

Sunday 15th November 2009

London F.A. Sunday Intermediate Cup Second Round Match at Hazelwood Sports Ground

EDMONTON ROVERS	6	NACIONAL DE LONDRES	5	After Extra Time
McGovern (1, 26, 61, 117 mins.), Daley (91, 94 mins.)		Dixon (13 mins.), Parkinson (22, 116 mins.), Newell (35, 107 mins.)		H-T: 2-3 F-T: 3-3

**EDMONTON ROVERS LINE-UP (with Marks out of 10):** Darryl JOHNSON (6K) (5½); Paul WOOLSTON (7½); Alan BARNARD (8); Martin LOVEDAY (8); Tony KING (7½); Rob BROWN (8); Danny SMITH (7½); Steve COKELL (7½); Stuart DORWARD (7); Conor MCGOVERN (9½); Terry BROWN (7) Subs.: Daniel DALEY (7½) (On for Dorward 58 mins.); Vernon NXUMALO (7) (On for King 81 mins.); Peter MURPHY (Not Used)

**NACIONAL DE LONDRES LINE-UP (I think ?):** Nuno AFONSO (6K); Jose Luis, Darren EASTMOND, Leon LEE, Rui VIEIRA; Marc ANTONIO, Tyrone PETERS, Andrew NEWELL, Frank DIXON; Daniel BERRY, Nathan PARKINSON Subs.: 'ASWAD' (On for Vieira 48 mins.); Glen BRUCE (On for Antonio 58 mins.); Gavin SHARPE (On for Luis 66 mins); Darren MORGAN (Not Used); Jose VIEIRA (Not Used)

Referee: Peter NAGY

Weather Conditions: Sunny

Attendance: 20

**Report (by Laurence Hughes):** After 24 hours of torrential rain, it looked certain that this game would be called off by Enfield Council (because they might get sued if a puddle formed and a player pulled a muscle trying to kick the ball out of it !?), but amazingly, the groundsman responsible for Hazelwood actually did a Sunday morning pitch inspection (when we were told that would no longer be the case and it would be Fridays only due to cost-cutting) and deemed it playable, much to our surprise. When myself and Tony King arrived just after 9.00 a.m. to do the opening-up/nets job though, the weather was perfect for football and the pitch had drained superbly !

Predictably though, some of our players assumed the game would be called off and were still in bed when I texted them 'Game ON !', while Terry Brown had lost his shinpads and skipper Stuart Dorward had left his boots at work in Canary Wharf. That saw Dorward turn up dead on the scheduled 10.30 a.m. kick-off after going to get them and then getting stuck in roadworks on the A10 on the way back, but as our opponents and some of our other players had also been held up by that and arrived later than they originally expected, Referee Peter Nagy seemed quite happy to kick-off 10 minutes late. Another reason for the late kick-off though was keeper Simon Jackson suffering some sort of shoulder injury from flinging himself about in the mud at the cow-shed end during the warm up, which meant sub keeper Darryl Johnson (who wasn't 100% fit himself due to an ankle injury) replacing him at the last minute, thereby necessitating a change on the team-sheet that we have to complete and hand in to the Referee for London Cup matches.

When the game finally kicked off then, we could have been excused for being a bit disorganised and also a bit cautious with two first-choice players in defender Terry Moore (playing golf) and last season's Player Of The Year Danny Hagan (hamstring injury) both missing, but for the third time this season and the second week in succession we took the lead in the very first minute with Conor McGovern running on to Danny Smith's perfect through ball to finish well past the oncoming keeper.

