

Blues Lose Vital Ground After Harps Defeat



Willy John Kiely leads this counter attack for the Blues against Finn Harps.

Finn Harps - 1
Waterford United - 0

Ruairi Keating scored the only goal of this game after 53 minutes in Finn Park, Ballybofey on Friday night last.

Due to illness, injury and suspension the Blues had to plan without players such as Vinny Sullivan, Gary Delaney, Paul Quilty and Gavin O'Donovan.

Three outfield players were named as substitutes, Thomas Whitty, Kynan Rocks and Mark Walsh, an under 21 player.

Goalkeeper Matthew Connor was the other substitute. The result leaves Waterford in fourth position on the league table, nine points behind the leaders Shelbourne who defeated Wexford Youths three nil.

Galway FC, who will visit the RSC this Friday, lost three nil to Longford Town and the midlanders have now moved into second place.

Galway have slipped to third, four points ahead of Waterford who now have a total of 20 points from the 15 games played.

Ruairi Keating took advantage of a defensive mix-up to win the points for Harps who have moved on to a total of 18 points.

With the teams having shared a 0-0 draw on opening night in March, it was an evening that, from early on, looked like being decided by either a touch of magic or a mistake. Unfortunately for Tommy Griffin's side, who hadn't lost to Harps in their nine previous outings, it was the latter.

Patrick Barrett's attempted clearance hit the back of Brian Nolan, who was completely unaware, and the ball broke perfectly into Keating's path to slide the ball past Kevin Burns for the only goal of the match.

Harps, during a pedestrian start, had two sights of goal only to see the chances evaporate due to poor touches in the penalty area. Firstly, on nine minutes, Keating managed to get clear but showed too much of the ball to Patrick Fitzgerald, who won the sliding tackle cleanly.

Then, three minutes later, Gareth Harkin was set free by Michael Funston but once again, a slight miscontrol was enough for Waterford to survive – this time when Burns, the visiting goalkeeper, got out to smother.

On 23 minutes, Waterford tested Conor Winn in the Harps goal with a dipping half-volley from Conor Whittle. The effort, though, was easily saved by the hosts' goalkeeper as was a second, more adventurous effort from the right-back on the half-hour.

Similarly, at the other end inbetween those, Kevin McHugh brought a comfortable gather from Burns. Harps had shaded the first half but the margins were water-thin.

Jack Doherty, the Waterford winger, fizzed a shot over Winn's crossbar at the start of the second half before Keating's goal finally created some daylight between the teams.

The goal galvanised the contest to a degree, with Harps going close to a second when Funston was denied by the feet of Byrne, who was moving the wrong way but readjusted superbly to block with his feet, after a McHugh centre. Burns gathered Pat McCann's follow-up with less fuss.

McHugh then went close to a second for Harps as he got on the end of a well-worked move that saw Josh Mailey clip the ball into the box and Keating's lay-off was caressed just side of the far post by the Harps skipper.

O'Connor, on 73 minutes, came close to a leveller when his early shot from a bobbling ball 25 yards from goal, which might've caught Winn by surprise, was just tipped around the post by the Harps netminder as he scampered back.

As Waterford pressed, they were understandably leaving holes behind them and Keating could've made the points safe only to drive over the crossbar from a position of promise.

Packie Mailey, with a free header, had an even better opportunity to make it 2-0, only to miss the target from Gareth Harkin's corner with 11 minutes left to play. Harps, if guilty of anything, were occasionally taking the wrong options when on the break.

Waterford showed little from an attacking force during the game and their four efforts on goal came from outside the penalty area.

If there was to be a second goal it was Harps who were closer to getting it and and goalscorer Ruari Keating went close late on with a curling effort but Kevin Burns tipped the ball over his crossbar.

FINN HARPS: □Conor Winn; Caoimhinn Bonner, Keith Cowan, Packie Mailey, Ciaran Coll; Pat McCann (Thomas Bonnar 81), Josh Mailey, Gareth Harkin, Michael Funston; Kevin McHugh (Sean McCarron 87), Ruairí Keating.

WATERFORD UNITED: □ Keith Burns; Conor Whittle, Patrick Fitzgerald, Patrick Barrett, Shaun Corcoran (Thomas Whitty 66); Jack Doherty, Thomas Croke (Kynan Rocks 66), Kevin O'Connor, Philip Drohan (Mark Walsh 90); Brian Nolan, Willie John Kiely.

REFEREE: □ Rhona Daly.