

TT No.28: *Mike Latham* - Sat 19 October 2013; McBookie.com East Superleague; Broxburn Athletic 3-2 Hill of Beath Haw; Attendance: 130 (h/c); Admission: £5; Programme: £1; Raffle ticket: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

There are times when you have to use your rain card and today was time to finally take advantage of Broxburn's enviable 3g pitch which guarantees football in the sort of weather that claims many fixtures on grass surfaces.

I'd headed north hoping to visit Whitburn's iconic town centre ground with West Calder as back-up. Sadly, torrential rain, sweeping eastwards across the Central Belt wiped out many games, including those two games after early afternoon inspections. So off to Albyn Park in Broxburn it was, a small town about 15 miles west of Edinburgh. Happily, as I arrived the weather was beginning to fare up but it was still a relief to see the players warming up and the usual pre-match activities taking place.

Wherever I go in Scotland I marvel at the range and quality of sports facilities that are available. It's a far cry from some of them available in England. Sport Scotland, local councils are various other bodies, not least the Scottish FA have worked wonders, it seems to me, in the past decade or so.

Broxburn's Albyn Park ground is a case in point. In 2009-10 it was redeveloped to install a 3g surface which is now used widely by the local community throughout the week. The ground is beautifully maintained, with a fine pavilion building, covered standing enclosure, neatly mown grassed banks, a good canteen and floodlights. Despite the rain the pitch had drained superbly and played well. Not a thing was out of place, not a hint of vandalism or disrepair, a huge credit to all involved.

Football has a long history in Broxburn, the outline described superbly on a series of display boards along one wall in the pavilion. Broxburn was once a largely agricultural community, then grew after the development of the oil shale industry in late Victorian times. There are many shale-spoil tips, known as bings, which provide a lasting memorial to that industry, one clearly evident from the grassed banks of Albyn Park.

Football was first played here in the 1880s and in the 1920s there was once a Scottish League club in the town, for a period of five years. The present club was formed in 1946, the current ground secured from the Earl of Buchan. The council now owns the land and Broxburn Athletic has a lease until 2036. Slightly out of town, it has a good outlook and the Union Canal, linking Edinburgh with Falkirk passes by just beyond the far side of the ground. With some amazing cloud formations of a day when heavy rain alternated with spells of bright sunshine it was a good place to watch an enthralling game in the top division of the East Juniors.

The visitors looked totally in control at half-time, leading 2-0 and with the home side down to ten men after their right-winger was shown a straight red card for an elbow offence in front of the dug-outs, sparking an interesting exchange of views between the members of the respective coaching staffs.

So, it stayed until midway through the second half when, out of nowhere the home team found a way back, scoring twice in quick succession. The equalising goal was a superb effort, the home number ten racing clear from halfway and calmly rounding the goalkeeper before shooting home. With just five minutes remaining the same player sent his fellow striker through on goal with a fine flick; again, the finish was clinical to the joy of the home supporters. Sadly, the goal hero was injured in the act of scoring and was carried off from the field. Somehow, with only nine men Broxburn saw out time to record a famous victory.

So, I used my rain card, and I was glad I did. A memorable match played in a lovely, well maintained stadium that is a huge credit to all involved. The tea hut was excellent, so too the colour programme. I'd recommend a visit here unreservedly.

04/20