

LEEDS SFA UNDER 11'S BATTLE THROUGH TO THE NATIONAL FINALS

On Saturday 24/03 the U11 Team travelled north to Sunderland's Academy of Light for The Northern Finals Day of the ESFA 'Danone Cup' Competition. The top two teams would qualify for the National Finals in early June and the winner of that will go forward to the World Cup Finals in October, so a big prize indeed.

The teams were divided into 2 leagues of five, all excellent teams who had won their County Final. Leeds as Yorkshire champions, and previous National winners and World Cup Finalists in 2015 had high hopes of a top two finish.

Leeds opened up with a strong performance against Redcar and Cleveland and triumphed 3-1 with Reece Wilson[2] and Noah Gill on the score sheet. Next up were the overall favourites Wirral and although Leeds battled hard Wirral ran out deserved winners 2-0.

Leeds needed to bounce back and beat Carlisle and once again the boys showed their mettle to overcome their opponent 3-0 with goals by Gill, Ewan McGawn and George Sebine. This left Leeds in 2nd place in the group with one game to play against Macclesfield, and a draw would take them into the semi final against the Group One winners Darlington. A tense game ensued and Harvey Collinson made a great one on one save and with Dylan Cadena and Alfie Bradshaw physically strong and wide players Thomas Mills and Max Dickinson lively, Reece Wilson continued to frighten their opponent. Against the run of play Macclesfield took the lead with a free kick and with time running out it appeared that some time wasting tactics were evident but fortunately the referee added on time. The captain Sebine rallied his troops and with Ethan Weaver and McGawn joining the fray one last effort was needed. Weaver burst from the back and threaded a ball through to striker Wilson who turned and fired home with 10 seconds to go!

The semi final versus Darlington was an unbelievably tense game and every boy in the Leeds team played to their highest level. A quick throw in from Dickinson found Cadena who weaved his way through and crashed the ball home from an acute angle. The clock was running down and desperate defending, brave goalkeeping from Collision and two Herculean goal line clearances from first Sebine and then Wilson saw Leeds through to the National Final. Every single player wore their shirt with pride and deserved the praise awarded to them.

Newcastle beat Wirral in the other semi final after a penalty shoot out when the game finished 0-0 and join Leeds in the National Final.

The organisers decided to hold a 'reduced time' final to decide the overall winners and with tired Leeds limbs finally kicking in after the early rise and long journey to the Academy, local favourites Newcastle triumphed 1-0 in a tense battle.

The Leeds team was not disappointed as the ultimate prize the National Final had been achieved!