

SATURDAY, 19 APRIL 2008

TIVERTON TOWN 0-2 BANBURY UNITED

British Gas Business Southern League Premier Division

In Tiverton Town's final home match of the season Banbury United became the first team to complete a league double over the Yellows in the current campaign, and did so without ever needing to get out of first gear in a lacklustre match at a soggy Ladysmead. Two second half strikes, the first from perennial goalscorer Nicky Gordon, and the second a stoppage time penalty from Ady Fuller were bright spots on a dull game which saw the hosts muster just a single weak shot on target throughout the afternoon. United were equally as ineffective for the most part, and Martin Horsell was untroubled for much of the match in a game that will quickly be forgotten.

One Tiverton Town goalkeeper who shall remain nameless but has been seen hobbling around for the last few weeks was quick to point out that there should be no reason for "end-of-season mediocrity" - the players should always give their maximum effort regardless of the fact that there was little to play for in terms of league glory. A while he is completely right there was nonetheless the feeling that both sides were going through the motions and looking forward to the summer break, if indeed we will ever see summer again in England.

Matty Bye had the first sight of goal for Tivvy but failed to bring Joe Murrell into action as he belted his shot well over the top, and Bye was soon guilty of squandering another opening by playing a ball too heavily into the area which gave Paul Wyatt little chance. Horsell watched untroubled as Andy Baird volleyed high from the edge of the area after Adam Faux's headed clearance didn't receive the require purchase, and the Tiverton goalkeeper followed this up by punching Wayne Blossom's header upfield.

Blossom is a strange character - a central defender more often than not he has shown his versatility over the past couple of seasons at Banbury and filled in just about everywhere on the pitch, and showed excellent technique and used the ball well when the Puritans ventured into opposition territory. It was his physical and skilful presence that was at the heart of Banbury's attacking threat while Nicky Gordon alongside him up front was a willing runner and stretched the Tiverton defence without ever reaping rewards for his hard graft through the first half of the game. Elsewhere Banbury looked ordinary, but they didn't need to look anything more than that to at least retain parity.

As Tivvy stuttered towards the half time interval Radley Veale met Chris Vinnicombe's corner but the result was as standard - over the crossbar, and Wyatt managed to race down the right flank but scuffed a left-footed shot and the ball bobbed harmlessly wide for a goal kick. That really was all for the initial 45 minutes - three efforts for Tiverton, all off target, and two half chances for Banbury. Entertainment value could only increase after the break.

And it did, eventually, but by such a small amount that it was barely measurable. A game of ping-pong in the middle third for five minutes ensued, a host of misplaced passes and throw-ins that went directly back to the other team, and a lack of quality that would depress even the most enthusiastic of the season's high 429 spectators that had braved the rain. Craig Pearman drove a shot straight at the legs of Tiverton captain Nathan Rudge and Baird headed Ady Fuller's free kick onto the roof of the stand as Banbury made the majority of the attacking advances but Horsell's goal remained unthreatened. Anton Sambrook replaced the injured Tommy Kinch and was soon in the thick of the action, tussling with Rudge in an incident that saw both players cautioned, and then volleying terribly wide from twelve yards after another determined run and cross from Gordon.

With fifteen minutes remaining Murrell finally had a save to make but didn't even need to move his feet as Bobby Hopkinson drove a long range effort straight at the Puritans 'keeper, and within a minute the ball was in the opposite corner of the pitch at the feet of Lewis Travers. The Banbury left back curled a cross towards the near post, Horsell advanced to claim the ball but then hesitated, and Gordon stole in to head home from close range for his nineteenth league goal in just 24 starts (remarkably only five of these goals have come at the Spencer Stadium).

Faux unluckily saw yellow for a foul that he didn't even commit and was happy to watch Fuller sky the resultant free kick, but with Tiverton showing a lack of urgency it was left to the visitors to cap off the game with a second goal as the game entered added time. Gordon and Hopkinson frolicked in the penalty area, and twice the Tivvy midfielder tried in vain to outmuscle his opposite number in an attempt to let the ball cross the goal line. The second time Hopkinson fell beside the ball and grabbed it, believing he had earned a free kick, but the referee correctly awarded a penalty for hand ball. Play to the whistle, Bobby! Fuller rammed the spot kick into the roof of the net as Horsell dived out of the way, and Banbury made the journey home with a 2-0 victory in the bag.

Sean Szabo replaced Paul Wyatt for the last minute or two, and there was just enough time for the ineffective Simon Bochenski to pull a shot wide before the referee called a halt to the game and put everyone out of their misery. Tiverton are stuck on 50 points and fifteenth in the league table - exactly the same as last season. A win at Hemel Hempstead in seven days time would mean an improvement over twelve months ago, but nobody is under any illusions that there needs to be a much greater improvement if Tiverton are to make a challenge in the top half of the Southern League next term.

Tiverton Town: Martin Horsell; Will Gardner (Glenn Gould 72), Chris Vinnicombe, Matt Villis, Nathan Rudge, Adam Faux, Matty Bye, Paul Wyatt (Sean Szabo 90), Simon Bochenski, Bobby Hopkinson, Radley Veale (Tom Knighton 84)

Booked: Vinnicombe 36, Hopkinson 40, Rudge 58, Faux 83

Sent Off: None

Banbury United: Joe Murrell; Lewis Travers, Tommy Kinch (Anton Sambrook 54), Mark Essex, Andy Baird, Ady Fuller, Greg Williams, Craig Pearman, Wayne Blossom, Nicky Gordon, Ollie Stanbridge

Goals: Gordon 78, Fuller 90 (pen)

Booked: Sambrook 58

Sent Off: None

Attendance: 429