

RAF Football Association - E-Bulletin

RAF FA Veterans vs HMP Service & Wales Over 40s, 19th&20th Jan 19 played at The University of South Wales

Here we are in Cardiff. Capital of Wales and the next stop in our double header tour. First up is the Prison Service, a new game for the veterans and one we are all looking forward to. Also new to the vets set up is we will be playing the games at the University of South Wales Sports complex in Treforest otherwise known as Craig Gill's Office!! In terms of facilities it is second only to St George's Park in that it is slightly smaller but they are superb facilities and the staff are excellent too (Craig included).



And so, onto game 1. First up will be HMP Service which, as I stated, is a new fixture for the vets. They come highly recommended and this should be a stern test but also an opportunity for the boys to get back to the standards that they had set themselves prior to the Christmas/New Year break. For those that have forgotten...they are pretty high standards!! Being played on the indoor pitch it's HMP to kick off. The RAF are on the attack as soon as they get the ball and a mistake by an HMP defender gives the RAF a

corner in the first minute. It comes to nothing but a couple of minutes later the first attempt on goal comes to the HMP but the shot is wide. Both sides are playing high lines as they both look to press the opposition and long balls over the top by HMP are looking to utilise the pace of their forwards. After just seven minutes, Robertson is forced off when his ageing hamstring calls time and he is replaced by McCormick whose first action is to shoot wide from 20 yards. Bartley then tried a shot but same outcome and eleven minutes played. A corner to the RAF almost resulted in breaking the deadlock when Rooney whipped it in deep and Tweedie rose to head the ball narrowly over. In the seventeenth minute, a free kick to the RAF wide to the right of the box, saw Rooney standing over the ball. He was told by the management to treat it as a corner and to fizz it in. He did the opposite and floated it to the far post where Schofield outjumped the defenders to send a great header into the back of the net. Well listened Roons and 1-0 RAF.



But, not to worry as in the 20th minute, another free kick to the RAF, midway in their own half, was launched forward by Taylor. The ball reached Tweedie who turned his marker and rifled the ball back across and under the keeper. 2-0 RAF. Both sides were playing some nice football, in patches though as a lot of times possession was given away easily with sloppy passing or the perceived "killer ball" being playing 30 or 40 yards to the opposition. Both sides were guilty of this and, coupled with some niggly tackling, the game was becoming a little bitty and stop-start. In the 29th minute, HMP were then awarded a penalty. McCormick penalised but it did look harsh to me. That said, Laurie in the RAF goal saved it brilliantly but the No10, who had taken it, was first to react and as Laurie picked himself up he slotted the ball into the opposite corner. 2-1 RAF. That goal galvanised HMP and they upped their game but the RAF were giving as good as they got and should have had a penalty when a Bartley shot, following a short free kick, was obviously handled by the wall. The ref didn't see it and things got worse when HMP broke quickly and a run down the left saw the ball played across goal for an intruding forward to slot it in. 2-2 and thirty seven minutes gone. That's the way it stayed until half time with both sides creating and missing a couple of half chances each before the break. HT 2-2.

The RAF kick off the second half. It took almost eight minutes for the first action of note and it was a goal. Scored by HMP after the ball was given away and once again, a pass across the box was slotted home. 3-2 HMP. Schofield had a chance, wide before Coull made way for Robison. The sides were cancelling each other out now and chances/action was few and far between but a free kick to the RAF in the 74th minute saw Bartley take it. His cross to the far post saw McCormick arrive and power in a header that the keeper had no chance with and it's 3-3. Laurie was then called into action again making a great save with his legs before the RAF squandered a chance at the other end. Both teams were now playing better football as the tiredness took its toll. Because of that tiredness passes were only being played 5, 10 or 15 yards at most and were being played to feet. Possession was now the name of the game and both sides were doing it well...until. The RAF lost the ball whilst attacking and a quick break down the left saw a low pass pulled back across the box before a low right footed shot nestled in the corner. 4-3 HMP and eighty four minutes gone. Immediately, Schofield and Robison worked a good chance before the ball was cleared off the line for an RAF corner. A minute later it was all square again when Taylor, playing at centre half, rolled back the years and burst down the left. His pinpoint cross found the head of Tweedie and his rocket header bulged the net. 4-4 and eighty five minutes on the clock. That looked to have knocked the stuffing out of HMP but in the second minute of added time a bad mistake at the back saw an HMP forward through, one on one. He drew Laurie from the goal and stroked it home and it was 5-4 HMP. The RAF took the restart with 9 players on the half way line looking to swamp the opposition but it was not to be. As soon as the kick off was taken the ref blew the final whistle and it was over. 5-4 HMP.



Was anything learnt? Most certainly. Mistakes are all part of the game and it was just a pity that last one happened as it did. The boys had done incredibly well coming back twice in the second half and they never gave up, giving their all against a very, very strong side. These are the standard of opposition that we WANT to play and it's a timely reminder that we don't have a divine right to win games just because of what we have done in 2018. It hurts, of course, but what hurts us makes us stronger. So, it will be regroup tonight and then we'll be ready for Day 2.

RAF FA Veterans Squad: Laurie, Laing, Robinson, Taylor, Robertson, Bartley, Bryan, Tweedie, Schofield, Rooney, Coull, Robison, McCormick, Seddon, Barker, Richards.

Other RAF representatives. Beattie (RTM), Gill (Coach), Dye (GK Coach), O'Sullivan (Liaison), Payne (Head Therapist), Foster (Therapist), Sheehan (Head of Comms), Butt (Support), Tindle (Support), Bielby (Referee), Danny Gill (Mascot)

Onto Day 2 and initial thoughts are that this is going to be a tougher game than yesterday. Wales were one of the last sides to beat us early last year at St George's Park but the RAF Vets family has gone from strength to strength since then, but so too have the Wales Vets. The formation would remain the same as the previous day but there were a couple of changes to personnel with some players having to leave and others arriving. This is one of the added bonuses of "Double Headers" as the flexibility it allows for players and staff to choose what is best for them...Saturday or Sunday or both days.



