

Match Report: Passmores 4-2 Roding Valley

On a crisp, sun dappled April afternoon, away from the bright lights and buzz of the hallowed astro. Passmores produced a virtuoso display of teamwork, grit and guile to end the year on a high as West Essex U16 Champions against Roding Valley.

Passmores opened brightly, dominating the initial exchanges without carving out any real chances. It wasn't until the 12th minute when Mitch Ward, bravely returning to the pitch with a fat and bloodied lip courtesy of a Roding knee, made an incisive run down the left and whipped a dangerous cross into the centre. It was headed out but only as far as captain Haydn Kearney whose silkily cushioned volley set up Charlie Johnson on the edge who dragged his shot tamely wide.

This half chance woke Roding Valley up and their star man, a diminutive, pacy left winger with more tricks than a card-carrying member of the Magic Circle began to assert himself on the game. Full back Tommy Newnham battled well, matched up against a dangerous dynamo who dipped and danced his way across the pitch with ease. On the opposite flank Blessing Danquah marshalled both full back and winger with the cold, robotic intensity of a seasoned killer. One moment epitomised the contest, or lack thereof, down Passmore's right-hand side: Roding launched a dangerous looking fast break from a corner and Danquah found himself 2v1 on the halfway line. Feinting to step up he forced the pass which he then expertly intercepted with calculated precision. Seemingly caught between the two opposing players he then held his ground before audaciously Cruyff turning between them leaving spectators and players agape.

Soon after the deadlock was broken by all action wide forward Albie Tyler. The Roding 'keeper rolled the ball out to a hulking centre back who dithered on the ball slightly too long allowing Tyler's one-man pressing machine to burst into action. Wining the ball from a bobbly deflection he cut inside and shot, another deflection sending the ball out of the reach of the despairing goalie. It was a goal that

drew derision from the onlooking RV fan club 'Lucky... Stupid... Rubbish', clearly they'd never seen the due reward for desire, grit and doggedness on a football field.

It looked good for Passmores but sadly, the lead was not to last. Mere minutes later a scything through ball carved open the Passmore's back four, a desperate lunge from centre back Alfie Collins inches away from cutting it out. Roding's forward didn't need to be asked twice and struck a sweet finish at Oliver Matthew's near post.

Disaster spiralled down to tragedy straight from kick off as the aforementioned danger man took flight into the area, darting past two players and being felled by a Passmore's defender who shall remain nameless. The referee pointed confidently to the spot and although penalty expert Matthew's guessed right the ball was just out of reach and the match was turned on its head: 2-1.

This was a test. The first time this season that Passmores had been down for a significant portion of a game. Coach and fans together were shell-shocked, but our brave boys refused to be beat, iconic former captain and all-round nice guy Ward leading the charge. First, a show of great feet in midfield to wriggle away from two challenges and minutes later a burst down the left-hand side and cut back to Kearney who hit it sweetly enough and brought a superb save from the Roding 'keeper.

Bobby 'Beckenbauer' McDonald was another stepping his game up in the face of adversity, ever strong in the tackle and with a velvet glove to match his obvious steel at the back. Multiple times he would snuff out an attack with a timely interception or challenge, only to barrel forward himself and arc one of those sat-nav passes towards Tyler or Oakley Harrison who had started to find a lot of joy down wings.

It was Harrison, so often the creator of great Passmore's goals, who dragged Passmores back into the match shortly after. Taking what looked like a heavy touch on the right wing, he used his incredible pace to sear past his opposite number who'd stepped up to intercept. He squared cleverly

for Ethan Ottley who, having his shot blocked at first, fired in from close range, reaching one extendo-leg round a Roding player to poke home.

The equaliser galvanised Passmores and a flurry of chances followed. Ottley, so soon after scoring himself, turned into the creative hub of the side, combining guile, strength and technique into some kind of footballing Frankenstein. The power of Akinfenwa to hold off two centre backs behind him, the vision of De Bruyne to see Harrison's runs in behind and the execution of a prime Ronaldinho to both turn and lob the ball right ahead of the onrushing paceman Harrison. His shot sailed over but it was a sign of things to come. Mere moments later Ottley again passed through to Harrison, this time the human steam-train beat not just the first, but the second and third Roding Valley challengers before calmly slotting the ball into the corner with the outside of his boot. 3-2, advantage Passmores.

