

Limavady United 1(0). v. Ballinamallard United 2(0)

Bluefin Sports Championship, Saturday 29th December, The Showgrounds

Limavady's wretched December continued as they lost again at home, as a result of which they are becoming detached from the rest of the table, and effectively locked in a duel with Dergview to avoid automatic relegation. The first goal was always going to be crucial, and after United fell behind to the visitors midway through the second half, they were always struggling.

The first half saw unseasonal mild sunshine, and a lively start to the game, as a short back pass nearly put Connelly in trouble as early as the third minute, but he just foiled Pomeroy, who was waiting to pounce. There was a suspicion that he had handled outside the box.. The Mallards were playing neat football, and forced a series of half chances in quick succession. The dangerous Campbell was combining well with McCartney down the left, and he forced Brown into a good save. Smith and McEvoy both went close in quick succession, each heading over the bar.

The best chance of the half fell to the home side on 27 minutes, as McConnell's cross from the right was met perfectly on the volley by Doherty, who save Connolly stretch out an arm to tip the goal bound effort over the bar. The Mallards retaliated with a 31st minute Campbell free kick round the wall which Brown intercepted.

United may have been rather more hurried in their football, but they had arguably the best chances of the half. Pomeroy- having his best game for the club, was a constant threat, and he had a great chance to open the scoring, when he nearly embarrassed Clarke by stealing the ball on the edge of the box, but was foiled by Connolly.

On 41 minutes, Campbell headed Cashel's cross over the barThe half ended with United probably marginally the better side, but with nothing to show for their commitment, and there was a feeling in the crowd that they would be made to pay.

The second half sadly followed a predictable pattern, as United were gradually overrun in midfield, and defended deeper and deeper, although McConnell had an early tentative dipping effort which Connolly kept out as it was dipping under the bar.on 52 minutes , Campbell threatened again, firing wide at the back post.

As the pressure on United mounted, it was no surprise when the Roesiders fell behind on 55 minutes, to an untidy and preventable goal, after the ball came over from the left and was not effectively dealt with, and was headed back into the danger zone. With Brown unable to clear, and on his back as Campbell swooped to slam the ball home from close range.

United could have allowed their heads to drop, but to their credit they forced an early equaliser, albeit a scrappy one. From a corner, the ball was hoisted high into the six yard box, and under pressure, Connolly dropped the ball, which was forced over the line from three feet by Devine, despite protests by the Mallards' players.

The visitors felt aggrieved not to be awarded a penalty, when Campbell went down in the box, and they continued to press, and created several chances, the most impressive of which saw Brown produce a fine double save low to his right. From the corner, a long range effort skimmed the top of the crossbar.

For all the visitors' pressure, it was not until the 78th minute that they retook the lead, when Cashel scored with a close range header from a corner which Brown failed to reach. It was another scruffy goal, which again ought to have been defended better

United were unable to come back again, although they did have a late Devine chance which was blocked in the box. As the year draws to an end, Limavady will need to strengthen a threadbare squad stretched to breaking point by injuries, and Sean Friars knows that he must bring in some experience, to move up the table. That talent is obviously there has been shown in occasional games, but in this tough league, youth alone will struggle. In the relegation dogfight.

Limavady United: Connor Brown, Marcus O'Kane, Gareth McFadden, Shane Boyle, Emmet Friars, Hugh Carlin (c.), Aidan McCauley, Gary McFadden (Ryan Devine), Oran McConnell, Ryan Doherty, Alex Pomeroy (Stephen Duffy 73).

Substitutes not used: Richard Stewart.

Cautioned: McCauley (61), Boyle (67)

Ballinamallard United: John Connelly, Ross Taheny, Matthew Smyth, Ross Clarke (c.), Aaron Arkinson, Ryan Campbell, Jason McCartney, Nathan Cashel (Christopher Kelly 89), Ben McCann, Gary Henderson, Sean McEvoy (Michael Glynn 80).

Substitutes not used: Jacob Britten, Simon Warrington, Sam Robb.

Cautioned: Henderson (33)

Referee: Mr. Niall Gallagher (Londonderry).

Roesiders Man of the match: Hugh Carlin