

TT No.29: *Mike Latham* - Saturday 1 November 2014: East of Scotland Juniors, Super League; **Musselburgh Athletic** 2-0 Ballingry Rovers; Attendance: 220 (h/c); Admission: £5; Raffle ticket: £1; Team-sheet: FOC.

The first day of November and the temperature gauge on the car thinks it's more like late summer than the near onset of winter, 15 degrees it reads. At Musselburgh the locals are strolling on the promenade overlooking the stunning views across the Firth of Forth and an ice-cream van is doing brisk business. There are even some families on the beach, playing ball games and building sand castles. The Harbour Cafe is purveying good, wholesome Scottish fayre and all seems well in the world.

Just inland Musselburgh Athletic are preparing for the visit of their friends from the Kingdom of Fife. The Olivebank ground is hard to find, located as it is up a narrow track in-between a school and a community centre. It's an amazing ground, hemmed in by buildings and with the far side a grassed bank, once terracing in the days when Athletic attracted far bigger crowds than they do today. On the other side of the main road on which traffic whizzes by is the town's rugby club, its floodlights a local landmark. They are at home today and as I arrive two friends who have walked together to arrive at Olivebank say their farewells, one is going to the Juniors, the other to watch the oval ball game.

Athletic were formed in 1935 and once attracted big crowds with the steep terraced banking on two sides making it an imposing venue. Nowadays their crowds are modest but everyone is friendly and welcoming and the tea bar is one of the best in the Juniors- superb stovies and pies. There's a small terraced area and cover along one side, backing onto a newly- constructed area that serves as a centre for driving tuition. Unusually for the Juniors there are plenty of young supporters among the spectators, including a well-behaved and vocal group who look barely above junior school age.

As ever in the Juniors the action is fast and frenetic but both sides are trying hard to play football on the immaculate pitch. The locals are keen football people, assessing the action with an expert eye. The visitors are hanging on at times but always dangerous on the counter. After 70 minutes the game is scoreless but Ballingry have created- and spurned- the best two chances.

Finally, the home side make their pressure pay with a scrambled goal following a mad scramble. In added-on time they add a second following a counter-attack as Ballingry press desperately for an equaliser. It was great entertainment, but then visits to the Juniors rarely disappoint.

I'd recommend a visit to Musselburgh- the town and the football club unreservedly. It's six or seven miles east of Edinburgh and easy to access by car or train. I've visited the racecourse previously and found it to be a friendly and welcoming place. The football club is just the same- the supporters here are discerning, keen

football folk and their team plays high tempo, skilful football that is easy on the eye. Throw in a fantastic tea bar and a free team-sheet on the turnstiles and it's a no-brainer. All this for a fiver. Fantastic.

04/20