

Hellenic League Premier Division

Saturday 27 October 2012

Witney Town 2-3 Slimbridge

A fiery clash between teams second and the third in the UHlspot Hellenic League Premier table saw the visitors return over the county border with three precious points, to put them into second spot behind leaders Marlow, who needed a 95th Minute winner to see off Wokingham & Emmbrook.

The Swans had a three goal lead going into the hour, but a Witney fightback, and a late second goal for the hosts (on 88 minutes for the second game running) saw Slimbridge fully tested as they played out four additional minutes to secure the victory.

Marvin Roberts' two goals gave the visitors a platform for some of their best football of the season, and Shaun Bennett's third seemed to have sealed the points. However, Witney struck back, and the final third of the game was all about the Swans' defence, who to a man produced superb performances to ensure the points came back to Gloucestershire.

As was to be expected, there was an edge to this important game, as both sides sought to impose themselves on their opponents, and the first yellow card was only four minutes in arriving - Kelvin McIntosh being booked in an incident involving a Shame Anson tackle, and a flare up between McIntosh and Marv Roberts.

The early exchanges swung from end to end, as Mark James scuffed a shot wide for Witney a minute later, and Dan Holloway's header played in Roberts, whose shot was saved by Witney Keeper Jamie Zolden.

One of the best early moves went to the visitors with ten minutes on the clock, when Saul Williams and Holloway combined nicely to set up Roberts, who was already looking a handful for the Witney defence, but his shot was blocked.

As play went down the other end Dave Evans needed to be alert to tip over a dangerous corner from Nic Thorne, before Roberts again caused problems, this time shooting over after turning his man on the edge of the Witney box with 13 minutes gone.

The Swans took the lead on 19 minutes, when when a Freddy Ward cross was headed neatly back into space by Shaun Bennett, and Roberts was on hand to smash the ball home and put Slimbridge ahead.

Witney had a great opportunity to strike back three minutes later, but Jermaine Ferreira headed wide with the goal gaping after good work and a pinpoint cross from James.

James and Conor McDonagh both wasted further chances to level the scores, before Witney has easily their best chance of the half just before the half hour. A through ball wasn't dealt with by either Evans or Will Wellon, and the ball fell to James, who's shot was saved at point blank range by Evans, pushing the ball for a corner which was cleared.

The game continued to flow from end to end, and Ward needed to be alert to block a shot from Adam Morris, before a superb Ward free kick found it's way to Bennett, who just managed to put the ball the wrong side of the post into the side netting, leaving the visitors a goal to the good at half time.

The start of the second period saw Slimbridge produce some memorable football as they sought to kill the game off, and they were richly rewarded with two well worked goals. With 47 minutes gone, Anson's through ball saw Roberts hold off his marker and net his second. Holloway went close with another effort on 51 minutes, before the third goal arrived just before the hour. A Ward free kick was flicked on by Roberts, and Bennett netted to put the visitors in control of the game.

Yashwa Romeo's 65th minute header seemed to be no more than a consolation for Witney, but was the catalyst for a complete change in momentum in the game. Two minutes later, Wellon's brave block on the line from a point blank shot from McDonagh marked the start of a torrid period for the Swans' back line. With Anson and Njoya making some perfectly timed tackles, and Wellon and Tom Speers repelling the aerial attack, it was backs to the wall for the visitors.

As the game became more tense, Witney felt Speers should have been more harshly punished by Referee Hawkes, after he pulled back Morris, and received only a caution, although Slimbridge could have argued the same when Roberts was hacked down by Joel Mead as he closed through on goal five minutes later. Mr Hawles was consistent, with both incidents being marked by yellow, rather than red cards.

As Witney pressed and the game became very physical, the home contingent were becoming increasingly frustrated, and with Romeo being penalised for an overhead kick, which brought a good save from Evans, they became increasingly vocal regarding what they deemed unfair decisions by the officials.

Ryan Books grabbed a second goal with two minutes remaining, and with four minutes of added time, the Swans endured a torrid end to the game as the hosts sought an equaliser, but they held firm, and the final was met by great celebration from both players and club staff, as an important victory was gained.

Slimbridge travel to Lambourn Sports next Saturday (3.00pm) for a Bluefin Sports Challenge Cup Second Round tie, before returning to Wisloe Road the following weekend, when Highmoor Ibis are the visitors.

Team: Evans, Anson, Njoya, Wellon, Speers (Sterling 79), Bennett, Harding, Ward, Roberts, Williams (Coombes 70), Holloway (Fower 66)

Goals: Roberts 19, 47, Bennett 58

Supporters Man Of The Match: Marv Roberts