



Ballyclare Comrades 2-1 Ballymoney United

Saturday 18th February 2012 – Belfast Telegraph Championship 2

Ballyclare Comrades team (4-4-2)

1. Paddy Flood
2. Craig Reid
4. Glenn Pierce
5. William Wharry
3. Philip Logue
7. Scott Irvine ⚽ (57') 🔻 (61')
8. Stuart Galbraith
6. Keith Armstrong 🔻 (68')
11. Andrew Simms ⚽ (13')
10. Ricky Higgins
9. Mark McClelland 🟡 (65')

Substitutes:

12. Stuart McCullough
14. Aaron Montgomery
15. Simon McGowan 🟢 (68')
16. Ricky Moore
17. Mark Patterson 🟢 (61')

Ballymoney United: Moore, Scott, Buckley, Wilkinson, Getty, Gilmore, Kearney, McKane, Gillan M, Gillan G, Christie. Subs: Fleming, Lavery, Dempsey.

Comrades continued their promotion push, collecting three points at home to Ballymoney United, despite a rather laboured performance against a team whose indiscipline meant they ended the game with only seven men.

For this match, Eddie Hill was without four suspended players: Lee Rushe, Paul Harbinson, Stephen McDowell and Johnny McClurg. Also unavailable through injury was his younger brother Anthony Hill. On the plus side however, the manager could welcome back striker Ricky Higgins after a number of games out injured, and defender William Wharry, making his return to first team action after a month in Australia on honeymoon.

The early stages of the game were evenly matched, although the first half-chance inside the opening minute fell to the visitors. Christie received a ball on the left and cut inside to fire a low shot from 16 yards, but Paddy Flood was able to make a routine save.

The game burst into life in the 11th minute when Ballymoney keeper Moore received his marching orders from the referee. With the visitors' defence stretched, Ricky Higgins slipped the ball through to strike partner Mark McClelland just outside the box. Moore, seeing the danger, had rushed from his goal, but as McClelland tried to

lift the ball over him towards the unguarded net, he blocked the effort with his hand outside the area. There was little choice but for the referee to send the keeper off and outfield player Scott had to take over between the posts.

The stand-in keeper's first duty was to face the free-kick conceded by Moore, but he could do little to prevent dead-ball expert Andrew Simms giving his side a 13th minute lead, when his well struck effort took a slight deflection off the wall and the ball flew into the net.

Comrades now, as would be expected, dominated attacking possession, but Ballymoney made it hard for them to get any shots in against the stand-in keeper. However, the home side were very unlucky not to increase the lead in the 32nd minute, when a cross from the right from Scott Irvine found the head of Keith Armstrong, who had arrived at speed into the box, but his powerful effort from 8 yards came back off the crossbar. Although the rebound fell back at Armstrong's feet, it arrived very quickly and he had no chance to steady himself and his second effort went low past the post, with the keeper stranded.

Comrades were trying to stretch the Ballymoney defence at every opportunity and in the 35th minute a ball played forward from the back eluded the visitors' backline and Mark McClelland burst onto it, before being brought down by a challenge from behind by Getty, who had already been booked and had received a final warning from the referee earlier. The player might well have received a straight red card for preventing a goal scoring chance, but in any case the yellow card he received meant he went for an early bath anyway.

Ballymoney were now down to nine men, but still they stubbornly resisted the home side's efforts. A second goal might have opened the floodgates, and in the 43rd minute Comrades had a great chance to increase their lead. A through ball beat the Ballymoney defence and was latched onto by Ricky Higgins. He outstripped his marker and bore down on goal, before sliding the ball past keeper, but also just past the post from 6 yards.

Comrades must have approached the second half confident of securing a comfortable win, and two minutes in Ricky Higgins had a half chance when he struck a decent half-volley from 13 yards, which the keeper did well to hold on to low on his line. Generally though, the home side were rather frustratingly unable to unlock a resolute Ballymoney team with the regularity that might have been expected.

At the other end, the visitors had understandably been restricted in their attacking efforts, but they stunned the home crowd on 53 minutes with an equaliser out of the blue. A quick break saw the ball played to Buckley on the left and he took the opportunity to strike a swerving effort from 25 yards, which deceived Paddy Flood and flew into the back of the net.

Ballymoney were not to be on level terms for long however. Four minutes later Comrades were back in front when Craig Reid and Scott Irvine linked up well down the right, before Irvine struck a shot from just inside the box, which flew through the crowded area and past the keeper.

Comrades continued to dominate possession, but chances were not that frequent, however a couple of efforts came in around the middle of the half. Firstly on 66 minutes Stuart Galbraith played in Mark McClelland, but his shot from 14 yards was too close to the keeper. Then, a minute later, Galbraith himself was unfortunate not to score when, after receiving a pass from McClelland, he crashed a shot against the bar from 20 yards out.

On 71 minutes the referee was again reaching for the red card. This time again after another second yellow for a Ballymoney player; Gilmore being the player dismissed.

Despite continuing to lose men, the visitors still looked confident and Comrades seemed to be struggling under the expectation of playing against such a weakened side.

In the 78th minute Ballymoney weren't that far away from an unlikely second equaliser, when a free-kick into the Comrades box was only cleared out to Christie, who half volleyed an effort from the edge of the box, just wide of the post.

Amazingly the visitors were to end the game with just seven men, after Gerard Gillen was given a straight red card for an over the top challenge on Stuart Galbraith on 84 minutes

A rather flat Comrades display could not conjure up any further goals, with only a 35 yards free-kick effort from Simon McGowan, which went just over the bar on 90 minutes, coming close to adding to the score-line in the remaining minutes.

Despite there having been a number of stoppages during the second half, the referee blew up for full-time the second that the 90 minutes had been reached; perhaps mindful of what had gone on before.

This was far from a vintage display by Comrades, but they still come out of it with a vital three points. They can also take some credit for keeping their discipline as their opponents lost theirs.