

THE NEW JERSEY SOCCER GROUP

Press Release



Blaze Snatch Defeat from Jaws of Victory in Final Game of Season
Monmouth Junction, NJ—July 14th, 2010



The New Jersey Blaze were keen to make sure that their season ended how it started, and for 85 minutes of the game, it looked like they were going to win it. However, the final five would be what ultimately mattered - a period that led to the second FC Reading Revolution goal to make it a 2-1 loss in Monmouth Junction.

Outplaying the visitors for long periods of time during the match Wednesday night, the Blaze proved to be the force they deserved to be reckoned with, underlining how the table was not an accurate representation of their quality of football. The table, however, still represented the run of luck for the Blaze, who lost the match in the 94th minute with a stunning counter-attack.

Rob Napier, the Blaze head coach, said after the game: "We knew we had the quality to dominate the game and playing at Harvest Woods rewarded our emphasis on quick-tempo passing and combination play. However, it's about putting the ball in the net and while there were many glorious chances in front of goal, we simply weren't clinical enough."

Evans Ofori, the graduate of the U20s youth program, continued his sterling work from the first minute, testing the keeper with a great shot from distance that went just over the bar. Stevenson forward Ansgar Otto used his pace up the centre to terrorize defenders as Frenchman Alexis Gallice stormed up the field alongside him. Otto set Gallice up with a brilliant opportunity, only for the midfielder to pull it wide. FC Revolution also had a number of chances but were unable to get the final shot, particularly during a three-minute stretch of corners and crosses a quarter hour into play.

On the 15 minute marker came the deserved breakthrough for the Blaze. A mis-hit cross from the back of the field fell to the boots of Mathieu Larrousturou on the left, who charged past defenders and laid off the ball, which ran parallel to the byline and past both Revolution and Blaze players. Ofori, on the back post, was the last person to have a chance of converting. He did it with style, handing the hosts a 1-0 lead.

Ofori gave Otto a perfect ball just one minute later to double the scoreline, though the quick striker was closed down instantly and his options were limited. Kevin Gramata, the Blaze goalkeeper, again earned his stripes between the pipes at the back of the field as Dominic Popolizio and Derek Long had a couple of chances denied. Gallice also had a shot or two, though strong goaltending from Richard Kessler kept him out.

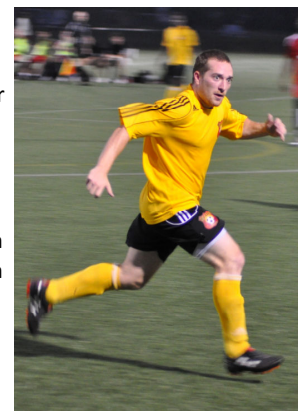
The final chance was the closest the Blaze would get to goal again in the tie. Otto found free space to the right of the goal and unleashed an amazing shot, but David Pacella, putting his body on the line, cleared the ball, taking a huge blow to his shoulder off the post as he did it. Down for several minutes, the defender was able to get back to his feet and proved to be a major asset to sustaining the Revolution's momentum going into the break.

"At half-time, we emphasized the need for total and utter concentration for the whole half and yet for their equalizer we got sloppy from a quickly taken free-kick.," Napier continued. "We knew we could exploit certain areas and we reminded the players to take advantage of the opportunities which would surely come."

Lee Selby (pictured) had the first chance to score in the second half, starting the second 45 with a shot that would lead to an end-to-end display, much to the delight of fans. Gibrilla Conde, who scored a hat-trick against the Blaze earlier in the season, followed up the strike with one of his own, though Blaze second-half keeper Kevin Davis scrambled to keep hold of it.

Ofori had more chances on goal though his misses frustrated both him and his teammates. Increasingly vocal, the Blaze were visibly frustrated by their inability to turn in a second goal, knowing they wanted - and could get - the win. Nonetheless, the Revolution defense were staunch. Only minutes later, the visitors would get an equalizer. A perfect through ball from Conde set up Popolizio, who slotted the ball under Davis.

Returning fire from the subsequent kick-off, Otto went very close again with another back-post cross from Rob Campos, though the shot went over the bar. While Ofori and Larrousturou continued their strong advances, the Blaze started to look a little shaky, even after Otto forced another save at a tight angle while trying to convert with flair from an overhead kick. Substitute Sam Bryant also tried his luck with a header.



THE NEW JERSEY SOCCER GROUP

Press Release



Nonetheless, things started to go downhill for the Blaze on the 80-minute mark. Moises Iniguez, who had been a thorn in the side of the Revolution on 77 minutes when he received a yellow card alongside Pacella following a small spat, was handed a second yellow after going in for a 50-50 ball with keeper Kessler, though the tackle looked questionable, particularly given the reaction from players and fans alike. The keeper returned to his feet soon after Iniguez walked, although his injury at first seemed like he would need medical assistance.

Even when down to ten men, the Blaze continued to test Kessler. Coron Short went close with a header, while Otto lifted the ball over the keeper with a header of his own, though it lacked the power to go the distance. Ofori unleashed another rocket, though he was again stopped by safe hands. Despite many one-on-one chances for Ofori and Otto, both were constantly denied by Kessler.

Playing three minutes of added time, the goal would still find its way in during the 94th minute and against the run of play. The Blaze, in a last-ditch attempt to score upon the referee's announcement that their corner would be the last attack of the game, threw everyone into the box, while keeper Davis stood close to the half-way line. The cross went across the full box and out for a second corner before coming under the Revolution's control. On the counter, they broke free up the right hand side with no-one to defend.

Gibrilla Conde ran up the right as his partner Greg Ermold split away and across the field, leaving Davis in an untenable position to stop the ball on his own. Aiming to smother Conde's shot, the striker instead played a clever pass wide to Ermold, who fired it in, much to the delight of the travelling team, who continued to celebrate into the ensuing kick-off. Unable to take advantage of their celebration, the Revolution finished 2-1 victors, despite the Blaze having 14 shots to the visitors' five.

"The defeat, and the manner in which we lost, physically hurt – I was stunned," Napier said. "We knew there were three minutes of added time and the first of two corners was awarded with 93 minutes gone, hence wanting to get everyone forward. If we felt there was time for them to counter, we wouldn't have gambled. Still, we only have ourselves to blame as we created enough clear-cut chances to win five games, never mind this one."

Mike Moyer, the head coach of FC Revolution, offered a lot of credit to the hosts. "It was an even game but the Blaze are a much stronger team than the league suggests. - they were at throughout the match. Several of their players caused real problems for us tonight, particularly Ofori, who really tested our boys."

He continued: "They're well organized and we were lucky to get the goal at the end but I think we did well. It's our first road win of the year and 1-5 on the road is unacceptable so we'll look to improve on that next season."

Moyer noted a few standouts during the game, particularly Conde. "He was very impressive to help us get both goals but Richard Kessler came up big tonight and really kept us in the game. We finished the season on a high and we can only get better from here."

Napier concluded: "We have a good core of players here who have demonstrated a great attitude and commitment throughout the season and they know they can compete at this level. We'll build on the foundations put down this year to come back even stronger next year and work hard towards getting a record which better reflects our play."

"The future of NJ Blaze is exciting and despite coming away empty-handed again when we deserved much more, all the players here tonight can be proud of what they've done in a Blaze jersey this year."

The [New Jersey Blaze](#) are the central New Jersey members of the [National Premier Soccer League](#), the highest level of men's amateur soccer in the United States. They are part of the [New Jersey Soccer Group](#), a management company for a family of soccer based organizations offering a full range of soccer services in New Jersey.