

Ballyclare Comrades U20 2-3 Newington Reserves

Tuesday 21st March 2017 – NIFL Development League North

Report courtesy of the Newtownabbey Times

Ballyclare Comrades U20s enter the final phase of their Championship Development League North campaign in pole position, but they could be overhauled in the run-in by main rivals Institute Reserves who have several matches in hand.

Kingsley Burrows' lads missed the opportunity to cement their place at the summit, when they lost their final pre-split clash with Newington Reserves at Dixon Park.

Having won the corresponding fixture on the road two weeks previously 5-1, hopes were high of completing the double in midweek with home advantage, but they were never ahead and finished on the wrong end of a 3-2 scoreline.

The north Belfast lads were first on to the scorecard with a header, but this was cancelled out when Scott Cummings tucked the ball under the advancing keeper, after latching on to a fine pass by Joel Haggan.

Approaching the interval the hosts exerted some pressure, but efforts by Cummings and Reece Gilmour failed to find the net, so the teams turned round all square.

Comrades resumed with Luke Fenton replacing Mark Shannon at left back, but soon they were trailing again as a result of sloppy defending.

Substitute Sam Lilburn raised home hopes when he chased down a ball over the top, but the keeper got there first and cleared. Later Cummings blasted over the bar from a Ryan McIlwaine pass, and then Cummings was the provider when a Fenton header flashed wide.

Ten minutes from time Newington sealed the points with a third goal, but the locals had the final say when a McIlwaine free was headed on to his own net by a defender.

Man of the Match: Joel Haggan who was outstanding in midfield.

"It was a terrible performance - one of our worst of the season," fumed manager Burrows. "Our passing was poor, and our defending was sub-standard, but we are still top of the league going in to the split.

"We now face four virtual cup finals, and although we are tops we are being closely pursued by Institute, who have a couple of games in hand, so we face a nervy end of season programme," he speculated.

Ballyclare Comrades U20s: McKnight; A McCauley, Chalmers Thompson, Shannon; Clarke, Haggan; Robinson, McIlwaine, Gilmour; Cummings. Subs: Fenton, Lilburn, McAbery.

Cummings on 16 and Gilmour with 15, are having a head-to-head battle in quest of the Top Scorer's Trophy.