

Match Report: Harlow Tournament Qualifier

Quality was hard to come by in the freezing conditions last night as Passmores' first XI battled to a win and a draw in the inaugural Harlow Schools' Tournament.



Passmores were led into the unfamiliar territory of the field by captain Charlie Johnson as they braved arctic winds, 3-foot long grass, semi-darkness and an outright ban on spectators in their opening two fixtures, recording a win and a draw.

St Nick's were first up and the game started brightly for Passmores with silky central midfielder Haydn Kearney hitting the bar from a cross-shot out on the right. The Passmores midfield quickly realised that the Nick's 'keeper was more than a little wobbly and soon speculative shots were raining in, Kearny shooting just over again from outside the penalty area.

Despite Passmores dominating possession and chances, neither team could take a grip on the game due to the appalling conditions. Nick's resorted to Brexit-ball very early in the game, hoofing it up to their 7ft, 17 stone front man at every opportunity, while for Passmores, even the usually metronomic Harry 'H' Dorrington was seen misplacing passes, such was the state of the 'pitch' they were forced to play on.

Nick's route one football did nearly pay off in the opening exchanges when their hulking express train of a striker latched onto a through ball from the back and bore down on goal. A late, cynical, yet glorious body check from star defender Will Forde the only thing keeping the score at 0-0. Forde somehow escaped even a caution from the referee for this blatant act of anti-football, perhaps only his age and magnificent mullet keeping him out of the book.

The deadlock was eventually broken in bizarre fashion by first XI debutant Tommy Newnham who, perhaps seeing how close Kearney had gone minutes earlier, crossed again from the right-hand side. He went one better than Kearney,

his effort looping in at the back post over the bewildered 'keeper's head, further cementing the poor lad's lack of awareness and goalkeeping talent.

The goal seemed to finally inject some quality into the game and returning star Mitchell Ward began to exert proper dominance over proceedings. First, some silky skills left two players in his wake before his cross was deflected into the path of the grateful Nick's 'keeper. For his next trick, a mazy, jinking run resulted in two Nick's defenders literally sprawling on the floor with another chasing shadows in desperation to catch up with the Passmores' Iniesta.

Nevertheless, it was the conditions, not quality, that decided the next goal and perhaps the match. Just when St Nick's might have thought they were getting a foothold in the game an innocuous back pass from a defender caught the 'keeper napping and in a cruel twist of fate the ball bobbed agonisingly under his foot, 2-0 Passmores.



St Nick's were a wounded animal; outfought, outplayed and outgunned, but still dangerous. Long balls over the top were the order of the day for their colossal frontman, and business was good. The Passmores' back four coped well enough with this until a mix-up in the middle left

Blessing Danquah 1 on 1 with Harlow school's answer to Shaquille O'Neil. But Danquah, unflappable even in crisis, was unfazed. He went shoulder to shoulder with the man-mountain, zipped past him with the pace of a flying Kyle Walker, before leaving this reporter in raptures with a sublime body feint which sent the Nick's forward toppling (a long old way) to the ground and Danquah galloping forward to start the next attack.

Seizing the opportunity, Danquah released Newnham again down the right, his pace likely causing footballing PTSD for the opposing left-back, his cross for Johnson was a peach

but the captain and forward somehow managed to bounce the ball off his knee and onto the post from arguably less than a metre away from goal. However, the footballing gods were smiling on Johnson that day and rewarded his typical all-action performance with a favourable rebound which he gratefully tapped into the empty net. Final score, 3-0 Passmores.

Next up for our brave boys was a much stiffer test in the form of Stewards. The early game went Passmore's way as a sumptuous long ball from Ward freed Johnson through the middle, he bullied one defender to the ground and bore down on goal but his tame shot was held appreciatively by the 'keeper.

Despite being only 20 minutes long this game seemed to drag for eons and ages. Darkness fell, the temperature dropped and in the deteriorating conditions footballing quality was a scarce commodity. The closest either team got in this turgid period was Ward twisting and turning yet again on the edge of the area before shooting just over with his right foot. Perhaps it was too dark to play on, perhaps the ref couldn't bear to watch anymore of this ponderous and freezing football, for whatever reason the final whistle blew 5 minutes early and the match was abandoned with the score 0-0.

Overall, a positive afternoon for Passmores. Fingers froze, bobbles bobbed, passing went astray but the result was win and a draw, no goals conceded and some encouraging debuts. The Passmores Faithful will be happy to see the back of the field and look forward to more games on the horizon and a possible final at Harlow Town FC. This reporter, for one, cannot wait.

MOTM: Mitch Ward

Reporter at the scene: A Lovell

Pictures courtesy of Google Images

