

Hellenic League Premier Division

Saturday 23 February 2013

Slimbridge 4-1 Cheltenham Saracens

The Swans maintained their fifth position in the UHlsport Hellenic Premier League, on a day when all top 5 clubs won their games, by doing the double over their near neighbours at Wisloe Road.

Three first half goals for Slimbridge, two for Jamie Martin and one for Dan Holloway had effectively ended the game as a contest by the break. In the second period, Liam Harding's strike increased the home side's lead before Stuart Davies pulled one back for Sarries, but the result was never in doubt, with the Swans chalking up a comfortable victory on the day.

Slimbridge made a good start to the game, and after Harding's shot on two minutes had drifted just past the Sarries post, the next break saw the home side take the lead - Jack Rutter went on a powerful run down the Swans' right flank, and his cross found its way to Jamie Martin, who netted from a yard out for the first goal of the afternoon.

A minute later, it should have been two - Freddy Ward's corner found Dean Barnard a yard out with the goal gaping, but he mistimed his header and the ball fell the wrong side of the post, much to the relief of Ryan Betteridge in the Sarries' goal. As Slimbridge sought to turn the screw and build on their good start, their next effort also went close, as Tom Speers' header from another Ward corner was just too high with ten minutes on the clock.

Harding was the next Slimbridge player to go close, but he scuffed his shot after Martin's shot had come to him on the edge of the Cheltenham box, and Betteridge was able to collect easily. It was 20 minutes before the visitors created their first decent opportunity, but Jamie Hammond's miskick when well placed allowed his effort to be blocked, and the resulting corner was punched clear by Slimbridge Keeper Lee Martin.

Sarries then had a good period of pressure, when they had opportunities to get back on terms, but superb defending from Will Wellon saw off Stuart Davies' dangerous break, and Lee Martin was alert to make a good stop from Elliott Kennedy as the game drifted towards the half hour mark. Slimbridge regrouped and began to regain the advantage, going close when Betteridge made a hash of Jamie Martin's Free Kick following a foul on Dan Holloway before Martin doubled his own, and Slimbridge's, tally on 35 minutes.

Wellon's probing free kick caused problems in the Sarries' box, with Rutter's resulting shot being pushed onto the bar by Betteridge. Unfortunately for the Keeper, the ball fell to Martin in exactly the same spot he was for the first goal, a yard out, and he nodded the rebound in for Slimbridge's second of the afternoon.

Just before half time, the home side increased their lead in style - Dean Barnard fed Junior Maderner, and his pass played in Holloway, who advanced and drilled the ball past Betteridge for the Swans' third. Slimbridge nearly increased their lead in the first minute of the second half, when Martin's neat diagonal ball played in Holloway, but he had just drifted offside and the move broke down.

At the other end, Speers was sharp to break up a move involving Kennedy and Owen Donaghue as Sarries tried to get back into the game. Martin clearly had his sights on completing his Hat Trick, and saw two good efforts just too high in the first ten minutes of the second period, but it didn't take long for Slimbridge to increase their lead to four.

On 57 minutes, the ball broke to Liam Harding twenty yards out, and he drilled the ball superbly past Betteridge, leaving the Keeper no chance. Stuart Davies pulled a goal back for the visitors on 69 minutes, when he found a gap in the box to beat Martin, and a couple of minutes later, the game may have had a more interesting finish if Davies had netted a good chance from outside the Slimbridge box, but he skied his shot, and the opportunity to build a little momentum was lost for the visitors.

As the game petered out, Holloway saw a decent effort saved by Betteridge in the last ten minutes, but chances in the last knockings of the game were scarce, as Slimbridge hung on for a well-deserved and straight forward victory.

The win will stand the side in good stead for their trip to Third Placed Wantage Town on Tuesday night (7.45pm), before the Swans continue their travels next weekend, making the trip on Saturday to Wokingham & Embrook for what is sure to be another tough encounter (3.00pm)

Team: L. Martin, Rutter, Njoya, Wellon, Speers, Ward (Coombes 66), Harding, Maderner, J. Martin, Barnard, Holloway

Goals: J. Martin 4, 35 Holloway 43, Harding 57