

Optically challenged officiating

Dramatic end to UPEI soccer season

By Todd MacLean

We can start by listing the few UPEI Panthers that played and did not receive cards in last week's semi-final end of season soccer match against the Dalhousie Tigers: Brodie McMurrer, James Johnson, Steve Boswall, and backup goalie Shane Etchegary.

Every other player was either given a yellow card or an ejection by the number two ranked referee in the country, who was an official for all of the Dalhousie home games this season.

Altogether, a total of 6 red cards and 4 yellow cards were given to the Panthers while not a single card of any kind was given to a Dalhousie player throughout the entire match.

Observers of the game said that there were many "card-able" offences on both sides, and that several close calls were made against the UPEI players. Paul English, the star player for the Tigers, was even given three warnings by the referee. Still, Dalhousie avoided penalty for the whole game.

"In the big game, I demand of my team to take their play to a new level, and as a player, that's what I usually expect from the ref as well," stated captain Glenn Miller. "Only the ref and the Lord above knows what was going on in his head that day, but I have no doubt in my mind that his thought process was impartial."

Nobly, UPEI did relatively maintain their composure through most of the game, though things began to fall through midway into the second half. Only after the UPEI goalie received a red card for diving at a shot outside the 18 yard box, (which meant an ejection that left them short handed) were the Tigers fi-

nally able to score in the 70th minute of play. It was after this that things began to go downhill.

Goran Rudic was soon ejected, once he received his second yellow card of the match. Then tensions rose even higher after Glenn Miller was given a red card for accidentally elbowing a player, and then punched the player in frustration. This was when the so-called "brawl" broke out, as several other players got involved in the scuffle as well. However, no other fights resulted.

Incidents continued when a blatant handball inside Dalhousie's 18 yard box -- one that would have awarded a penalty shot for UPEI -- was not called. More UPEI players lost their composure, leading to further cardings.

Soon thereafter, Dalhousie scored their second goal. Up to this point, of course, it was still anyone's game, but this put a berth in the finals out of sight for the Panthers, and tempers ran wild as several other players were thrown out into the final minutes. The referee had eventually ejected enough Panthers that the game had to be called prematurely, as there were not enough players on the field to finish the game.

"I'm not happy with the way the game ended, but nothing would have occurred if the officials were impartial," said John Sutton, full back for the Panthers, and one of the recipients of the red cards in the semi-final. "Incidents can be prevented by providing fair, impartial officiating. The Dal players weren't at fault for what happened, and it was a good game for the most part."

All of the officials that day were natives of Nova Scotia, with one of the line judges being a Dalhousie Alumni. Even though the Pan-

thers are obviously not placing all of the blame for their loss on the officiating, some players think that it is time to take action in the AUAA, in terms of assuring the service of unbiased refereeing.

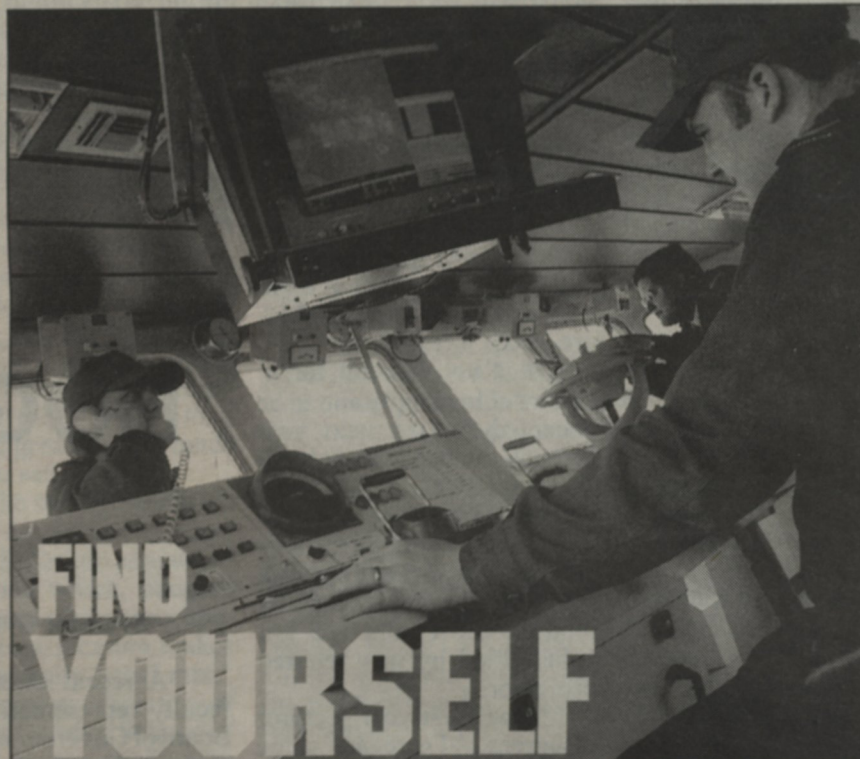
"I'm not looking for a scapegoat, but it was all just plain to see," explained Miller. "We've had about 400 fans at each of our home games this season, which gives us plenty

of witnesses to back up our usual good behaviour on the field up to this point. I just hope that in the future, the AUAA can change the format somehow, to ensure neutral refs."

However, as for the present, UPEI will just have to "suck it up," and somehow try to cope with this terribly bitter end to an otherwise remarkable achievement of an outstanding season.

"This isn't the kind of image we want associated with our team," commented Sutton. "I hope people can remember how strong a team we are. I don't want to go down the tubes because of one mistake."

"The best we can do is learn from what happened, and improve on it," added Miller.



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
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