

ACT COLTS CONTINUE FAIRYTALE RUN
Wednesday 11th January 2012

The ACT Colts team continued its remarkable FFA National Futsal Championships display by going through a busy third day of the tournament undefeated. Gallant draws against the highly fancied NSW Thunder and NSW Lightning teams was book-ended by a come from behind 3-2 win over Tasmania to keep the unheralded locals in with a chance of ending the round-robin phase in what would be an unprecedented and storybook first place.

A combative derby match between Southern NSW and Southern NSW Flame kicked off Day Three of the Open Men's competition at the AIS Arena with the Flame being doused by their near-neighbors 3-1 in a match that saw the Flame's Russel Crighton sent off for after receiving two yellow cards. It had appeared early on that it would be the Flame that would take the spoils especially after William Mobs gave them a 13th minute lead. Southern NSW weren't prepared to lie down and take that setback though and drew level before the break via a thunderous free-kick from Darryl Fernandes. Fernandes was at it again in the second half, squeezing in his second of the match, off the near post to give his team a narrow 2-1 lead. Whilst only one goal separated the teams the match could have gone either way so it was much to Southern NSW's relief when Robert Foti found some space inside the area to stab the ball into the roof of the net and complete the scoring.

The ACT Colts dream tournament almost had an even better story as they were within 45 seconds of claiming a surprise win over the NSW Thunder in their first match of Day Three. A free-shot from within the 10 metre zone, awarded after a foul on the tricky Chris Zeballos, was converted by Greg Giovenali to earn the Thunder a share of the spoils in a terrific encounter which finished 2-2. Jarrod Basger, the hero of the NSW Thunder's Youth team success last year, opened the scoring as early as the fourth minute but any thoughts of a routine win were quickly dispelled by Elia Salloum's equaliser two minutes later. Lukas Cole smashed in a trademark free-kick to give the Colts the lead and could have had a second only for Gavin O'Brien to sensationally save his penalty after Cole's trickery had seen him upended in the box. As seems to be the norm this week Colts 'keeper Kieran Stroh put in another man of the match effort with some solid saves aided by his hard working team mates including David Dexter and the tireless Goran Josifovski.

NSW Lightning began the day by winning their first match of the tournament as they defeated a depleted Tasmania 5-1. The Lightning had the perfect start when Giacomo Di Mento gave them the lead inside three minutes with a fine ending to a well-worked move. This led to some extreme pressure on the Tasmanian goal and a second duly arrived two minutes before the half-time break when Goran Ljuboja smashed in a shot from an acute angle. To their credit Tasmania responded well and Alex Gordon reduced the arrears with his first goal of the championships. This only seemed to spark the Lightning into even more frenzied attacks and, after only scoring one goal in their opening three matches, they finally found their scoring boots and added goals from Marino Musemeci, Giovanni Leuzzi and Denny Dutra as Tasmania finally ran out of steam.

A moment of genius from Hara Yoshinao preserved Victoria's 100% record in the final match of Round 4 at the expense of the ACT Cobras. Yoshinao struck the only goal of the match as Victoria claimed the three points with a 1-0 win in the 27th minute. Collecting the ball on halfway Yoshinao turned sharply, nutmegged Trent Flanigan and slipped the ball underneath the advancing Roger Cua in the Cobras goal for a fantastic finish. It was a goal fitting to win a match in which little separated the two teams and good chances were at a premium. Jonathan Barrientos almost made it 2-0 after immediately coming off the bench but his fearsome effort flashed just wide of the upright. The defeat left the Cobras with what amounted to a must-win game against Southern NSW Flame in Round 5.

The Thunder kicked off the afternoon section of the tournament and proved to be too ruthless for Southern NSW without even getting out of second gear. Early goals from Greg Giovenali and Daine Merrin paved the way for a 3-0 win that could have been more but for the heroics of Southern goalkeeper Connor McGoldrick. McGoldrick made a string of blocks to deny the Thunder a bigger winning margin as the top NSW team took the opportunity to rest a number of key players ahead of bigger tasks. Giovenali netted his third goal of the week to get the Thunder off to a winning start and when Merrin made it 2-0 minutes later the writing was on the wall for Southern. They responded well with some staunch defence but could do little about the third Thunder goal which was beautifully created and sublimely executed by Corey Biczko.

Two goals in the last two minutes rescued the ACT Cobras in their second match of the day as they turned around a 2-3 deficit to claim a precious 4-3 win over Southern NSW Flame. It looked for all money like the Flame had done enough to get a win that would have put them in pole position to qualify for the semi-finals until the late, late Cattanach show. It had all looked so serene for the Cobras when they went ahead after twenty seconds with the quickest goal of the tournament to date. Skipper Trent Flanigan blasting home into the bottom corner to open the scoring. The Flame hit back though with goals from William Mobs and Fran Pierro to go into the half-time break 2-1 up showing their breakneck counter-attacking to good effect. Robbie Cattanach equalised for the Cobras at the end of a slick three-man move before Michael Oliveria had the Southern NSW Flame back in front with a quite sublime lob. Just when all hope seemed lost though the Cobras made it 3-3 with more than a touch of fortune. Robbie Cattanach was looking for George Cattanach with a pass that everyone missed as it rolled into the net. George Cattanach got hold of one second later though to win a cracking match.

