

TT No. 19: *Andy Gallon* - Sat 21st September 2013; **Llandyrnog United** v Llanrug United; Welsh Alliance Div. One; Res: 1-2; Att: 40; Admission: £3 (including 20pp programme); FGIF Match Rating: **.

THE HOP: Heading home from our blissful (well, you've got to say that!) two-week Celtic honeymoon, we sought an unticked venue on the Welsh side of the border to round off the break's sporting entertainment. Having suffered some right old Cymru Alliance dross during the fortnight, I couldn't face a fifth game in it therefore we opted for the First Division of the Welsh Alliance, the next rung down on the Principality's non-league ladder. The match at Llandyrnog, 10th versus fifth, seemed reasonably attractive. But, more importantly, the route over there from Dolgellau permitted an opportunity to visit Corwen for the first time before dropping in on Ruthin, one of our favourite Welsh towns. I was also keen to photograph Neil Dalrymple's fine bronze sculpture commemorating Ruthin's most famous son, Formula One racing driver Tom Pryce, tragically killed at the Kayalami circuit in a freak accident during the 1977 South African Grand Prix.

THE PLACE: A tiny village, a couple of miles east of Denbigh, in the scenic Vale of Clwyd. Most of its houses are grouped around a junction - right next to the football ground - of four minor roads. The biggest show in town appears to be a sprawling Arla creamery a few hundred yards north of the village centre. I noted, without surprise, that my invaluable Rough Guide to Wales ignored Llandyrnog.

THE CLUB: Renowned in hopping circles for running a summer league, Dyrny do very well to operate at such a high level. The chap taking the gate money described the club as being "like a charity" - a hand-to-mouth existence, then. In common with many football clubs, Llandyrnog owe their existence to a few blokes meeting in a pub. That get-together, in the Golden Lion, was in 1975. The pub's name explains the presence of a big yellow cat on the club crest. Llandyrnog rose steadily and impressively through the numerous divisions of the Clwyd League. They have played in the Cymru Alliance, a notable achievement, but for now are consolidating in the league below.

THE PEOPLE: Another warm Welsh welcome, not least from youthful club secretary (and much else besides) Matthew Lewis, whose family appears single-handedly to keep little Llandyrnog in business. Matthew's dad, Gareth, has been the Villagers chairman for 15 years and talked his son into helping out.

THE WEATHER: Wouldn't you know it? Time to go home and the weather is glorious. The lush Vale of Clwyd can seldom have looked more enticing.

THE GROUND: Cae Nant is relatively undeveloped but cheerfully idiosyncratic. The pitch features a fearsome east-west downward slope. There cannot be many surfaces in senior football so challenging. A single-storey clubhouse occupies a plot behind the goal at the west end, the nearest for the bulk of spectators arriving through the gates. Dedicated to one Ian Langford Jones, it was opened officially in

1993. A plaque recalls the happy event. The structure houses dressing rooms, kitchen and toilets. Adjacent is a tiny kit-style stand with a few steps of terracing. Oddly, it was padlocked, caged like an aviary and out of commission. Perhaps the stand sees action only when it rains. The other cover, even smaller, is nearby, almost in the south-west corner. The dug-outs straddle the half-way on the south touchline. Stands and dug-outs are fashioned from dark green metal sheeting. Bungalows fringe the north touchline and east end, the latter accessed either by a stile or a five-bar gate. Delightful! The pitch is railed off but there aren't any floodlights. As ever in Wales, setting is everything and the flanks of the broad vale rise impressively to east and west. We were told the summer league commitments leave only a few weeks to carry out pitch repairs whilst the two vast oaks that dominate the east end exacerbate the situation by sucking the lion's share of moisture from the soil.

THE GAME: So disappointed have I been with the majority of matches I've witnessed during the last couple of years, I'm beginning to doubt my footballing judgment. This being the case, I felt vindicated to read the Llanrug United website's take on this abysmal offering. Contributor Kevin Owen described the game as an "awful spectacle", felt the visitors were "well below par" and admitted there was "nothing worth reporting on until the last 10 minutes". An honest summation! Following Kevin's lead, I'll pass on the opening 80 minutes. One goal always looked like being enough to win this match and when Dyrny's Lucas Cruz crashed a 20-yarder past Dylan Roberts with 10 minutes left we were confident the home side had three points in the bag. Not so. In a dramatic finish, wholly out of keeping with what had gone before, Llanrug scored twice in the last six minutes. Dylan Owen saw his 84th-minute penalty saved by Gareth Pope but the loose ball ran kindly enough for him to net from close range. With three minutes to go, a lapse of concentration in the hesitant home defence allowed substitute Sion Eifion to scramble a winner that left the Dyrny players with heads in hands.

THE PROGRAMME: Free with admission and yet the pick of our five-match Welsh holiday schedule. Fairly slim with a basic design and layout but at least some thought and effort had gone into its content.

THE VERDICT: Lovely weather with which to bid farewell - for the time being - to Wales and Cae Nant certainly enchanted the eye. Unfortunately, once again, the football did not. I feel an oval ball-shaped diversion looming larger and larger!

04/20