

SPORT ITALIA HELLENIC LEAGUE –PREMIER DIVISION

(Played on Saturday 24th March 2007)

HILL DOUBLE SECURES POINTS FOR ARDLEY

ARDLEY UNITED 2 , SLIMBRIDGE 1

Chris Hill was the Ardley hero with a goal in each half to thwart the overnight leaders Slimbridge, who as a result, saw top spot regained by North Leigh, 3-0 winners at relegation-haunted Pegasus Juniors. Will Morford had put the Swans back on level terms just after the break.

In a tight match Ardley took two of only three clear chances that came their way, defended with great heart for long periods, and often had ten players behind the ball. Slimbridge had to concede that Ardley's stifling tactics had done a job on them, not pretty to watch, but executed in a disciplined fashion for the most part, and on the day, highly effective.

A low key start didn't produce any goalmouth action until the opening goal on 18 minutes. Ardley won a corner on the left and Luke Brandon's kick bobbed about in the visitors box before being stabbed in by Hill from close range.

This livened the game up as Slimbridge burst forward with Craig Cole shooting straight at goalkeeper Paul Searl and Ross Casey hitting a 35 yard free-kick that Searl forced round a post. Joe Tustain had some lengthy treatment after pulling up, before Johnny Meadows set up Casey who volleyed just wide. Several other good passages of play failed to find a clear opening and clearly the visitors were looking frustrated as the interval approached.

The last action of the half saw Ardley nearly get a second goal when a long diagonal free-kick from Phil Martin saw Ryan Wiffin rise in the box, and head over an open goal, the ball landing on the top of the net.

Slimbridge pressed from the re-start and after a couple of near misses, finally breached the home defence with the equaliser on 51 minutes. James Cole lifted a dipping through-ball to Morford who turned and half-volleyed across Searl and into the corner of the net.

In the next five minutes Tustain was twice off-target with headers from crosses by Morford and Matt Green, before the latter should have done better than flick an inviting opening into the arms of an exposed Searl.

All this action in the home box did not ruffle Ardley to any visible extent and against the run of play Hill nipped in to squeeze the ball past Chandler on 59 minutes, for what proved to be the winner. Some good inter-passing up the right had caught the re-treating visitors defence out of position!

It was back to some hard graft for the visitors as Ardley were naturally encouraged by regaining the lead and defended as if their lives depended on it. Although a couple of half chances thereafter fell the visitors way, it was substitute Mike Green, who had replaced limping skipper Leon Sterling earlier, who brought the save of the day out of Searl. A looping volley that was heading for the top corner, was turned round the post to deny the Swans a point and ensure all three for the hard-working Ardley side with only three minutes left on the clock. In fact in four minutes of added-on time there was some desperate defending in the home area as Slimbridge threw everyone forward in, as it proved a vain attempt to get something out of the match, the bombardment only being relieved by two late Ardley substitutions.

As Slimbridge manager Doug Foxwell summed the situation up after the game, ' You could see they really did want that result, worked for it, and on the day earned it the hard way. It's a wake-up call for us.'

Ardley United; P.Searl, T.Smith, A.Richmond, M.Essex, D.Mason S.Kitson, L.Brandon (M. Lagioia 90), T.Green, C.Hill (A.Beckett 71), R.Wiffin (Z.Omar 90), P.Martin.

Slimbridge; R.Chandler, L.Sterling (Mike Green 59), J.Cole, R.Casey, Ashley Thomas, A.Axton, C.Cole (T.Haddock 71), J.Meadows, J.Tustain, W.Morford, Matt Green (K.Johnstone 71)

Referee; Mr. I.Timms (Banbury)