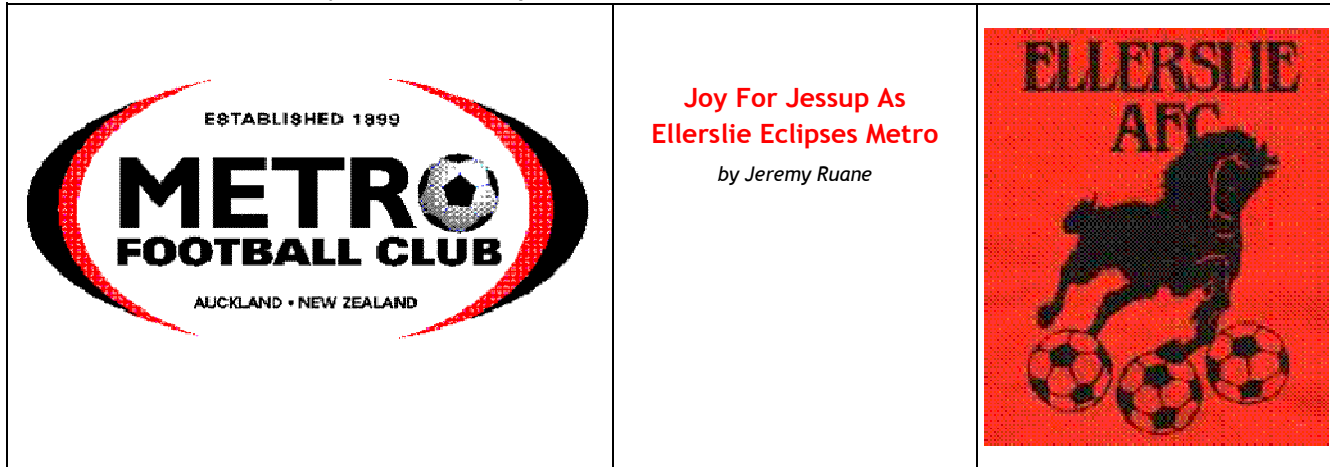


ELLERSLIE AFC - CLASSIC MATCH

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Broadway Tavern Ellerslie continued their perfect start to the Bluebird Premier League on April 3 when downing Feltonmix Metro 3-1 at Albie Turner Field.

The star of the show was Craig Jessup, whose explosive acceleration and lethal finishing earned him a hat-trick on this occasion. It won't be the last one he claims before the season's out, either - of that I'm certain.

His first goal came halfway through the first half of a match which, up to that point, Metro had largely dominated. Nigel Curteis, Danny McHenery, Hoani Edwards and Aaron Beckham had all gone close by this time, with Ellerslie's only chance coming as a result of Metro's failure to clear a rare opposition raid - the legs of Bruce Plunkett foiled Nick Russon on the quarter hour.

With Metro pressing forward in search of a goal, one which the resolute Ellerslie defence was determined to deny them despite their sometime shakiness under the threat of the high ball, the home team were leaving themselves vulnerable to Ellerslie's counter-attacks, and it was from one such raid that Jessup opened the scoring.

Latching onto a Russo through ball in the 22nd minute, the speedster outpaced the far from slow Shaun O'Mara before slamming the ball past Plunkett to open the scoring very much against the run of play.

Metro's response was provided moments later by Stuart Mair, who grazed the post with a shot through a crowded penalty area. Jason Thompson and John Lawler also went close before the half-time whistle, while Plunkett bravely denied Thearoth Thou before the break.

I say bravely because, in the 39th minute, the goalkeeper received an arm injury in an Ellerslie raid which saw O'Mara clear a certain goal off the line, much to Robbie Allen's frustration. The injury eventually forced Plunkett to leave the field in the 54th minute, Thompson taking over the gloves for the remainder of the match.

By which time Metro had fallen two goals behind. In the 47th minute, Jessup had brought a fine parried save out of Plunkett, but had been unable to convert the rebound. Four minutes later, he beat the 'keeper all ends up, unleashing a screamer from the edge of the area which soared into the top corner of the net.

Willie Thompson and Russo exchanged shots on goal before Thompson dragged Metro back into the game from the penalty spot in the 73rd minute, after Lawler had gone down in a screaming heap in the area without Gary Harrington, the nearest Ellerslie man to him, appearing to have made any contact.

This spurred Metro on to greater heights, and Lawler and Steve Nickson combined superbly two minutes later. The former picked out his team-mate with a gem of a pass, and Nickson's close control took him past Grant Robertson without needing to break stride. But his shot on the turn was cleared off the line by Harrington.

The fight quickly drained from Metro in the 82nd minute, however, when, on the report of his assistant, Steve Fletcher, referee Craig Borland sent Curteis off for a red card offence.

It wasn't the match official's most memorable performance, despite the consistency of his calls. Some of the tackles by both sides left a lot to be desired, yet the yellow card was brandished more for issues regarding dissent.! Little wonder that players were becoming increasingly frustrated before the final whistle.

By which time Jessup had claimed his hat-trick in clinical fashion, rewarding Russo's left-wing industry five minutes from the finish in the time-honoured manner to bring about the final 3-1 scoreline, though it must be said that Ellerslie's margin of victory was a little flattering.

Still, you takes your chances, you wins your matches - Metro didn't; Jessup did!