

Wales SFA U18 1 England SFA U18 2

Monday 17 March 2014

Played at Wrexham FC, 14th March 2014.

It was a delight to be invited to play at the Glyndwr University Racecourse Stadium, home of Wrexham FC, an excellent facility far above the club's present status. We had a typically warm welcome and the Welsh SFA Chairman and club officials could not have been more helpful. The large, flat pitch was in very good condition and we were looking forward to a fine demonstration of schools football and an opportunity for England to repay Wales for the hammering they gave England in Lincoln last season. Last year England were two down in five minutes and were so again as both England centre backs had to leave the pitch to remove barely visible undershorts which were the wrong colour – ridiculous - but an event which proved to be almost the most exciting moment of the first half. This was England's first match in the Centenary Shield this year, Wales already having been defeated 3-0 by the Republic of Ireland.



Action from the game

In this fixture we always expect a fiery and competitive start but not so this evening – both teams began like two fencers who had forgotten their swords, and they continued with barely a contact made for most of the first half. Indeed the loudest cheers were reserved for the strange bird sounds which intermittently came over the tannoy system, probably to keep pigeons off the pitch. After 5 minutes Oliver Brown Hill made the first attempt on goal with a shot from 25 yards out but it was easily blocked, and then Rakim Newton introduced his undoubted skill to the game by mazily dribbling past several England defenders across the top of the box before he was clearly brought down, but thankfully the referee saw no foul and England came away

with the ball. The slow tempo of the game seemed to be encouraging mistakes and after 8 minutes Brown Hill needlessly took on Lewis Jones in the bottom right corner of the pitch only to present the ball to Jones who sped towards goal and shot across keeper Kieron O'Hara. For the first time and not the last in the evening O'Hara was to dive and push the ball to safety past the post.

After 15 minutes O'Hara was called on again after Wales' best player, winger Kostya Georgievski, hit a super cross to the far post where Zyaac Edwards met it full on, but O'Hara spectacularly saved the day once more. In a lacklustre first half England finally won two corners, the first of which was met by Danny Haile at the back post and had to be scrambled clear, the second handed Wales back possession with a needless foul. The rest of the half saw long lazy balls pumped forward for Ryan Charnley to chase but with little effect, only Welsh forward Georgievski showed ambition but his several well struck crosses from the left were very capably collected by the very safe hands of O'Hara. The half ended predictably 0-0, nothing so far for the Scottish 'spies' in the stand to worry about.

England started the second half with much more pace and enthusiasm for the battle ahead and the slumbering crowd were stunned when Daniel Bruce in the first minute of the half raced down the right, crossed to Brady Hickey 10 yards out whose shot was blocked when he ought to have scored. Then in the 53rd minute manager Buckingham deployed his secret weapon – Andrew White came on for Charnley and Mark Onyemah moved from left back to centre forward. Mark's physical presence around the box made sure the Welsh centre backs were very uncomfortable for the rest of the game. With the centre backs looking after Onyemah more space was afforded to Bruce and it was he who in the 60th minute won the ball on half way, travelled at pace towards the top right of the box and having drawn the left back was able to slip a perfect ball for Michael Hampson to run on to and blast past the goalkeeper into the top of the net. 1 – 0.

The very next attack was Wales and the ever troublesome Georgievski dribbled into the box and drew a very soft foul from Haile for a fortunate penalty. Aron Davies stepped up and made no mistake with a fierce penalty shot into the roof of the net. 1-1 after 63 minutes.

Continuing this spell of frenetic activity, England won a corner in the 65th minute. After some indecision Bruce went over to the left to take it right footed. A superb cross to the far post saw Danny Haile rise and head majestically into the top of the net, more than making up for the penalty of a few minutes before. 2-1 to England.

Wales fought hard to get back into the game and almost made it when, after a long back pass, goalkeeper O'Hara took too many touches and fluffed his clearance. Jamie Jones picked it up and hammered it towards the right corner of the goal but O'Hara once again had recovered his position and dived to his right and with strong hands pushed the shot safely wide. As the game went into 3 minutes of over-time it looked more like England would score than Wales.

Onyemah burst past his markers, into the box and blasted a shot goal wards only to see the Wales custodian palm it away to safety. All in all a satisfactory, if slow, start to this campaign for England with Haile and Adam Curry looking very solid at centre back, O'Hara outstanding in goal, and Danny Bruce affecting the play in all sorts of areas around the pitch.

For more images of the game please visit [RWT photography](#) here. Further match reports and the current Centenary Shield can be found [here](#).

