

VISITORS ARE GOOD SPORTS

OUT IN FRONT: Dave McDonnell (11) celebrates with goal scorer Robbie Ward after he fired Sportslink into the lead



VEC.....1

SPORTSLINK.....4

**STEPHEN WRIGHT reports
Pics by MICK O'NEILL**

SPORTSLINK FC may have dealt the final blow to VEC's hopes of retaining their UCFL Premier Division crown with this vital victory in Terenure on Saturday.

Terry Donohoe's men from north of the Liffey knew only a win would do to keep the pressure on at the top — and they missed a couple of good chances before eventually emerging with full points.

Time and again a combination of poor finishing and excellent goalkeeping by VEC's Darragh McGinley had threatened to derail Sportlink's own title aspirations, before two goals in quick succession at the start of the second half swung the game in their favour.

Sportlink had surrendered their position at the summit of the Premier Division to Orchard Celtic in recent weeks, and could only watch in frustration as the Ballyfermot side went four points clear, with two games in hand.

A home loss to Lower Crumlin and a 1-1 draw with Trinity Corinthians brought their challenge to a temporary halt — but Saturday's win over the champions should restore some lost confidence going into their final three matches.

Clear

The victory was made all the more important following the news that Celtic had beaten Schalke Rovers 6-1 shortly afterwards to remain four points clear at the top.

Champions VEC had fallen behind to an early strike by Robbie Ward, but equalised in fine style through Anthony Dunne on the half hour — a goal of supreme skill by the number 11.

But defeat leaves them trailing Orchard Celtic by 11 points, with just five games left to try to hang on to their title.

Struggling with injuries in crucial positions, VEC started the game on the back foot as Sportlink looked for an early advantage.

Adrian Kearns, Robbie Ward and Joe Gartland created a good opportunity for the visitors, six minutes in, but Gartland could only head Kearns' left-wing cross wide.

Robbie Ward did much better barely 60 seconds later, however, shooting Sportlink in front with a super effort from the left side of the box, low to the far corner, showing great close control and balance as he cut in from the touchline.

On the quarter hour the impressive number 10 was at it again, this time aiming high having collected a pass from Eddie Enright on the left — but McGinley was alert enough to push his shot away superbly for a corner.

The hosts slowly began to gain a foothold in the contest, and Anthony Dunne was now seeing much more of the ball in attacking areas.



READY FOR ACTION: Sportslink and (below) VEC before their game at the weekend



VEC title hopes end in stunning 'link win

He equalised for VEC on 30 minutes following a good move between Siccio Lanso and Brian Ward — the number 11 cutting in from the left and curling a wonderful effort beyond William Wylie and into the far corner.

Sportslink's response was swift as Robbie Ward forced McGinley into a great double save a minute later, before the number 10 headed wide from Gartland's flick-on shortly after that.

With the game more even now, VEC created another chance when Anthony Dunne again caused panic on the left — this time crossing low for the onrushing Cormac Jennings, who could only fire wide.

Gather

Lanso then had a couple of opportunities for the hosts towards the end of the half, turning free of the Sportslink defence only for Wylie to gather at his feet — before heading a Brian Ward corner over the top.

But Robbie Ward had an even better chance for the visitors right on half time, after a great interception and through-ball by Keith McDonnell — but he clipped a clever effort over McGinley,

and also over the bar.

The second half was 14 minutes old when Keith McDonnell restored Sportslink's lead from the spot, after Robbie Ward was tripped — before a freak goal just two minutes later gave VEC a mountain to climb.

Right-back Joe Dempsey made a great run forward, and attempted to fire in a cross to the box, but his mis-hit effort deceived McGinley as it arched into the net at the near post.

At 3-1 down, the signs weren't good for VEC, but they still had chances to eat into that lead when Wylie saved twice from substitute Stephen Kieley — before the loss was confirmed late on when Sportslink grabbed a fourth.

Kearns lead a superb breakaway following a VEC attack, linked up with Robbie Ward, before finally shooting past McGinley from 15 yards.

VEC: Darren McGinley, Rory O'Dwyer, John Doyle, Peter Morrissey, Ross Kavanagh, Stephen Van Loon, Siccio Lanso, Cormac Jennings, Gerard Dunne, Brian Ward, Anthony Dunne, Subs: Joseph Byrne for A Dunne (45), Stephen Kieley for Gerard Dunne (65 mins), Pat Malone for Kavanagh (71 mins) Subs not used: Jack Ivorek, Cathal O'Donnell

SPORTSLINK: William Wylie, Joe Dempsey, Keith Barrett, Derek Caldwell, Jay Wilson, Eddie Enright, Adrian Kearns, Keith McDonnell, Joe Gartland, Robbie Ward, Dave McDonnell, REFEREE: Singleton



EYE ON THE BALL: Dave McDonnell in the thick of it during the weekend clash



CONTROL: Joe Gartland of Sportslink dodges a tackle during a marauding run



PICTURED during the (IFA) Thomas Gallagher (IFA), Alan O'Farrell (St Anne's), John Coughlan (IFA), B (MMI), John Mullen (Sar



UCFL TABLE

MMI CUP SEMI-FINALS				R/W
Stedfast 2nds	1-0	Sandford		
Aston Village	2-0	St Anne's		
PREMIER DIVISION (LEAGUE)				
Orchard Celtic	6-1	Schalke		Ord
Vec FC	1-4	Sportslink		Sp
Glasnaoin FC	2-0	Brayzill FC		Trin
PREMIER DIVISION SHIELD - 10 MINS.				Ar
Ardmore	1-4	Trinity Lower		VE
Orchard Celtic	3-0	Clontarf		Bra
Strand Utd.	2-0	Lucan Utd.		Gla
DIVISION 1				Low
Greystones	4-1	Lalioo Town		Clo
Division 1. Shield - 10 Mins.				Str
E.W. E.T. & Penalties, if Necessary				Luc
Stedfast Utd.	2-0	Alexbury		Sch
Aet				
Sandford	1-0	Brayzill 2nds		Ste
St. Mary's F.C.	2-3	Strand Utd.		All
DIVISION 2				Leb
Castle	4-2	Dobymount		St.
Division 2 Section A - Shield				Ser
Play-Off (E.T. & Pens., if Required)				Bal
Amber Celtic	2-0	Clontarf Ath.		Gre
Division 2. Shield - Section B (Points Basis - No E.T.)				Sar
Claremont	2-3	Harding F.C.		Ter
DIVISION 2A				Bra
Brookfield	4-2	Sporting		St.
Division 2a. Shield - 10 Mins				
E.W. E.T. & Pens., if Necessary				
Glan Oaks F.C.	3-1	Terenure St.		Am
Mark's F.C.	3-2	Greystones		Clo
Portobello	1-2	Sportslink		Har
Division 2b. Shield - 10 Mins				Stie
E.W. E.T. & Penalties, if Necessary				VE
Seaview Celtic	3-0	Granada		Ash
Athwood Celtic	6-4	Terenure		Or
Siemens	1-5	Kingswood		Cast
Division 3. (League)				Dot
Schalke 2nds	0-1	Grant City		Cl
Division 3. (Shield) 10 Mins.				
E.W. E.T. & Penalties, if Necessary.				
Runns Rovers	6-1	St. Mary's		Gle
Dobymount	5-3	Clontarf Ath.		Ten
DIVISION 3A				Gre
Lazio FC	0-1	Ashbourne		Bro
Glasnaoin	1-1	Stedfast Utd.		St.
Growenor	4-0	Huddleston		Gle
Moortfield FC	1-2	Larkview		Sp
Bolton St.	2-4	Chapelizot		A.G.