

2008 Round 16 - Seniors vs Warragul Utd

Last Updated Tuesday, 22 July 2008

Score: 3 - 0

Goals: Johnson 2, Bucedí

Match report by Joaquin Rodriguez San Pedro

After the painful defeat against Nunawading, Monash Uni travelled to distant Warragul with only one thing in mind: victory. Both teams were compromised in the struggle to avoid relegation and the winner of this decisive match would emerge as the favourite to stay in Provisional Division One.

When we arrived in Warragul, the reserves were down 1 - nil and struggling to find their rhythm in a pitch that resembled a pigsty after a monsoon. However, just before the break, a swift move down the right flank found Miles "Rastaman" Rodrigues inside the box and he made no mistake when he fired past the despairing keeper. Jah be with you, brother.

Right when the seniors were about to go to the dressing room to get changed, Roy "Jackie" Chan scored another one of his classic crackers. The ball was partly cleared inside the box and, just like Captain Tsubasa, Roy rose over the helpless defenders to power an exquisite overhead kick to the back of the net. Every soul on the pitch and the stands gasped as he floated in mid-air to elevate soccer to the state of an art.

Back in the dressing room, we were receiving our instructions by our new coach, Simon "the Merry Prankster" Oliver and getting ready for the all-important game ahead. It had been a few eventful

weeks at the club with the destitution of our former coach and the presentation of Simon. He has introduced a new style of training and some tactical changes in our side to infuse us with a new style of play.

When we finally jumped on the pitch we decided that we shouldn't be jumping too much or we would end up knee deep in the mud. The pitch was muddy, heavy, long and wide - just the kind of pitch that would bring tears of joy out of a Scotsman. It didn't suit our game but we had gone there to win and we weren't going to sway in our determination.

From the first minute of the game it seemed that we were in control. Very early on we started creating chances and limited their attacks to erratic long balls. In reality, to say that we constrained their attacking flair is a bit of an overstatement; the truth is closer to the fact that playing the long ball was their only tactic. We, on the contrary, were playing the ball on the ground in the middle of the park, running it on the wings and passing it to our forwards, Johnny "Viduka" Vichetti, and Richard "Roadrunner" Nation.

In all fairness to Warragul, their tactics did add another aspect to their game. This was mainly playing rough and kicking the living bejesus out of us. Nick "The Kid" Burriss and I received a considerable amount of personal attention on the wings, I guess the nice fellows only wanted to explain how footie is normally played in the country.

The referee didn't control the game but we paid no mind to their friendliness and, after creating a series of good opportunities, we finally reaped our reward. Nick broke in from the right and crossed the ball inside the box for Liam "Herald Sun Star" Johnson to place it near the right post. We were up one - nil but we weren't going to leave it at that. Given our defensive record thus far this season, we wanted to secure the win. A few minutes after the restart, a combination between me and Johnny "VB" gave us the advantage on the right wing. Richard met my cross but his header was slightly scuffed; however, Liam was there again to poach the goal and put us 2 - nil up.

When half-time came, we were winning with authority and feeling confident to take the three points home. Our most important objective after the break was to remain focused, many an occasion during our season we have squandered our lead and given the opposition the chance to fight back. This meant we had to take control of the game again and prevent them from pouring forward and, if possible, we had to score another goal that would effectively seal the win.

The second half was similar to the first in that we always seemed to lead the dance; however, tiredness started affecting our game so they had a few more chances to play their long balls. In any case,

our defence stood firm and their chances were limited. We continued to play our game, Hector "Weón" Nuñez dictating the play in midfield alongside Chris "MVP" Vinecombe and Liam whilst Greg "All-rounder" Costaras marshalled our defence alongside Luke "Skywalker" Davis and the incombustible Justin "Gladiator" Beck. On the flanks, Nick and I combined with Richie and Johnny to give our team the space needed to create scoring opportunities.

Halfway through the second half, Johnny fought for a ball against the goalkeeper and nailed his first goal of the season for the senior side. It was a fitting reward for a man who's got the fiercest strike in the squad and the broadest smile. This last goal put the game beyond doubt but we could've had a few more, especially when the referee didn't give us two rather clear penalties, one against Johnny and another one against your humble servant. Warragul did hit the post once but we held tightly in order to achieve our first clean sheet of the season thanks to a brilliant display by the defenders and our goalkeeper Rodrigo "René" Becerra.

There were a few incidents towards the end of the match, one of them rather painful for me. The first one involved a misunderstanding between Chris and Rod. A long ball down the left saw our keeper running after one of their strikers and pushing him towards the sideline. When Rod run back towards goal the striker foolishly crossed the ball to our defenders and Chris was there to calmly head the ball back to Rod. However, "Rene" Rod didn't expect this last development and he slipped as he fumbled the ball towards our goal. Luckily for us, the ball limply hit the post and went out for a corner.

The other incident involved me, Joaquin "ex-Rattail" Rodriguez San Pedro, and two Warragul players. In the first one, I plead guilty to the crime of teasing. I didn't do so on purpose but I probably deserved the kick anyway for pushing it too far. I picked up the ball on the right wing and dribbled my marker, only to pass the ball between his legs when he came back for me, and I even tricked him again when I cut the ball back with my heel on a third and final occasion. Obviously this time he decided that he had had enough of it and shoved me from the ground in a most spectacular fashion. As usual, the offender escaped with nothing but a yellow card and I was admonished by the referee that one more protest would see me sent off. The ways of the men in black are ineffable...

On the second occasion my punishment went beyond colourful cards brandished by a short-sighted midget. Just before the game was finished, Warragul had a corner kick. The resulting cross was cleared and the ball fell on the edge of the box where I was performing my defensive duties. It was a high ball and I kicked it towards who knows where, but whilst I was still in the air, a Warragul player decided his studs would look good on my thigh. Needless to say, I digress. He was as late as a Connex train on a Sunday night and with as much good intention as Chopper after hearing a joke about earwax. As a result, I couldn't walk on Sunday and, as I write this match report, my leg still hurts and my gait has a considerable limp. My dear opponent, however, wasn't even cautioned by the referee and is probably enjoying the delights of bipedal walking. I can only hope that his karma will suffer the consequences of his action.

We won a crucial game of our season that has put us in a good position to avoid the threat of relegation. We still have a lot of important games ahead of us but we have played most of the difficult teams already and we still have a game in hand. Hopefully the changes our new coach is implementing will result in victories that will place Monash Uni in a safe position in the ladder.

In the meantime, judging by Liam's goal profligacy maybe a few of us should consider watching Big Brother...