

TT No.76: *Mike Latham* - Sat 8 March 2014: South of Scotland Amateur Cup Q-F: **Terregles Athletic** v Carluke Baptist Result: 4-5(aet); Attendance: 54 (h/c); No admission or programme; FGIF Match rating: 5*.

With heavy rain on Friday spreading into Saturday the Scottish Junior football programme was in danger of being decimated. I had several targets but all proved to be postponed so, for once, I played it shrewdly and followed the weather.

The Dumfries area had escaped the worst of the rain and the forecast was to improve as the day went on. The Dumfries AFA not long ago had 22 teams playing in two divisions; sadly, this is now down to seven and there are fears that the Saturday league may fold altogether at the end of the season, though the Sunday league, by comparison looks to be surviving well.

The league has lost several teams lately to the Southern Counties League which in turn has lost Threave Rovers and Dalbeattie Star to the newly formed Lowland League. This intriguing quarter-final tie gave me the chance to tick-off another ground in the Dumfries area, one of my favourites for football and also take a look at a long established club (dating back to the late 1980s) who have visions themselves, so I was informed of joining the South League, maybe as early as next season.

The Dumfries League has an excellent web-site, superbly maintained by Steven Todd and this fixture stood out as an interesting one. Carluke Baptist AFC, to give the visitors their full title competes in the Strathclyde Evangelical Churches Amateur Football League and their secretary, Ronnie Todd is also the manager. Having failed to contact the home secretary, a call to Ronnie confirmed the match was definitely on and he kindly provided me with the postcode of the ground and a few details. The Baptists have enjoyed a remarkable season for not only have they reached the last eight of the South Cup they are also in the quarter-finals of the Scottish Amateur Cup, an even more prestigious competition that attracts over 700 entrants. Ronnie says he's living in dreamland, can't explain it and just enjoying the ride.

Then the home secretary kindly calls me back, says the park is fine, though a bit on the soft side and the forecast is for improving weather. With that I head northwards on what is now a familiar route, looking forward to what looks to be a really engrossing game.

Terregles is a village and parish near Dumfries, in Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland and lies in the former county of Kirkcudbrightshire. Normally the journey here would be easy as Terregles Street, home to Queen of the South FC is one of the main arteries out of Dumfries. But today the main A75 ring road around the town that leads to Stranraer has a diversion so my sat-nav takes me on a magical mystery tour through Maxwelltown, a couple of unmarked roads, through a heavily

swollen steam and finally to Terregles, a sleepy village set in open countryside and with glorious sweeping views of distant wooded hills.

Queens are at home today, their game against Hamilton ending 1-1 but despite that a good, few local enthusiasts have gathered at Terregles Park for this important game. There's an impressive changing room pavilion built in 2002 and partly funded by the SportScotland lottery fund and a steep grassed back along one side with some strategically situated benches. Behind the pavilion is a lovely small church and graveyard and apart from when the football team plays here it must be a tranquil setting. But today there's a big match atmosphere and both teams are clearly up for the game. Despite that the visiting manager, remembering our earlier conversation, finds time to wander over for a chat and thank me for coming. To be honest the pleasure's mine because this is the type of football, I enjoy most of all these days.

From first look it's evident that the park must favour the home team, used to playing on such a sloping and narrow pitch. And they duly take the initiative, going 2-0 up and looking in control. But not for nothing are the Baptists such a redoubtable cup-fighting team. They pull back a goal from the penalty mark after a rash challenge and survive a disallowed goal just before half-time, a home forward, harshly in my view, adjudged to have climbed on the back of a defender to head home a corner.

Within minutes of the re-start the visitors are level, again from the spot after another ill-judged challenge and, playing some good, neat football they edge the game, scoring again to lead 3-2. But as tempers simmer and the challenges fly in referee Davy Kirk has a job on his hands to control an increasingly frenetic game. Three minutes into injury-time, by which time the Baptists are reduced to ten men, Terregles draw level- their joy shows how much this game means. But what's been a generally hard-fought but sporting encounter boils over, there's an almighty stramash after a bad challenge and virtually everyone, bar me and the tea lady gets involved in an ugly on field skirmish. When calm is restored extra-time looms and the tea lady and me are red-carded for cowardice.

So, to extra-time, not the best option on the face of it as tempers are flaring and some of the players look tired and fractious. But despite being short-handed the visitors look the fitter side and their calmer approach is justified when they re-take the lead, then score again. In another dramatic finish Terregles pull back a goal and come desperately close to an equaliser. At the end of 120 minutes, after at least ten yellows, a red and nine goals we have a winner. The referee's final whistle, as ever in Scottish football signals an end to any animosity- handshakes all round, plans made for a post-match drink and feed at Terregles' HQ. My new friend Ronnie has more urgent tasks to deal with, extra-time has hampered his plans to catch a 7pm flight from Glasgow Airport with his wife, he'll have to be away sharpish. Not as sharp as me, within minutes I'm driving close to Palmerston Park where the floodlights are on and the game still has half an hour to go. I resist the temptation to call in and head for home, the new Lisa Stansfield album Seven on the stereo interspersed with news of Bolton Wanderers, who I despaired of only

weeks ago and their amazing 5-1 win at Leeds United. I reckon I've just had the best football day out of the season so far, marvellous.

04/20