

sports

Glory days for men's soccer at AUAA's

by Angel Figueroa

And the legacy continues. Sweeping to a 2-1 victory over Saint Mary's in the Atlantic championship final this weekend, the Dalhousie men's soccer team has again *thunderstruck* league history by claiming its second AASC title in as many years.

Defeating first the University of New Brunswick in a 4-0 semi-final, Dal handsomely earned its berth to the championship match in a manner which set its ultimate goal loud and clear. Meanwhile, Saint Mary's too had set its agenda for a shot at the league crown by earning its ticket with a 4-2 win over l'université de Moncton in the other semi-final. Both victories thus set the stage for a super heavyweight bout between the perennial powerhouses of the Atlantic league, whose cards had been on the table since the beginning of the year.

However, neither UNB nor Moncton were teams to be taken lightly, despite the fact that both had been beaten by SMU and Dal during the regular season and had far inferior records. Anxiety was high for some members of the Dal contingent, as any nightmarish upset would be utterly unbearable for months to



Audain PHOTO: ANGEL FIGUEROA

come. But that's just what UNB had in mind, although its reasons were more for revenge than survival. This would be a re-match of last year's championship game, where Dal powered their way to a 2-1 victory not only for the title, but for the first time against UNB in five years.

Yet it was their own nightmare that unfolded, as Dal opened the scoring early in the game with a real beauty. In the 22nd minute, Colin Audain gently flicked a pass from a throw-in by Rob Sawler to feed John Richmond. On a run into the box, he first beat a defender before lofting a cross to Tony Pignatiello, who slammed it home on the volley for a goal that was quick and decisive — one whose calibre to herald the scoring binge to follow.

Audain and Richmond were brilliant this day, and were key variables for the insurance goal to follow. It came only nine minutes later when

Adrian Ibbetson took a free-kick deep in Dal territory. Sending it down the flank, a header by Richmond dumped the ball to Audain, who fed it to Pignatiello for a one-on-one break. The showdown was one of little fanfare but it was still a beauty, as Pignatiello deftly tapped it into the far corner for his second of the day.

UNB mustered a surging attack for the remainder of the half, but its repeated attempts at scoring were nullified by the collective talents of Dal's defensive line. Particularly effective were veteran defenders Rob Adams and Adrian Ibbetson, who simply did the same thing they've been doing all year: just shut 'em down. Also consistent was keeper Trevor Chisolm's stellar performance. Dal's third goal came in the 48th minute, when midfielder Andy Wheeler laid a ball to Rob Sawler on the wing, who beat two defenders and then crossed to Audain on the opposite flank. Audain himself outplayed a defender, before sending the ball into the right corner of the net for a goal with a decisive killer punch.

Jamie Sawler, a veritable defender who always contends that he's a better striker, put in a punch of his own by scoring from an assist by Geoff Axell and Tony Pignatiello. His first goal in three years was the fourth and final marker to seal the fate of UNB in the 75th minute.

"Take your pick on what was the goal of the game," said a very pleased Matt Townsend, assistant coach of the team. "It was very solid all the way around. You could really tell that the focus of the guys was one of the key assets for the win."

Townsend couldn't have been more correct. "Focus" had been the buzz-word all week, and Pignatiello, who won player-of-the-game, agreed.

"Not one player played poorly today. This win was all teamwork. Today was probably the best effort as a team that we have had. That I won the player of the game today means nothing — it was a team effort the whole way."

Audain, whose contribution to the team's win was very significant, agreed: "It was our best game since the roadtrip [to PEI and Moncton]. Everybody played really well. Before we were just coasting through with some soft teams. But with playoff time the guys really had their heads in it and really wanted to win it, after training hard all year. With today's great performance we will be entering the final on a good note."

Alluding to the absolute game-of-the-year, the Championship match couldn't have been better designed. The two best teams in the conference were also the two with the fiercest rivalry. Having met twice already this season, and splitting the games between them (Dal 4 SMU 0 on Sept. 13, and SMU 2 Dal 1 on Oct. 21) the two contenders were geared up for the super-match like

there was no tomorrow.

While Dal was making its third consecutive appearance in the final, SMU was a Cinderella team springing back from a dismal season last year, where it lost seven games and won only two. Making the difference were two key additions — strikers George Kyreakakos and Peter MacIntosh, whose CSL experience gave them the run of the AUAA scoring leaders' list, and a couple of things to worry about on the part of Dal's defensive line, not to mention keeper Trevor Chisolm. Never before would their hands be so full.

And Chisolm immediately came up with a big save in the opening minutes, and many more followed. (The guy would have a great performance on this day, so while we're at it, let's confer one more award to the arsenal of honours that were handed out at the end of the game. As everything was covered save an award to playoff MVP, the Gazette Sports department has taken it upon itself to present "the scribe's player-of-the-playoff's award" to Dal keeper Trevor Chisolm. The guy was just brilliant, so he deserves it.)

The scoring opened in the 17th minute with a marker for Dal that had the grace of a World Cup goal.



Pignatiello scored two goals in the 4-0 semi-final PHOTO: ANGEL FIGUEROA

From a free-kick by Pignatiello inside SMU territory, Ibbetson redirected the ball into the six yard box, where Audain did a scissors kick and crossed over to Craig Janc, who pumped it into the net. While Audain and Pignatiello were again two key assets on the field for the Dal offence, so too were Ibbetson and Adams for

the Dal defence. Despite their business, however, Chisolm was kept busy himself with a couple of close saves, including one where he pushed the ball over the net in the 33rd minute.

Similar talents by the SMU keeper held Dal at bay for most of the game, but a SMU defensive error in the

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the jubilant men's soccer team PHOTO: ANGEL FIGUEROA

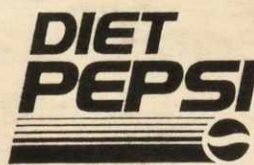
Dalhousie Athletes of the Week

* Anne Marie Farnell *



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* Shawn Plancke *
(no photo available)

At the Laurentian Tourn. the Tigers Men's BB Team won 1 game and lost 1 game. Shawn had 27 rebounds and scored 40 pts. He was chosen as a tournament all-star.