

sports

Men's soccer right in the thick of things

by Angel Figueroa

Two wins and a draw have given the Dalhousie men's soccer team six points out of eight in three successive games at Wickwire Field. This catapults the team into second place on the table, but still with no playoff berth, as the squad finds itself in unpleasant company, tied with three other teams. Yet the recent results have put Dal within striking position, and set a tempo for the crucial road trip to New Brunswick this coming weekend.

The lopsided win over Saint Mary's on Wednesday, October 13, may have come as a surprise to would-be fans. Not because of Dal's level of play, which was indeed superior, but rather because of myopic predictions based on their last meeting, which would have dictated another tough, nail-biting game.

Not. Exactly one month has passed since the first match-up between these crosstown rivals, which ended in a season-opening 1-1 draw at SMU. Dal was then an embryonic team, unmaturing and playing on alien artificial turf. As so far this season has proven, the Dal side is like fine red wine—better when aged, and the recent 4-1 thrashing is the case in point.

Only the week before had Dal gotten rid of its offensive woes, racking up impressive wins against Memorial and Prince Edward Island. The win over SMU became its third in a row, and showed complete recovery from the crisis that had left it winless in three of its first four games.

It was only fitting then, that Dal's opening marker came from one of this year's key variables in the offensive shake-up: second-year midfielder (and Scot)

Chris Devlin. It came in the ninth minute of play, after receiving a headed pass from Adrian Ibbetson deep into the six-yard box, where from some crazy angle, he punched it home on the volley.

Netminder Trevor Chisolm started his hard day at the office with excellent saves in the 13th and 15th minutes, as SMU responded with two quick drives on the Dal net. A subsequent drive gave them the equalizer, with a well-placed header from a corner-kick in the 32nd minute of play.

Touches of brilliance by strikers Craig Janc and Colin Audain opened the second half, setting up the go-ahead goal by Rob Sawler in the 53rd minute. It was textbook Sawler: a rush down the right wing, then a lob from 25 yards out, over the keeper and into the far net.

Fearless, if brilliant goal-keeping by Chisolm prevented any more equalizers, with two great saves in the 63rd and 75th minutes of play. Chisolm's antics would not only frustrate SMU, but also earn him player-of-the-game honours for his fine performance this day.

Another great show came from the boots of David McFarlane, the rookie midfielder who was suddenly sent in to replace Devlin, who was yanked because of dissent. At first he was rusty and hesitant, but later made up for a dozen errors with two fabulous touches late in the second half. The first was goal number three: a crisp, jumping header on a set play from a free kick by Geoff Axell in the 82nd minute.

The second was a beautiful cross in a play that had "gola" written all over it. First-year midfielder Mathew Series who came in as a substitute late in the

game, targeted a random ball in SMU territory, back-passing it perfectly to McFarlane, who received it on the run down the wing. McFarlane beat a defender and then made the cross. Getting on the end of it was Tony Pignatiello, who doubled his own height to flick it in for the game's *piece de résistance* in the 91st minute.

Sawler finally got a quote for the winning goal he had engineered. "It's an important two points," he said, "because for one thing it makes up for tying them on the turf, and this victory now keeps us going. We couldn't afford to lose anymore, and by [beating SMU]—he grinned cheekily—"it's a big kick in the teeth to them."

Another match that couldn't afford a loss was the next one, against Memorial, on Saturday October 16. Despite having Cinderella status this year, Memorial was a troop of thugs intent on revenge after its 3-1 loss to Dal two weeks before. That was a watershed win for the Dal side, having executed its offensive reform with devastating success, and now was no time to blow it.

They didn't. With unrelenting intensity, they gave Memorial a dose of striking déjà vu, this time with a more modest score of 2-1. Completely dominating the first half, striker Danny Burns made it count with a 30 yard lob that fooled the keeper to go up 1-0. Pignatiello was brilliant in the midfield, notching the winning goal in the 51st minute, while Axell, Janc, and Morty Mooers were pivotal in their support. Chisolm was relegated to spectator, although he managed to hug the ball, stopping a penalty kick in the 61st.

The game was not without a unhealthy dose of panic, however, as in the last 15 minutes, Dal froze up and found themselves on the beleaguered defense. The result was Memorial's only goal, coming off a scramble in the 80th. Sheer terror gripped the last ten minutes, as Memorial fought desperately for the equalizer, and Dal may have been lucky to survive that mysterious lapse, a lapse which hopefully won't become a habit.

L'université de Moncton entered Halifax on top of the table at 5-0-2.

the only undefeated team and damn cocky about it, too. Tensions were high both before and during the game, as there was more than just 4 points at stake—there was a bit of pride, as well.

Play was piano-piano until late in the first half, when Dal went up one-nil. A dangerous strike with some brilliance by Axell fed Rob Sawler a great ball down the right flank. Not surprisingly, he was fouled deep in Moncton territory, and with a free-kick by Janc,

the play became like a corner-kick: there was a gentle chip, a scramble, and boom—into the net via Ibbetson's head.

The equalizer came in the 65th, with a header off a corner-kick, and that did it. Dal exploded, and were all over them, like the go-ahead goal was worth a million bucks. Two missed breakaways, three airballs, two goal-posts, a deflection by a defender on the line, one missed penalty kick, two great saves, and fifteen minutes later, it was still a draw, although you'd swear it shouldn't have been.

"It was a tough game," said man-of-the-match Ibbetson. "We dominated, but we had to be careful because they've got some quality players. You've got to give them respect, although we do feel unlucky not to get a win; we outshot them 15-6."

"Quality shines through in the end," he added, "and they'll probably be in the final four, so it was at least good information for us. [The draw] is still two points, and with the other two wins, I think we have established ourselves and set us up for a good run in."

The run into the AUAA playoffs, where Dal will hope to nab a third championship title, won't happen until wins are recorded in New Brunswick this weekend. With two wins it's a guaranteed berth, plus a chance at hosting the Atlantics, depending on how the other cards fall into place. On Saturday it's the University of New Brunswick at 3 pm, and then it's Mount Allison on Sunday at 1pm.

"Regarding the weekend," reflected coach Ian Kent, "We will be playing our game on the opposition. We will do the job we have to do. By the end of it all, the writer is going to have some great quotes."

| Men's Soccer | | | | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|---|----|----|----|-----|
| | W | L | T | F | A | Pt | Pp* |
| UdM | 5 | 0 | 3 | 17 | 5 | 18 | 28 |
| DAL | 5 | 2 | 2 | 16 | 7 | 15 | 25 |
| StFX | 5 | 2 | 2 | 16 | 7 | 15 | 25 |
| SMU | 4 | 3 | 2 | 15 | 13 | 15 | 21 |
| MUN | 4 | 2 | 2 | 14 | 10 | 14 | 26 |
| UNB | 2 | 4 | 2 | 14 | 17 | 7 | 19 |
| MTA | 2 | 5 | 1 | 8 | 19 | 6 | 16 |
| UPEI | 1 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 13 | 6 | 14 |
| ACA | 1 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 18 | 5 | 15 |

*indicates points potential



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