double figures. Had they done so it was the only way Bonnyrigg's humiliation could have been more complete.

But, hey, let's try to be positive. I've been a regular visitor to Scotland over the years, but it was not until 1991, at the suggestion of a Dundonian then-colleague, that I drove to Edinburgh via the A68 and A7. Many times, since have I ventured this way, and I never tire of the journey. Scenically, it is one treat after another. Off the A1 at the Piercebridge junction and a back-road short cut to West Auckland heralds a glorious run through the west Durham hills. A steep drop to cross the broad Tyne near Corbridge then a wonderful rollercoaster road through Ridsdale to the lonely Kielder Forest area of Northumberland, England's last true wilderness. The bleak - though beautiful - climb to the Scottish border at Carter Bar is followed by an engaging descent to Jedburgh, dominated by stark twelfth century abbey ruins. On, via pretty Melrose, to Galashiels, so completing a neat east-west switch to join the A7, which winds north through a stunning landscape to reach villages now forming the southern outskirts of Auld Reekie. In good weather, it's a memorable experience. On a perfect autumn morning of brilliant sunshine and sublime colours, the drive is unforgettable. A shame, then, that football had to come along and spoil everything! Not for the first time did I find the actual match the least uplifting aspect of a hop.

Dalbeattie and Innerleithen, personal destinations this season for earlier rounds, might have remained immune to Scottish Cup fever, but Bonnyrigg had caught the

bug to the extent that its metaphorical brow bore a film of sweat and its nose dripped like a tap with a worn washer. Red and white scarves hung from bedroom windows, posters advertised the game in virtually every shop and cheery supporters manned a well-stocked souvenir stall alongside the crossroads at the heart of this somewhat unappealing village.

Club officials very kindly allowed me in the ground well before anyone else so I could take photographs. I don't have much first-hand knowledge of Scottish non-league football, but the facilities looked pretty good. Everything, from turnstiles to pitch, had been prepared with great care. Landlocked New Dundas Park, hemmed in by houses, has three sections of shallow terracing on its west side. One, between corner flag and halfway line, boasts a basic brick and corrugated iron cover. There is also a curious little shelter by the turnstile in the south-west corner. Small areas of terracing behind each goal are flanked by earth banks upon which are scattered - oddly enough - a mixture of wood chips and pine needles. A springy surface! The gardens of houses abutting the south end offer an excellent free vantage point for the unscrupulous: a row of heads was visible throughout. A grass bank takes up the entire east side, beyond which are the houses of Dundas Park. The dug-outs, low and unusually deep, are positioned amidships. For this game, a section to the rear was set aside for the cameras of BBC Scotland, there to capture the best bits. The dressing rooms and offices are in the north-west corner: a squat, ugly structure perched atop terracing. The players enter the pitch via unfenced steps. There aren't any floodlights, hence the 1.30pm kick-off. So important to clubs at this level, the clubhouse, another building which doesn't deserve any plaudits for architectural merit, is outside the ground on the west side, where a tiny car park can be found. Before the start, the clubhouse was packed with boozers watching what might turn out to be Heart of Midlothian's last hurrah, a 1-1 draw at Inverness Caley Thistle.

An interesting chat with The Bloke Next to Me preceded the main event. He related the Bonnyrigg story, a former mining village that provided workers for surrounding pits, and revealed its connection, through the fifteenth century Rosslyn Chapel, with the Da Vinci Code. His son was a pro with Dunfermline Athletic, Meadowbank Thistle and Livingston until a ruptured Achilles ended his career prematurely. As mentioned, the game itself was a huge flop. A 20-yard Kurtis Byrne free-kick, deflected off the back of a jumping home player in the defensive wall, gave Brechin an 11th-minute lead. With Bonnyrigg all over the place, left-back Johnny Brown (16min) was given the time and space to pick his spot from 20 yards. Three minutes later, a Derek Carcary cross evaded everyone and unmarked Alan Trouten tapped in at the back post. With an audible collective sigh, all but the 100 or so Brechin fans present began pondering how better spent their £12 admission (it's usually a fiver here) might have been. People headed for the exits in the 33rd minute when hopeless Bonnyrigg keeper Michael Burgess spilled an Andy Jackson shot and Trouten, following up, tucked away number four.

No respite for the hosts in the second half. Burgess, perhaps relieved to get off the pitch, retired through injury three minutes after the restart. Byrne struck the top

of the crossbar from 20 yards before, in the 53rd minute, Jackson rammed home a loose ball after a Byrne effort had come back off a post. Highlight of the game was Carcary's 71st-minute strike. The left winger, whose pace and skill were a delight, smashed an 18-yard volley into a top corner of the net after a corner had been partially cleared. There was just time for Rose's Liam McKenna to lose the plot in a big way. The midfielder went down in the penalty box and as referee Andrew Dallas prepared to book him for diving McKenna pushed over his tackler and the yellow became a red. All, I have to say, pretty dull viewing. To add insult to injury, it rained during the second half.

I really haven't done very well with the Scottish Cup this season. The three ties involving non-league sides I've seen have been horribly one-sided (0-5, 1-5 and 0-6), so I won't bother with this competition in 2013-14. I'd be happy, though, to witness non-league against non-league, and certainly won't rule out another trip north of the Border in the near future: perhaps in the famous Junior Cup, about which numerous good reports I've read and heard.

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