

THE NEW JERSEY SOCCER GROUP

Press Release



Blaze's Strong Performance Plows Through Snow
East Stroudsburg, PA—May 15th 2010



The New Jersey Blaze kicked off their inaugural season in the National Premier Soccer League in style tonight, taking down the Pocono Snow with a 1-0 victory on their home turf at East Stroudsburg University's Eiler-Martin Stadium. The NJ Blaze were true to their name, outpacing the opposition in Pennsylvania to truly establish their presence in the Keystone Conference.

Things started slowly for both teams. While there were few chances in the opening 15 minutes, battles in midfield raged and the Snow established a particularly physical game, leading to several yellow cards for the Snow during the 90 minutes. However, the Blaze soon managed to turn up the heat and began fast, flowing football that lasted for a solid 20 minutes, though the Snow proved to be impressive through several counter-attacks.

Pocono's Michael Kane had the first real shot of the game on the half-hour mark, though managed to waste the chance by playing it straight to Blaze keeper Kevin Gramata, who rarely seemed flustered by the strikes coming his way throughout the match. The Blaze had other ideas however; quick to turn up the heat on the wing was Antonio Valerio, who used a combination of excellent ball control and blistering pace to play a beautiful through ball to Larry Geraghty. Running out of space, Geraghty was unable to convert, though galvanized a swift return to the other end of the field through another drive by the Snow.

Kevin Kennedy perhaps had Pocono's best chance of the first half, looping a shot over the left of the crossbar from six yards out to make the game much shakier for the visiting Blaze, though it would be a goalmouth scramble before the whistle for half-time went when Jeff Natale managed to scramble the ball off the line after Blaze players conspired to beat veteran goalkeeper Greg Sherwood—something that could have been instrumental in his substitution at half-time for Troy Hernandez.

Despite going into the break with momentum on their side, the Blaze were on the back foot after only two minutes of the second half with a great chance for Roshane Ellison. While the 15-minute break was enough to help the Blaze refresh themselves, the Snow still looked tired, leading to clumsy tackles including a shocking challenge on Blaze defender Lee Selby by Danny Drago, earning him a yellow card in the process despite there being seemingly no intention of him playing the ball. The Blaze also took a blow when Liam O'Donnell left the game to go to hospital after a clash of heads with a teammate led to a suspected fractured skull.



After a long-range effort by Valerio was parried by Hernandez, it was a defensive blunder that allowed the ball to land at Geraghty's feet, who calmly slotted the goal into the bottom left-hand corner for the Blaze, much to the delight of the away supporters and leading to a small exodus of Pocono's more vocal followers. Injuring himself in the process, Geraghty was later substituted off the field and could sit out tomorrow's clash with FC Sonic, though this was not before a chance went begging for him to finish after an inspired cross from Ansgar Otto, who proved invaluable in the closing stages of the match.

Despite slow clearances in the Blaze backline in the final few minutes, leading to a number of attacks and corners for the Snow, attacks proved half-baked due to the home squad's fatigue, handing the win to the visitors in their first ever professional game.

Rob Napier, the head coach of the Blaze, said it was a fantastic start to come away with three points in a tough first test. "We know how hard it is to win games in the NPSL, but we stayed disciplined and the boys worked tremendously hard." Quality up front, particularly from game-winner Geraghty, as well as the communication between the players also gave the squad the edge, he continued.

Looking forward to tomorrow's game against FC Sonic, Napier said: "It's a big boost to go into a game off the back of a win, but the guys have been involved in a very physical battle and they need to rest and recuperate properly. Our strength in depth should hopefully help." In regards to O'Donnell's condition, he added: "The damage is serious and it was clearly a bad bang. We pray that he'll be recovering quickly and the situation is sad for both Liam and his teammates."

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