

# Women's football – Spartans battle through



By Edmund Brown

A first half goal from Sarah Ewens sealed the victory for Spartans against their rivals Celtic in the Scottish Women's Premier League with a 1-0 win at Ainslie Park, meaning their unbeaten run has stretched to three games ahead of the League cup final on Wednesday night.

Confidence was high going into a league encounter which has brought several goals over the last couple of seasons and Manager Debbi McCulloch was overjoyed at the battling performance her team put in. She said: "We knew Celtic were going to have a lot of the ball as they pass it so well and so we were under a bit of pressure in stages throughout the match. However we were patient and pressed for the ball and took our chance very well. I'm delighted with the performance and even though it wasn't pretty at times it was a fantastic three points."

Spartans started the game brightly and within five minutes of the kick off were awarded a freekick 24 yards from goal after Louise Mason, who had nicked the ball off of former Spartans Molly McKean, was tripped as she aimed to shoot. Up stepped Kirsty McLaughlin to curl the ball over the wall and over the bar.

With only 15 minutes gone the home side took the lead with Sarah Ewens finishing off a well worked move down the right wing. A through ball was played down the right to the pacey Trisha McLaughlin who swung a low cross to Ewens on the edge of the area. The Spartans forward looked up and crashed a shot in which smashed the post and the forward latched onto the

rebound to fire the ball home.

✘ Spartans came close to doubling their lead moments later with first Ewens firing a looping shot over the stranded Gemma Fay and onto the top of the net and then Captain Louise Paterson curling a shot wide of the mark after some great wing play by McLaughlin.

Celtic were starting to press the Spartans defence and it took a last gasp challenge by Stephanie Briggs to keep the home side in front after Mairead Fulton had managed to break clear of the Spartans back four.

The pressure on the Spartans goal mounted after the half time break and substitute Abigail Harrison drove in off the right wing and thundered a driving left foot shot which whistled past the post. Harrison was starting to cause problems for the Spartans defence and with only an hour on the clock drifted in off the right wing and smashed a shot in from the edge of the area which was blocked by centre half Louise Moultray.

Spartans were dangerous on the break however and a fierce Rebecca Zoltie shot crept past the post after some great midfield passing by Kirsty McLaughlin and Alana Marshall. With injury time approaching Celtic did create one more chance with Harrison again firing in a shot however Briggs was again equal to it as she blocked with her chest.

✘ Scotland Number one and Celtic Captain Gemma Fay felt they didn't perform as well as they could have but a draw would have been a fair result. She said: "I think Spartans had the better of the first half and we didn't respond to going a goal down and they deserved to go in a goal up at half time. I think the second half we dominated the game and unfortunately the rub of the green wasn't with us and we couldn't get that goal we were looking for with Spartans defenders throwing themselves at everything."

Teams:

Spartans: Rachel Harrison, Louise Moultray, Trish McLaughlin, Bobbie Beveridge, Kirsty McLaughlin, Louise Paterson, Alana Marshall, Louise Mason, Katie Reilly, Sarah Ewens, Stephanie Briggs

Subs: Charlene Lessells, Ashley Nicolson, Claire Crosbie, Elliss Jenkins, Rebecca Zoltie, Kirsty Hamilton

Celtic: Gemma Fay, Rhonda Jones, Chloe Craig, Emma Brownlie, Kelly Clark, Emily Thompson, Molly McKean, Mairead Fulton, Chloe Arthur, Heather Richards, Carla Jackson

Subs: Abigail Harrison, Fiona Brown, Chloe Logan, Rachael O'Neill, Monica Harty

Photos Carson Ralton