

12<sup>th</sup> Grade Blenheim tournament was, at times, thrilling, depressing, exciting and heartbreaking, often all in the one game, and certainly for the whole tournament. The boys will surely reflect on this as one that got away. Right from the start they were competitive in every game, with plenty of missed opportunities to win, but occasional lapses in concentration let them down. This was no better illustrated than in their first game against Canterbury where from the kick off Canterbury broke down the left, crossed to the far post and the boys were 1-0 down with less than 1 minute played. Perhaps it was the reality check they needed and they responded well and were unlucky to lose 3-2. Nelson was next and entered the game very confident of a win but someone forgot to tell Southland and Southland scored a well taken goal to go 1 up. Certainly we dominated possession and deserved to win but a late goal to Nelson ruined all the hard work.

Saturday started fine with a game against West Coast. An early error put us 1-0 down but from there in we dominated and scored 2 good goals to win 2-1. The last pool game was against Marlborough and a win was needed to finish 3<sup>rd</sup> in the pool and progress to 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> group qualifying playoffs. Marlborough was bottom of the pool and a win was surely certain. However much to the team and spectators surprise Marlborough dominating from the kick off led 1-0 at halftime but with 10 minutes to go were 2-0 up. Finally Southland got some possession and Alex Tait made a break and scored a goal that gave the dumbfounded Southland supporters some hope for a draw. Minutes later Southland scored again to tie things up. Then in the last minute of the game a goal kick from Southland was mishandled by the Marlborough goalie and Alex Tait was on hand to score an unbelievably valuable hat-trick and give Southland the win. The boys described this as the most intense game they had ever played and the supporters were ecstatic at such an emotionally draining victory.

Southland drew South Canterbury for their first post pool game. Whether the previous game had taken too much out emotionally was hard to tell but the boys were flat and while they created plenty of one on one opportunities they flew past the outside of the net. On another day instead of being 1-0 down at halftime they could easily have been 3-1 up. The second half proved to be a continuation of the first and a hoped for late finish never eventuated resulting in a 3-2 loss.

Sunday was an early start and a strong finish was expected. But again the boys were flat and finished up losing to Selwyn 1-0. This result meant a playoff for 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> against West Coast. It was an even game and a great volley from Jack Shaw produced the winning goal and his first for the tournament.

The final report would have to be a pass mark with the usual teachers remark "could have done better".