



Portadown 1-2 Ballyclare Comrades (after extra-time)

Saturday 6th January 2018 – Tennents Irish Cup (Fifth Round)

Ballyclare Comrades team

1. Paddy Flood
2. Curtis Woods
5. Chris Rodgers
23. Dean Youle
3. Matty Parker
7. Chris Middleton 🟡 (79') 🔴 (96')
4. Samuel McIlveen 🔴 (39')
8. JB Dobbin 🟡 (42')
11. Adam Gray 🔴 (109')
24. Stewart Nixon ⚫ (57') ⚫ (118')
9. Mark Kelly 🔴 (77')

Substitutes:

14. Adam McCart
18. Jason Johnston
17. Thomas Robinson 🟢 (96')
12. Joe McWilliams 🟢 (109')
19. Francis Dugan 🟢 (77')

Portadown: McGaughey, N Henderson, Brennan, McCallum, McVey, Kilmartin, McCullough, Warwick, Lavery, Salley, D Henderson. Subs: Neill, Hall, Duffin, Balde, Wilson.

Comrades gained a memorable Irish Cup victory, as they overcame adversity to beat Portadown in dramatic fashion at Shamrock Park.

For this match manager Clifford Adams was able to use some of his January signings, with Chris Middleton in the starting line-up. He also changed the formation of the team to 4-4-2, with Matty Parker coming in at left-back.

The early stages of the game were evenly balanced, with neither side able to carve out an opening until the 17th minute, when the home side came close, after the ball was drilled into the box by Salley and met by a deft volley from Warwick, which went just over from 8 yards.

Adam Gray was the man causing most problems to the home defence, with his surging runs and on 19 minutes he should have scored, when a move involving him and Mark Kelly cut open the Portadown defence, giving Gray a great chance in a

central position 7 yards out, but his resulting effort was sliced disappointingly wide of the target.

The opening goal came in the 27th minute and fell to Portadown. A corner was not fully cleared and the ball came back into the box, laid back perfectly for McCallum to fire a fine first-time effort into the roof of the net from 10 yards.

The home side now had their tails up and looked capable of increasing their lead. In the 37th minute McCullough was played through to run free towards the goal, but Paddy Flood came out to force him wide and the threat fizzled out.

Two minutes later, the tie looked to have taken a major further shift towards the home side, when Comrades were reduced to ten men. Samuel McIlveen went in for a full bodied 50/50 challenge with Kilmartin. The Portadown man came off worst and the reaction of the home players perhaps ensured that the Comrades man received a harsh straight red card.

Portadown tried to make the most of their numerical advantage with another goal before the break. They nearly succeeded in the 42nd minute, when a great cross from Lavery found the head of Salley, but his effort from 6 yards clipped the top of the bar.

On 45 minutes a swift counter-attack from the home side ended with Lavery getting in a shot from 12 yards, which Paddy Flood did well to save with his legs.

Comrades went in at the break with the odds heavily stacked against them, but the second half saw them produce a display of grit and passion to frustrate the large home crowd.

The Portadown supporters might have expected their team to capitalise on their extra man and in the 53rd minute there was a great chance for them to increase their lead, when Salley found himself free in the box, but his attempt to lob the ball over Paddy Flood was fluffed.

Comrades were showing enterprise, even with ten men. In the 56th minute they won a free-kick midway inside the Portadown half and Chris Middleton played a great ball into the box, which was met by a header from Curtis Woods from 9 yards that forced a save from McGaughey.

A minute later the home crowd were stunned by a Comrades equaliser. Adam Gray picked the ball up in a central area and played a lovely through pass to Stewart Nixon. He then moved forward to smash the ball past the advancing 'keeper from 14 yards.

Comrades were more than holding their own. Although unsurprisingly the home side had more of the play, the visitors defended superbly and threats on Paddy Flood's goal were kept to a minimum.

At the other end Comrades kept trying to get something. In the 75th minute a good move involving Mark Kelly and Adam Gray ended with JB Dobbin getting in a powerful strike from an angle 16 yards out, which stung the palms of McGaughey.

In the 85th minute the home side came close, when a high ball played into the box found the head of Salley, whose effort from 7 yards sailed just over the bar.

A minute into injury-time a great Adam Gray run ended with him releasing Stewart Nixon for shot from an angle 9 yards out, but the 'keeper was well placed to save.

Two minutes later, and seconds before the end of normal time, Portadown lost their numerical advantage, when Brennan was dismissed after a foul near the touchline earned him a second yellow card.

The game now went into extra-time. The home side had a couple of chances in the first period, as playing with a man less for over 50 minutes looked to be telling on Comrades legs.

Four minutes in Lavery was played through on goal, only to see his resulting effort from 16 yards blocked by Paddy Flood, who had flown out of his goal. Then, in the 12th minute of the first extra-time period, Salley made good room for a shot from 14 yards, but dragged his effort wide of the target.

The second half of extra-time again saw the home side do most of the pressing, but the visitors managed to find the energy to keep danger largely at bay, although Paddy Flood had to block a well-struck Lavery strike from 14 yards in the 111th minutes.

The game looked to be headed for penalties, but there was to be a dramatic winner for the heroic visitors. In the 118th minute substitute Thomas Robinson produced a superb flicked through ball to Stewart Nixon, who had anticipated well and outstripped the home defence to finish with aplomb from 16 yards.

At the final whistle the Comrades players deservedly celebrated joyously with the travelling supporters.