However, we knew that Dulwich-based Nacional De Londres were going to be far stronger than our First Round opponents Russellers, as they are one of the better sides in the [top Division](#) of the South-West London-based Sportsmans Senior Sunday League and were formerly known as (the strangely-named) Deborah United, who had been one of the top teams in London (and Surrey...they also enter their County Cups) for a number of years. Indeed they turned up for this match with a young, fit, quick starting line-up and a massive entourage of substitutes and coaching staff. With us fielding a starting line-up with an average age of 33 (as usual), it was therefore a fascinating contest of youth against experience, and not surprisingly we had to really concentrate at the back as Nacional's players were clearly very adept at quick one-two's and sharp turns in and around the penalty area. However, Manager Trevor Hughes's experiment of playing a 3-4-2-1 system with Stuart Dorward and Terry Brown both playing in free roles behind central striker Conor McGovern was clearly paying off once again just as it had done against Great Eastern the week before with Nacional's defenders looking totally bemused by it. Indeed we could easily have gone 2-0 up after just 12 minutes when Tony King was clearly brought down for what should have been a penalty but Hungarian? Referee Nagy presumably played a very late advantage as McGovern forced Nacional keeper Afonso into a spectacular tip-over save as the ball ran loose. Typical of us though, we then went and let in a poor goal from a goalkeeping mistake just a minute later as Darryl Johnson's weak punch under pressure saw a Nacional forward equalise with a simple finish from the loose ball and we then knew that we were going to face a real onslaught. That saw a number of our players commit clumsy late challenges because Nacional's players were much quicker with the ball at their feet than the older experienced players we generally play against in Waltham League matches, and we were lucky that only one player (skipper Stuart Dorward) ended up being booked...this actually being a real shock to us as we know he is not that sort of player at all and in fact I cannot remember him even being booked for a foul before in his entire near-350 match Rovers career ! They were probably thinking at that stage that we were just a typical 'Pub Team' (as it says on our Home Page) who still play 1970's-style football, but our clever formation and quality passing movement in the final third gradually started catching them out more and more as the First Half went on. Unfortunately though, Dorward missed a sitter in the 20th minute when he blazed over the bar from 8 yards with nobody near him and then Nacional punished us two minutes later by going into a 2-1 lead with a tap-in from the rebound after a sharp turn and shot from the edge of the area had forced 'D.J.' into a difficult save low down to his right in the muddy cow-shed end goalmouth, but one that he couldn't hold on to. However, Conor McGovern then hit back with his second of the game to make it 2-2 with another good finish in the 26th minute after rounding keeper Afonso from a Dorward pass, but Nacional then went and regained the lead in the 35th minute with a deflected shot which was just a result of sustained pressure rather than us making mistakes defensively. It was our finishing that let us down in the First Half though, as Dorward and Terry Brown both squandered clear-cut chances that should have seen us come off at Half-Time with a 4-3 lead, but with us kicking towards the cow-shed end in the Second Half we knew that we were well capable of scoring again.

Not surprisingly, both sides tightened up at the back to some extent as the Second Half got under way, but we started to get on top and had another obvious penalty decision turned down in the 55th minute when Stuart Dorward was clearly pushed over in the area. We then feared that our attacking impetus might be affected when Dorward had to be substituted in the 58th minute because of pre-planned family commitments at home, but the extra pace and youth of his replacement Daniel Daley (who had missed several matches recently due to work commitments) was eventually to change course of the game. In fact Daley typically nearly scored as soon as he came on but keeper Afonso made a good close-range save to foil him.

The game then started becoming even more end-to-end than it had been already, and after Tony King had dived in heroically to block a goalbound shot in the 61st minute, the ball broke to Danny Smith who played another quality through ball for Conor McGovern to complete his hat-trick with a superbly-drilled low shot into the far bottom corner to make it 3-3.

Although both sides continued to push forward, the rest of the Second Half didn't produce many clear-cut chances despite us bringing on the younger, quicker, sharper, more attack-minded Vernon 'Kizza' Nxumalo on for Tony King, thereby risking not being quite as solid defensively, so the game therefore ended up going into Extra-Time, which suddenly brought back memories of our penalty shoot-out win against South-West Soldiers (another team from the top Division of the Sportsmans League) at Hazelwood a couple of seasons ago. It was Extra-Time where Second Half substitute Daniel Daley was to have a real impact though, firstly after just a minute of the First Period when Nacional keeper Afonso came out of his area and completely missed Conor McGovern's through ball, leaving Daley with a simple tap-in into an empty net to put us 4-3 ahead, although Daley actually didn't know where the ball had gone at first after the keeper's mis-kick and had to rely on shouts from his team-mates to turn around and score what was a really comical goal. However, Daley's second goal three minutes later that put us 5-3 up was pure brilliance with a quality turn and finish from another McGovern pass that will definitely be a Goal Of The Season contender.

After two killer blows like that, it looked as if our opponents would be shell-shocked and just accept defeat, but to their credit they came back and really put us on the rack with Steve Cokell having to make a miraculous clearance off the line just before the turn-around while Paul Woolston, Alan Barnard and Martin Loveday all had to make an increasing number of superb blocks and last-ditch sliding challenges to keep our lead intact. Indeed Nacional's No.8 Andrew Newell was so fast that he made Daley and Kizza (our two quickest players) look like tortoises in comparison, but he was also a quality player, as were two or three others in their line-up who presumably play at Ryman League level on Saturdays (or should be). That saw them pull it back to 5-4 in the second minute of the Second Period, but it was a goal that looked suspiciously offside. However, as so often happens in London Cup matches, the Referee chose to have the Club Linesmen only flagging for throw-ins, something that Paul Woolston told the rest of our players just before the kick-off after being informed of that in a touchline discussion...only Wooly forgot and bellowed out 'Linoooooooooo' at one stage, which was highly amusing.

