

TT No.22: *Mike Latham* - Saturday 5 October 2013: Scottish Junior Cup First Rd Replay: Falkirk JFC 3-3 Kirkcaldy YM; (Kirkcaldy YM won by 7-6 on free-kicks taken from the penalty mark); Attendance: 80 (h/c); Admission: £4; Programme: £1; Raffle ticket: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

It was a glorious autumnal afternoon in Scotland but disappointingly there were slim pickings for replay opportunities in the Scottish Junior Cup, my favourite football competition. I chose to visit the Grangemouth Stadium and was rewarded with another fine match with a dramatic ending.

At first impression the Grangemouth Stadium was somewhat unpromising as a venue for football. It's of rather stark utilitarian design, built in the 1960s and not dissimilar to many from Eastern Europe. But like many council owned sports facilities in Scotland it is immaculately maintained and the longer the afternoon went on the more I warmed to the place.

The Stadium was the first all-weather track surface in the UK and has established itself as one of the busiest athletics stadiums in Scotland. It hosts many regional, national and international athletics events and has superb indoor facilities in the large building adjoining the main stand.

That large concrete stand forms the main focus of the ground on football days where the spectators are seated in bucket seats. Despite the running track and remnants of an old cycling track the sightlines for watching football are decent and the pitch was in good nick.

The rest of the ground is shallow open terracing backed by well-manicured trees and shrubs and on a gloriously sunny afternoon I chose to watch the second half of the game from the far side of the ground, which I found more conducive to feeling closer to the action on the pitch.

Grangemouth Port has the largest container terminal in Scotland and the petrochemical industry is the biggest employer around here. Part of the massive oil refinery dominates the skyline to east of the stadium.

Falkirk lies three miles to the west and a prominent Junior club, Bo'ness is five miles to the east. Falkirk JFC were formed as recently as 2011 and have formed an alliance with Syngenta Juveniles, a well-established club with a proven track record in developing young players to develop an infrastructure that must be the envy of many clubs. Some of the young players from the club act as ball boys on match-days, an invaluable service especially in such a vast stadium which enables the game to flow freely without interruption.

The club also issues an informative colour programme and club officials were friendly and welcoming.

The first tie in Kirkcaldy had finished 3-3 and the replay was equally as entertaining. The visitors scored twice within a minute early in the first half but Falkirk fought back well in a fluid and free-flowing game to equalise. In an exciting finish Kirkcaldy regained the lead after spurning several good chances only for Falkirk to equalise again in injury-time.

Straight to penalties, the tie was decided after 20 attempts when the Kirkcaldy goalkeeper stepped up to strike the match-winning kick.

Despite their disappointment at going out of the Junior Cup at the first hurdle this year I feel sure that Falkirk JFC will have a good future in the juniors. They look to be a well organised and structured club with deep roots in the community. I wish them well.

04/20