

TT No.39: *Mike Latham* - Saturday 16 November 2013: Scottish Junior Cup Second Round; **Camelon Juniors** 4-2 Lesmahagow Juniors; Attendance: 250 (est.); Admission: £5; Raffle ticket: £1; FGIF match rating: 5*.

The Scottish Junior Cup rarely fails to disappoint and this tie certainly warmed the cockles on a cold afternoon. After three successive Saturdays ruled out by a waterlogged pitch in South Lanarkshire the tie was switched to Camelon and brought together a classic East v West Juniors match-up.

Camelon Juniors, formed in 1920 lifted the Junior Cup in 1995. They were expected to progress, being in the top echelon of the East Juniors against their opponents from the third tier of the West but anyone who has seen Lesmahagow recently will know that they rarely give up without a battle.

Camelon's ground on Fairlie Drive is approached through a large housing scheme and backs on to the Forth and Clyde Canal which was renovated as part of the Millennium project. Camelon is a village of around 4,000 inhabitants close to Falkirk, Larbert and Bonnybridge. The major attraction around here is the Falkirk Wheel, a rotating boat lift that connects the Forth and Clyde Canal with the Union canal. The lift was opened by the Queen in 2002 as part of the regeneration programme of Scotland's inland waterways. Some of the best-preserved parts of the Roman Antonine Wall are also to be found close-by, so this is an area not without interesting places to visit.

Top of my list is Carmuir's Park, a classic junior ground with an imposing entrance, even though there's a not misplaced but totally spurious apostrophe in the Camelon Junior's (sic) sign that marks the entrance. There's a large social club and the ground is lovingly maintained, the two covered enclosures on either side of a well-drained pitch giving excellent sightlines of play.

The Pie Hut passes muster, serving pies, sausage rolls and Bovril, welcome on a chilly afternoon especially as the rain and darkness draw in, and, full marks, a committee man patrols the edge of the pitch early in the second half with a board displaying the winning raffle ticket numbers.

The game quickly explodes into a whirling mish-mass of arms, legs and shouts. After several weeks of waiting, both teams are clearly up for the game. The homesters look a good footballing side with a good shape and width but the Gow are physically their match and not short of confidence. Despite falling behind to an early well-crafted goal, the Gow equalise with a penalty after a handball. But then one of their midfield players receives a second yellow card for one foul too many and the visitors are short-handed.

That's the joy of Junior football, as the Gow have no thoughts of sitting back and consolidating. Instead they pour forward in search of another goal, throwing caution to the wind. Camelon are clearly rattled, especially so when the visitors

take the lead early in the second half, then miss a glorious chance of extending their lead.

Gradually, Camelon recover their composure and the extra-man advantage finally tells in the last quarter, though it's not until the last stages that their victory is confirmed. By then one of the visiting management staff has been sent from the field for protesting at what he perceives to be time-wasting tactics. He has to stand with the Camelon fans under the covered enclosure but instead of hostility he is greeted with a few slaps on the back and some good banter.

Camelon clearly have a committed and loyal support and a club of good standing; their ground is a classic Junior ground and definitely rates as a 'must visit' in my book. They've been rattled here by their visitors from the West and some of the home crowd mutter loudly about what they perceive to be the Gow's over-aggressive approach. In truth it was just a typical; Junior Cup-tie, no quarter asked or given and after a month of waiting the last second round-tie is finally decided. Camelon will host Lochee United in round three next Saturday, Lesmahagow lick their wounds. The referee's final whistle is marked by warm handshakes all round, there's no hint of rancour or bitterness, the game has been hard-fought but contained some excellent football. Great stuff!

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