

TT No.6: Ian Brown - Sat 10th September 2016; **Annagh United** 1 v HW Welders 4; Northern Ireland Football League Championship; Admission: £6; Concessions: £3; Paper: No; Headcount: 80; Refreshments: Available from Club (none partaken)

With the cricket season in the last throes (Magic gleefully informed us later his beloved Bootle had won and a double was secured when he won the farting competition 31-0 in the score box - oh joy of joys! It was decided that a trip across the Irish Sea would be in order for the remaining posse of the Mersey Hopping Mafia: Peter, Harry & The Sofa Bear, as it was booked in advanced by top booking agent Leigh, we got the flight for £37 each. Flying out at 08.15 from JLA.

On our previous NI jaunt back in April, we purchased an *iLink* card which is a top-up-able smartcard, for the day it was £13.50 including all bus & train in Zone (inc 1 & 2), not too bad considering that it is £10.50 return from Belfast International Airport into Belfast City Centre.

A hearty Ulster Fry Breakfast, with coffee or tea, was purchased from Platform Food in the Great Northern Mall. After that was consumed, we jumped on a train out to Adelaide to have a look at the re-development of Windsor Park, as Linfield were at home later in the day, the club shop was open, so I bought a badge and match programme. After that we walked back to Adelaide Station and caught a southbound train changing at Lisburn for Portadown.

As we arrived in good time into Portadown, Peter asked myself and the good doctor if we fancied having a look at Portadown's Shamrock Park. On the way up we came across a First Round Mid Ulster Junior Cup Tie featuring Hannover Reserves v Mountainview (it finished 3-2 to the hosts). I was quite impressed with it. On the far side is the main stand which had no seats in it just a platform for cameras. Looking at the ground from the new Met stand on the east side of Shamrock Park, to the left is the new south stand which replaced a curved open terrace in 2006. This impressive stand has 1,000 red plastic seats beneath a "goalpost" steel roof structure, takes up the width of the penalty area, and is raised slightly above pitch level. Unusually the stand sits in a similar position as the former south terrace, leaving a gap of several metres behind the goal where the speedway circuit used to be. The curved line of the former terrace fencing has been repositioned behind the goal. Despite the distance from the touchline, the spectators have an excellent unobstructed view of the pitch. Looking to the far right from the main stand the shape of the old ground layout becomes more obvious, with the former speedway track now buried beneath the grass of the new training pitch which sits behind the goal.

Looking opposite to the west side of the ground, the old Main Stand sits proudly on the pitch centre line, with 1,000 modern red plastic seats on a raised seating deck. There are a number of columns to this stand which may impede your view. Players emerge from dressing rooms beneath the stand's seating deck. A pair of modern

plastic dug outs sit either side of the player's entrance. Although the stand still maintains its distance from the pitch behind the former speedway track, the elevated seating deck ensures a good view of the action. Finally turning to the MET Stand, this impressive cantilever stand was opened in 2008 and has 1,800 red plastic seats. This new structure replaces a covered terrace. As with the new south stand, the base is raised slightly above the pitch level and sits behind the outline of the former speedway track.

With Portadown Reserves kicking off at 2.30pm, the father of the players kindly gave us a lift from Shamrock Park down to Annagh United. AU Football Club were formed in 1963 and they play their home matches at their Tandragee Road ground, in Portadown, county Armagh. Just a ten-minute's walk out of the centre of the town of Portadown lies, what was, once upon a time, the village of Annagh. Today it has been absorbed into the town itself as a residential area on the way to Tandragee with the football club located on the left-hand side as you leave Portadown.

Club Info: Nickname: 'The Annagh'; Motto: Semper Sub Ponte (Always Under the Bridge); Club Colours: (Home) Red shirts, red shorts, red socks; (Away) Blue shirts, Black shorts, Black socks.

The main developed area of the ground is where the main entrance to the ground is situated. With Tandragee Road itself being a quite narrow and busy road it's useful that there are two car parks situated at this side of the ground. The car parks are situated either side of the club house which has recently been extended and refurbished. The main feature of the ground is the Met Steel stand which runs either side of the half way line and is the most popular vantage point for watching the game. It was built in 2003 in preparation for the club's elevation from Mid Ulster Intermediate football to the Irish league and is covered and laid out in concrete steps, in preparation for the addition of seating. The stand can accommodate the required 200 people. There is additional covered standing area within the Joe England stand. This stand is a new addition to the ground having been added for the 2010-11 season. This stand is named after the club's Life Patron and provides disabled access and seating for wheelchair users and accompanying spectators.

There is no standing at The Railway End, whilst hard standing runs three quarters of the way around the ground from the end of the Joe England Stand past the MET Steel Stand, round to The South End. On the far side is "The Bog Side", where there is hard standing up to where the dug outs, from the dug outs towards the Railway End there is no spectator access.

There were no hot drinks available from the club house, only soft drinks & those of an alcoholic variety. However, we were invited in for tea & sandwiches at half time.

The game started off at a brisk pace but as the half wore on the game slowed and nothing much happened in the way of goal chances, with the visitors having the bulk of possession. At H-T the score remained 0-0.

Chris Middleton opened the scoring just before the hour when he buried the ball in the top corner from a Michael McLellan lay-off. David Rainey made it 2-0 on 68 minutes after William Armstrong had slipped a great pass into his path. Chris McElroy pulled one back for United with six minutes remaining but any thoughts of a late revival were extinguished when Ethan Boylan struck twice in stoppage time to earn the points for the Welders.

On getting back into Belfast just before 18.20, we had a nice pint in The Bridge 'Spoons... Munro Dark from the Swannay Brewery from Orkney, To make it even more palatable Harry gave us some CAMRA Vouchers so it cost £6.75 for the round before we made our way back to the airport for our flight back at 21.00. As everyone was there promptly the plane left early so, we were back on the ground at JLA at 21.20.

04/20