

First Grade Match Report: Glebe Vs Bankstown Saturday 25th April 2009 The Crest Bankstown 2:00pm.

Result: 3-2

The contest between Glebe and Bankstown has become a real blockbuster in recent times, with both teams seeking to prove a point on each occasion. This match was no different.

Bankstown started the match and won a sideline hit inside the Glebe 25 off their first possession. An innocuous pass into the circle from Bankstown was easily cleared by the Glebe defence, but unfortunately at waist height. This incurred a penalty corner, awarded after only 45 seconds. Bankstown are very strong on the set-piece and their specialist made no mistake, whistling one past Deano's earhole to put Bankstown a goal up after less than two minutes had been played. Glebe's first possession was off the ensuing pass-back.

Receiving a difficult reminder as to the potency of the Bankstown attack so early in the game may have been beneficial to the Glebe cause, as from this point they valued possession much more highly than in previous weeks. Patience around the back and precision passing were hallmarks of the Glebe performance today. Bankstown were happy to sit back and let Glebe come at them, and when Glebe attempted the most direct route to goal they played into Bankstown's hands somewhat – it is far easier for a side to defend the middle third of the field than its entire width. Where the maroons were far more successful was when they searched side-to-side from the back then attacked along the touchline and backline. Josh Laspina and Daniel Cleary used their skill to good effect against the defenders and clapped on the pace once they roamed into the wide open spaces.

Skirting around the outside of the defence has been one of the few common themes of the great teams throughout hockey history. Much has changed in terms of playing equipment, playing surface and playing tactics, but attacking up the flanks is every bit as potent today as it was when Brother Macartan Keegan was giving it to them in The Punjab.

As Glebe warmed to the idea that you've got to go sideways to get ahead they managed to force numerous short corners. Unfortunately the Glebe battery was not quite as well drilled as their opposition's, and it took a few attempts before a goal was slotted away by Michael Wark 20 minutes into the first half. Even this corner was not directly out of the playbook, with a bodgied trap from Patrick Wark forcing Peter Wark to find Michael with a rather unorthodox pass.

Glebe created a wealth of promising attacking raids, with plenty of scraps getting thrown about in front of the goalmouth. Mark Paterson was unfortunate not to be awarded a penalty stroke after a well taken flick over the keeper was 'saved' by a Bankstown defender on the goal line. Capitalising on the half chances wasn't the best today and the score would remain 1-1 at half time.

Glebe knew they were playing well, but also knew that Bankstown wanted the game almost as much as they did, so the half time talk focussed on getting on with the job in a similar fashion to the first half, with a bit more emphasis on clinical aggression in the attacking circle. In first grade half chances must be converted to goals, and the Glebe side has struggled to do this a bit this year.

The Glebe defence was holding up well, with Peter and Matthew Wark combining well to thwart the few attacks which Bankstown mustered. Zach Farlow and Patrick Wark on the flanks showed good restraint (or poor fitness) and generally held back from streaming forward and getting caught in attack, leaving a solid defensive wall to engage the inevitable counter attacks which Bankstown seemed to be relying on.

One such counter attack 15 minutes into the second half led Bankstown into the Glebe circle, and the defence was scrambling well, with plenty of numbers back behind the ball. The umpire thought the ball hit Matthew's foot. Matthew and your learned author did not. The player's beliefs, of course, count for naught on such occasions. The Bankstown corner combination proved its worth and scored their second goal from as many attempts.

All of a sudden Glebe had a blunt reality check. The side had been playing well, controlling the ball and possessing it well, forcing short corners and creating chances - everything but scoring. And now they found themselves 2-1 behind with 20 minutes left to play. Yet there was

no panic amongst the Glebe ranks, just a quiet self belief that if you go through the correct processes the result will look after itself. And so it was with 14 minutes left to play that a cracker of a pass found Mark 'Hollywood' Paterson in the attacking 25. He deftly eliminated the hapless Bankstown defender and sprinted into the circle to confront the keeper.

For aspiring young players I would recommend they watch as much of Mark play as possible. His intensity in all facets of the game is incredible – tackling, leading, passing. The attention he pays to vital, fundamental principles of the game makes plain the reason we hear them so often: Make your leads sharp, get low and strong when trapping (especially in the circle), make your drags behind square, keep balanced and crouched when shooting, *don't drag to keeper's stick side*. All too often we see forwards on the end of a brilliant attacking play or the end of a visionary pass and then they drag to the goalkeeper's right side and get picked off. Not only is this the goalkeepers's dominant hand (~90% of population) but it will move the ball to the striker's reverse stick. Only one Glebe forward in my memory was as good on his reverse as his forestick, and Chopper is in temporary retirement at the moment. So for the rest of us we should concentrate on bringing the ball to the keeper's left, our right, then slotting it home.

This fundamental play was well executed by Mark in his encounter with the keeper on Saturday. Mark moved sideways and had the keeper beaten, the ball on his stick, but the keeper made a last-gasp effort and took out the Glebe player. A penalty stroke was duly awarded. And duly scored by the fellow who forced it.

Glebe were mightily pleased to be back on an even footing, with plenty of time left to put themselves in front for the first time and scoot through with the three competition points.

Bankstown also rallied to the task somewhat, but could not find a way through the vice-like Glebe defence, who marked ever tighter and squeezed ever harder. Some tenacious tackling was seen from all of the Glebe players, with Zach Farlow and Peter Wark coming up with some bell ringers.

It took a couple of promising raids from the Glebe forwards before Josh LaSpina found himself on the top of the circle with the ball on his left side. He considered the tomahawk before doing well to run his feet around the ball and crack off a good shot from an awkward position. The Bankstown keeper saved the first effort but a signature, swashbuckling swipe from the electric substitute Andrew Cheong saw the ball home to the back of the net. Glebe rejoiced to finally have their toil pay off where it mattered. Yet there was seven minutes left to go.

The Glebe Club spirit dictates that the best way to defend a lead is to extend it, and Glebe, while cautious of the dreaded counterattack continued to make inroads into the Bankstown defence. Smart and patient play around the back wound down the clock and finally the hooter went and Glebe could claim a hard fought but much deserved victory.

Players Player: Matthew Wark had another excellent game at fullback, martialling the defence well when he didn't have the ball, stealing plenty of it off Bankstown with his superb tackling and then providing excellent passes over 10, 20, 30 and 60 metres with a combination of pushes as well as his world class slap hits and overheads.

Glebe face off with South West Strikers next week, who have been troubling some of the better sides this year. Glebe will have to stick tightly to the game plan.

Regards,

Patrick Wark.