

UCD AFC finished the first half on the season with a win on Sunday.



UCD AFC finished the first half of the season with another three points in the bag. Verona FC provided the opposition for UCD's final game before the Christmas break in the Leinster Senior League Sunday Senior 1 Division. An own goal was all that separated the sides as UCD secured 4th place in the league as they look to challenge the league leaders in the new year.

The Verona pitch was in need of a de icing machine, but with none in the immediate vicinity, both sides were employed in its place. A vigorous warm up across all parts of the pitch resulted in a sufficient thaw for the game to begin. When it did, the pitch began to play its part in slowing UCD's passing football. Spreading the ball to the wings was UCD's clear game plan and it found Eoin Roche and Marc Whelan in fine form. In possession UCD were formidable and without the ball Tyrone McNelis and Michael Whelan were tireless in their efforts to win the ball back.

The first chance of the half fell to Marc Whelan. He picked up the ball on the edge of his own box and turned on the turbo boosters. This change of pace eventually lead him to the Verona box. With James Timmons matching his younger counterpart stride for stride the home side began to panic in defence. Whelan wound up for a shot which was deflected at the last minute past the post.

Timmons may have wondered why he did not find himself in a goalscoring position courtesy of a Whelan pass and he used this invaluable knowledge to create UCD's next opportunity. A through ball sliced the home defence and found Timmons steaming into the area. Peering up through his flowing locks he spotted Tyrone McNelis arriving right on cue. An inch perfect ball found the speedster on the edge of the box and his first time effort sliced just wide of the post. It was all UCD as the half drew to a close.

Verona came back into the game after the break and began to put The Students under more pressure. It became a midfield battle as Timmons and Harte looked to assert their authority and spread the ball wide at every opportunity. Brian O'Reilly was beginning to influence proceedings from his right back office, working well with marc Whelan. When the breakthrough came it came from the UCD wing, but not right.

Eoin Roche was revelling in the space afforded to him as he brought his scintillating form from the previous games into this one. Roche laid the ball back into the path of Paul Curtin, arriving from left back, and he whipped a ball into Verona's corridor of uncertainty. Centre back and keeper were caught out as the unfortunate centre half finished coolly past his own keeper.

UCD looked to press home their advantage with their opponents reeling. Kieran Harte and James Timmons showed incredible fleetness of foot in the middle before combining with Roche again. Roche set up Timmons for a shot and Timmons duly obliged. The strike stung the palms of the keeper and the ball fell to the feet of McNelis. With the goal at his mercy McNelis missed the target and passed up UCD's chance of opening an insurmountable gap.

It was a chance that UCD looked to about to rue as Verona came into the game and looked to push UCD aside. A succession of corners produced last ditch clearances from UCD's scrambling defence. Conor McGroarty and his defence stood firm during the onslaught as McGroarty made two impressive interventions to keep hold of his clean sheet. First he showed an impressive turn of pace to race off his line and leap at the feet of the onrushing striker, then minutes later he showed his impressive athleticism when getting down, Shilton-esque, to divert a powerful header away from his bottom left hand corner.

UCD were well and truly on the ropes and it looked like the knock out punch was on its way. In the middle of Verona's efforts to grab hold of the game Ronan Lynagh popped up with a potentially game changing effort. Spotting the opposing goalkeeper off his line, little Lynagh conjured up all his power to lob the ball goalwards from 30 yards. The keeper could only watch as the ball sailed over his head, it was on a collision course for the goal, but which part? Several seconds passed before the ball crashed off the crossbar and to safety as Lynagh pulled his jersey back over his head, caught mid celebration.

This chance looked to spur UCD on again and the last good chance of the game fell to James Timmons. The veteran UCD midfielder found himself in the box again as the minutes ticked away. Tyrone McNelis smashed a ball across goal but it narrowly avoided the outstretched boot of UCD's midfielder.

The final whistle was blown minutes later and UCD had secured the latest three points to leave them in a good position to challenge the leaders when the league resumes in January.

UCD AFC: McGroarty, O'Reilly, Davey, Dent, Curtin, Marc Whelan, Timmons, Harte, Roche (Campion), McNelis, Michael Whelan (Lynagh)