

A strong second half sees Harps win out over Eoghan Rua

A game of two vastly different halves is the way one would describe the entertaining affair fans enjoyed in Keash on Sunday morning. The conditions were perfect for a game of free-flowing football, dry and with little wind. Harps lined out a noticeably young team with almost all players playing under-age football as well as senior for Harps. They came up against a physically strong Eoghan Rua side with plenty of power going forward. Spectators were certainly in for a great game from the start.

The game began well for Eoghan Rua as they drove forward and won a free almost immediately after the throw in. Rachel O'Brien stepped up to take the free and calmly strook the ball between the uprights to get her team on the scoreboard. Harps responded well, winning the kick out and then working it through the lines to Megan McCormack, in corner forward, who fired it over from an acute angle for Harps' first score of the day.

Kick outs would be crucial today as both teams fielded strong midfield pairings. In the 4th minute Harps' midfielder Zara Stafford won a kick out and passed it off to Róisín Molloy. Always willing to carry the ball, Molloy drew a free in a great position for Harps. Lisa Casey wasted no time in popping the ball over the put Harps in the lead. The lead was short lived as the girls from west Sligo flew up the pitch from the kick out. The ball fell to Orla Naughton, who slotted the ball past Harps goalkeeper, Shereda Davey.

In the 6th minute, Lisa Casey stepped up again and scored her second free kick of the day. Free taking would be another crucial battle in this game. Both sides struggled to get into scoring positions until the 11th minute when Rachel Hannon was sent to the bin following a collision with an Eoghan Rua forward. To make matters worse for Harps, the free was in a relatively scorable position. However, the resultant free went wide of the posts. The Eastern Harps were girls left feeling lucky. The two teams traded wides after this with the Eoghan Rua defence putting a lot of pressure on their opponents when they got on the ball.

Eoghan Rua extended their lead to two points in the 15th minute after a lovely free by Rachel O'Brien. This was followed by a beautiful score by Orla Naughton. Eoghan Rua looked to be pulling away as Harps struggled to get the ball forward and were often pressured into making bad passes which were easily intercepted. Eventually Harps got themselves back on the scoreboard with another free from Lisa Casey in the 20th minute. This score was Harps' first since the 12th minute of the half. Harps did however have a couple of goal chances in this period but both times they failed to convert the last pass to Megan McCormack who would have been through on goal.

Eoghan Rua finished off the half with two more scores from their free taker, Rachel O'Brien, who was on song today.

Half time score: Harps 0-4 Eoghan Rua 1-5

As the teams lined out for the second half, it was certain that the young Harps team would need to improve their performance to be in with a chance of victory. Harps won the throw in and carried the ball forward. They worked the Eoghan Rua defence and eventually won a free which was taken quickly by Lisa Casey who spotted Leanne McGowan running through on goal. Leanne blasted the ball past Ellen McGuire into the roof of the net. A perfect start for Harps to get back into the game.

A minute later Orlaith Connolly received Harps' second yellow card of the match, this time for what the referee, John Gilmartin, adjudged to be persistent fouling. Eoghan Rua capitalised on the extra player and scored twice within the next two minutes, one lovely score from Louise Lindsay and

another from Rachel O'Brien, her first from play. In the 25th minute Harps keeper Shereda Davey was once again called into action and this time made a great save off her knee to prevent a definite goal. Eoghan Rua seemed to be pulling away as Rachel O'Brien extended their lead once again from a free. The girls from West Sligo were now leading by four points.

Eastern Harps needed to score next and once again relied on the boot of Lisa Casey to pop over another free. It was then Eoghan Rua's turn to go down to 14 players as Rachel O'Brien was sin binned after a tackle from behind on Zara Stafford who was breaking out of defence. The challenge followed a period of excellent defending from the Harps backline, notably the three Hannon cousins, Emma, Riona and Rachel and assisted by Aideen Coyle. From the free Eastern Harps worked it up the field with great running from Eimear Connolly and Grace Rafferty. The ball ended up with midfielder Amy McGovern who won a free, once again in a position for Lisa Casey to send the ball straight through the uprights.

At the other end of the pitch Riona Hannon showed her skills in defence as she forced Eoghan Rua's Sinead Naughton to kick the ball out over the end line. Harps were on the attack once again with Róisín Molloy running forward. She gave a lovely hand pass to Lisa Casey on the right wing who sent a perfectly weighted pass to Lisa Powell, who made no mistake and fired the ball into the far corner of the net for an exceptional finish to a well worked goal. Harps were looking like a new team. Things would only get worse for Eoghan Rua, as seconds later after a high ball into to danger area, the ball fell to the alert Róisín Molloy who passed the ball into the back of the net.

After the water break Harps looked alert and momentum had most certainly swung in their favour. Lisa Casey opened the scoring for the last quarter with another score from a placed ball. She would strike again a few seconds later when she split the uprights for her first score from play. Eoghan Rua responded carrying the ball straight up the field. They were incredibly unlucky when Sinead Naughton's shot hit the post and went wide. They would get their score no less than a minute later, from midfielder Louise Lindsay, after she won the Harps kickout.

The home team were not finished yet. Róisín Molloy was taken down in the box as she was through on goal. The referee awarded the penalty and Lisa Casey, cool as ever, slotted the ball into the right-hand side of the net. With less than 10 minutes left in the game Harps were now thoroughly in control. Eimear Connolly made a fantastic run forward and won an excellent free which was easily converted by the on-form Casey. With 6 minutes left Eoghan Rua scored another free off the boot of Rachel O'Brien, who had returned to the field after her sin bin earlier on in the half. Suitably, the player of the match, Lisa Casey closed off the scoring with a final free kick to bring her personal tally to 1-09. A minute later the referee blew his whistle and the game was over.

A cracking game which was won by a tenacious young Harps team who outscored their opponents 4-6 to 0-05 in the second half.

The final score: Eastern Harps 4-10 Eoghan Rua 1-10