

Birmingham Select v Leeds B - Saturday 2nd November 2013

Sector 1 began with Birmingham all in yellow heading uphill towards the Leeds City Boys and their newly christened white kit (thank you to the new sponsors Western Thermal Ltd). Whilst very cold, the rain held off for the most part which enabled us to witness a good game between two largely equal teams apart from one or two star players. Birmingham started strongly with a corner within the first couple of minutes, well cleared by Tom Crowther however it was obvious from the start that Birmingham were going to be both very physically strong and quick, sensing through balls very well indeed and getting to the ball first on the majority of occasions. That said, Leeds equipped themselves well in the first sector, defending well and counter attacking when the chances presented themselves. Leeds' first corner came only a couple of minutes later and a lovely cross by Archie Owen was fluffed by the Birmingham 'keeper but Lleyton Garbutt Everett was unable to fire in the resulting rebound hard enough and the keeper was able to tidy up which was a huge relief on the faces of the Birmingham supporters. The resulting fast thinking Birmingham defence threaded an inch perfect ball through several players to a lightning fast yellow 16 for a 1:1 with the Leeds 'keeper Jake Donohue who marshaled him well, pushing him out wide and allowing the Leeds defenders time to re-group – it was one of those days where the Leeds 'keeper was going to have to be on form... The resulting corner landed in the box and it became obvious that '16' would be the star of the show today with lovely footwork and a strong presence all around the field although Donohue was able to wrestle the ball from his feet... and whilst I was dictating that bit for you, Leeds played Birmingham at their own game with a delightful inch perfect pass from Jack Grassham to Jarvis Barker who in turn slipped the ball out to the right for Matty Webb to score low and hard – 0-1 to Leeds! Yellows came back strongly immediately with the yellow 14 linking well with 16 who ran through a hole in the Leeds defence and slipped the ball deftly under Mr Donohue. 1-1 and all evens within 5 minutes and despite the Leeds defence' best efforts a seemingly carbon copy attack by Birmingham within the next minute caused similar damage, once again by the yellow 14 and 16 who were now dictating the game. 3-1 to Birmingham. At this point the score line seemed very cruel to the Leeds defence as Grassham especially was having a brilliant game. 3-1 at the break.

Sector 2 saw Grassham, Barker, Archie Owen and Garbutt make way as Leeds tried to rebound from the lethal strike force from the Birmingham 14 and 16 who were the only real difference between the sides. However as Leeds limbered up after the kick off, yellow 14 skirted straight down the centre and knocked in number 4 before the supporters had even taken the lids off their coffee cups – a fantastic talent that Leeds were now struggling to deal with, especially with Grassham off the pitch. Charlie Owen and Webb had several promising forays forward but unfortunately were unable to make that last accurate last pass which would have enabled the strikers to have a clear shot on goal. Leeds were able to make a much better fist of the fight now that the Birmingham 16 was off and even 14 was finding it harder work without his wingman - as such Leeds capitalized with several good attacks down both the left and the right hand sides but the last touch seemed to be missing due to the lack of an out and out striker on the pitch. As is often the case, Birmingham soaked up the pressure before releasing yellow 14 once again who made a fantastic run down the centre and round Ben Kenneally before passing the ball to the yellow 28 who calmly slotted the ball past Donohue. The 5-1 score line seemed to flatter the Birmingham side somewhat given the amount of pressure and possession that Leeds had, however the score line ultimately never lies... An injury to Crowther following an untimely elbow enable Grassham to return to the pitch and shore the defence up well, stopping any further damage being inflicted. The remainder of sector 2 was played out in a war of attrition as both sides chose to scrap around in the centre of the field rather than use the wings to gain that valuable space to run into, thus nullifying any chance of further goals. Thompson was taken off following another ill-timed tackle enabling Barker to return to the field which provided some much needed punch going forward. However, two minutes later the Birmingham 14 was once again allowed time and space just outside the penalty area, loosing off a belter of a left shot, low and hard but Donohue was on hand to gather the shot cleanly. A good save. Leeds finished sector 2 much stronger but at the break were unable to capitalize on the increased amount of possession.

Sector 3 began with the substitution of the Birmingham 14, only to be replaced with the yellow 16 once again. Gulp... Kenneally, Webb, Thomson and Crowther made way for a more attack minded Leeds with Charlie Owen getting the bit between his teeth immediately, matching the yellow 28 in the Birmingham

defence on several occasions. The first Birmingham break came courtesy of the danger man 16 who passed a lovely ball through to yellow 7 for a clear chance for a 1:1 with Donohue, however a storming run back by Archie Owen did enough to put 7 off with the resulting shot being skied the ball over the crossbar. The following attack by Leeds was well managed as some superb passing came about for a few minutes before Barker was crunched by 3 defenders and Leeds lost possession once again. The resulting goal kick was poor enabling Richards to drop a lovely ball to Barker who tried a wonderful chip over the keeper which missed the right hand post by millimeters. The following Birmingham attack yet again involved the immensely fast yellow 16 but the attack down the left was well parried by Donohue and put out for a corner. Another Leeds attack between Staniforth and Richards was well built but sloppy passing inevitably lost the ball and gave the ball back to Birmingham and yet another yellow attack which also came to nothing due to poor passing. Leeds then dominated the last 5 minutes with Staniforth and Barker linking well and the rare attack by yellows were well managed by either Grassham or Donohue. 5-1 at the end of the match. In short, a good game which flattered Birmingham a little however the final result was not to be disputed – Leeds just need to be slightly better at keeping the ball and the results will inevitably go their way. Overall a promising performance against a side with a couple of extremely good players. Well battled Leeds.