

Saturday 14th October 2006 F.A.CUP –Third Qualifying Round

UNBEATEN MARTYRS END SWANS CUP RUN

Merthyr Tydfil 2 , Slimbridge 0

Two first half goals from skipper Gary Shephard and Craig Steins turned this intriguing tie to the home side's advantage, after a steady opening from an injury plagued Slimbridge side.

Slimbridge manager Doug Foxwell recalled Goalkeeper Ryan Chandler for his first, first team start for just over twelve months and opted to give a first start of the season to Matt Green, now attaining match fitness after his long injury lay-off, on the right flank, in the continuing absence of Fred Ward. Mid-field inspiration Johnny Meadows managed the starting line-up with the aid of pain-killers. A different line-up that beat Chippenham Town in the previous round, but no less combative for all that!

Merthyr though, are unbeaten this season, have eyes on a promotion place in the Conference South, and very much looked the part with some solid, uncompromising defending. Supplement that with quick, skilful attacking on the break and the recipe was there for a difficult afternoon for the visitors, which it proved to be.

It took six minutes for the first attempt on goal, Merthyr's Steins bearing in from the left and firing over the bar from just inside the area. Shortly after Paul Keddle tested Chandler from distance, the tall goalkeeper was in action again, saving with his legs from six yards after a goalmouth scramble.

On fifteen minutes Green was put in by Will Morford and home 'keeper Ashley Morris must have been pleased to see the ball dragged just wide of his far post, a big let-off. Morford then appeared to be held back in the area as his foot skimmed a gentle shot to Morris from six yards, but the referee waved on play.

Just as Slimbridge were starting to look comfortable, a mix up between Ashley Thomas and Chandler gifted Merthyr the lead on 28 minutes, Shephard taking full advantage to find the back of an empty net from the edge of the area in front of goal.

After Robbie Colwell had gone close to an equaliser with a snapshot on the turn, a real unfortunate piece of bad luck saw Merthyr double their lead on 34 minutes.

Steins drove low from the left which hit the near post, the ball trickling into the net off the back of the prostrate Chandler. Steins claimed the goal, but Welsh TV playbacks proved conclusively that it was an own goal.

This goal relaxed the Merthyr side and made the visitors task even harder, but Slimbridge came back and before half-time, were unlucky not to get a goal back when Colwell fired across the face of the goal when set up by Green.

Slimbridge suffered a further injury concern when defender Jon Embling, having a hamstring problem, didn't come out after the interval and was replaced by John Cant, coping admirably in an unaccustomed position for him.

Early in the second half Shephard hit the side-netting after turning on the left of the visitors box, but Slimbridge defended well to deny any sort of clear chance to the home side for the rest of the game, although they had to rely on conceding a few corners along the way to achieve it!

On the hour Meadows ran out of defence and found Colwell to cross into the Merthyr box, where Morris punched clear at full stretch to deny an incoming Morford.

Clear attacking opportunities were becoming few and far between for Slimbridge as Merthyr dominated some keen mid-field battling, despite the hard-working efforts of Meadows and Tim Haddock in particular, with Merthyr's Gareth Phillips winning plaudits for his man-of-the-match defensive work.

Steve Badham did fire just over the Merthyr bar after his first attempted shot had come back to him, then very near the end only found the far post side-netting from a superb defence splitting cross from the right by Morford.

Then, it was all over for Slimbridge as the final whistle blew, seemingly somewhat taken aback as they were applauded off the pitch to a generous round of applause from home and visiting supporters alike. A tremendous run in the competition had to end sometime, and it finished to a good side on the up at Penydarren Park.

Merthyr Tydfil; A.Morris, S.Williams, N.Smothers, G.Phillips, G.Warton, J.Rewberry, J.Kift (D.Williams 64), K.Dimond (T.Billing 72), G.Shephard, C.Steins (C.Moses 77), P.Kedde.

Slimbridge; R.Chandler, L.Sterling, J.Embling (J.Cant 45), T.Haddock, Ashley Thomas (J.Inch 85), A.Axton, Matt Green (C.Cole 77), J.Meadows, W.Morford, R.Colwell, S.Badham.

Referee; Mr. N.Hobbis (Birmingham)

Assistants; Mr. R.Lethbridge (Bromsgrove) & Mr. M.Daniel (Worcester)

Attendance; 511