

18 Centenary Shield: Rep. of Ireland 2-3 England

Monday 02 May 2011



England Under 18 Schools' Squad 2011

Played at Shamrock Rovers FC – 28th April 2011

Because neither team could win the Centenary Shield this season, it is already in the shared hands of Northern Ireland and Scotland, the prospect of the game being live on Sky was not an exciting one, but thankfully even with nothing to play for, both teams contributed to a thrilling encounter.

The Talaght Stadium is only two years old and routinely filled with 6000 Irish Rovers fans, and because of summer football the pitch was in almost pristine condition, and the view out to the Dublin Hills as the sun went down was startling. Sadly only about 1000 came to witness this international.

For England, Lee Close from Hertfordshire was brought in as a right back replacement for Tom Boakye, and Lee went straight into the team and was soon making one wonder why he never made the starting squad. Early links down the right with Close, Connor Thompson and Fabio Goncalves De Abreu released Fabio who shot past the right hand post after 12 minutes. Then after 15 minutes a Josh White long throw was headed on by Jordan Ayris to Thompson, 12 yards out, but his powerful volley was straight at the Irish keeper. This was immediately followed by one of Thompson's many mazy dribbles to the by line, but his cross was scrambled away.

It was 20 minutes before the Irish looked dangerous when after a dubious free kick awarded near the right touchline was struck firmly across and met by John Mountney, but his firm header just skimmed the bar. And then after 27 minutes the classic defensive tangle happened. A long clearance from the Irish half saw Jamie Summers following the ball back towards his

goal and keeper Ed Baldy running out to meet it. They met each other but not the ball, which continued in stately indifference towards the empty net finally to be tapped in by Irish No 10, Chris Lyons, who probably was the best player on view in this game.

Just when it was looking like England would be going in at half time 1-0 down, Lee Glover sent Ayrís away down the left with a fine ball inside the full back. Long striding Ayrís was not to be caught and from the by line he turned back a fine ball onto the foot of Fabio who couldn't miss from 6 yards out. 1-1 at the break was a much fairer reflection of the action.

Jack Wood replaced Jordan Ayrís at half time and Tom Hurley replaced Jonny Evans in midfield and it was not long before these were making a real impact on the game. In the 50th minute Fabio won the ball around the half way line, beat one man then sent Woody away to be 1 on 1 against the keeper. Retaining his cool he beat the keeper to the left, but then running out of space he had to pull back again before he calmly slotted home to give England the lead. It is not like the Irish to lie down and accept defeat and they came storming back with several balls into the box, mostly calmly dealt with by Ed Baldy in goal, but then only 11 minutes into the half John Mountney again found space in midfield but at least 30 yards out. Undeterred by the distance he touched the ball onto his left foot and lashed an unstoppable shot into the top corner – Ed Baldy could only watch and marvel at what must be the goal of the Centenary Shield this season. 2-2.

The game then became very much end to end stuff and the tricky Hurley fed Fabio and Wood balls inside the full backs and from one chase Wood turned the ball back to Alex Meaney, who took one touch to his right and smashed the ball towards the left hand corner only for the diving Irish keeper to push it past the post. Baldy was called to a similar feat at the other end from a shot by Irish no. 10, Lyons, who was replaced in the 70th minute.

Fabio was then floored as he entered the box from the in what TV was able to show was a certain penalty, but without the benefit of video replay the referee saw no contact and the game continued. This made no difference, however, as in the 80th minute clever play between Fabio, Wood and Hurley opened up the Irish back 4 and with another cunning pass Hurley sent Fabio away to slot home calmly as the keeper advanced. 3-2.

The Irish responded again but this time Mountney's long range effort whizzed by the post and in the dying minutes a header from Billy Lane thankfully came back off the post.

With 6 points recorded England were just two points behind the trophy winners and rue the poor performances and some bad luck against Northern Ireland and Scotland. As usual the English party were regally welcomed by the Irish, who for this game had Don Givens along to watch the match and present the Irish caps at the post match function. Lee Close received his cap from our chairman, Mike Coyne, at the same event.

John Read said after the game that “Once again a squad of U-18 international players has proved to be an absolute delight to work with – all fine ambassadors for their country”.

Coach Andy Williams said “I am delighted that things came together in the end and disappointed that we let opportunities in previous matches slip away”

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