Another pulsating match followed as the ACT Colts and NSW Lightning ended 3-3 amid pushing and shoving as the Colts were denied a victory by a superb penalty save from Lightning goalkeeper Lionel Da Souza from Goran Josifovski. There was little sign of the drama to come as Nathan Walker gave the Colts the lead before the Lightning took full control of the match with goals from Giacomo Di Mento, Justin McLeay and Marino Musemecci to leap ahead 3-1 by the break. McLeay's goal in particular was worthy of note as he clipped a delightful shot over the Colts goalkeeper to end a terrific move. The Colts fought back in the second half with Josifovski giving them hope on the end of a sweeping move before Walker leveled the game with a deft finish at the near post. As the match neared its denouement a shot from close range was pushed around the post by Lightning defender Tim Simpson who was sent off for deliberate handball. Da Souza brilliantly saved the

resultant penalty to his left. The match ended in acrimonious fashion as the Colts were denied a free-kick in a god position by the sudden emergence of a second ball. Ugly scenes followed as a confrontation after the final whistle saw Josifovski and a Lightning team management member also dismissed.

Victoria made the most of NSW Thunder's 2-2 draw with the Colts to move with a 4-0 win over Tasmania as Round 5 of action completed. It was an ultimately comfortable win secured with two goals in each half with Hara Yoshinao sending the Victorians on the way with the first goal of the match in the second minute. It took a further dozen minutes for Victoria to double that lead and, whilst the score remained 1-0, Tasmania were still in with a shout. Once Oner Simsek had grabbed the second goal though the match was all over as a real contest. Tasmania battled bravely in the second term and was unfortunate to see Joao Da Silva make it 3-0 after some stubborn defending had finally been broken down. Ahmed Azzam added a fourth with seven minutes remaining to complete the scoring.

The evening session opened with the pick of the fixtures as the home team, the ACT Cobras, met NSW Thunder and, at the end of a tense match, the Cobras took the honours ending the Thunder's unbeaten record by the narrowest of margins by winning 1-0. The only goal of the match came ten minutes from time when Travis Dries saw his initial shot saved by Gavin O'Brien in the Thunder goal only to chip the rebound across the face of the net where the waiting Glenn Smith headed into an open goal. The Cobras should have given themselves breathing space when Pat Ross-Magee was bundled over in the area only for skipper Trent Flanigan to blaze his spot-kick against the crossbar and away. Earlier, Smith and Dries had wasted passable chances for the Cobras whilst Raymond Miller and Tobias Seeto had the pick of the opportunities for the Thunder but failed to extend Angelo Konstantinou in the home goal.

Southern NSW proved to be a thorn in the side of NSW Lightning on Wednesday evening by fighting back from 0-2 down to earn a 2-2 draw and thus making the Lightning's match with the ACT Cobras a must-win for the NSW team. It had all looked so simple for the Lightning by half-time as they raced into a 2-0 lead courtesy of goals from Gavin Schipp in the 5th minute and Goran Ljuboja, the latter scoring his second of the week. The glint of a Southern recovery was evident though as Daryl Fernandes and Peter Gaffney spurned chances to get their team back into the match. That honour was left to Bradley Ferraro who rounded the otherwise unbeatable Lionel Da Souza to slot home. With time running out a Lightning win edged ever closer however Peter Gaffney had other ideas and Southern's stand-out player crashed in the equaliser as the clock ticked down to just less than sixty seconds remaining.

A courageous Tasmania were denied a maiden win at this year's event by the ACT Colts whose incredible rise through the ranks of the competition continued with a late 3-2 win confirmed by Lukas Cole's fabulous turn and finish close to the end of the match. The Tasmanians, who have by far the smallest squad in the tournament took a surprise lead against the unbeaten Colts when Jacob Clamp scored early on. A tremendous rearguard action ensued from the Tasmanian team with Captain Andrew Clark putting in a machine-like display of tireless running. The underdogs withstood wave after wave of Colts attacks before David Dexter levelled with a curling effort into the top corner. Almost immediately however Liam Scott hammered a left foot shot high into the roof of the net to put Tassie

back in front. Scott then saw a header pushed onto the bar by Kieran Stroh as Tasmania looked for a killer third. That stop by the in-form Colts 'keeper was to prove decisive as first Nathan Walker made it 2-2 before Cole broke Tasmanian hearts in the final three minutes to keep the Colts Hollywood story on track.

