

North Wellington Whiskey's vs Brooklyn Baboons

Alex Moore # 1

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After threats of rain cancelling the game it was good to awake to a pleasant day knowing the top of the table clash would go ahead.

The most important task of the day was taken care of early when I filled the chilly bin with beers and ice to ensure we all could celebrate another win with the cold amber nectar. On reflection, it was surely my best contribution for the day. No, I won Player of the Day, though I think that was because I spent more time on the bench allowing players on who were performing better to play or because Phil thought it was my turn to write the report before I got injured again.

The omens weren't good as Phil and Ludo's plans to have an immaculate changing room with all shirts hanging up in number order were spoiled by the presence of another Norths team in our changing rooms. What was going on? Weren't we the superior side deserving of our own changing rooms? Aren't there other changing rooms closer to the No 2 ground where these usurpers were playing? This made team discussions difficult as Phil tried to plot our win on a white board, and we went to our playing field informed of our positions, but not much else. Still the banter between the teams was friendly – very different from what was to follow during our match. Oh, and Joe F made some comment about white boots, not sure I've heard him say anything like that before (did I hear someone say broken record?).

The match started off on a very greasy pitch and we were competing well for the first 10 mins, although Brooklyn seemed to be able to control the ball better than us and their passing game was stronger. We then showed our attacking prowess when pressure was put on their defense forcing confusion between a defender and their goalkeeper, Ludo carried his run between them forcing the ball into the net – “Hand Ball, hand ball!!” the cry went up aggressively and persistently from Brooklyn, but referee Phil would have none of it and rightly awarded the goal. Norths 1, Brooklyn 0. It was not the last we would hear of referee criticism on the day.

Then the tide of the game turned and all of a sudden it was like Spain vs the All Whites. Brooklyn started dominating all over the pitch, winning all 50/50 balls, finding space and attacking strongly. We also implemented our strategy of not marking their best players who quickly took advantage and scored two goals and deserved their lead. Norths 1, Brooklyn 2. As a team we seemed to lose focus on playing football and stooped to the opposition's level, a niggling type of play and constant whining, this didn't help our game. Our usual strong defence of Bill, Paul, Glenn, Dave and Fraser (nice shorts by the way) were made to look ordinary, but they did not get the support from the rest of the team – defence starts up front and they seemed to get through our forwards and midfield with ease.

Against the run of play we drew level when we scored. Norths 2, Brooklyn 2. I must have Alzheimer's, because I can't remember the goal, only that Ludo scored it. Bloody good to have a guy in such good scoring form this season.

Late in the first half Brooklyn launched another attack, an unmarked player passed to another unmarked player and the ball ended up inside the penalty area where Paul in his haste launched a tackle that took more player than ball and Brooklyn were awarded a penalty. They slotted the penalty easily passed a diving Chris, who it must be said had very little chance saving any of the goals. Half time Norths 2, Brooklyn 3. We were lucky to be down by only 1 goal.

The half time chat was less than positive with several players venting their frustration in an inappropriate manner. The lack of focus at half time reflected our lack of focus on the field during the first half. Bruce did his best to refocus the team and we headed out on the pitch with some determination. Paul decided it was safer for everyone if he had a spell – I've seen volcanoes that looked less threatening immediately prior to an eruption!

Phil passed the referee duties to Des and much to our surprise got abused regularly by the opposition and occasionally by us.

Our play improved markedly in the second half with everyone putting in a huge effort and we were rewarded with an equalizer that on balance of play we deserved. Bruce is back to goal scoring form, nice to see. Can't remember this goal either, geez.

Brooklyn struggled with Des's referee style and it got too much for them after this goal that Des asked one of their players to have a spell on the sideline. I thought for a moment that was going to lead to another send off followed by a walk off, but sense prevailed and the game carried on.

We dominated much of the second half and had we scored 2 goals in the half it would have been deserved, we came closest to another when Westie nearly headed one in at the far post. Our midfield certainly picked up with Bruce winning more possession, Mike ran himself ragged and was often a threat, Doc and Joe played their normal solid mistake free games, Chafie continues to defy time with some class play and showed his passion when some fool suggested he should have a breather, Kevin slotted between midfield and attack smoothly as did Westie.

Overall, even though we had the better of the second half, it would be fair to say we were happier with the draw than Brooklyn, in the same way the Longballs were happier to draw than we were last week.

There were many unsavoury incidents throughout the match and to support Joe F's message – we need to be better than this. The game is certainly not as enjoyable when we take our minds off the game and instead get involved in verbal and physical battles with the opposition and/or referee. Having a competitive nature means you are focussed on being ahead on the scoreboard at the end of the game and this can only be achieved if we are not drawn into this type of niggles. We also need to be aware that we have partners and children watching and need to set an example, I know some partners are not happy with the abuse and the language being used (by both teams).

Sometimes its up to us as players to try and change the atmosphere of the game. I got together with their left back to try and inject some mirth by conspiring between us to produce 4 foul throws in a row. Unfortunately no one else got the joke and just thought we were a couple of pratts who can't throw. Sadly this was closer to the truth.

After the match, Joe W awarded the Football for Dummies to our tremendous Central Defender Bill, Paul offered me throw in lessons (small fee), Joe F continued his incessant nagging about players wearing white boots, Paul offered me free throw in lessons, we drank some beer, showered together, drank more beer and looked forward to next weeks match against the Vindaloos.