



Knockbreda 1-3 Ballyclare Comrades

Saturday 7th March 2020 – Bluefin Sport Championship

Ballyclare Comrades team (4-4-2)

1. Ben McCauley
8. JB Dobbin 🟦 (17')
6. Adam McCart
18. Kevin Hagan
11. Adam Gray
7. Thomas Robinson
4. Samuel McIlveen
22. Oisin Barr
17. Tom Mathieson
16. Nathan O'Neill 🟦 (73')
24. Gary Donnelly 🟦 (11') 🟥 (85')

Substitutes:

19. Josh Dunn
3. Lee McCune
25. Louis Wilson
12. Kurt Cooper
10. Ronan Laverty 🟢 (85')

Knockbreda: Deane, McCauley, McGreevy, Hamill, McDermott, Rice, McNeill, Irwin, Smith, Cafolla, Storey. Subs: Smyth, Delaney, Burns, Best, Bennett.

Comrades kept their top-six hopes alive with a battling win in windy conditions at Knockbreda.

Manager Paul Harbinson was faced with the absence of three of his first choice defence for this game, with Curtis Woods and Jordan Malone suspended and Lee McCune only fit enough for a place on the bench. Kevin Hagan got his first competitive start for the club. With JB Dobbin and Adam Gray being deployed as full-backs, Tom Mathieson and Oisin Barr, also making his first start, came into the starting line-up. The bench was made up largely of players from the Under 20 side. Comrades had the strong gusty wind at their backs in the first half and began on the front foot. In the 4th minute home 'keeper Deane had to make a great double save, first blocking a fine Thomas Robinson strike hit from 16 yards and then denying Gary Donnelly from the follow-up inside the 6-yard box.

On 10 minutes the visitors came close again when Samuel McIlven's free-kick from 22 yards struck the crossbar.

A minute later, the Comrades pressure was rewarded when they hit the front. A cross to the far post area was met by a lovely cushioned header by Nathan O'Neill which set up a great chance for Gary Donnelly and he made no mistake finishing from 5 yards.

The pressure on the home defence continued and in the 16th minute Deane had to be at his best again to keep out a rasping 14-yard drive from Adam Gray after he had ran onto a ball fed into the box by Tom Mathieson.

It wasn't long before the visitors lead was doubled despite the best efforts of the home 'keeper. Deane did very well to keep out a powerful effort struck by Samuel McIlveen from 20 yards and he also performed wonders to deny Oisin Barr from the rebound. However he could do nothing when the loose ball fell to JB Dobbin who drilled the ball in low from the corner the 6 yard box.

The hosts rallied after this and had good spells of attacking possession. However, the Comrades defence managed to keep chances to a minimum. However, on 24 minutes, they had a good chance when Rice got in a position to shoot from 8 yards, but his effort flew over the bar.

At the other end Comrades weren't as fluent as they had been in the first 20 minutes, although on 37 minute Thomas Robinson created a chance when he made space for a shot from 15 yards which went just wide of the near post.

It looked as if the visitors would take a two-goal lead into the break, but in the 45th minute Knockbreda grabbed a lifeline. A ball played into the box was held up by the wind, causing some confusion between Ben McCauley and Kevin Hagan, which allowed Rice to nip in and head the ball into the net from 8 yards.

The second half began with the home side exerting pressure with the conditions now in their favour. Comrades defence however was resolute and hard to break down, ceterarily not looking in any way make-shift. Consequently chances for Knockbreda were few and far between. However, on 62 minutes a long throw into the box wasn't cleared and the ball fell to McDermott, whose srike from 10 yards was saved by Ben McCauley at the second attempt.

After being under the cosh for most of the second half, the visitors began to get some more joy going forward. In the 73rd minute they restored their two-goal advantage when a cross played into the box by JB Dobbin was met by a header from Nathan O'Neill 6 yards out which found the back of the net.

On 87 minute the excellent JB Dobbin snuffed out the chance of a comeback by the hosts when he produced a great block 8 yards from goal to deny Smyth who had looked set to score.

The game ended with Comrades deserved winners, having showed good qualities all over the pitch.