

Hyde United0
Barrow0

by **DAVID JONES**

THE 736 fans who packed Ewen Fields on New Year's Day probably saw this season's UniBond League champions in action.

But the fascinating thought is, will the coveted trophy end up in Cumbria or Cheshire?

Both sides produced football of such quality that they looked capable of beating clear leaders Bamber Bridge in the chase for the title. Goals might have been missing, but the action certainly was not.

The posse of league scouts, who regularly camp out at Ewen Fields these days, must have gone home satisfied.

Hyde - named UniBond club of the month for the second time in succession - should have won a match which, although tight, was always exciting.

Barrow too - with games in hand - might have won if they had put away their first-half chances.

It all made for a fascinating game that was in doubt until the final whistle.

The visitors had the best of the early exchanges, with Peter Smith sweeping a shot cum cross just inches past Arthur Williams' far post.

Ex-Cambridge and Carlisle striker Mark Dobie proved a handful all afternoon, but he missed two first-half sitters. Amazingly, he sliced the ball wide from the six-yard line and, on the half-hour, headed Steve Foley's deep cross badly wide.

Defences were generally on top, with the Tigers getting little change from a Barrow rearguard in which Jeff Parker was outstanding. However, after a sudden break, keeper Mark Deegan had to sprint out of his nets to beat Colin Little in a race for the ball.

The visitors, however, were kept shackled by a home defence dominated by in-form Billy Garton.

Hyde might have snatched one in the 44th minute, when a typical piece of Ged Kimmins trickery in the box resulted in a chance for Little; but Deegan came out to save with his legs.

An injury to Chris Speak seemed to disorganise Barrow's defence after the break, as the Tigers surged forward on runs that should have produced goals. With Gary Henshaw spraying some great passes, they had the Cumbrians on the rack.

Dave Nolan, playing his 164th consecutive game for Hyde, went close; and Steve Tobin wasted a glorious chance by shooting wide from the edge of the penalty box.

Little had a shot beaten out, and Nolan drilled wide as Hyde came again. However, Barrow hung on, and might have snatched it had it not been for the class of Williams.

The former Runcorn keeper may not have seen Billy Kenny's free kick that zapped late through the defensive wall, but the keeper made a fantastic save at the foot of the post.

Then, a Neil Morton shot hit Henshaw before careering for a corner. Yes, it was that kind of a match.

Hyde: Williams 7, Gallagher 7, Switzer 7, Wilson 7, Garton 8, Henshaw 7, Kimmins 6, Tobin 6, Little 6, Carroll 5, Nolan 6. Subs: McLellan, Esdaille 5 for Carroll (76), Camilleri 5 for Tobin (88).

Barrow: Deegan, Speak, McDonald, Harold, Parker, Kenny, Foley, Humphreys, Dobie, Morton, Smith. Subs: Hoskins, Kennedy for Speak (46), McAuley for Kenny (76).