

GFA CHALLENGE TROPHY FINAL
(Played on Tuesday 1st May 2007)

SWANS RETAIN GFA TROPHY IN STYLE **ALMONDSBURY TOWN 1 , SLIMBRIDGE 3**

An early goal from Johnny Meadows put Slimbridge in the driving seat at Oaklands Park in the G.F.A. Challenge Trophy Final against Almondsbury Town. In the second half, Will Morford doubled the lead before Town's Marcus Mapstone pulled a goal back, but Craig Cole made the game safe for the Holders late on. The Swans have now won the coveted County Competition three times in the last four seasons.

After his 35 second opening goal in their last match, Slimbridge's Meadows done it again, as an early corner on the left from Fred Ward was flicked on at the near post by Matt Green for Meadows out-stretched foot to turn the ball into the net with the Almonds defence wrong-footed, to put his side ahead with 79 seconds played.

Lifted by this, Slimbridge dominated the first quarter of the game, but some excellent defending by Town snuffed out some promising moves into their box, although Kacey Johnstone did find the side-netting and John Cant was hustled off the ball, when about to strike from close range.

Quick one touch passing nearly undone Town again on 22 minutes, Cant scuffing his final shot to goalkeeper Andy King.

An interesting contrast in styles developed with Town coming more into the game with some direct football, but Ashley Thomas and Allton Axton mainly repelled the aerial threat with composure, and very little was getting through to the hard-working Justin Bishop. Mid-fielder Paul Fowler was his usual determined self, but could not find an much space or time to work with, such was the mid-field battle raging, with Meadows, Cant and Ward catching the eye for Slimbridge.

As the half hour mark approached, Adam Cole tried a 25 yard lob that drifted wide with Swans 'keeper Ryan Chandler back-peddling, this shortly after Town seemed miffed at not getting a penalty decision when Bishop and Thomas went over in the box together. The ball reverted to the other end with Ward to Meadows feeding Johnstone, who fired just over from a narrowing angle past the diving King.

Town then had a strong spell but could not find a clear sight of goal. Twice they won free-kicks on the edge of the Slimbridge area, with Steve Winters firing over the wall straight at Chandler and then Bishop's blockbuster being deflected away.

Town came out after the interval looking fired up, Bishop testing Chandler from distance and then Ben Pope's run and cross from the left saw Cole get under the ball with his header over the bar.

Slimbridge came back and on the hour went 2-0 up, a long diagonal cross from James Cole, after motoring up the left, finding Ward at the back post to head down for Morford, to half turn and volley inside the post, all in one movement from 12 yards out in front of goal for a quality strike.

The next phase of play saw Slimbridge swap several half chances with Town that came to nothing Johnstone and Cant going close at one end and Paul McKelvaney and substitute Rich Kerr at the other. The majority of the game though was still primarily mid-field orientated, with Swans' Tim Haddock, on for a tiring Meadows, in the thick of things, adding fresh impetus to the cause.

Ten minutes from time, Town pulled a goal back to set up an interesting finish when Chandler lost out to a high ball in a crowded box, the ball bobbed about and Marcus Mapstone re-acted quickest to force the ball into the roof of the net.

Naturally lifted by this life-line, Town threw caution to the wind and for a few minutes exerted some tremendous pressure which resulted in Slimbridge being pushed back, seemingly trapped in their own third of the pitch.

Chandler just beat Kerr to the ball after a slide-rule pass from Fowler put him in on goal, but the game was settled two minutes from the end of the ninety minutes when Town over-stretched and got caught on the break. Good work from Cant set up Craig Cole, on for Johnstone, to calmly curl the ball past the exposed King from 14 yards and ensure the Trophy was returning to Wisloe Road.

A hard fought game played in good spirit throughout and well-handled by the match officials, but a disappointing attendance of only 130, no doubt down, due to the live televised game coming from Anfield. The harm all these televised top games is doing to non-league football has long been commented upon, and sadly, one suspects, it will still be being commented upon when it is all too late!

**Almondsbury Town; A.King, S.Winter (R.Kerr 73), B.Pope, M.Emery, S.Peters, P.Fowler, M.Mapstone, B.Andrews, J.Bishop, A.Cole (K.Ingram 57), P.McKelvaney. Slimbridge; R.Chandler, L.Sterling (Mike Green 68), J.Cole, Matt Green, Ashley Thomas, A.Axton, E.Ward, J.Meadows (T.Haddock 62), K.Johnstone (C.Cole 75), W.Morford, J.Cant.
Referee; Mr.M.Russell (Bristol)**