

LX Team Red – Équipe Rouge Lille Tournament 15th – 17th March 2024 report.

The LX Equipe Rouge preparations for the Lille Tournament 2024 started even before anyone had set out for foreign parts with Peter Bale the captain establishing a WhatsApp group and immediately beginning the tactical discussions. He clearly meant business. The penalty corner routines were considered and suggestions invited, the team formation and individual roles were laid out and the organisation of beer kitty manager and team scribe defined (actually Jez Allen did this).

On the first morning the team got to the ground early (to the extent it was barely open), a warm-up ensued led by the resident expert physiologist Phil Sykes. Then a small-sided game with defence against attack to rehearse the tactical approach was carried out and finally the penalty corners that had been discussed at such length on the WhatsApp were practised.

All was prepared, the team of elite athletes was ready both physically and mentally. They took to the field, a well-oiled (the beer came later in case you are wondering) machine entering the fray of the first game, the whistle went and then ... an instant and collective amnesia seemed to strike and chaos ensued!

Not really, actually the first game and indeed all the later games showed how preparation makes such a difference. The first match against Scottish Thistles proved quite tight with a 2 – 1 win. Steve Hewitt opened the scoring with a tight turn and a push inside the post. Early in the second half a cross into the penalty area was deflected first by Vinny Smith and then Mike Wingent for the second goal. Thistles now came back strongly with a high press and eventually following a penalty corner save by Dave Webb low to his left, scored by lifting the ball over the prone goalkeeper.

The second game against German Eagles Grey saw a 2 – 0 win. In the first half Alan Craddock opened the scoring from a penalty corner with a deflection off a defender. Interestingly this was a simple stop and shot, something which had never been discussed or practised! It did though become a theme with Alan scoring again several times in later games through the same “route 1” approach! The Germans though were determined to make a game of it and the defence with David Blackmore, Jez Allen, Lee Robinson and Ian Harvey with Dave Webb at his best had a lot of work to do to keep them out. The midfield also had to work hard, led by Alan Craddock with support from Joe Dowling, Phil Sykes, Peter Bale and Jerry Revans rotating between positions to keep the running going. Indeed, this was a feature of all the games with the midfield never letting any opposition settle on the ball. The second goal came from a perfectly hit penalty corner strike by Alan Craddock just above the keeper’s kickers, but below the backboards.

The next day in the third game the team faced the Welsh Dragons and again came out on top with a 2 – 0 win. The Welsh pressed hard from the start, but gradually the LX team regained the offensive and again it was a strike from a penalty corner by Alan Craddock going in off the post that gave the team the lead. The second goal was a penalty flick, Steve Hewitt received the ball in the D and as he turned to shoot was rugby tackled by the defender marking him. Mike Wingent put away the flick. The second half saw the Welsh resurgent and the defence was under tremendous pressure with Dave Webb making a number of critical saves. The save of the day though was by Jez Allen; initially Webby had gone to ground to make the save, Ian Harvey then tried to clear the ball, but a Welsh forward got onto it and his lifted shot was cleared off the line by Jez Allen with an instinctive flick of

the stick. Unfortunately, in the latter stages of the game Peter Bale got a hard hit ball on the hand and had to be substituted before heading for A&E.



The Welsh attack thwarted

The last pool game was against Supervétérans A, the French team. The result was a close win 1 – 0. In the absence of Pete Bale, Alan Craddock took over the team leading role with a more of the same approach! It was a most competitive match and the midfield harried and chased the whole game to disrupt the French to good effect. It was not though until the second half that LX scored. Mike Wingent won a penalty corner having received a pass from Alan Craddock and moving into a goal scoring position was fouled. Once again it was Alan Craddock who stepped up to strike the ball just inside the left-hand post. Dennis Hooton guested for the team on this occasion to make sure the legs were there in midfield and in the end the French resorted to long balls and a degree of physicality, pictures of Vinny Smith on the “naughty chair” are available at a very reasonable price.



Naughty Mr Smith!!

The semi-final was the third game of the day and was against Netherland Hokkies. This was a hard fought game resulting in a score of 1 – 1. The Dutch were a very mobile side and scored during the first half, a run along the baseline saw the pass reach an attacker who close to the goal crashed his shot high into the net. LX Reds though came back and in the second half a mazy run saw Alan Craddock go past several defenders before beating the goalkeeper from close range. So, the outcome was to be decided by penalty flicks. The Dutch scored first, wrong footing Webby. Mike Wingent then stepped up and equalised. Next Webby saved, but Jez Allen put his flick past the post. All square. Then Webby pulled off an amazing save catching the flick with the tip of his stick and deflecting it onto to the post and safely away. So, it was down to Steve Hewitt who calmly tucked the ball away for the win! The final beckoned.

Sunday dawned rather damp, but the team was up for it with Peter Bale returned with the good news his hand was not broken, just badly bruised so once again Dennis Hooton stepped in to help out. The opposition was Supervétérans A so the team were optimistic. Right from the start LX Reds went after the French and created several goalscoring opportunities, but without actually getting that all important first goal. The midfield seemed in control so surely it was going to come? However, then a small mistake in the defence saw the French centre forward through on goal, Webby came out and saved, but the umpire felt unfairly so awarded a penalty corner from which the French then scored in a well worked move. However, what was to prove more costly was that Webby had injured himself in making the save and was no longer mobile. The team now redoubled their efforts and it was one way traffic with the French increasingly resorting to physical means to stop LX. Eventually this led to a penalty corner from which Alan Craddock hit another perfectly placed shot to score. At the end it was 1 – 1 and this time penalty shuffles would decide it. This is where the injury to Dave Webb became crucial. The first 3 shuffles saw the French score once and LX Reds once through Mike Wingent. Then came the sudden death with new takers and sadly the French scored and LX Reds missed, so second place and the silver.



Defending the line



Pflick save from Webby



The two finalists after the French win

Despite the result in the final though the team felt it had achieved what it had set out to do. The organisation by Peter Bale was exemplary, the *esprit de corps* was outstanding and everyone played their part and really enjoyed the weekend. In addition, the red berets bought by Peter Bale will remain in the memory for years to come!



Captain Peter Bale with the 2nd place trophy and his x-ray

The social side was also a great success with Jez Allen delivering an incredibly well organised event for both teams with an excellent experience for partners as well players. Overall, a wonderful time was had by all.



The Ladies of The Rouge

Ian Harvey 25th March 2024