

SPORTS

Two draws in New Brunswick for men's soccer

BY ANGEL FIGUEROA

Mixed feelings terminate a tough road trip that befell the men's soccer team over the weekend, as they returned home with two draws in games they otherwise dominated on the stats sheet. The itinerary included visits to U.N.B. and Mount Allison, the top teams in the west division. It was clear to everyone that these encounters likely foreshadow an anxious rendezvous which will come again at the AUA play-offs in November.

Being back-to-back away games, the pressure was certainly intense but also fierce. It was at the hands of Mount Allison that Dal received a deeply upsetting blow when they lost 2-1 in an absurdly unlucky final last year at the AUA championships. Somehow, that absurd luck more-or-less repeated itself, and against U.N.B. as well—a team which Dal has been winless against in five years.

Yet despite the turn of events, head coach Ian Kent returns completely positive from the strenuous weekend, where great playing by Dal couldn't better a 1-1 score against opponents who found themselves almost forever on the frantic defense.

"I am impressed," he said. "I really liked what I saw. You can say it was a tough weekend [with two draws], but really, it was clear to me that we were by far the better team than Mount Allison or U.N.B., who are the best teams in their division. On another day it could've been 5-1."

But veteran starter Tim Hall found the draws frustrating, and his bitterness was shared by others on the team. Still, Rob Adams was clear to point out that it wasn't too long ago when two points out of four from such a road trip was a great thing—an indication of just the sort of high expectations the team now has of itself.

Those expectations were put on hold however, when Mount Allison scored first in the 35th minute, and Dal found themselves immersed in irreconcilable déjavis of last year. Dal had been all over them and controlled the game from the start, but a quick steal and then a deep lob by Mount Allison found an open attacker behind Dal defense (and offside, too), where it was taken down field and shot past

the Dal keeper into the near corner.

Many wide shots, two rebounds off the posts, and a few air balls later, tenacious attacking finally found its mark at the 65th minute with a brilliant equalizer by Rob Sawler, after a beautiful chip from centrefield by Neil Sedgwick.

"very nice, mate"

A perfect diagonal pass down the right wing, Sawler took it on the bounce just outside the box and gently knocked it over the keeper's head to sink just under the crossbar.

Back in the spirits, Dal was unable to get the go-ahead goal, despite tenacious footwork by the entire front line, fullback Adrian Ibbetson, and more entertainment by Sawler, as rebounds and unbridled air balls continued to be the curse of the day.

U.N.B. was next on the list, and after a scenic tour of bencher Bob Hathaway's homeland (the covenant Saint John, Mr. Potato Head, and descriptive accounts of Curly's summer wipeouts), the team descended on a beautiful pitch which left even the Brits slightly impressed.

"Very nice—mate," they said.

A mustering of 400 manic U.N.B. fans wasn't enough to intimidate the Tigers, however, and only 3 minutes went by before John Richmond nearly headed a score on a cross by Rob Sawler. Great playing that followed rooted the ball in the home team's half, yet not even bitten nails on the writer's part could force it into the net, as frantic marking by U.N.B. left little time for accuracy and air balls again became a mark of the day. Consistent feeding and one-touch passing by Sedgwick and Andy Wheeler at midfield kept strong support for Hall and Richmond to cut deep gouges in the defense, but their golden opportunities just couldn't materialize.

Once again the nature of Dal's domination was belied by a quick goal on a U.N.B. counterattack. A badly fluffed strike by the forward line left the defenders caught up field, and a well placed shot in the 53rd minute put Dal in another nervous fix of a would-be upset. Mounting tension spurred further great playing by Sawler, Sedgwick, and Ian Clarke, but it was the magic touch of Wheeler that nailed the equalizer in the 64th minute.

From a throw-in by Adams, Wheeler lightly flicked the ball to rebound into the net. The goal was

a fitting trophy for a superb game on his part, despite being ravaged by injuries, and hobbling before the game like a broken doll.

Injuries have become a sort of plague for the team, with Craig Janc absent from play and both Sedgwick and Hall also playing on delicate muscles. Even strong-man Ibbetson would kiss the pitch three times this day, and a bloodied jersey was all he could show for a hard day at the office. His great tackles on defense were complemented by the consistent passwork of Sedgwick at midfield, despite being covered like a dirty rag since his reputation with the Clippers precedes himself.

"it's a building thing"

"It's hard to get the results you want on a tough road trip so early in the season when we are still building," he said in retrospect of the weekend, "but most teams would be satisfied with [two draws], especially back-to-back against two good teams. So it's a building thing, and now we're quite sure we can beat Mount Allison and U.N.B. in the future."

After the game, a divine pasta festival at the Hathaway's (which rivalled any Italian wedding) left the 27 person entourage practically adopted by the family. Followed by afternoo tea while watching the weekly round-up of British F.A. action, this team proves to be gelling into a family of their own. What can be expected of these gallant men is something truly dynamic, a sort of class to be experienced as an art form both on and off the field (and at the dinner table).

Witness the art for yourself when they host Saint Mary's on Monday, September 30, at 4 p.m. SMU is long considered a rival for the division title, but eyebrows were raised after their 0-1 loss to Memorial, a team that was smashed 5-0 by Dal the week before. In other division play, Acadia and U.N.B. drew at 1-1, while Memorial and St. Francis Xavier also drew at 0-0. By defeating Mount Allison 2-1, Acadia now emerges as the top contender against Dal, and they'll test each other out on October 2 at Acadia, and then again on Sunday, October 6 at 4 p.m. at Studley field. This tough, three game week will undoubtedly make it or break it for Dal.

AUA OVERALL STANDINGS

TEAM	W	L	T	GF	GA
ACA	3	0	2	8	2
DAL	2	0	2	8	2
MIA	1	1	2	5	3
UdM	1	1	1	6	5
MUN	1	2	1	1	8
UNB	0	0	3	2	2
PEI	1	3	0	5	8
SFX	0	1	2	0	3
SMU	0	1	1	1	0



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