

Laurentian tide finally comes in 10/11/02

By JOHN BROWNE, The Telegram

Richard Kelly cracked the cold night air with a thundering volley at the six-minute mark and St. Lawrence Laurentians rode superb goalkeeping and a brilliant defence to a 1-0 upset victory over British Columbia in Challenge Cup soccer Thursday night at King George V Field.

The Newfoundland representatives, spurred on by about 4,000 boisterous fans, turned in a heroic defensive effort after taking the early lead. A win over Quebec tonight will put the Laurentians into medal contention.

In one of the most memorable matches ever played at the old St. John's pitch, Kelly, the provincial league's scoring champion, brought the crowd to its feet after teammate Rudy Norman started the play just outside the penalty area.

"I just walked right into it. There's no way you could miss," said Kelly of his closerange, game-winning strike that beat B.C. keeper Scott Samuelson.

"We think we took B.C. down a couple of notches by scoring early. The fans were going crazy and then we kept fighting hard to the end."

Laurentians' coach Junior Edwards was obviously pleased with the big win, but calm in his assessment of the match.

"We played like we were the underdogs, but we played hard. We did what we were supposed to do and that's score the first goal to get the fans into it. That's exactly what happened," said Edwards.

"They (B.C.) are a very good side. But we had the fans, the guts and the big save from Patty (Byrne)."

Byrne's big save talk of the game

The save everyone at the game is still probably talking about happened around the 30minute mark of the first half. A B.C. player drilled a high shot that looked to be headed to the top corner of the net, but Byrne leapt and made the diving save as the fans went wild.

Byrne was steady as a rock throughout the contest and after the match, he said he didn't mind the pressure B.C. was putting on all night.

"I loved it, actually. There's no better way to stay focused than to have lots of shots," said Byrne, who made another key save late in the first half.

B.C. took a low, hard free kick from about 20 yards that Byrne somehow found through traffic and kept it out.

“B.C. is a tough team, no doubt about it, but we have a strong defence and our forwards can score,” said Byrne.

Byrne said the win was the biggest of his career — “no question about it.”

The talented keeper said his players needed a tough match for them to “get on” their game and “we’ll be flying” against Quebec.

Newfoundland players showed right from the start they were willing to sacrifice their bodies for ball possession.

On numerous occasions they used the old-fashioned sliding tackle to take the ball away from B.C. players or to drive it out of bounds and regroup.

Players on both sides got testy at times, with referee Tiger Liu handing out seven yellow cards, including four to the Newfoundland squad.

“We’ve been waiting 10 years to beat these guys,” said an excited, but exhausted-looking Blair Aylward moments after the final whistle sounded. “We knew it was our time. We promised our fans we’d do it and we pulled it off. It wasn’t pretty, but we got it done.

“They (B.C.) are a great soccer team. They proved it last year. It was a great struggle. We don’t see anything like the way they switch positions. It was a great struggle.”

Aylward said the big stop by Byrne probably saved the game for his team. He felt that if B.C. had tied the game at that point, they would have had taken the wind out of our sails.

“I don’t break my promises,” said a smiling, but obviously relieved Laurentian defender Bob Spearns, who had gone out on a limb by boldly predicting a St. Lawrence victory.

“It just goes to show you the heart this team has,” said Spearns. “B.C. gave us a tough battle.

“They played well, but it was just our time.”

The victory is believed to be the first for a Laurentian team over a squad from B.C.

Spearns, who didn’t seem one bit tired after the match, said his squad has to regroup quickly and prepare for the Quebec match 7 o’clock tonight at King George V Field.

In the meantime, Spearns says he’s staying away from any further predictions.

“I wouldn’t dare. I got away with it once,” he added, smiling again.

It took the favourite B.C. players about five minutes to recover their composure after the stunning goal, but when they did, they gradually took control of the game and held it, with the exception of maybe 10 minutes, the rest of the way. In fact, the B.C. defence, outside of a few mistakes, was superb, as was their dominating midfield.

In the last five minutes, B.C. stormed the Laurentians’ net but couldn’t find the equalizer.

They had several scoring chances but bad luck, erratic shooting and a Laurentian defence that bent but wouldn't break finally did them in. British Columbia had 12 corners to five by Newfoundland.

In other games Thursday:

Ontario 1, Alberta 1

Felix Napuri opened the scoring for Alberta at 28 minutes and Ontario's Andrew Loague tied the match at the 76-minute mark.

Nova Scotia 0, P.E.I. 0

Mark Gardiner was in net for Nova Scotia, while Charles Bosworth was in the P.E.I. nets. Nova Scotia outshot P.E.I. 6-3

Manitoba 1, New Brunswick 0

Steve Rebizant's penalty kick goal at the 39-minute marker was the only scoring. Sean Sylvestre posted the shutout.