



Portadown 1-2 Ballyclare Comrades

Saturday 7th October 2017 – Bluefin Sport Championship

Ballyclare Comrades team (3-5-2)

1. Paddy Flood
5. Chris Rodgers
14. Adam McCart
23. Dean Youle
17. Thomas Robinson 🚩 (86')
12. Gary Brown 🚩 (3')
8. JB Dobbin
4. Samuel McIlveen 🚩 (64')
11. Adam Gray
19. Stewart Nixon 🚩 (81')
9. Mark Kelly 🚩 (86')

Substitutes:

7. Michael O'Hanlon 🟢 (86')
10. Paul Maguire 🟢 (81')
16. Zach Barr 🟢 (86')
18. Jason Johnston
26. Geoff McKinty

Portadown: Connolly, Brennan, Neill, McVey, McCallum, Kilmartin, McCullough, Warwick, Amuneke, Lavery, Duffin. Subs: Hazley, Salley, Ferris, Upton, Wilson.

Comrades came away from their visit to Shamrock Park with a deserved victory, which took them to the top of the league.

Manager Clifford Adams made only one change from the starting line-up of the mid-week League Cup win over Institute, with Gary Brown coming into midfield and Jason Johnston moving to the bench.

The visitors were boosted by an early goal. In the 3rd minute Mark Kelly's shot was only cleared out to Gary Brown, who fired the ball back towards goal from 22 yards, his effort taking a small deflection, which took it past the wrong-footed 'keeper and into the net.

Portadown reacted well to this early set-back and they were unlucky in the 11th minute, when Amuneke saw his fine shot from 25 yards hit the bar. However, two minutes later the home side were back on level terms, when a good cross from the left from Neill was met by a perfectly placed glancing header from Lavery, which flew into the net from 7 yards.

For a spell after the equaliser Portadown put Comrades on the back foot and the visitors had to be resilient at the back to keep them at bay. However Clifford Adams' men soon weathered the storm and were back giving as good as they got.

In the 29th minute Ports' keeper Connolly had to make a good double save. Initially he did well to block a shot from 11 yards from Adam Gray, who had got free on the left side of the box. Then, when the ball went loose, Gary Brown struck a shot from 7 yards, which Connolly was able to turn wide of the target.

On 38 minutes Comrades had a good chance, when Mark Kelly did well to control the ball in the box and then turn a defender to create space for a shot from 8 yards, but his effort flew well over the bar.

Comrades really should have been ahead at the break. Two minutes into first half injury-time Stewart Nixon nipped in before the 'keeper to intercept a back pass from Neill. He seemed certain to score, but only managed to hit the post from 6 yards, with the unguarded net at his mercy.

Comrades didn't appear downcast after spurning this opportunity and opened the second half strongly. Four minutes in, Mark Kelly did well to rob a defender on the by-line, but his resulting effort from a very difficult angle went into the side-netting from 5 yards.

The visitors continued to look good all over the pitch and in the 64th minute they regained the lead. Livewire Gary Brown did well on the left and was able to put the ball into the box, from where it broke out to Samuel McIlveen on the edge of the area. He sent a well-controlled shot towards goal and, again aided by a slight deflection, the ball hit the back of the net.

This time the home side couldn't react the way they had done after the opening goal and Comrades looked the more likely side to score again.

In the 73rd minute the excellent Gary Brown robbed a home player on the right and played the ball into the box, where it was met by a good volleyed effort from Stewart Nixon from 7 yards, only kept out by a good save from Connolly.

Two minutes later Comrades were denied again by the 'keeper. This time it was Nixon who created the chance, flicking the ball onto Brown in the box, but his stabbed effort from 11 yards was kept out by a fine block from Connolly.

On 79 minutes Adam McCart, having another great performance in Comrades defence, almost grabbed a goal at the other end, when he got his head to a Samuel McIlveen corner, but his effort from 8 yards went just wide of the post.

Comrades' defence had been excellent and given the home side few chances.

However in the 81st minute Ports came close. Again the Neill and Lavery combination created the chance, with Neill's cross finding the head of Lavery, whose deft header from 9 yards went narrowly wide of the post.

As the game moved to its close the visitors continued to look good and certainly weren't clinging on to the lead. In the 88th minute substitute Zach Barr unleashed a shot from the angle of the box, which forced an acrobatic save from Connolly.

Four minutes into injury-time and seconds before the final whistle the home side had a chance to salvage a draw, when another dangerous Neill cross found the head of Salley 9 yards out, but his effort went well wide of the target.