Wales kick off and once again the RAF are quick out of the blocks and win possession. Watkins goes close when he works an angle but pulls his shot wide of the far post. A positive start. Wales then get in on the action when following a free kick, Scotty Taylor, in goal today after his MoM performance outfield on Saturday, pulls off a great double save to thwart the reds. Both sides were looking to create chances



but the better ones fell to the Welsh though they didn't take them. That was to tell as, in the fourteenth minute, a lovely long ball over the top of the defence by Wanless saw Seddon run on, chip the keeper, and follow up to slot the ball home. 1-0 RAF. Wales almost responded immediately but the shot was easily saved. Both sides continued to attack and after another great save by Taylor, the ball ran loose and a Welsh forward fired goalwards. It looked to be flying in from no more than 10 yards but Barker appeared from nowhere and headed off

the line and the ball was cleared. Superb defending. No quarter was being given in this game and both sides were defending stoically but in the 28th minute Wales drew level. From winning the ball just outside their own penalty area, they mounted an attack down the left hand side. A cross was whipped in and travelled right across the edge of the six yard box before a Welsh forward smashed it back across goal and into the net. 1-1. It was probably no less than the Reds deserved and from a spectators point of view, this was an excellent game to watch. Again, both teams kept pressing but the defending from both was first class and though end to end, there were very few actual chances. That changed in the 37th minute when another break down the line by the Welsh saw a cross come in and the Welsh centre forward outjumped all only to see his header come back off the bar and then it was cleared. A let off for the Blues. The score remained the same till the half time whistle went though, in all honesty, I was really enjoying this game and didn't want it to end. Ah well, still another half to go. HT 1-1.

Once again, Beattie (Manager) and Gill (Coach) accentuated the positives. Some players had an input but the basics were, keep doing what we are doing. The RAF were starting to boss the game as the half time whistle went and Wales were struggling to keep up with the tempo that the RAF lads were playing at despite the fact that Wales were constantly substituting players in an effort to keep them fresh. The fitness of the RAF squad is immense despite the ages and credit to the management and the players in that they are honest. They are asked to give their all for as long as possible, be that 20 minutes, 30 minutes or the full ninety and they do.



So, the second half and it's the RAF to kick off. Zenko, on at half time, was quickly into action heading a dangerous corner clear before Thomas headed over from a great Watkins cross at the other end. The game looked to be following the same pattern as the first half before the RAF seemed to find another gear and went on a prolonged offensive winning corner after corner and free kick after free kick. Alas, all to no avail and it could have been costly as, after 57 minutes, only a great save from Taylor, after a rare break forward for the Welsh, kept the scores level. That wasn't to last however as Wanless received the ball out wide on the left. He tried to take on the defender and got a lucky break, as the ball bounced back off his shins from the defender's tackle, before he ran the line and whipped over a cross. The cross was the worst one ever. Everyone thought so including the Welsh keeper who was as surprised as the rest of us when the ball floated over everyone before hitting the far post and nestling in the net. "What a goal!" I

screamed...till I thought about it. 2-1 RAF and sixty one minutes gone. McCormick, Seddon and Watkins all had chances but could not convert but as the Wales team pushed for an equaliser, the vision of Wanless and the pace of Seddon began to cause more and more problems for them as the boys in blue continually beat the offside trap with delightful through balls and only poor finishing or good defending was keeping the score the same. A corner to the RAF saw Watkins come across to take and a sweet left foot cross found the head of Thomas who made no mistake with a powerful header from 8 yards and it's 3-1 RAF and sixty six minutes on the clock. Taylor was called into action making a good save down to his left after a slip by Stewart let in the Reds but by now it was all RAF and the Welsh were left fighting to keep the score down. Watkins was flying down the left, Zenko down the right, the midfield led by Thomas were winning everything and the defence were solid. This is a great performance from all. It stayed 3-1 despite RAF pressure until the



last minute and then...a free kick to the RAF from inside their own half saw Wanless play the ball forward to Seddon. Seddon had run from left to right across the Wales defence and took the ball on his chest before his overhead kick arrowed its way past the helpless keeper and into the back of the net. "What a goal" I screamed...till I thought about it..."What I goal" I screamed again (you can see it as there is a video of it on the Vets facebook page and I suggest you see for yourself). The final whistle went and it was FT 4-1 RAF.

A great weekend with the family ended on a massive high with a contender for goal of the season to boot. What did we learn?...Lots and lots that will hold us in good stead for the big games to come but most of all...continue doing what we are doing. It works well, everyone has bought into it and whenever there is a blip, the boys respond superbly. It really is a pleasure to watch these players at close quarters and to be involved in this family.



RAF Squad: Taylor, Barker, Robison, McCormick, Stewart, Wanless, Shanks, Stockport, Thomas, Watkins, Seddon, Laurie, Laing, Coull, Tweedie, Zenko, Bartley, Schofield, Rooney, Richards.

Other RAF representatives: Beattie (RTM), Gill (Coach), Dye (GK Coach), Pugh (GM), O'Sullivan (Liaison), Payne (Head Therapist), Foster (Therapist), Sheehan (Head of Comms), Robertson, Robinson, Butt, Armour, Hamilton (Support).

Massive thanks to the players and staff of both HMP and Wales teams, to Craig Gill and all the staff at the University of South Wales for the use of exceptional facilities and to everyone who was there to make this an incredible weekend. Play Up Air Force!!

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