

UCD AFC advanced to the next round of the FAI Intermediate Cup.



With a 5-2 defeat against Edenderry on the same pitch only three weeks before, last Friday nights FAI Intermediate Cup 2nd round fixture provided UCD with an opportunity to build on some more recent good form, as well as put right that initial heavy defeat to their opponents. It turned out to be a classic cup tie, with some great goals, extra time and penalties, and a sending off.

Brian O'Brolcháin got the ball rolling for the Students. Clever play and quick feet between Brian O'Reilly and Eoin Roche after a short corner found O'Brolchain in space, and he made no mistake with a low drive from close range. The goal came after a good opening spell from UCD that saw their 4-2-3-1 shape set Roche, McNelis and Whelan into dangerous positions, forcing some good early defending from the hosts. The game really came to life in the second half. With UCD custodian, Conor McGroarty having to go off after receiving an ankle injury, Eric Barber entered the pitch with the game tensely poised at 1-0, and the hosts pressing for the equaliser.

A sizeable crowd had turned out to cheer their local side on in the Cup game, and they were rewarded with a superb equalizer that saw the Edenderry striker pick the ball out of the air and, from distance, find the back of the net in almost the same movement. Momentum was further shifted in the host's direction with the somewhat harsh dismissal of UCD's McNelis for two bookable offences. However, the recent step up to the LSL Sunday Senior 1 has taught the side some serious lessons in a few short weeks, with a stronger, wiser team emerging. And there are few stronger and wiser than the man who restored UCD's lead against the run of play, James Timmons. Edenderry's persistence with a high defensive line was finally breached and Timmons' run from deep wasn't tracked. With a good forty yard run to goal ahead, Timmons kept his composure to knock the ball around the onrushing keeper before finishing in off the post from a tight angle.

Ten minutes to go, and the ten men were giving it everything to hold on to their slender lead. The defensive duo of Dillon and Doyle were making clearance after clearance, while the full backs and midfield still managed to use the ball well when they got the chance. However, Edenderry's persistence paid off, and a late free kick that Barber will wish to forget saw them equalise, and sent their supporters into raptures.

Extra-time with ten men would normally be a daunting task, but the UCD tacticians got it right and between substitutions and a formation change, Edenderry never looked like they had an extra-man. Having covered every blade of grass in the first ninety minutes, UCD's man of the match Kieran Harte stepped up his game even more and appeared to cover the Longford pitch twice over in extra time, and inspired his side through to the penalty shoot-out.

A late dubious call from the linesman denied the outstanding Michael Whelan a real scoring opportunity after a great through ball from David Campion. And so Penalties it was, and

interestingly, with the penalties, arrived a note of calmness and confidence to the UCD ranks, more typical of the atmosphere in training sessions in Belfield, rather than cup shoot-outs.

The confidence was well warranted, as Roche capped off a fine individual performance to get UCD off the mark. The Enigma that is Brian O' Reilly added another to his long list of top quality heart stopping penalties, going in via both the crossbar and the post. Lynagh and Harte added the third and fourth, leaving Barber with a chance to make up for his earlier uncharacteristic blunder. It never looked in doubt, as the Edenderry peno was saved low to the keepers left, who was promptly engulfed by his team-mates. The journey back from Offaly was much sweeter than the last, and a new level of performance and mental toughness had been reached by the team this season.

Their reward; a place in the 3rd round of the FAI intermediate Cup, and with captain Niall Daly, top scorer Mark Whelan still to return, and competition for places heating up each week, UCD's LSL Sunday side will prove extremely tough opposition for whoever faces them in the next round.

UCD AFC: McGroarty (Barbour), O'Reilly, Davey, Dillon, Doyle, Harte, Timmons (Lynagh), Whelan, McNelis, Roche, O'Brolchain (Campion).

Subs not used: Curtain, Bourke, C O Brolchain, Buckley.