

1-1 draw a wake-up call for men's soccer

by Angel Figueroa

Head coach Ian Kent of the men's soccer team had predicted that Dal's first game of the season would be "a nail biter."

Indeed it was — but for more reasons than you'd usually think after the 1-1 draw against St. Mary's on Wednesday September 15th. Add to the fact that it was against the cross-town arch rivals, that they were playing on (unfamiliar) artificial turf, and that both teams seemed at an uneasy, grumpy par during the course of the game, and you've got the makings of a 90 minute chewing spree up half your hand.

True to Dal-SMU tradition, elbows were high and obscenities a plenty in a game that was quick and rough from the opening kickoff. Among the game's first victims was Tony Pignatiello, a key midfielder for Dal, who went down with an ankle injury after only 6 minutes of play. His exit was soon followed by a SMU defender, who left limping and clutching a bloody nose in the 12th minute. Many fouls smeared the first half, with a level of play that was nothing more than scrappy and ugly, despite some near-scoring chances by both sides. Some dubious refereeing only heightened the chaos that developed on the pitch, and an end result was the opening goal by SMU in the 42nd minute.

Keeper Trevor Chisolm held Dal's hopes alive for the remainder of the game, with fantastic saves in the 59th, 80th, and 84th minutes of play. But SMU's defense was equally strong, and repeated attacks by Dal could not break

the ice, despite a rejuvenated push that was starting to get very intense indeed. Rising to the alarm bells were talented performances by 2nd-year midfielders Hieu Quack and Morty Mooers, defenders Jamie Sawler and Adrian Ibbetson, and stopper Chris Devlin.

Just when it seemed like the game was an inevitable loss, Dal was granted a penalty kick in the 84th minute, after striker Colin March was taken down just inside the box. The equalizer was delivered by halfback Craig Janc, rarely one to disappoint when it matters most, and the game was salvaged.

Coach Kent had little to say about the salvage, however. "It was an ugly game, but on a positive note we fought back and grabbed a point," he said. "It's also good to have the turf out of the way," he added, alluding to the fact that Dal's next match-up against SMU will be a home game on grass — something its far more accustomed to.

Man-of-the-day Janc also shared Kent's feelings. "We really didn't play that well," he said, visibly disappointed by the lacklustre draw. "Saint Mary's played strong and it was hard to counter, but I'd say we really lacked in midfield distribution — that's something we'll have to work on."

Characteristic to the men's soccer team is this weird sort of perfectionism. Interesting to note, however, is that this is also one of the squad's assets, and you can be sure that much will have been gained from this year's first game.

Each and every year it is the match-up that launches the season for Halifax's two premiere collegiate soccer

teams: Saint Mary's and Dalhousie. Almost always, it serves as a good indicator of what lies ahead. Last year's 4-0 rout of SMU was Dal's first game in a glorious quest that not only snatched the league's Holy Grail, but also a bronze medal at the national championships. This year, a 1-1 draw can only indicate that both teams will be at a neck-to-neck race for the Final Four qualifying for the playoffs. If anything, it's a fitting wake-up call to dispel pre-season predictions and get on with the game's oldest cliché: *take one game at a time, fellas.*

The next one is against Acadia, in Wolfville, at 2:00 pm on Sunday, September 19. Then it's back to Halifax for the home-opener on Sunday, September 26 at 2pm, also against Acadia (go figure as to why the AUA scheduled back-to-back games so early in the season). *Be there.*

Dal's last meeting with Acadia was its second exhibition game held last Saturday, with a 1-0 win going in favour of Dal. Dal got the go-ahead goal in the 61st minute, after a blitz setup in the backfield that found striker Colin Audain for the marker. Quick distribution by keeper Chisolm found Jamie Sawler, who then lobbed a cross upfield to Audain. Audain flew down the right wing, cut the ball into the centre, and while beating a defender, launched a left-footer from 35 yards out. In baseball jargon it was like a sinking pitch: the ball sailed right over a misplaced keeper, then sank just under the crossbar. Simply put, the whole play was big, bold, and brilliant.

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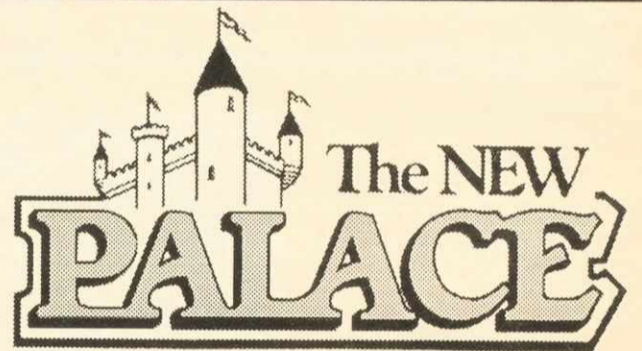
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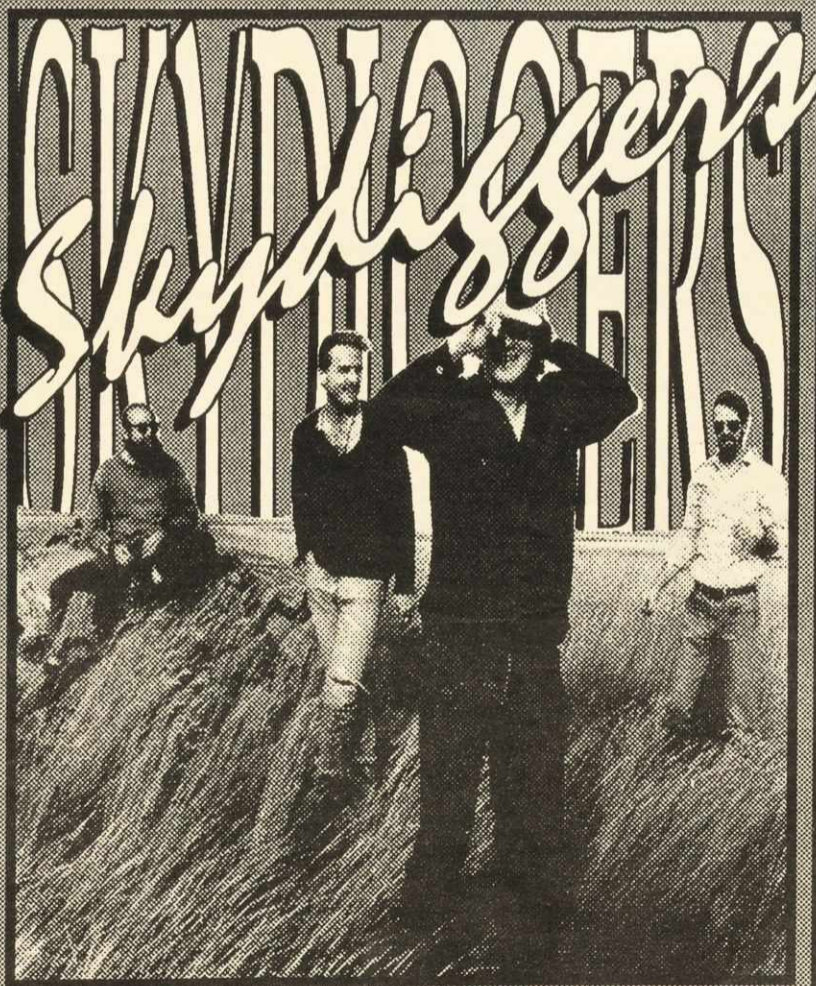
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