

Limavady United 3(2) v. Ballyclare Comrades 3 (0)

Bluefin Sports Championship, Saturday 10th November, The Showgrounds.

A weakened Limavady United welcomed Ballyclare Comrades to Rathmore Road on a bright but blustery afternoon, knowing that points were vital, given that their next two fixtures are against Larne and Portadown. And United were gifted the perfect start on seven minutes, when Flood was shown a red card for a professional foul, bundling over Hume just outside the box after the flying striker just beat the offside trap and was bearing down on goal. After a lengthy delay, and without a replacement keeper on the visitors' bench, substitute Kirk took his place in goal, and could only watch as Hume curled the ball around the wall and hit the post.

Despite their man advantage, United laboured to break down the visitors, who protected their goal staunchly. Their first clear chance only arrived in the 33rd minute, when a perceptive ball from midfield dropped perfectly over the defenders for Hume and no one had any doubt of the outcome as he collected the ball and coolly rounded Kirk to steer the ball into the net. With their tails up, United nearly struck again a minute later, as Kirk was all at sea in his box when Hume picked up the ball inside the box, twisting and turning with his back to goal, before turning and stabbing the ball wide of the back post.

United were two up on 37 minutes, when McFadden's free kick fell perfectly for Hume to steer the ball into the net with a sublime one touch finish inside the box. The captain for the day might have had a first half hat trick on 42 minutes, but he failed to direct Duffy's ball on target. Nevertheless, at the break there seemed only one likely victor.

With their backs to the wall, Comrades came roaring out of the blocks, and within two minutes Curtis Woods thumped a header off the cross bar with Wells beaten, and only two desperate blocks of the loose ball preserved United's lead. However, the visitors got a lifeline on 51 minutes, when McIlveen saw his 25 yard free kick take a slight deflection before bouncing down off the cross bar and over the line.

Three minutes later, United were cut open, and Brown unleashed a thunderous volley which was goal bound before Wells leapt high to tip the ball over the bar with an incredible save. On 56 minutes the comeback was complete after Friars was penalised for handball and Tully took the spot kick. Wells dived low to his left, and just failed to keep the ball out. On 61 minutes Tully spun McMullan and fired narrowly over the bar.

United's man advantage was long forgotten by now, but they gradually came back, and on 66 minutes Hume fed the unmarked McCarron, who seemed sure to score but Kirk dashed off his line in desperation to block. Next, Duffy hit the crossbar from Hume's cross. Then on 69 minutes United won a penalty after a handball, and Hume stepped up for his hat trick. Houses throughout the Roe valley were surely bet on him matching the trio he scored against Comrades last season, but incredibly he hit the post.

United did go ahead again on 71 minutes, as Hume pressurised Kirk, and the stand in keeper dropped the ball at his post, and watched in horror as it squirmed away from him straight to Duffy who rolled the ball over the line. Two minutes later the points ought to have been safe, but Doherty hit the ball with his shin and saw it bobble wide. McCarron was also off target, with a 75th minute shot that went wide. The striker knew it was not going to be his day on 86 minutes, as Kirk instinctively stuck out a leg to deflect his goal bound effort.

Surely the Roesiders would now hold on for a precious victory? Comrades, to their great credit, kept pushing forward in numbers, and got a deserved reward with two minutes remaining. Gray was allowed space to fire home with a low effort from distance, to which Wells got a hand, but he could not keep the ball out. It was deserved reward for a performance of character. United, by contrast, were dejected at the end, as the valuable point they gained must feel like a defeat. However, as they were battered in the second half, they must be grateful that they got a point that might still prove vital at season's end.

Limavady United: Paul Wells, Marcus O'Kane, Stuart McMullan, Emmet Friars, Ryan Devine, Stephen Duffy (Alex Pomeroy 84), Aidan McCauley, Sean McCarron, Robbie Hume (c.), Ryan Doherty.

Substitutes not used: Connor Brown, Oran McConnell, Shane Boyle.

Cautioned: Devine (86).

Ballyclare Comrades: Patrick Flood, Curtis Woods, Samuel McIlveen, Michael McQuitty (Christopher Crane 22), John Dobbin (c.), Eoin Kane, Adam Gray, Jason Johnston, Joseph Tully, Thomas Robinson (Taylor Kirk 7), Gary Brown (Christopher Trussell 80).

Substitutes not used: Gary Donnelly.

Cautioned: Woods (34)

Dismissed: Flood (7)

Referee: Mr. Barry Monaghan.

Roesider Man of the match: Robbie Hume.