

Airtricity League Premier Division

SLIGO ROVERS (1) 2

UCD (0) 1

Amond 28, 90+1.

Kilduff 87

The Showgrounds, Sligo, Tuesday 13th July 2010 ko 1945

By Brian de Salvo

Paul Cook wants to add a full time coach to his staff. Far be it from me to keep his chairman's cheque book in his pocket but on this evening's evidence somebody's already doing a good job with this Sligo Rovers team.

Take the enigmatic Joseph Ndo, a former Cameroon international, touched by genius. In a soccer context "Enigmatic" can mean "inconsistent" or even "difficult" but at the Showgrounds he looks the epitome of contentment. He must love strutting his stuff on its wonderful playing surface but rumour has it that he loves playing for his manager even more. From the kick off he's all over the park, orchestrating midfield, turning up as a striker, taking corner kicks - and he plays the full 93 minutes. When he's in the engine room he's beside Richie Ryan who, whisper it softly, is the real powerhouse. When Ryan finally misplaces a pass I have to double check the shirt number to convince myself that he is the offender.

So where is UCD in all this? On the back foot for the majority of the first half, the Students' major achievement is to go in at the interval just one goal in arrears. This is achieved by a combination of missed opportunities from the home side and commendable composure on the part of the visitors. UCD never panic and always insist on playing themselves out of danger.

Sligo press from the first whistle. After only 2 minutes the impressive Doyle has a shot blocked, then come three close shaves and a good save between the 10th and 12th minutes: Russell fires narrowly past a post, Dillon's angled drive just clears the angle of the goal and Ndo's shot is just over. Then Barron narrows the angle perfectly to save Ndo's low shot with his feet. The pattern of the game is reflected in the tally of goal kicks: one for Sligo, twelve for the visitors.

But it takes Sligo 28 minutes to translate this superiority into a goal. John Russell is the sponsor, Eoin Doyle the provider and the trajectory of Pdraig Almond's strike is immaculate, clearing Barron and deflecting into his net from the underside of the bar. Rovers should have had a second four minutes later when Ndo, well placed, wastes Doyle's pass by shooting over. It was denied them just before half time when Russell, sent in by Dillon and Ndo, cracked his shot against the face of the bar. And, in time added on, it takes a fine save from Barron, making his first appearance in a season disrupted by injury, diving to his left to keep out Ndo.

The second half showed a remarkable transformation with UCD seizing the initiative. Creevy, on for the injured Corry at the break, adds steel and Keith Ward, revelling in the opportunity to forage midfield fires in a vicious long drive that makes Brush in the Sligo goal look lively in order to turn it over. A little later Ward, with both Ndo and Russell breathing down his neck, performs a sublime dummy to leave them both flatfooted. But UCD's main penetration again comes from the gangling Wilson on the right flank.

Paul O'Connor has had another good game in very good company but when he is replaced by Stephen Roche the UCD revival continues unabated. Michael Kelly, ostensibly the Students' third choice right back, slots in as if he's been a regular. When Roche sells him short with a pass, Kelly rescues the situation with a great tackle and he makes an important headed clearance for a corner a little later.

Sligo have not let up either and Russell comes close with a near post header from Ndo's corner. And a great run down the right from the African star is only halted by a quality tackle from the impressive Nangle.

The natives were getting restless. Based on their first half performance Rovers would have been well worth the points but with the game finely balanced in the second there was always the chance that UCD would equalise. Sure enough, Kilduff came close in the 84th minute, whacking a shot just wide of Brush's left post. Three minutes later he succeeded when his shot from just inside the box deflected off Laughlan to give Brush no chance. It seemed the perfect climax to a thrilling encounter.

But there was more to come in added time. An exquisite free kick from the right by Ndo a perfectly judged run, leap and header from Amond and Sligo had finally won the points they almost gave away. Another goal conceded from a set play; there will undoubtedly be an inquest at the Bowl. But sometimes you can't legislate for excellence.

SLIGO ROVERS: Richard Brush; Alan Keane, Gavin Peers, Jim Laughlan, Iarflaith Davoren; Eoin Doyle, Richie Ryan, John Russell (Conor O'Grady 77), John Dillon (Gary McCabe 77); Joseph Ndo, Pdraig Amond.

UCD: Ger Barron; Michael Kelly, Evan McMillan, Andy Boyle, Ciaran Nangle; Paul O'Conor (Stephen Roche 67), Paul Corry (Robbie Creevy h/t), Keith Ward; Dwayne Wilson, Ciaran Kilduff, Graham Rusk.

Referee: Tom Connolly