

## **Leeds B U 11 vs. Blackburn U11 - Friendly**

**St Theresa's School, Leeds - Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> Feb 2011. 10.30am.**

Don't you just love schools football? All week we find ourselves building up to the game, reflecting on the previous week, looking out for your son's name in the paper, the build up, the opinion, the banter, being proud as the boys look smart in their uniform! Belief, smiles, nerves, bacon, coffee, friends, drama and fun. Whats not to like? This Saturday was no different, an air of optimism as ever, hope and desire that this would be a great game. Saturday saw a bright sunny day at St Theresa's and probably Leeds best game of football they have played since the tour of Birmingham last October. Certainly, on the day Blackburn's strike partnership caught Leeds out and eventually got a 2-1 result. But as any person at the game will testify this was a moral victory for Leeds. The boys played their hearts out and showed the kind of grit and determination which will win plaudits and matches in the future.

The team were in a familiar 4-4-2 formation with Mason Mail acting as defensive sweeper at the back. A warm up, run with the kind help of Mr Rossiter's son, saw Leeds start as they left off against Maghull, with power, pace and passion.

The Blue and Yellow of Leeds contrasted well with Blackburn in their familiar White and Blue, as "Rovers" got the first half underway. Leeds started exceptionally well, Oneil Ouinsou and Lewis Firbank dominating the challenges and Joe Hayton driving the second ball on.

Two early Blackburn shots saw Matthew Owen called into early action , but he easily dealt with and swept up the pressure from the off. After fifteen minutes the Blackburn strikers ran through the middle of the central defence and again tried to chip the goalkeeper, but Matthew Owen was up to the task and ran out to meet the ball and took a great catch above his head.

Leeds were dominating the midfield, but Rovers were very fast on the break and showed real danger signs as the half progressed. Leeds were using the right hand channel well to pass and move. Eddie Copeland showed power and pace driving out of defence and Kelan Swales connected the play along the flank ensuring sustained pressure.

This outlet saw a slick move lead to an early goal as Eddie moved the ball through to Ned Dry. Ned then provided the assist through to Danny Edward's, who ran straight at the goalkeeper 1 on 1 and with sublime skill moved the ball to go left then switched quickly right to see the ball drive into the bottom of the net. One Nil to Leeds and a fine reward for some great approach play.

As the clock ran down , Lewis Firbank shot wide and O'Neill drove and snapped at the heels of the Blackburn midfielders. Leeds were totally dominant, looking for the pass and providing it. As the whistle blew the crowd agreed this was a great start and Leeds looked on track for a win.

As events unfolded , the second half of the game proved to be very similar. i.e. Leeds passion play, Blackburn tough tackles and the break away. However, there would prove to be a less than pleasant twist of fate to this tale.

Devon Ward and Ollie Worland had come on for James Shaw and Joe Hayton respectively and were instantly drawn into consecutive heading and repelling of Blackburn's long balls. The Rovers continued their tough tackling, No matter though, Leeds continued their attack through Kelan Swales and Joe Gardner down the flanks. They drove and drove, whipping crosses in and causing a number of big chances Leeds via corners.

It was a day of end to end action as the teams fought but neither could gain supremacy. Matthew Owen was called into action to make 3 big saves from the Rovers breaks, however the pressure started to tell. Leeds ambition to close the game out saw the team press too far forward leaving Ollie Worland alone at the back. The rest is history as Blackburn managed to drive across from the right hand side powering into the top left of the Leeds net to make it 1-1.

Yet the Leeds B boys were not down. The next passage of play was Leeds best of the match. There were seven key chances on goal over a ten minute period and somehow Rovers managed to survive. Firstly Ned Dry ran straight through Blackburn's defence and unfortunately kicked the ball just wide of the left post. The referee missed a certain hand ball in the penalty box as he was unsighted and Leeds then went on to hit the cross bar, scramble the ball wide through Danny Edwards and leave a real air of frustration that lady luck was not on the boy's side.

As if to drive a stake through Leeds heart , Blackburn's lively No10 broke out from their own half and drove the ball hard, fast and low and made the game 2-1 totally against the run of play.

The drama was not done there though. One last twist could have seen Leeds take a deserved draw as James Shaw drove straight through the middle, looked like he was on for a certain goal, but was taken down by the keeper for a penalty. The last minute of the game and Danny Edwards bravely stepped forward to take responsibility for Leeds. Strangely, there then followed one of the most bizarre episodes as the team, then the ref and coaches could not find the penalty spot. The Rovers keeper was big and in bigger goals Danny would have made the shot. Alas it wasn't to be for Leeds, but Danny showed extreme bravery in the face of adversity and got on with the game.

When the whistle came, Mr Rossiter said after the match that .." I'm shattered , that's just totally drained all my energy, the boys did so well, they put in 110% and I feel like I've been pick pocketed! What a great game and the boys played so well..."

Whilst some of the boys were a bit embarrassed at the impromptu parent and coaches applause when they were arrived back inside for their lunch, this was a small but clear expression of how well everyone thought the boys had done.

The recent superbowl game reminded me of an apt quote from the great American Football coach from the 1950's, a certain Vince Lombardi. He once said

"...The spirit, the will to win, and the will to excel are the things that endure. These qualities are so much more important than the events that occur..."

Maybe words that really describe how the Leeds boys should feel about this game? So, onwards and upwards we go to the next match, to that great cycle of anticipation and to enduring excellence!