

Hotscots FC v Newcastle Panthers

Saturday 19th July



Hotscots starting eleven

Darren Girdwood, Kevin Rowe, Michel Quinou, Mark, Fraser May, Stevie Blythe, Captain Paul, Alan Rodgers, Nick Dickson, James Beveridge, Craig Anderson
Subs: Stuart Mallen, Martyn Bell
Acting(not very well) Manager : Ross McClung
Peffermill South Pitch, Peffermill, kick off 3pm.

The game took place on an excellent surface with light winds and overcast conditions and promised to be a great day for football. After their 10-2 victory in the first leg, Hotscots would have normally headed into this game with a good amount of confidence. However, several first team squad members were posted missing for this game with the holiday season in full swing. To add to the squad problems, goalkeeper Ross McClung was also unavailable whilst nursing an injured knee following a training ground incident. This enabled him to take the reigns as acting manager while Conor Simpson was hoping for a continued undefeated streak whilst he was on a “camping trip”.

The threadbare squad also had to contend with a new formation, as the lack of options dictated a return to the 4-4-2, where previously a 5 man midfield had been serving Hotscots well. So Girdwood left his striking boots off to head between the sticks, Mark adopted an unfamiliar centre back role, and Stevie Blythe moved further up into a right midfield position. There were welcome returns from injury for Kevin Rowe and Michel Quinou in defence.

No quicker had the team talk of being careful from the kick off finished, than Panthers took the lead with a well worked goal. Possession was lost in midfield, and with crisp passing play down the Panthers left the ball was clipped inside and stroked past the helpless Girdwood. Hotscots rallied a little, and Beveridge was through on goal on two separate occasions, but contrived to lose the ball under pressure, with the moment possibly getting to him.

However, Hotscots were in serious trouble, and the Panther’s abundance of pace up front was causing problems. With possession again lost in midfield, the Panthers added a second, and prompted black looks from the sidelines as Hotscots were really losing a grip on the game.

At this point McClung decided to make some changes, taking off James Beveridge and bringing on Hotscots debutant Martyn Bell up front to join Anderson. This brought some quick remedy as high balls behind the Panthers defence were causing problems. It was from such a ball that the Hotscots got a

corner. Bell's inswinging ball was sublime and Craig ANDERSON rose above the static Geordie backline to nod the Scots back into the game.

No sooner had McClung been screaming "concentrate" at the Hotscots, the Panthers regained their 2 goal advantage with a pin ball style goal where the defence had opportunities to clear but clinical attacking finishing from the Panthers got the goal.

It was clear that the midfield was where the game was being won and lost, and Hotscots were suffering from practicing with 5 men and only working with 4. With this in mind, McClung pulled Bell into midfield, with Captain Paul sitting deeper and Anderson up front on his own. The game stuttered to a close as Hotscots started to play well and control the half right up to the whistle.

Half time – Hotscots 1-3 Newcastle Panthers

Into the second half, and a change to the personnel for the Hotscots. Girdwood exchanged his gloves with Stevie Blythe, with the former moving to the right wing.

Despite the promising end to the first half, the second half threatened to resemble the start of the game. Panthers got their 4th goal which would normally kill a game like this off. A high ball wasn't dealt with properly and the resultant header beat our 4ft 11 goalkeeper ends up. Blythe having never touched a crossbar, certainly didn't have a chance of getting to a looping header!

From this moment on though, the Hotscots started to play some serious football and threatened to level the scores. As the Panthers tired, the Hotscots drove forward in attacking waves, and completely controlled the last half hour of the game. The second goal was as simple as our first, a corner drifted in and from the resultant play, Martyn BELL added a goal to his debut performance.

Bell, driven by his goal, then set about at times single-handedly trying to get Hotscots level. With 20 minutes to go, he picked the ball up at the half way mark, strode forward, and thundered a cracking strike from 25 yards out, which crashed agonisingly off the post with a touch from the keeper proving vital.

A final change to the Hotscots team then took place, with Stuart Mallen coming on for Girdwood on the right. Not long after this change the third goal came. Nick Dickson was fed on the left by Captain Paul, and his ball into the middle was met by Craig Anderson, who clipped the ball into the net. 3-4, and a cracking final 10 minutes to come. Chances came and went with Stuart Mallen coming closest to grabbing an equaliser, however the Panthers clung on desperately to a famous win.

Final score – Hotscots 3-4 Newcastle Panthers

In summary, a terrible first half, but a spirited second half more than made up for it with the result not doing any dis-service to a depleted Hotscots side. The change in formation certainly caused problems as it seemed clear some of the players were getting used to a 5 man midfield.

While the defence started slowly, Mark shone through in the second half once he had settled into play. Fraser May had yet another solid performance not putting a foot wrong and keeping the left hand side of defence tight. Kevin Rowe and Michel Quinou also started fairly poorly but were completely solid in the second half, with Quinou even venturing up front and causing problems for the Panthers. Certainly plenty of life in these two old dogs yet!

In midfield Blythe can be happy with his first half, while Dickson was superb throughout the game. Captain Paul and Alan Rodgers played much better when the fifth man came into midfield, and the two of them contributed to the driving play in the second half. They really linked well with Martyn Bell who had an excellent debut, adding some much needed guile to the attacking midfield. Girdwood on the right didn't have much opportunity to show what he could do.

Up front Beveridge needs to work on his pace and fitness before really pushing for a place. He can score goals but at times on Saturday was frustratingly slow at getting to loose balls. More practice of this at training will really help his case. Craig Anderson, despite being well off full fitness, again added 2 goals to his collection. He can't stop scoring, and his form will be well needed next year in the league.

Finally a mention for Stuart Mallen, who did really well when he came on. His exploding boots from the previous game were swiftly forgotten as he really got stuck in and proved a point to some of his doubters with some well timed tackles and his never say die attitude. The training is really paying off and well done Stu.

A full squad would have despatched the Panthers without much hassle, however congratulations to them for their victory. Once their fitness improves with time, they will be a very good side. Onwards and upwards Hotscots – to the world cup!