

HENDON V CHARLTON ATHLETIC U21 (by David Ballheimer)

Hendon (0) 1 Charlton Athletic U21 (2) 2

Mert Apat 89 Pat Casey 4, 38

Charlton Athletic U21s retained the London Football Association Senior Challenge Cup with a 2–1 victory over Hendon, who extended their two Cup records, a 10th defeat in their 16th Final.

This Final was decided by man of the match, Pat Casey, the prolific young Addicks striker, who notched goal numbers 37 and 38 in the first half.

The key factor of the game, however, was the Charlton attitude: in last season's final, they raced into a 3–0 lead and went for more, were clawed back by Haringey Borough before eventually winning 4–3 after extra-time. After going 2–0 up after 38 minutes, the Addicks reined in their attacking instincts and invited the sky-blue-clad Greens to find a way past them, something they achieved only the once, and that in the last minute of normal time.

Hendon had the first chance of the game. Barely a minute had elapsed when a deep cross from Kai Brosnan was met by Samuel Adenola, but he had almost no angle for his header and the ball ended up in the side-netting.

In the fourth minute, Charlton attacked down the right where Lucas Perry made a good tackle on Tolu Ladapo. The ball, however, went straight to Casey, who pounced with a first-time shot. Hafez El-Droubi moved a half step to his right, only for a deflection to send the ball into the opposite corner of the net.

Two minutes later, from a Charlton corner, the ball came to Casey, who swept the ball past El-Droubi, but Dave Diedhiou was perfectly positioned, a yard from the goal-line, to clear the ball clear. The Addicks inventiveness at set-pieces, what few they had, caused the Hendon defence every time.

For the next half-hour there was little of note to record at either end. Hendon tried to use the width of Brosnan and former Charlton trainee Kurtis Cumberbatch to stretch the Addicks defence, but it didn't really work because Harmony Okwumo and Toby Bower stuck doggedly to their tasks of stopping the balls coming into the danger area.

Greens manager Lee Allinson took advantage of an injury stoppage to change his formation, but it didn't have the desired effect. Eight minutes before half-time, however, from a free-kick 25 yards out, Cumberbatch curled a free-kick goalwards, but Harry Molyneaux made a fingertip save.

A minute later, Ryan Huke was five yards offside when a ball was played forward, but he remained in a passive position as Casey, onside, burst past Dan Matsuzaka, took the ball, unchallenged, towards El-Droubi and fired into the net with all the confidence of a player who can't stop scoring goals.

In the last minute of the half, Hendon finally got a clear chance. A left-wing cross for once eluded Keenan Gough and Seydil Touré and Adenola had a free header. He went for power, rather than placement, allowing Molyneaux to make an excellent save.

To all intents and purposes, the second half was pretty much a non-event. In the first seven minutes, Hendon forced five corners and a couple of free-kicks around the Addicks box but, inside the penalty area, rarely had a sniff of chance. Naz Bakrin and Jeremy Santos worked tirelessly in midfield, denying Billy Leonard the chance to make dangerous runs forward.

There was one real scramble, after 53 minutes, but a red shirt was there to clear the danger. In the 70th minute a right-wing cross needed only an accurate touch but Adenola and Diedhiou couldn't apply it, the ball squirting wide of the far post.

At the other end, the imminent danger from Casey, with Huke and Kai Enslin willing co-attackers, the Greens had to be careful not to leave too many men upfield. Blaise Riley-Snow made one vital intervention and a couple of offside flags meant the lead was not extended to an unreachable margin. One Hendon goal, after all, would set up a grandstand finish.

Shaun Lucien and Simeon Olarerin replaced Leonard and Perry for Hendon, while Charlton managed the game and the clock expertly. Their first three changes saw Euan Williams, Harvey Kedwell and Matt Dench take over from Ladapo, Santos and Bower, respectively.

With 15 minutes to go, Casey was caught offside, lobbed the ball over El-Droubi after the whistle, and became the first player to receive a yellow card.

What drama there was came in the last few minutes of normal time and it was unusual to say the least. Mert Apat was intended to be the last Hendon change, but he wasn't allowed onto the pitch because his leggings were black and not his team's sky-blue shorts.

Lee Allinson's protestations earned him a yellow card as Apat tried to lower his shorts and raise his socks so the offending underwear was invisible. Removing the leggings would have required time-consuming undressing and redressing in the changing room, all – given the game circumstances – with time of the absolute essence. The Laws of the Game were correctly applied, but it was farcical, and it took almost four minutes for play to resume, Matsuzaka going off for Apat's introduction.

Within 30 seconds, Apat, normally a centre-half, was in the middle of the Charlton six-yard box, tapping home a loose ball to make it 2–1. Before play could resume, the board showed five minutes of additional time, but almost eight were played during which Charlton had their first shot of the second half, which went wide, and Hendon struggled in vain to find the equaliser they craved.

Hendon: Al-Droubi, Adenola, Perry (Olarerin, 82), Riley-Snow, Matsuzaka (Apat, 88), Diedhiou, Cumberbatch, Leonard (Lucien, 63), White, Muir, Brosnan. Unused sub: Allinson.

Charlton Athletic U21s: Molyneaux, Okwumo, Bower (Dench, 76), Gough, Touré, Bakrin, Ladapo (Williams, 61), Santos (Kedwell, 61), Casey, Huke (Adigun, 90+5), Enslin. Unused sub: Adegoke (gk).