

England v ROI Centenary Shield Action

Monday 29 April 2013

ENGLAND SFA U18 2 REPUBLIC of IRELAND SFA U18 2

Played at Cork City FC 26th April 2013



Turner's Cross Stadium

It had been a balmy spring day and the warm sun convinced many that they were in a Caribbean paradise rather than by the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. That was until 20 minutes before kick-off, when the skies blackened and the icy rain whipped across the Cork City Stadium, stealing the voices of those endeavoring to sing their national anthems and creating a flutter in the fair play flag held by shivering primary school children desperate to hold it still. The Centenary Shield had already been presented to Northern Ireland after their victory against Wales and while there was no trophy at stake for either team in this game both set about the job of restoring their pride. Despite the testing conditions they produced the most memorable game of this year's Centenary Shield, albeit a little late for two countries who at last showed some real potential and ability. Connor McCormack was made captain for England; a quiet young man who has been England's most consistent performer all season in whatever position he has been asked to play. On this evening he led the side by inspiration; barely put a foot wrong himself, and was always on hand to cover for others errors.

The early exchanges were all Ireland's with Gavin Boyne and the tricky Kynan Rocks putting England on the back foot, but they were forced to shoot from distance and didn't hit the target. Then after 11 minutes England broke forward and Shaquille Hippolyte-Patrick showed his pace and strength as he burst past two defenders, his shot could only be parried by the outstanding Irish 'keeper, Sean Patton, and Nick Haughton's follow up shot was blocked by an Irish centre-back. The English intention to play fast and direct was evident and Shaquille was about to have his best game of the season. This match was nothing if not open and Tom Gowans the England

custodian was not to be out-done by his Irish counterpart as he made a splendid one handed save from Boyne after he broke through the England defence. It was all being set up now for two really attack minded teams and two in-form, bloody minded, 'keepers determined to stop everything that came their way. Michael Smith had an attempt foiled by Patton, while at the other end Gowans always had safe hands at corners and crosses.

The game then took an odd twist after 28 minutes. Rocks went on a typical mazy dribble down the right then started along the by line only to be met by a slide tackle from Gani Nuredini. To all except the referee it looked the perfect challenge and should have been a corner (many in the stand were aghast), but a penalty was awarded and Jack Doherty stepped up to fire it home off the right hand post. 0-1. Sadly a comment from Gani also resulted in him being booked.

Only 3 minutes later Gani was able to make up for the penalty in the best way possible. Playing as a right footer at left back he crossed the half way line, pulled the ball back onto his favoured foot and struck a peach of a cross deep into the Irish box. Patton for once was in two minds and Luke Donaldson was able to rise unchallenged and head into the bottom corner from 12 yards out. 1-1.

England might have gone into the break ahead when, in the 41stminute, Shaquille outpaced the Irish again and ought to have scored, but Patton was outstanding once more, this time using his legs to block a fierce attempt and send the ball for a corner. This was proving to be a very evenly balanced game.



Kieran Morris and Tom Gowans look on as Ireland attack

Curtis Gaylor and Lewis Binns came on at the start of the second half for Donaldson and Nuredini. There was no letup in the excitement of the action. Immediately from the off Rhys Turner raced free and forced yet another save from Patton, and then at the other end a long

speculative cross found Rocks alone 10 yards out and his first time shot for once beat Gowans but thankfully the ball nestled safely in the side netting.

Shaquille, Haughton and Turner were proving a real threat to the Irish but were unable to convert chances into goals; several corners were won but the Irish coped well with crosses. Relying on breaks the Irish were never more dangerous than when Rocks escaped the white defence and from one of these moments after 69 minutes he got to the top of the box, pulled the ball onto his favoured left foot and hit a screamer which thankfully pinged off the top of the cross-bar. In reply McCormack struck an inch perfect ball to Shaquille on the half way line, with instant control he raced away and pushed a perfectly weighted pass between two defenders for the advancing Turner who this time finished with aplomb and made no mistake in hitting the bottom corner of the net. 74 minutes and England 2-1 ahead.

The Irish were not finished yet and within two minutes had won a corner on the left. Centre back Fitzgerald rose like a swan at the back post and headed strongly down wards. The ball was going well past the post but an English defender chose to keep it in play and even roll the ball to an Irish forward. With the crowd stunned and open mouthed, the Irish forward blasted the ball goalwards only to be thwarted by a fantastic one handed reaction save by Tom Gowans. The Irish finally got their reward from yet another corner in the 81st minute. Fitzgerald rose again at the back post; his header was down and bounced about in the box. The only one to react positively was Alex Byrne who dived in to head home a deserved equalizer. 2-2. Both sides really went all out for the win and it was end to end stuff. Gowans saved to his left, then to his right, Patton was blocking everything England threw at him. Then in the 86th minutes a super chance fell to late substitute Jack Odam. He burst through onto a long bouncing ball and aimed to head over the advancing keeper into the empty net beyond. Patton just got a fingertip on it and slowed the ball down, but this drove the ball wider and when Odam reached it he was only able to hit the side netting and the chance was wasted. Patton had to be substituted right on full time after a clash with Binns, but in the 5 minutes of overtime England were unable to seriously worry the new 'keeper, and the game finished all square. For both sides this was their best performance of the season; very entertaining, nip and tuck throughout the game but particularly in the second half where both goalkeepers and centre backs McCormack for England and Byrne for Ireland, were outstanding. As one of the management team commented "it was like watching a Rocky film with two teams slugging it out to the finish".

Cork City was an excellent venue for the game and the Irish Schools FA, supported by the FAI, provided an outstanding hotel and training facilities, and were delightful hosts for this international match.



Action from the game

Images kindly supplied by Tom Russell of anoisphotography