The final match of a day that saw twelve men's fixtures completed was the clash between table-topping Victoria and Southern NSW Flame which Victoria won 4-3. Victoria were heavily favoured to win the game and end the day unbeaten but were stunned by the Flame, searching for their first win of the week, who took the lead with a goal from William Mobs, his third of the competition, very much against the run of play. The pace of Victoria was proving tough to handle though and quick-fire goals from Kui Mu and Jonathan Barrientos had the Victorians back in front before the break. Any hopes of a Flame resurgence seemed dashed by Mu, netting his second goal early in the second half, before the diminutive playmaker claimed his hat-trick. Franc Pierro pulled one back for the Flame and Doug Woodwiss made a game of it at 4-3 but Victoria held on to win despite late Flame pressure.

OPEN MEN

Round 4

Southern NSW 3 (Darryl Fernandes (2), Robert Foti) Southern NSW Flame 1 (William Mobs) ACT Colts 2 (Elia Salloum, Lukas Cole) NSW Thunder 2 (Jarrod Basger, Greg Giovenali) NSW Lightning 5 (Giacomo Di Mento, Goran Ljuboja, Marino Musemeci, Giovanni Leuzzi, Denny Dutra) Tasmania 1 (Alex Gordon) Victoria 1 (Hara Yoshinao) ACT Cobras 0

Round 5

NSW Thunder 3 (Greg Giovenali, Daine Merrin, Corey Biczo) Southern NSW 0 Southern NSW Flame 3 (William Mobs, Franc Pierro, Michael Oliveria) ACT Cobras 4 (Trent Flanigan, Robbie Cattanach (2), George Cattanach) ACT Colts 3 (Nathan Walker (2), Goran Josifovski) NSW Lightning 3 (Giacomo Di Mento, Justin McLeay, Marino Musemeci) Tasmania 0 Victoria 4 (Hara Yoshinao, Oner Simsek, Joao Da Silva, Ahmed Azzam)

Round 6

ACT Cobras 1 (Glenn Smith) NSW Thunder 0 NSW Lightning 2 (Gavin Schipp, Goran Ljuboja) Southern NSW 2 (Bradley Ferraro, Peter Gaffney) Tasmania 2 (Jacob Clamp, Liam Scott) ACT Colts 3 (David Dexter, Nathan Walker, Lukas Cole) Victoria 4 (Kui Mu (3), Jonathan Barrientos) Southern NSW Flame 3 (William Mobs, Franc Pierro, Doug Woodwiss)

TABLE

Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
1	Victoria	6	5	1	0	20	5	+15	17
2	ACT Colts	6	2	4	0	14	12	+2	14
3	NSW Thunder	6	3	2	1	13	4	+9	13
4	ACT Cobras	6	4	0	2	19	9	+10	12
5	NSW Lightning	6	1	3	2	11	14	-3	9
6	Southern NSW	6	1	2	3	8	17	-9	7
7	Southern NSW Flame	6	0	3	3	14	18	-4	6
8	Tasmania	6	0	1	5	8	28	-20	2

3pts - WIN, 2pts - Score Draw, 1pt - No-Score Draw

LEADING SCORERS

5 George CATTANACH (ACT Cobras)

4 Robbie CATTANACH (ACT Cobras), Lukas COLE (ACT Colts), Danny RISTEVSKI (Southern NSW Flame), Joao DA SILVA, Kui MU (Victoria)

3 Misko NAUMOSKI, Nathan WALKER (ACT Colts), Miles DOWNIE, Greg GIOVENALI, Chris ZEBALLOS (NSW Thunder), Williams MOBS (Southern NSW Flame), Andre CARO, Oner SIMSEK (Victoria)

2 Travis DRIES, Trent FLANIGAN, Daniel FULTON, Jason O'DWYER (ACT Cobras), Giacomo DI MENTO, Goran LJUBOJA, Marino MUSEMECI (NSW Lightning), Daine MERRIN (NSW Thunder), Darryl FERNANDES, Peter GAFFNEY, Robert FOTI (Southern NSW), Michael OLIVERIA, Franc PIERRO, Doug WOODWISS (Southern NSW Flame), Jacob CLAMP, Andrew CLARK, Liam SCOTT (Tasmania), Ahmed AZZAM, Jonathan BARRIENTOS, Hara YOSHINAO (Victoria)

1 Glenn SMITH, Pat ROSS-MAGEE (ACT Cobras), Kristian COLLINS, David DEXTER, Goran JOSIFOVSKI, Elia SALLOUM (ACT Colts), Denny DUTRA, Giovanni LEUZZI, Justin McLEAY Gavin SCHIPP (NSW Lightning), Jarrod BASGER, Corey BICZO (NSW Thunder), Bradley FERRARO, Mitchell DEL TURO (Southern NSW), Russel CRIGHTON (Southern NSW Flame), Alex GORDON, Joshua QUAN (Tasmania)