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At last, Westy top dog in North

By Allyn Hamonet
SOCCER WRITER



Bluebells clinch grand final in extra time

WEST Wallsend yesterday clinched its first ever grand final win in the Northern NSW Soccer Federation first division when it beat Belmont Swansea 2-1 in extra time at Macquarie Field, Speers Point.

The victory is West Wallsend's only triumph since the NNSWSF was formed in 1956.

But for the legion of Bluebells' supporters who watched the match it must have seemed even longer than 29 years between Westy's winning goal 10 minutes from the end of the match and the referee's full-time whistle.

More than one figure garbed in Westy's blue and white approached unofficial timekeepers, yours truly included, to find out how long their gladiators had to last before carrying off the crown that has proved the most elusive of their club's 89-year existence.

To listen to the West Wallsend players, their supporters had nothing to fear. The game was in their keeping from the moment in the fifth minute of the second period of extra time when Belmont Swansea midfielder Mark Walmsley pushed a ball into his own net to put Westy 2-1 ahead for the first time in the match.

Walmsley, one eye blood red from an incident at a Newcastle nightclub a week earlier, arrived late on the scene after a header from Westy's midfielder, Paul Gillogly, hit the Belmont Swansea bar and fell free inside the area.

Of all the desperate boots flung at the ball, it was Walmsley's that

connected to ironically put Westy ahead.

Understandably, West Wallsend shut down for the rest of the match but its resolve to keep the grand final winner's trophy was by no means unbreakable.

Belmont Swansea proved the popular champion by continually pushing forward against the Bluebells although it was not surprising to see the West Wallsend players finishing so strongly.

Almost from the start of the season coach Keith Harris had estimated his players' level of fitness as the best of the federation teams, and it certainly paid dividends in the second half of extra time yesterday.

According to one Westy player, it was a foregone conclusion when extra time came around.

But Belmont Swansea was left wondering what might have been had a 30m shot from Davie Butchart, 'the only one I've hit right all year', not been ruled ineligible when it cannoned into the back of the net in the 63rd minute.

Butchart's 'goal' was disallowed because of players allegedly offside, denying the Belswans the chance of going 2-0 ahead and seal the result that would have given them the

pre-season, premiership, grand final hat-trick.

Yet coach Greg Smith remained impassive throughout the incidents and after the match paid handsome compliments to West Wallsend.

'They were probably the only team that was going to beat us and they deserved their win today,' he said.

For the first time this season Westy coach Keith Harris had plenty to say during a half-time break when his players went in 0-1 to a 23rd-minute penalty converted by Davie Butchart.

The penalty was awarded by referee Mr Jim Reeves for an incident behind play in which, according to Mr Reeves, Westy captain Mark Twohill had kicked a Belmont Swansea player.

Butchart buried the kick to put Belswans on the road to what most thought would be the third victory over Westy this season.

But Westy weathered the Belswans' storm and, through replacement Brett Baldwin, equalised in the 70th minute.

Baldwin has been missing for the past six weeks with a knee ligament complaint and made a late re-entry to figure in Westy's grand final, his third in a blue and white shirt since moving from Weston.



Referee Jim Reeves show West Wallsend captain Mark Twohill, centre, the yellow card after an early incident yesterday. Belmont Swansea scored from the penalty.

He was at the end of a long cross from the right to nod home Westy's equaliser, a goal that spurred the Westy players on to greater efforts.

The stimulation helped the team to engineer the winning goal in extra time.

In a crowded and boisterous Westy dressing room after the match midfielder Gillogly, the team's hardest worker, explained how close the result had been and what the second goal had meant.

'I was so glad to see that ball in the net,' he said. 'I really thought once it went to extra time that we'd have to go to penalties.'

Harris implored journalists to 'give the team the credit' and refused to take any of the plaudits so freely handed around after the match.

But perhaps the greatest influence on the Westy result was an unassuming, retired gentleman who watched the game from the north-eastern corner of the ground encircled by West Wallsend fans.

'It was no coincidence that the players ran across to that corner after the game,' Harris said. 'They all wanted to show Dave (Turnbull) the trophy.'

Turnbull, 78, has been very much a part of West Wallsend's premiership challenges for the past four years.

Both teams were missing regular players at the end of the match. David Wilson (West Wallsend) and Neil Harrower were both taken to Belmont Hospital after leaving the field in extra time with head gashes that followed an aerial clash between the two.

Harrower and Wilson were both concussed. Harrower needed six stitches to a cut in the back of his head and Wilson six above his eye.

Midfielder Gillogly in harassing mood



Pictures by SANDY McINTOSH

West Wallsend midfielder Paul Gillogly, left, challenges Belmont Swansea striker Neil Harrower.