

CLEAR (Southampton) Vs Plymouth Hope FC – Friendly: Saturday 16 April

“So where are you then?” “I’m at the place you gave me the postcode to.” “Oh right, I can’t seem to see you at the entrance, what’s the road called?” “Weston Road.” “Ah, I see.....” “What’s up?” “Well I think you maybe on the other side of the city!”

Despite a slightly haphazard start, Saturday 16 April turned out to be a competitive but well spirited encounter between the football teams of CLEAR select XI from Southampton, and our opponents Plymouth Hope FC. PHFC, a club with a similar philosophy to us, are

established to bring football opportunities to the wider community of their city, Plymouth. We had arranged to play them in a friendly match and hopefully establish some links between the two clubs.

Although (admittedly!) the postcode given by CLEAR was slightly different to the Sports Centre venue at which the game was due to kick off at 12.30pm, Plymouth Hope were willing to forgive this to ‘human error’ rather than underhand tactics prior to kick off! The match was forced back by half an hour but nothing could take away from the nervous excitement that everyone was feeling prior to the game. We would about pitting our wits against an opposition who have recently completed their first season of competitive 11 a-side football. This would be our first run out as an eleven, and as a group used only to playing 6 a-side, on astro-turf.



Once pleasantries had been (hurriedly) exchanged between the two teams and photographs taken in the middle of the pitch, we kicked off at 1pm. In almost perfect weather conditions for a game of football, Hope started the game on the front foot, almost camping themselves in the CLEAR half. Their early dominance paid dividends when a penalty was awarded and duly dispatched. This seemed to rally the CLEAR boys and they began to relax in to their own game, with the initial nerves looking to have settled.

A reply came soon after, when one of CLEAR's danger players, Ahmed, rounded off a well worked move. 1-1 after nine minutes gave the impression that the game could potentially provide a feast of goals. However this wasn't to be the case and the rest of the half saw some very good passages of play with intricate passing taking place by both teams, but unfortunately no more goals.

The slap-dash start to the day continued as it was discovered that, due to our late kick off, the pitch we were booked on to, was then booked out for another game shortly afterwards. A quick, direct decision was made and we moved on to the pitch adjacent to continue the second half. This decision was to be a rueful one as it was soon discovered that another game was also to take place on this pitch! We then moved on to a third pitch, this time without goal nets and corner flags, but with little risk of being moved on! And despite the poor playing surface, the game continued and did little to detract from the beauty of a bunch of men kicking around a pig's bladder.

The second half was a less cagey and more open affair with both teams taking advantage of the opportunity to make regular rolling substitutions. CLEAR seemed to make the most of the opportunities which came their way and soon took the lead. Allan would prove to be the game-changer in the second half, bagging himself a hat trick in the space of twenty minutes, all of which were accomplished and composed finishes under pressure. The biggest cheer of the second half, however, was saved for the never say die attitude of Dan who expertly prevented the ball from plummeting down the hill on to one of our previous pitches. Emerging with the ball he was greeted by great appreciation and a round of applause that both sets of players could join in on.

At times both teams played some very confident, positive passing football and the game was a shining example of mutual respect and fair play. Overall a finely matched contest was ultimately won 5-2 by CLEAR. The errors that caused a delay in kick off and several pitch changes were taken in great spirit by both sides and did little to detract from the occasion. It simply reinforced the fact that football can bring unity, positivity and great enjoyment, no matter what the circumstances or background of players. I would be hard pushed to think of any other activity that could have the pulling power that this sport carries with it.



To end the day, both teams indulged in some food that was put on at a local pub. It gave both teams the opportunity to engage in some off field banter and although most were a little nervous at first, some good conversation was sparked up between members of both teams. The Plymouth lads then went off to see the sights of Southampton, including a visit to the mighty St Mary's and taking a guided walk of the city centre and history of the Titanic!

Many thanks to Plymouth Hope FC for coming to Southampton and for a great day. We hope to see you soon at your Football Festival on Saturday 18 June.