

Limavady United 0(0) v. Ballyclare Comrades 1(0)

Bluefin Sports Championship, Saturday 6th April, The Showgrounds.

It is a safe bet that, when he wrote "April is the cruellest month" in his epic poem "The Wasteland", T S Eliot was not thinking of football, but for Sean Friars, that famous line could yet prove apposite, following Saturday's results, which leave them needing to make up a six point gap with just three games left. And it was heartbreak in the sunshine for the Roesiders, falling to a last minute strike from Thomas Robinson, after having arguably been the better side in what had hitherto been a dour struggle.

United were seeking to continue the momentum of last month, and started cautiously, while Comrades were content to sit back and seek to exploit the spaces which opened up. United won a series of early corners which came to nothing, although on 13 minutes Harkin did meet Doherty's kick with a glancing header which was off target. Three minutes later Comrades had their own corner, but McQuitty's effort was weak.

On 25 minutes Tully was presented with a free kick opportunity in a good position outside the box, but although he beat the wall, Wells got down to the ball at the base of his right hand post. The rest of the half meandered through the spring sunshine without either keeper being over-exerted until just before the break. Then, in the 42nd minute, United sparked into life, and again it was from a corner that they were most threatening. Friars was almost on the goal line when his header clipped the bar before being cleared. Another corner followed in quick succession, and this time Pomeroy saw his effort cleared off the line by Long. At the other end, following a break from deep in their own half, Comrades were frustrated when Tully shanked his effort over the bar.

United resumed after the break with a bit more purpose, and had an early chance when Pomeroy headed the ball up in the air, and the ball dropped invitingly for McCauley, but his shot was deflected. On 53 minutes, Gary McFadden skipped into the box, and crossed for Pomeroy, but his effort went over the bar. A minute later, a long ball found Brown running into the box past Gareth McFadden, but he sent his effort wide of the post, much to Wells' relief.

United continued to press, and Logue had a good chance on 57 minutes, only to see Hazzard push the ball out. However, for all their endeavour, the hosts were not fashioning any clear chances, and they replaced Pomeroy with debutant Lewis Baldrick in the hope of breaking the deadlock, but to little effect. Indeed the next opening fell to the visitors in 78 minutes, when Robinson made space with a run across the box before hitting a fierce effort from 14 yards which Wells did well to push over.

With two minutes remaining, both sides seemed resigned to a point, but then disaster- in the form of Robinson-struck. Collecting the ball on the left, he cut in from wide, and struck a low drive across the goal into the far corner for the only goal of the game. As the clock ran down, now desperate United had a free kick in an excellent position just outside the box, and McCauley did well to beat the wall, but Hazzard was alert to scoop the ball round the post. Cruel was the only word to describe it.

At full time the despondent United players trudged off the pitch -down, but not yet out. A point was the least their efforts deserved, but they were punished for not taking their chances. Next Saturday is the biggest match of the season, with a defeat possibly consigning the Roesiders to relegation. However, if they can harness their frustration and channel it properly, it may yet bring about a miraculous escape. As Eliot also said, "Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go."

Limavady United: Paul Wells, Nathan Harkin, Gareth McFadden, Hugh Carlin (c.), Emmet Friars, Ryan Devine, Ryan Logue, Aidan McCauley, Gary McFadden, Ryan Doherty, Alex Pomeroy (Lewis Baldrick 73)
Substitutes not used: Conor Brown, Stephen Duffy, Shane Boyle, Ryan McCreadie.
Cautioned: Gareth McFadden (85)

Ballyclare Comrades: Jack Hazzard, Curtis Woods, Samuel McIlveen, Michael McQuitty, John Dobbin (c.) (Jamie Willighan 58), Eoin Kane, Adam Gray, Joseph Tully (Isaiah Tully 78), Andrew Long, Thomas Robinson, Gary Brown (Tom Patchett 72).
Substitutes not used: Christopher Crane, Chris Getty.
Cautioned: Long (80).

Referee: Mr. Declan Hassan (Ballymoney).
Roesider Man of the match: Gary McFadden