

Sunday, 27 March 2011
Martin Sheach

Lothian Buses South East Region 14s League Division 1

Swifts Swat Aside Lacklustre ACO

AC Oxgangs 1 Inverkeithing Hillfield Swifts 6

Half-Time 0-1

Scorer

Fin

ACO Man of the Match

Head scratcher . . . Let's just leave it this week.

It started as an untidy scrap between two apparently well-matched sides and finished in farce as ACO suffered their worst defeat of the season.

After decent performances against the two top sides in the division, this was another chance to lay down a marker for next season. Instead, ACO were simply overpowered by a team who did the simple things ruthlessly well. Oh, and guess who scored first . . . ?

Make no mistake. ACO are as technically gifted an outfit as the majority of teams in the league, including Sunday's visitors, who may have a case for considering themselves as the third force in Division One. For 25 unedifying minutes both teams thrashed around trying to get some kind of control on a CMP pitch which was as hard as a nightclub bouncer. Indeed, ACO, without stringing too many passes together, looked the more likely to score despite the fact neither goalkeeper had a save to make in that period.

When the goal came it was swift and clinical. The big, strong No.7 raced clear down the right, his crisp cross across the box was not dealt with and the ball was dispatched into the back of the net.

Being a goal down is not an unusual experience for ACO. It's almost as though the boys need to give opponents the lead in order to kick-start their own game. But this one was never going to splutter into life. As the boys trudged off at half-time, the closest they had come to threatening Hillfield's goal was from a couple of Harry free kicks, Jonny heading a smart delivery just past the post then Harry himself going for the top right, the ball drifting wide.

Half-Time 0-1

Swifts restarted with some vim about them and Elliot had to clear off the line as the defence struggled continually to get the ball to safety.

Then came a pivotal point in the match. In ACO's best move of the game Scott showed neat feet to find Fin. The midfielder's quick back-heel came to Chris who failed to get his shot away. The ball fell to Fin who cracked one against the bar. The rebound arrived at Calum's feet but he failed to make a decent connection, allowing the keeper to save what probably should have been the equaliser.

Before ACO could regroup, Swifts stormed up the park and shot home to go two-up. And almost from the restart it was three, and Sean must put up his hands (literally) for misreading what was not, by any standards, a blistering drive.

A chink of light appeared soon after when Fin robbed the ball in midfield, closed in on goal and cleverly lobbed the keeper. But there was no way back and almost immediately - after a bit of a stramash in the box - Swifts poked home to restore their three-goal lead.

It was soon five when Stan, Swifts' burly Hibs-bound striker, picked up a loose ball far too easily in the penalty area and shot diagonally across Sean into the net.

The game had simply run away from ACO and in the final minutes it was a matter of containment. Five was bad enough; six would flatter the visitors. But flatter them ACO did in a farcical end to the match. Campbell felled wee buzz-bomb Brodie in the box and the ref pointed to the spot. Up stepped the goalkeeper (apparently their ace penalty-taker) and promptly shot against the post. So 5-1 it would be then. No, I don't think so, said the ref, who immediately ordered a retake. This time the keeper slammed the ball past Sean as ACO – team, coaches and hingers-on – looked on in bemusement. When quizzed after, the ref said he hadn't been ready for the kick to be taken.

ACO weren't ready for a 6-1 defeat either . . . Can we play it again . . . Sam?

And still three hard games to go . . .

Full-Time 1-6

A few observations. Perhaps this was not ACO's strongest starting formation and, after Swifts scored, the changes came regularly without really altering the pattern of the game. Best players in their best positions would seem the best policy against one of the strongest sides in the league. That said – and all questions of skill and passing ability aside – a major difference between ACO and the top sides is physical presence. There was much talk after the Brazil match on Sunday about how even the slightest of their players was possessed of great upper body strength and that is something many of the boys need to work on. Too often ACO are coming off second best in challenges and allowing themselves to be turned. Barring a few exceptions, there also seems to be a general fear of heading the ball, especially in defensive situations.

ACO are not creating enough chances. Looking at Swifts (who didn't have the strongest defensive unit), the main threat came from the No 7 - Ally I think his name is - and Stan. Ally, big, strong and fast, provided both width and penetration. Stan, also a strong physical presence, was superb at holding up the ball and bringing others into play. ACO are struggling to play as effectively as they used to in the wide areas and haven't really found a player (although Scott has the potential) to do a 'Stan'.

Is there a case that ACO are getting “addicted” to playing on artificial surfaces? Most of their best results have come on the tight Firrhill pitch and the 4G at Meggetland produced a fine performance recently. Without checking back, I can't remember too many outstanding displays at CMP this season.

This is all said in light of a tremendously difficult end to a season in which ACO have consolidated in the group behind the 'big' boys and is not meant to be negative. The lads have secured their place in the division for next season and for this they must take a lot of credit. But wouldn't it be nice if they could put one over a top side before the boots are hung up for the summer?

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