

U11 Sheffield Schools' FA v Leeds Schools' FA

Forge Valley Community School, Wood Lane, Sheffield Saturday 28th September 2013 10.30am

With Sheffield equipping themselves well in the recent Leeds tournament earlier this month finishing as eventual runners up to York, the Leeds Schools' FA Boys supporters were somewhat apprehensive about today's match – not that you would have known it from the spirit within the team coach on the way down to the Steel City! Could the elusive first win be on the cards today? Surely not, against such a strong side judging from their last performance...

Once arrived and changed, both teams were quickly onto the pitch to get their warm ups under way under what seemed a low winter sun although in seasonally warm weather – Sheffield in their sky blue and burgundy kit and the Leeds lads in their brilliant (well, still almost white so far...) kit. The Leeds Schools' FA boys seemed to be absent minded missing the goal shots in the warm ups whilst the parents watched the Sheffield steel blasting through the ball into the top corners of the goal on several occasions... was this the shape of things to come?

The first 20 minute session started with a scrappy and slow start for Leeds, allowing Sheffield a couple mini breaks, with the first being down the right hand side by the Sheffield no. 11, only to be snuffed out by the quick reactions of Jack Grassham before really becoming a threat. Whenever Sheffield seemed to threaten in the early stages, the attacks seemed to be pounced on by the eager defending of Haroon Bostan, the mighty presence of Lleyton Elliott Garbutt and the aforementioned Grassham before being threaded back via the midfield trio of Harry Barton, Thomas Woodeson and Taylor Thompson to the sweet steps of Jaden Richards and the attacking Tom Spence in the strikers role, albeit with limited success due to some less than accurate passing. Slowly the tide seemed to flow Leeds' way as what in essence was a combative affair mostly being played through the centre of the field instead of via the wings before becoming almost a jostle in the central half of the pitch for some time, with neither keeper really being tested for the first 10 minutes or so. Cue the kicking of goal posts and the theme tune to 'the great escape' being whistled as the goalkeepers tried to amuse themselves. An adept attack by Spence and White ended the seeming stalemate with an attack ably defended by the solid Sheffield number 4. The resulting corner was taken in the eleventh minute by White only to have another scrappy part clearance. Thereafter followed by a period where Leeds firmly encamped themselves in the Sheffield half for the next 5 minutes without reward, but this definitely steadied the confidence in the camp and one could feel the self belief begin to swell within the players. The tide then flowed Sheffield's way for a short time due to Sheffield's attacking minded, hair banded number 2 but Garbutt and Grassham were always on hand to dispatch the attacks with ease before Garbutt being taken off with a slight foot injury. This was Thomson's chance to shine and he did so, combatting any attack and threading the resulting ball cleanly to the Leeds midfield. And so the first session finished with no real attacks on goal from either side – which reminds me of the very dull Birmingham / Newcastle draw in 2003 which I turned off in order to watch paint dry... 0-0 at the close.

Thankfully after some deft advice from Mr Elliot under the watchful eye of 'Doc' during the break, Leeds started the 2nd session with much more confidence and a considerably better strategy, using the fresh Alfie Owen down the left, determined brother Charlie in the centre and the quite brilliant endeavor's of Johnny allowing Leeds to carve open the Sheffield midfield and defence seemingly at will. The resulting panic and loss of discipline within the Sheffield ranks led to several free kicks being awarded to the visitors which only helped strengthen the confidence whilst shattering the Sheffield resolve – surely a couple of goals might be on the cards.... And, then, almost without any notice, Charlie Owen knocked in a great little goal after a floating ball from Tom Spence on the right wing landed at his feet – the first touch was 'reaction saved' by the keeper only to fall back to Charlie's feet whose owner quickly instructed said feet to score subutteo style with apparent ease. 0-1 to Leeds.

And then the flood gates opened... Thomson began easing any ball that was afforded him to little Archie on the wing who threaded beautifully down the left and through the Sheffield players to brother Charlie, Spence and the ever present White, resulting in shots on goal being parried by the keeper and a couple of well deserved corners. The resulting confidence in the Leeds side was there for all to see as the visitors seemed to lose the shackles in Hollywood slow motion movie style and begin to play freely. Taylor was gifted a couple of corners,

which although well taken seemed to pass untouched through a gaggle of defenders and attackers only to be pumped back in by supremely accurate midfielders such as Archie Owen and little Mr Barton to Spence who missed the bottom left hand post by what must have been 3 hair breaths... the writing was surely on the wall at this point. Another attack from Charlie sent the goalie scrambling, clearing the ball out to the right hand side Sheffield defender – cue White darting from one side of the Sheffield defence to the other seemingly without pause like a dog chasing the elusive bone – whatever he was doing, it was working though as second by second the Sheffield defence seemed to be falling apart at the seams. More and more Leeds possession suddenly made me realize that I didn't think Sheffield had even been out of their half in this session – as I muse this point, in comes a cross from the right wing from the feet of Spence and Charlie Owen was on hand, straight in front of the goalkeeper to drop it in the bottom right hand corner of the net. Well deserved and well earned 0-2.

And so the second session continued, with the defence of the steel city melting as the seconds passed. Archie Owen dropped in a sublime throw from the right hand side and Thompson, with a single touch, floated the ball high over the keeper and into the top right hand corner, kissing the back of the net from the roof to the floor – as good as any goal I dreamt of scoring as a lad... simply sublime. 0-3 to the visitors.

A short couple of minutes passed as Sheffield briefly threatened to get out of their half but sturdy defensive work by Bostan, Thompson and particularly Garbutt stopped anything before it even had a chance to come to fruition. The ever present Charlie Owen and the terrier like White bossed the midfield and then came the Sheffield free kick from their only attack of the session after an alleged push in the back by Bostan - hearts in mouths time. Not to worry though as the poor free kick was deftly cleared by Spence back into the Sheffield half where the clearance dropped straight to Alfie Owen whose precise pass threaded through the Sheffield midfield from the right to the left hand side finding the feet of White – cue a superb 30 yard run through 3 defenders and the inevitable goal slotted past the goalkeeper who was left all at sea due to defenders who simply couldn't handle White's sheer determination to score. 0-4, and deservedly so. I'm not sure what has happened to the Sheffield team that we witnessed three weeks ago on our home patch but this seemed a side bereft of ideas and without ability to cope with the rampant Leeds side – strange how football goes – about as predictable as my premiership fantasy football league team! There were flashes of brilliance in the Sheffield number 2 and number 18 who tried single handedly to mount attacks however without the support from other Sheffield players, these two little shining lights seemed to be snuffed out by the clinical passing, terrific tackling and sheer determination of the Leeds attackers. End of the second session, and whilst the Leeds lads retired to their corner of the ring sensing victory, the Sheffield heads had already dropped

The third session began and it was evident that the Sheffield lads had been rattled and the break had not done them much good Archie Owen and Woodeson linked well with a lovely threading pass being put up to Charlie Owen but was intercepted by Sheffield's number 4. This would have been a 'fait a complis' which would have been another goal, so well done to the foresight shown by the young Sheffield lad to offer some protection to his keeper. Sheffield then began to get back more into the game with a couple of free kicks as some sloppy Leeds tackling began to let Sheffield back into the game. Both Sheffield and Leeds both then took turns attacking and defending with some strong defending in particular by Garbutt, Harroon and Grassham. When the corners came again for Leeds Bartam put two splendid corners in the box and unfortunately Charlie Owen was unable to convert. In short, the end of the third session once again ended in stalemate. 0-4 overall – a deserved victory by an improving Leeds side and an unexpected loss for good team who evidently had a bad day at the office. Well done boys.