

## Bill Turner Cup

On August 7 St John Paul II College's Bill Turner squad travelled down to Albury to compete in the last 32 of Australia's elite soccer competition. It was a long awaited trip for this talented group who had previously defeated all opposition on the way to winning the regional competition (ACT/Southern NSW) earlier in the year. On a cold but sunny afternoon JPC's opposition were Marian Catholic College from Griffith, a largely unknown entity.

After settling into their rooms at Albury Tourist Park the boys headed to the ground to commence their pre-match preparations. Petro Kapantais and Cameron McCluskey failed a late fitness test due to injuries sustained for their respective clubs on the weekend meaning JPC were down to just a 14 man match squad – not the best news prior to the game. The game commenced at a fast pace with both teams testing the keepers. It took just 2 minutes for stand in keeper Steven Cerni to be tested by what was a speedy front line for Marian. Cerni's thorough warm-up led by the team's usual keeper Nick Katsoulis prepared him perfectly for what was to be a busy afternoon. After several half chances at both ends JPC settled into the game, dominating possession and moving the ball around all areas of the field. After some intricate work on the right hand side, Alexander Walsh's shot was parried by the keeper before Sebastian Wood's tapped into the empty net. Five minutes later and the JPC defensive line were caught ball watching as a long kick from the goalkeeper caught the defense by surprise; Cerni was left isolated and unable to do anything about the equalizer, 1-1 a score line that went completely against the run of play. In the final ten minutes of the first half JPC again dominated the play and were able to score two goals in quick succession. The first, scored by forward Jack Rowley, was a typical poachers finish after some great build up play in central midfield and a perfectly weighted through pass by Aiden Milicevic. The latter, a headed goal by team captain Krisitan Tokic, came straight from the training field with a superb corner by Samuel Hewitt. Marian's aggressive play throughout the first half left several players feeling somewhat bruised at half time but the score line reflected what was a fine first half display, 3-1 to JPC.

The second half seemed to go on forever as JPC took their foot off the gas in an attempt to consolidate the lead. The plan backfired and JPC were left wanting as Marian pounced on poor decision making and defensive errors with two goals in the final ten minutes. The latter, a tap in with just three minutes remaining, seemed to crush the JPC team spirit, they couldn't quite believe they'd managed to let the lead slip. As the game approached the final minute, Sebastian Woods was picked out by another sublime Milicevic pass and then Woods did the rest; some silky foot work and a precision finish into the bottom left hand corner, JPC had taken the lead. The team couldn't believe the fairytale end to the encounter, a last minute winner to take them through into the final 16 of Australia. The final whistle blew and it was clear that this team was finally beginning to believe in themselves. St John Paul II College (4) vs Marian Catholic College (3)

On return to the accommodation the boys took part in a pool recovery session in preparation for their last 16 match which was to be against Rowville College, Melbourne, on Wednesday. On closer inspection of the opposition we discovered they were not only the champions of the Melbourne Regional Competition but they had beaten last year's winners from 2017. After some down time the boys and their parents headed into Albury to the Downtown Pizzeria where they enjoyed a team meal to celebrate the victory against Marian.

On Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> August the boys woke up to a torrential downpour but despite this the playing fields were deemed fine for the game to go ahead. Like Tuesday, the game started at a fast pace with Rowville dominating possession and dictating the play in the opening quarter hour. It was the team structure and tactical awareness demonstrated by JPC that was most impressive during these early stages. The boys worked as a cohesive unit, pressing high up the field and forcing Rowville to think

quickly and subsequently limiting them to efforts on goal from distance. Several routine saves by stand-in keeper Cerni filled the team with confidence and slowly but surely JPC settled into the tempo of the game. JPC were able to demonstrate their own attacking prowess with several impressive passages of play. With 10 minutes of the half remaining some good work in the midfield to retain possession presented Sebastian Woods with the ball, his trickery and direct play was proving to be JPC's greatest threat. He collected the ball from a through ball and finished sublimely to shock the travelling Melbournians.

In an attempt to keep their bodies warm in the freezing cold conditions the team remained on the field for the half time team talk. *"Outstanding display boys – your determination and heart has not been matched by them, let's keep this up, we're 30 minutes away from reaching the last 8 in Australia"*. The instructions were simple, keep pressing and keep forcing the errors and we'll continue to pose our predominant threat on the counter. The second half commenced but this time JPC were down to just 11 players with three of the team picking up injuries. An onslaught of possession from Rowville followed but again the resilient JPC rearguard maintained its discipline. Then, out of nowhere the treacherous conditions came into play, a long range effort took an awkward deflection on the slippery surface to escape the clutches of goalkeeper Cerni. Rowville had equalized. The heads did not drop and the team still believed and with just 5 minutes remaining a sublime individual effort from Woods saw him beat the last defender and neatly tuck the ball away before crazy celebrations ensued. The final whistle blew moments later, a victory for JPC by 2 goals to 1. JPC had done it – a place in the last 8 of Australia. After multiple celebrations the boys returned to Canberra on a high. A fantastic performance.

A huge thank you to Mrs. Vicky Walsh the team manager, Mr. Andrew Woodman the assistant coach, to the nine travelling parents whose support was just sensational and finally to GUFJ for purchasing and donating a new set of red team socks. We look forward to seeing you in the last 8 – of AUSTRALIA.

