

Punishing schedule of matches leaves players unable to perform

Third time unlucky for shattered Hyde



Northwich Victoria.....1
Hyde United.....0

FA Trophy, semi-final, second leg
Northwich win 3-1 on aggregate

LADY Luck hit the Tigers when a hurt, on Saturday. The odds of them reaching Wembley were always going to be long, but the task was made impossible when playmaker Ged Kimmins limped off with a hamstring injury on 21 minutes.

That cruel blow - possible caused by the Tigers' glut of games - was the turning point. Without creative Kimmo, there was no one with the flair to unsettle Northwich.

by **DAVID JONES**

Hyde never lacked heart but, to be brutally honest, they did not have the ability to unlock the stubborn home defence.

Vics' hero was veteran centre-back Graham Abel, who not only snuffed out attacks, but also headed the winning goal, four minutes from the break.

At the start of the match, the tension was electric as heavy tackles resulted in Kimmins and Delwyn Humphreys needing lengthy treatment.

Then, in the space of five minutes, Arthur Williams raced from his line to beat Humphreys in a chase for the ball, and Kimmins broke down the right to clip a shot that drifted past the far post.

Val Owen chested the ball and, in one sweet movement, rifled a shot that Trevor Ball hugged to his chest.

Hyde looked good, but fans were not to know it was to be the Tigers' last shot on target for more than an hour.

Kimmins was injured and the whole face of the game changed. Hyde's attacks were suddenly disjointed and, unable to penetrate the five-man wall, the mid-field sent in hit and hope balls.

The Tigers were closed down and, as Northwich

grew in confidence, it became increasingly difficult to see how Hyde could conjure up a goal.

Vics' breakthrough came on 41 minutes. The superb Williams palmed a close-range cracker of a header from Ian Cooke over the bar. Wesley Simpson fired in the corner, and Abel rose above defenders to head home.

Hyde attacked strongly for the first ten minutes after the break, with Paul Varden and Tony Carroll buzzing, but the blanket Northwich defence stopped them shooting.

Vics came strong midway through the half. Carl Williams fired wide of an open goal, and Humphreys forced Williams into another point-blank save.

With minutes to go, Carroll, who had been surprisingly quiet, smashed a shot that zipped into Ball's gloves; and Paul Cox's overhand kick was saved on the line.

Northwich: Ball, Ward, Duffy, Burgess, Abel, Walters, Simpson, Butler, Cooke, Humphreys, Vardy. Subs: Williams for Duffy (66), Steele for Humphreys (84), Tate.

Hyde: Williams 9, Gallagher 7, Switzer 8, Wilson 7, Garton 7, Sedgwick 6, Kimmins 7, Owen 6, Vardy 6, Carroll 6, Nolan 7. Subs: Down 6 for Kimmins (52), Cox 6 for Varden (84), Donnelly.

Ref: Alan Butler (Bishop in Ashfield).

SCISSOR-KICK... Paul Varden looks on as Tony Carroll attempts to get some change out of a rock-solid Northwich defence. Above (right) Gerry Clowes escorts Ged Kimmins from the field.

Picture: Jon Snape