

# Chris Forrester inspires revival as St Patrick's Athletic keep the tie alive

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## St Patrick's Athletic 1 NS Mura 1

Funny old game. When St Patrick's Athletic lifted the FAI Cup last November, nobody envisioned that only Chris Forrester would remain in the line-up when European football rolled around. Nor could they have possibly foreseen three brand new players being unveiled at Richmond Park on the same night.

Forrester's presence was almost enough to stitch an unforgettable victory into St Pat's folklore. Almost. This street footballer to his tippy toes was on song all game, weaving enough magic to salvage a draw.

The Dubliner was a hair's breadth from claiming a late winner.

Correction, Harry Brockbank made his debut against Dundalk last Friday but Thijs Timmermans and Barry Cotter were parachuted in to stem the haemorrhaging from a squad that striker Eoin Doyle conceded this week needs time to "rebuild" after "a lot of upheaval."

Hardly the ideal backdrop for a grab at the eye-popping lucre pouring from Uefa for progress in these Europa Conference League qualifiers.

Nonetheless, Inchicore was hopping come kick-off but the glaringly obvious cannot be ignored. No wifi for a European match was deemed acceptable as is the club settling for a two-sided capacity and temporary seating behind the west end goal. The rest of the ground was populated by flags and stewards as the attendance dropped to 2,696.

Maybe it was all a ruse. If so, the Slovenians initially took the bait as they were rocked twice in the opening five minutes. First, Cotter blazed over after a mazy run down the left by Mark Doyle before Anto Breslin's shot drew a fine save from Matko Obradovic.

In between the missed chances, yells went up for a sending off when Klemen Pucko showed studs in a tackle on Forrester. Maltese referee Ishmael Barbara settled for a booking. This proved a costly decision for St Pat's when Pucko hit the deck in injury time following contact with Mark Doyle that Barbara felt warranted a red card.

Despite a lively start from Tim Clancy's unfamiliar side, the new signings combined to gift-wrap a goal for Mirind Daku. Cotter's throw-in cannot be faulted but Brockbank's atrocious back pass gave St Pat's goalkeeper Joseph Anang no chance of beating Daku to the punch. The Kosovo international finished calmly and with 27 minutes clocked St Pat's had a mountain to climb.

Up they went, with Forrester and both Doyles sharp in attack, while Joe Redmond was cursing on his retreat over halfway having headed another chance wide.

Twice Brockbank had headers to redeem himself but the Bolton native was also off target as St Pat's set up camp in Mura territory.

Hope remained so long as the hosts midseason fitness became a factor against the fourth best team in Slovenia, whose league campaign only began last Sunday.

Sure enough, Forrester's equaliser made the old stadium shake to the rafters. Here was a rare gem. Eoin Doyle controlled and laid off Cotter's throw before Forrester's oblique run enabled him to control the ball on his knee before a ridiculous volley to the top corner.

Seconds later Anto Breslin stormed forward to almost give Pats the lead with a rasping effort.

The last 20 minutes descended into an ugly fight for every ball so the introduction of Jamie Lennon, who relieved Timmermans, made a lot of sense.

Anang earned his salt late on to deny Dardan Shabanhaxhaj with a superb save.

The match ended with Cotter looking like he'd been a Saint for years, creating a triangle with Adam O'Reilly that allowed Forrester float into the Mura box, wandering past three defenders before Obradovic's leg blocked what would have been a goal for the ages.

**ST PATRICK'S ATHLETIC:** Anang; Brockbank, Grivosti, Redmond, Breslin; Cotter (Curtis, 88 mins), Timmermans (Lennon, 64 mins), O'Reilly; Forrester, E Doyle (Owolabi, 81 mins), M Doyle.

**NS MURA:** Obradovic; Begamovic, K Cipot, Morris, Pucko; Kous (Ouro, 85 mins), Marusko (Shabanhaxhaj, 65 mins), Lorbek, Bobicanec; Daku, Petkovic (T Cipot, 65 mins).

**Referee:** Ishmael Barbara (Malta).