

NORTHUMBERLAND SCHOOLS' FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

Hon. Treasurer:
C.D. Newman,
53 Cateran Way,
Cramlington, NE23 6EY



Hon. Secretary:
K. Belshaw,
5 The Demesne,
North Seaton Village,
Ashington, NE63 9TW.

Telephone: Home 01670 715911
School 01670 822625

Telephone: Home 01670 814601
School 01670 816111

English Schools' F.A. Premier League Under 16 Trophy Final Oxfordshire 2 Northumberland 3 (aet)

The Northumberland boys, Northern Counties' Champions and undefeated this season, travelled to the Manor Ground, Oxford to meet their destiny in this prestigious national final. Both sides opened nervously and a free-kick conceded by Mark Maley (St. Thomas More) gave Oxfordshire their first opportunity, but David Tremble (St. Cuthbert's) headed clear at the far post. At the other end, a foul on Mark Lazenby (Tynedale) produced a free-kick which was only half cleared to Chris Ellis (Tynedale) who shot just over from the edge of the box. North. had still not settled when they found themselves a goal behind; Robbie Eason got in amongst the defenders to glance home a header from a long distance free-kick and it could have been two as Craig Pearman turned a cross over the bar. A fine run from halfway by Andrew Hay (Whitley Bay) ended with a shot over the top, while at the other end Michael Swann (Bedlington) saved a low shot at the base of a post. Close marking had reduced North. to playing too many speculative balls in the air, but at last they began to string some passes together and Graham Hogg (Ridley) headed wide under pressure, while Hay turned neatly to put through Karl Porter (Bedlington), whose well struck shot was turned around the post by the flying keeper. A break by Oxford's Darryl Pugh looked menacing until the alert Colin Morton (Tynedale) snuffed out the danger with a well timed challenge. Next, Hay and Porter combined to feed Michael Carrick (Burnside) whose glancing header flew narrowly wide and the half ended with a chance falling at the feet of Stephen Warwick (Morpeth) who sliced his shot past the post.

North. stepped up a gear and began the second half playing on the ground. A low cross from Hay was flicked over the top by Carrick, then Warwick picked up a loose ball to let fly from 25 yards and bring out the best in the keeper. A short free-kick was tapped to Maley who shot wide from outside the box and the pressure was maintained when Hay turned brilliantly and produced a cross which beat everything, including the far post. After 15 minutes play, the door was finally opened when a low shot could only be parried by the keeper and Hay retrieved the loose ball to chip in the equaliser from an acute angle. North. were now in top gear and chances came thick and fast. A free-kick produced a loose ball, but Hogg saw his fierce volley pass just over the top, then a long clearance allowed Hay to lay the ball off to Porter who snatched at a volley which flew wide. The arrival of substitute Ross Anderson (Walbottle), with 17 minutes left, produced immediate results as he was set free by Hay to cross low to give Warwick a golden opportunity; his side-footed effort lacked conviction, but the goal-keeper's frantic attempt to keep the ball out was to no avail as the perfectly positioned assistant referee flagged to indicate that the ball had crossed the line. A moment's relaxation conceded a free-kick to the far post which was headed wide, and Oxford began to stage a rally in an effort to save the game. A long cross found the head of Butler, but Swann

gathered easily; then slack marking gave Oxford a chance which was headed past the post. With two minutes remaining and the match seemingly won, Andrew Pringle (Ponteland) substituted for Swann in goal, but in the last minute, North. were stunned by a long cross which produced an unstoppable volley from Lee Nix to send the game into extra time. At first, North. were reduced to playing hopeful long balls, but regained their composure for substitute Kris Leighton (Willington) to produce a shot which could only be turned for a corner while a penetrating run by Carrick finished with a shot just over the bar. The deadlock was finally broken when an Oxford defender, under severe pressure from Leighton, was forced into a weak back pass; Leighton got to it first and gleefully prodded it past the oncoming keeper to nose North. ahead. More chances came and went as Leighton volleyed wide after good work by Carrick, who later headed wide a cross from Anderson. The tension remained until the very last minute, when North. were relieved to see a last gasp free-kick float past the far post. The final whistle brought relief at the end of a thrilling, hard fought final which was a credit to schools' football.

CD Newman