The second half started in much the same way with the ball firmly rooted in the Roding Valley defensive third. Straight from kick-off a long, raking ball from McDonald was flicked on at the edge of the area and controlled by Ottley who clipped it over the defence beautifully for Harrison to run onto. He launched the ball across goal and, in a moment reminiscent of Gazza in '96, Tyler was inches away from doubling the lead and his personal tally at the back post.

The chances were popping like Pringles and this team simply couldn't stop. Great desire and energy from combative midfielder Johnson won a free kick which Kearney whipped teasingly into the 6 yard box, but once again Passmores were a hair's breadth from extending their lead.

Despite starting the second period so brightly Passmores quickly began to fatigue and, even with the lead secured, started looking more and more ragged as the game wore on. The Roding Valley dangerman firmly established himself as the central force of the game, showing quick feet to release a midfielder to shoot fiercely to Matthew's right, but the 'keeper was equal to the effort. Credit must also go to McDonald who was in danger of being arrested for

people smuggling such was the ease with which he pocketed both Roding central strikers.

At the other end a Passmores attack orchestrated by Johnson and Harrison finished with a half-volley struck a ways over by McDonald from the edge. It was a rare foray into the Roding half but a welcome one for Passmores spectators whose nerves were a jangling discord at this point, such was the ferocity and constancy of the Roding attacks. More long-range efforts rained down on Matthew's goal, but he was equal to them all, diving, parrying and clutching each ball to his chest with growing confidence.

With Passmores on the back foot tempers began to fray and frustrations with the referee were boiling over. A blatant foul on Kearney wasn't given and it was Johnson who stepped up to offer swift retribution in the form of a wild, lunging two footer seconds later. No card given.

With barely 10 minutes remaining the Roding left winger showed a clean pair of heels to Newnham, cut inside and hit a left footed shot towards the near post, only a fortunate deflection onto the upright kept Passmores ahead. The frenetic pace and quality of the first half had been lost and with it Passmore's dominance. Despite holding the lead they were outdone in momentum, desire and possession for long periods. It did not look good. Another chance went begging for the danger man as Collins slid in desperately to intercept, forcing him onto his weaker right foot to shoot over the bar from just inside the area.

Someone had to step up, take control and put the game to bed. Kearney was the first to try, pulling back on the edge of his own area and sending a wonderful through ball to Harrison who cut inside and squared to Tyler on the edge. The crowd held their breath as he struck the ball sweetly enough but sadly that ball may never be seen again, launched into the woods, miles above the fenced astro, probably still rising as I write this report.

Players were pulling up all over the pitch and spaces were beginning to open up. With only 5 minutes of normal time remaining Ottley thought he was in to double his tally after

another precision through ball from Kearney but was inexplicably blown for a pull back.

Then came the moment.

Cometh the hour, cometh the man. It had been a long road for Albie Tyler. Shown red in the opening game of the season and bailed out by a virtuoso goalkeeping performance from Matthews it was time for a redemption story to rival Anakin Skywalker. With Passmores pinned back firmly in their own half, Tyler was the furthest man forward. A hasty clearance fell the Roding right back who was harried and hustled by Tyler into losing the ball. 85 minutes into a gruelling final and our energiser bull terrier would not stop running! Having picked off the right back Tyler had no thoughts of running down the clock and instead pushed on straight for the heart of the Roding defence. Power, pace and some quick feet saw him fly forward, leaving two defenders in his wake and 1 on 1 with the 'keeper he sent a powerful shot in at the near post, wheeling away to the adulation of his teammates. Roding fans and players were silenced. The game had been won.

The final seconds saw Passmores players gleefully playing keep ball in the corner. The lead was almost extended again when Ottley, surrounded by three defenders somehow snuck the cutest of passes into the box but Ward saw his first time shot blocked.

The final whistle blew and Passmores were champions. Tyler deservedly took the plaudits and the MoTM award for two great individual goals but each player could hold his head high after a stunning victory, away from home in a hostile environment.

Coach's Comment: The best performance as a team I have seen for the last 5 years. The boys worked hard, never let their heads go down and their communication throughout the match never stopped. The boys thoroughly deserved the win!

MOTM: Albie Tyler

Reporter at the scene: A Lovell

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