

Under 14s Match Report

Sunday, 14 February 2010

Iain Middleton

Ian Mackay Cup Round 2 (Quarter Final)

Cool Foot Matt Wins High Noon Cup

Shootout

AC Oxfangs 0 Craigroyston 0 (after Extra-Time)

ACO won 4-3 on penalties

Penalty Shootout Scorers

Joe, Matthew, Murray, Neil

A clash of the Titans at Colinton Mains Park as ACO, unbeaten for three months, and Craigroyston, the current league leaders, met in the Quarter Final of the Ian MacKay Cup. The major concern for the ACO coaches surrounded the difference in match practice - their team hadn't played a competitive match since 13 December but Craigroyston had been able to take advantage of their superb facilities to play several matches even when most other Edinburgh venues were unplayable. A tough Cup match after two months of sitting around playing with PlayStations and Xboxes was hardly ideal, but everyone in the ACO camp was relieved just to get back into their Sunday morning routine. The referee was probably not so pleased to be back in his routine as an administrative mixup saw him being locked in the changing room while the teams were warming up - apologies to the ref for this poor welcome to *Fortress CMP*.

Right from the kick-off the game swung from end to end as both teams probed for the opening goal. Craigroyston had several players who dwarfed Cammie so they posed a huge threat from set-pieces. Cammie, Neil and Murray rose to the challenge - literally - and managed to win their fair share of the aerial challenges. Both Craigroyston wingers threw over some good crosses but, when their big striker managed to get his head to one of them, Andy was in the perfect position to hold the ball. At the other end, Guy and Mat were getting some joy with quick 1-2s, ably supported by Joe and Kalle on the wings.

Whatever the ACO boys had for breakfast should be repeated every Sunday morning as the whole team looked a lot sharper and wider awake than the supporters are used to seeing. Despite the continual efforts of both attacks, the defences held firm and it became clear to all spectators that these were two very evenly-matched teams.

Half-Time 0-0

The high pace continued at the start of the second half but the first 15 minutes saw ACO create their best chance of the match so far. First of all, a good ball from Steven out to Kalle saw the winger sling in a tremendous high cross which started to dip temptingly as it approached the 6-yard box. Michael made a great run into the box and the goalie took his eye off the ball as he spotted the inrushing midfielder. Michael got his head to the ball just before the goalie reached it but unluckily just lifted it too high and it bounced to safety off the top of the bar.

Five minutes later and the hard-working Mac managed to work some magic to create a bit of space on the edge of the box. He got a clear sight of goal and fired in a screamer which the goalie seemed to grasp down low, but

the ball slipped between his legs and looked as if it might trickle into the goal, but the goalie did well to recover and grab the ball, even though he had been badly winded.

At the other end, the greatest danger from Craigroyston came from the vicious crosses from either wing. A couple of low crosses sped across the face of the goal and Andy and his defence were glad to see them roll away to safety. As full-time approached, both defences still looked reasonably comfortable so it was no great surprise when the final whistle went to bring about 20 minutes of extra-time.

Full-Time 0-0

Any worries that the lack of match practice would affect the boys' fitness were soon allayed when even those carrying a few bumps and knocks reported that they were keen to carry on. With the spectre of the dreaded penalties looming large in everyone's mind, both teams set out determined to get the breakthrough. The ACO defence continued to look solid and, as time wore on, the ACO midfield started to spread their passes around, stretching the game as the opposition legs began to tire.

By using all the subbies throughout the match, Head Coach Garry had kept a freshness about ACO and two of the subbies combined to great effect as half-time approached. Mac made a good run on the right and managed to get past his marker, then another defender, and laid a superb ball into the middle where the ACO midfield had arrived in numbers. Zippy took the pass, controlled it and took a couple of strides towards the goal. Just as the home crowd started to anticipate one of the famous Zippy celebrations, they had to sit down again as the ball slipped narrowly past the post.

ET: Half-Time 0-0

Nobody but neutrals enjoy penalty shootouts so both teams continued to press for the winner in the last ten minutes. A lot of praise goes to the players on both sides for keeping going at such a high tempo, and in such a sporting fashion throughout the whole match. With one minute to go and anticipating the shoot-out, Head Coach Garry played his last card by bringing on Joe, one of his specialist penalty-takers, for Kai who had put in a good shift.

ET: Full-Time 0-0

The reason for the last-minute substitution soon became clear as a couple of the pencilled-in penalty takers said they didn't feel quite right for it - the right decision for them to make in a tense situation like this where confidence matters so much. When "confidence" and "penalty" are mentioned in the same sentence it can only refer to Andy, who was coming into the shootout with the incredible record of having saved the last three penalties he had faced in league matches.

Craigroyston won the toss and elected to take the first penalty:

1 - 0 Andy was given no chance as the ball was smashed behind him.

1 - 0 Andy turned penalty-taker and hit the ball high towards the top corner, but he hit it just too firmly and the ball flew over the bar, to the despair of the home crowd.

1 - 0 Despair turns to joy as Andy pulls off a brilliant save, diving far to his right to touch the ball over the bar.

1 - 1 Neil steps up and creams the ball into the net to get ACO off the mark, the clenched-fist, clenched arm and clenched stomach salute to his team-mates letting them know that this game was still up for grabs.

1 - 1 The tension mounted as Andy took his place to face the next kick. This time, no heroics were required as the ball sped narrowly past the post.

1 - 2 Yet another defender, Murray, stepped up to take responsibility for the next ACO kick. With not a trace of nerves he used his trusty left foot to hammer the ball high into the right hand of the goal to give ACO the lead for the first time in the match.

2 – 2 After their last two glitches, Craigroyston gave Andy no chance from the next kick.

3 – 2 Up stepped Joe to break the habit of a lifetime and take a set-piece with his right foot. Garry's cunning substitution paid off as the goalie dived to his right and Joe hit it high down the middle to put the pressure on the next Craigroyston player.

3 – 3 Fair play to the big Craigroyston player who kept his side in the match with a text-book penalty, but unfortunate for Matt who knew he would have all the pressure of the next kick.

3 - 4 With the whole crowd and both teams watching intently, Matt was the coolest person on the park as he strode purposefully up to the ball just as the nearby church clock chimed for high noon (or it would have been if we were on BST). He replaced the ball carefully on the spot and took seven deliberate paces backwards. A couple of quick breaths and then he ran forward and blasted it high into the net to set off mad scenes of celebration as he disappeared beneath a mountain of delirious ACO players.

Well done to both teams and all spectators for taking in part in a very evenly-contested match which was played throughout in a great spirit. To win by one penalty in a shootout is the narrowest of all margins - well done to all who stood up to take a penalty when the pressure was on. Good to see that ACO still know how to play on this strange green stuff - maybe a 2-month break between matches is the way to prepare for all crucial matches in future!
