

Old Nicks near and far—

I am challenged by the obligation to provide a match report from last weekend's game. [Highland Stillhouse] I have to say it was a puzzler. But here's the truth as I know it. In the middle of the week I was calculating that we had five or six players who were injured or away. And I'd heard from about 9 players that they'd be present. But that left me with some uncertainty. A conversation with Anatole led us to inviting Sieg and Bob Dolphin to show up just to give us a solid enough side to address our opponent, Stillhouse. What we did not know was that Stillhouse had recruited Nunn, Jeff Wallach and Paul and Scott Young to augment their efforts.

On the morning of the match, it was hard to complain. The sun was out, the restrooms were unlocked, and the final tally gave us 18 players for the match—a good number. At the starting whistle, Nicks were calm, executing simple passes, moving the ball forward but not pressing too swiftly. Fifteen minutes clicked by and the ball had not crossed into their attacking end. Mike was beginning to get bored in goal. In the way that things can be dumped on their head unexpectedly, Stillhouse managed to wrest the ball loose, breaking forward from the center and laying the ball out right to Jeff Wallach who sprinted down the touch line, beat our defenders, and scored on a shot that looked to be quite difficult from my standpoint. Nicks were stunned by the sudden shift. The play restarted and while Nicks were able to push forward, we had increasing difficulty controlling the ball. Anxiety led to passes that either went awry or were intercepted by the opponents, and Stillhouse began to find their pace. They untracked dangerous runs. We had shored up the right side to stop Jeff Wallach, but Scott and Nunn and their midfield scissored through our defense only to be stopped at the last run. When we had the ball going forward, Stand-in center defender Paul was effective at breaking up our attack and clearing the ball back to his forwards. Nicks continued to have breaks and shots, but our efforts were just wide. At one point, Mike scrambled out of goal to collect a ball but was beaten to it by an attacker who curled it past him from 20 or so yards out putting us two goals down. The worst moment, though, was when Mike came out quick and resolute to cut off the angles as an attacker gathered the ball and took a shot. Mike parried it with his right hand—and the referee immediately whistled an infraction. Mike was outside the box and was given a **straight red** for intentional hand ball, despite the fact that the ball would not have gone in if he'd let it go. We were distraught—this is not a situation anyone plans for. A quick switch was made to put Brink in goal and Rock came off as field player leaving us in a 4-4-1 formation. The half ended shortly after, and we gathered to regroup.

The mood on the sidelines was frustrated. We recognized that Mike's handball deserved a call but a straight red seemed harsh. We had to make a mental adjustment—we now had many more players to try to keep in rotation as we were playing with 10 and only one forward. With the cry of "Drink Cold Beer" Nicks returned to the field. The second half started with better attacking and a return to more settled play. Passes were more consistently to the feet of our own team, Despite being a man down, Nicks demonstrated poise and character to look for opportunities. And the chances came—Nicks pressed steadily. Shots went wide or to the keeper or just over the bar. But there were shots. About halfway through, however, a pass from the defending back to Brinkman in goal was delivered at a slow enough pace that an attacking player reached it first- sending it into the net to seal our fate. The strangest thing was that I thought our crew—start to finish—played well overall. If we could have eliminated the errant passes to opponents and not had the disruption of a red card and mistakes in the back, I am sure we would have won. That being said—the play was lively from our attacking front and the defense was mostly stalwart at the back. Both Jim and Mike made some great saves.

It was a strange game. And, yes, **I've sent an appeal** of Mike's red card to the league. We'll have to see what happens. Final score: 0 – 3, Stillhouse.

Best regards,

David

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