It was then a case of trying to grimly hang on, but an equaliser did look rather inevitable and Nacional made it 5-5 with just four minutes of Extra-Time remaining when a deep cross was met with a mis-hit volley at the far post that bounced up and over keeper Darryl Johnson.

It therefore looked as if we would either let in a silly goal in the few minutes remaining and lose 6-5 (knowing us) or have to suffer a penalty shoot-out, but then Conor McGovern proved himself to be the real hero and our undisputed Man-Of-The-Match with his 4th goal of the game as he powered in a superb header from Rob Brown's cross just a minute later to give us the 6-5 victory in one of the most dramatic and entertaining Rovers matches I have ever witnessed in 33 years of running the club.

It was certainly a rarity to see our goals being celebrated manically by our players and supporter(s), as normally we have nothing to play for and everything is just a run-of-the-mill mid-table Division One match with us being knocked out of all three Cups in the First Round year after year and not having a settled enough side to challenge for a League Title. It was also ironic that both sides had actually been having trouble scoring goals so far this season and on current form a 0-0, a 1-1 or a low-scoring narrow victory to one side or the other could have been predicted before the match, but it definitely seemed to be more a case of quality attacking play by both sides in this match rather than defensive mistakes being responsible for such a high scoreline.

It was brilliant to watch, and Referee Assessor Russell Howes (a Referee from our League) certainly enjoyed it as he had plenty to write down on the touchline. It was a cracking match and it's why I will always prefer watching Sunday League football to the divers, cheaters and moaners on show in the Premiership, even if the rest of our club members don't.



## TREVOR HUGHES'S MANAGER'S REPORT

We were drawn at home to Nacional de Londres from the very strong Sportsmans League from South London in the London Cup and they appeared to be well organised as they arrived on time with a strong looking squad. On the other hand we had several players arriving late including our captain, Stuart Dorward, and our goalkeeper, Simon Jackson, injured his shoulder whilst warming up. Fortunately, the delay caused waiting for substitute keeper, Darryl Johnson, to get ready allowed Stuart to make the kick off and then we took the lead after just one minute when Conor McGovern ran onto Danny Smith's through ball to slide the ball past the keeper. Despite the early goal Nacional

clearly had some excellent players and started at a fast pace. However, we could have doubled the lead after 12 minutes when Tony King appeared to be fouled in the area and the keeper made a great save from Conor's shot as the referee played on. Just a minute later Nacional equalised from a loose ball after Darryl's attempted punch failed to clear his area. Stuart Dorward missed a good chance to put us back in the lead before we fell behind when a long shot bobbed in front of Darryl and he fumbled it into the path of the forward for a tap in. It was now our turn to equalise after another excellent finish by Conor from Stuart's pass. We were unlucky to go behind again with a deflected shot from the edge of the area in the 35<sup>th</sup> minute and bad misses by Terry Brown and Stuart meant that we trailed 3-2 at half time. Early in the second half we had another penalty appeal turned down when Stuart appeared to be tripped from behind and then Stuart had to be substituted as he had to leave. Fortunately, we had a strong bench and Daniel Daley was an ideal replacement. In fact, he was only denied from scoring with his first touch by a fine save and his pace was to trouble their back four for the rest of the game. We got a deserved equaliser in the 61<sup>st</sup> minute as Conor completed his hat trick following a superb block by Tony King and an excellent long pass from Danny Smith. We looked the more likely side to win it at this stage but the game went into extra time. It was our turn for some good luck as Conor's through ball was air kicked by the keeper leaving Daley with an open goal once he realised that the keeper had missed the ball. The McGovern - Daley partnership combined again three minutes later with a brilliant turn and finish by Daley appearing to seal the win. All credit to our opponents as they did not give up and kept attacking. Steve Cokell produced a superb clearance off the line before Nacional pulled a goal back with our defence appealing for offside. The clock was ticking away but with four minutes left Nacional made it 5-5 after more pressure. Penalties were looming but man of the match Conor McGovern then produced a great header from Rob Brown's cross for a remarkable 6-5 win.