

## **TUSTAIN HAT-TRICK JUST CHAMPION !**

**SLIMBRIDGE 4 , WANTAGE TOWN 0**

**Joe Tustain's treble and a well struck goal from a free-kick by Tim Haddock helped a rampant Slimbridge to effectively take the Hellenic Premier Division title with one match to go at AFC Wallingford on Monday. The win puts them on top on goal difference from North Leigh, who have completed their league fixtures, but with a goal difference of plus nineteen in their favour, Slimbridge look certain to pick up the Championship Shield, and with it, gain promotion to the BGB Southern League.**

Slimbridge dominated the game throughout but started warily, knowing this was their big chance in their last home game of the season, to make up the three point deficit at the top of the table. On a warm, sunny afternoon that will long live in the memory, the home side played some attractive looking football, but to be fair to a game Wantage side, they desperately missed the injured duo of Gary Swann and Andy Wallbridge, normally rock-like at the heart of their defence, but that is not to take anything away from striker Gary Hartley and co., manfully filling in at the back.

Tustain's corner kick in the 8<sup>th</sup> minute saw Ross Casey climb to smack a firm header against the visitors bar, before Tustain again put in a good cross from a free-kick near the left corner flag that saw Kacey Johnstone rise and also hit the bar before being cleared. In turn, Haddock, Tustain on the volley from a delicate chip from Casey, and Will Morford all only missed the target by inches.

On 21 minutes, Wantage finally saw some light at the other end when Allton Axton was beaten by the high bounce off the hard surface and in nipped Tom Rowe who dragged wide of Ryan Chandler's goal from 20yards.

All the Slimbridge pressure had not settled their anxieties, but two goals in three minutes then did. On 34 minutes, skipper Leon Sterling went up the right, crossed to the far post where Johnstone cleverly headed softly to the un-marked Tustain to place his header into the net past the exposed Terry Burton. Three minutes on and Johnstone won a free-kick 20yards out in front of goal, whence Johnny Meadows rolled to the near-by Haddock to crash his low drive past the defending wall into the corner of the goal to make it 2-0.

Right on half-time Daniel Keen did get a firm shot at Chandler, back from his one match suspension, who took comfortably.

Five minutes into the second half, a flowing move down the right culminated in Johnstone crisply driving against the post and Meadows follow-up was shovelled off the line by the out-stretched boot of Burton as the Swans continued to press. Casey then had a power-lacking header from a run and cross from James Cole taken confidently by Burton.

On 57 minutes the home defence waited for an off-side flag that never came that allowed Danny Allen to go one-on-one with Chandler, but the tall 'keeper stood up well and got an out-stretched boot to the ball, and Town's best chance of the match had gone. Spurred on by this though, Wantage finally found some sustaining attacking with Rowe forcing a low save from Chandler, but the pressure was relieved when defender Ashley Thomas put his foot through the ball to find Morford, who in turn fed Johnstone, to snatch over the bar from ten yards.

On 68 minutes came the consolidating third goal, when a long diagonal cross from the left found Tustain at the far post to head across Burton into the opposite corner.

The introduction of some fresh legs in the form of John Cant and Craig Cole created further spurned half chances and as the match was running down Richie Bourne put a low drive across the face of the home goal.

The last action in added-on time saw Tustain complete his hat-trick by tucking the ball away after being put clear on goal by Johnstone.

The celebrations then began, with a generous tribute from the sporting Wantage side, who to a man, formed a guard of honour to applaud the jubilant Swans off the pitch, amidst emotional scenes from the hardcore Slimbridge following. The Championship might have not technically been won yet, but that did not stop the party mood pervading the clubhouse shortly afterwards!

**Slimbridge; R.Chandler, L.Sterling, J.Cole, R.Casey (Mike Green 85), Ashley Thomas, A.Axton, W.Morford (C.Cole72), J.Meadows, K.Johnstone, J.Tustain,T.Haddock (J.Cant 80).**

**Wantage Town; T.Burton, J.Stott, Glyn Jones, G.Hartley, W.Harbert (C.Hogan 54), L.McCullough, T.Austin (S.Keller 85), D.Allen, D.Keen, T.Rowe (R.Bourne 83), Gavin Jones.**

**Referee; Mr.D.Edwards (Abingdon)**