

Women's Football – Spartans v Falkirk

✘ By Edmund Brown

Photos by Carson Ralton

Spartans secured passage into the second round of the Scottish Women's Premier League Cup after fighting back from 2-0 down to beat Falkirk 4-2 after extra time.

Falkirk's Emma Lyons capitalised on a Spartans defensive error to give her side a 1-0 lead going into the half time break and it was the visitors who increased their advantage two minutes into the second half with Kerry Kennedy heading home from inside the six yard box. However, with an hour gone Spartans got a lifeline with Sarah Ewens heading home before Diana Barry secured extra time for the North Edinburgh side with a minute of normal time to go. Spartans accomplished their comeback and their place in the second round with two quick goals in the second period of extra time through a Ewens volley and an Elliss Jenkins' strike.

✘ Spartans started brightly with Sarah Ewens sliding in at the far post only to see keeper Leigh Skelton easily save. Sarah Archibald picked the ball up on the half way line and played the ball wide to Louise Mason on the right wing. After jinking one way she drove towards the byeline before firing a deep cross to the far post for Ewens to hit first time. However, her shot was arrowed straight at the keeper who saved comfortably.

Within minutes Spartans again came close to opening the scoring with Kirsty McLaughlin, who was making her second competitive debut for the club, sending a fierce right foot shot which narrowly flew past the post. Ewens, down the right,

charged towards goal before cutting the ball back to Diana Barry. As the defenders charged towards the Spartans Number 9 she flicked the ball into the path of McLaughlin but her right foot shot flew past the left hand post.

✘ Ewens was starting to cause problems for the Falkirk defence and after 15 minutes the Spartans forward saw a fierce header crash off the left hand post. Ashley Nicolson picked the ball up midway through the Falkirk half and, after playing a triangle of passes with Mason and Diana Barry, the fullback sent over a curling cross to Ewens who, unmarked, sent a header towards goal only to see it hit the post and bounce away from danger.

It was with Spartans pressing for that elusive goal that Falkirk opened the scoring with Emma Lyons pouncing on a long ball from Lauren Gallon to fire the visitors ahead. Jennifer Godfrey charged down the right wing and as she cut inside was tackled by Sarah Archibald who cleared the ball to the halfway line. However the ball returned straight away with Gallon lobbing a pass into the area straight to the feet of Lyons. The Falkirk captain, unmarked, took a couple of steps before unleashing a right foot shot into the bottom corner of the net.

✘ Two minutes after the half time break the visitors doubled their lead with Kerry Kennedy heading home from inside the box. Falkirk gained ground down the right wing and after finding space Lyons sent over a deep cross to the far post to the advanced Kennedy who sent a free header into the bottom corner.

However it wasn't long before Spartans had reduced the deficit with Ewens sending in a curling right foot shot over the keeper and into the net. Elliss Jenkins, who was making her first competitive appearance for the club after coming on for Mason, charged down the right wing and after cutting in she

sent a cross towards the near post for Ewens, who had escaped the grasps of her marker, to clip the ball beyond the keeper and into the back of the net.

Spartans were pressing for an equaliser and within minutes of scoring the home side came close to drawing level with Jenkins sending a fizzing right foot shot that went inches with of the post.

✘ Falkirk were still causing problems on the break and after 77 minutes the visitors were awarded a freekick just inside the Spartans half. Lyons stepped up and looped a shot that smashed off the top of the bar and away from danger.

However the pressure on the Falkirk goal was again under siege with Captain Louise Young firing a shot over the bar from the edge of the area. McLaughlin floated in a freekick which was flicked in to the path of Young by Jenkins. Young took a touch and, after creating space, fired a fierce right foot shot which flew over the bar.

With only a minute remaining on the clock Spartans finally got their just rewards with Barry tapping home from two yards out to send the game into extra time. Jenkins, who was causing havoc down the right wing, danced her way through the challenges before placing the ball into McLaughlin on the edge of the area. With three defenders surrounding her McLaughlin stepped to the right and unleashed a fierce right foot shot towards the bottom left hand corner. Keeper Skelton, add full stretch, could only palm the ball straight to the feet of the on rushing Barry who tapped the ball home.

Spartans pressure on the Falkirk goal didn't ease up and they took the lead five minutes into the second period of extra time with Ewens volleying home from eight yards out. Barry collected the ball down the left wing and, after cutting back onto her right foot, the Spartans Number 9 sent over a dipping cross for an unmarked Ewens to volley home.

Minutes later the victory and passage into the next round was sealed with Jenkins scoring her first competitive goal for the club. McLaughlin flicked the ball into Barry down the left wing, and similar to the previous goal, the Spartans forward sent a deep cross to the far post for Jenkins to tap into the bottom corner.

☒ Spartans Manager Debbi McCulloch was delighted with the comeback and securing the team's place in the next round of the competition. She said: "I think we showed a lot of character to come back from two goals down, the strength in the squad and the amount of procession we had we knew that chances would come and they did. With 60 seconds left we kept ourselves in the cup and after that we scored two unbelievable goals and thankfully we are in the next round."

Teams:

Spartans: Rachel Harrison, Ashley Nicolson, Claire Crosbie, Bobbie Beveridge, Kirsty McLaughlin, Louise Young, Diana Barry, Sarah Archibald, Louise Mason, Sarah Ewens, Rebecca Zoltie

Substitutes: Charlene Lessells (GK), Louise Moultray, Alana Marshall, Katie Reilly, Elliss Jenkins, Stephanie Briggs

Falkirk: Leigh Skelton, Lauren Gallon, Sarah Quilietti, Emma Lyons, Jennifer Godfrey, Jade Gallon, Lisa Sutherland, Lauren Hastings, Sinead McLeod, Kaitlin McGillivray, Kerry Kennedy

Substitute: Susanne MacLellan

Officials: Vikki Allan, Gary McGregor and Steven Rae