

TUESDAY, 19 FEBRUARY 2008

BARNSTAPLE TOWN 2-4 TIVERTON TOWN

Westinsure Devon St. Luke's Bowl Quarter Final

Tuesday evening was supposed to be a formality for Tiverton Town - Ilfracombe Town, comfortably ahead of Barnstaple in the Western League had already been beaten with the minimum of fuss, and there really was little to indicate that Barum would be capable of making a fight of the Devon St. Luke's Bowl quarter final tie at Mill Road. But the beauty of sport is that sometimes the unexpected can happen, and the North Devon side pulled out all the stops and took Tivvy the distance on a bitterly cold evening. The Yellows fielded a slightly experimental team with Ed Weeks making just his third start of the season in defence alongside Will Gardner and Matt Villis, and Shrewton United's hotshot striker Dean Foot was given a trial run up front alongside Phil Walsh, with Simon Bochenski dropping into midfield to deputise for the rested James Fraser.

Despite the deeper role it was Bochenski who opened the scoring after fifteen minutes, bundling the ball into the net from close range after Chris Vinnicombe's corner had pinballed around between Radley Veale and a host of red shirted defenders. The goal should have set Tiverton on their way to a cosy victory and Walsh rattled the woodwork with a screaming left footed effort from well outside the area as the away side looked to extend their lead. Just before the half-hour mark Tivvy suffered a setback when Will Gardner picked up a knock and he was replaced by perpetual maker-up of numbers Neil Pointing, a change that initially had a disruptive effect on the Yellows defensive line. At the other end Jamie Frickleton had a series of free kicks, the first saved, the second over the top via the crossbar, and the third fractions wide as the hosts rallied, and they were well worth their equaliser when it arrived on the stroke of half time. Kevin Squire slipped in behind the defence and pulled his shot back across goal past Ray Johnston and inside the upright.

Tivvy should have buried Barnstaple in the second half but some sloppy finishing and a flag-happy linesman combined to deny the Yellows a landslide, although Ed Weeks put Town back ahead with a smart header from Vinnicombe's free kick after fifty-seven minutes. Foot, Walsh and Glenn Gould all missed the target with only the 'keeper to beat, and Walsh then contrived the hit the sky on a couple of occasions as he showed his aim needed some fine tuning. With nothing to lose in the closing stages Barnstaple pushed everyone forward, even goalkeeper Jimmy Thorne when they won a corner in the last minute. Johnston fielded the flag kick and tried to launch a long ball towards the unguarded goal at the opposite end but sliced into touch on the half-way line. Back came Barum, and won another corner two minutes into stoppage time. This time Thorne stole in at the near post to knock the ball past Johnston and take the game into extra time.

By this time Tom Knighton had joined the fray and his fresh legs were integral in Tiverton finally seeing off the plucky Western Leaguers. The third and ultimately decisive goal came after Walsh and Tivvy's third substitute Chris Young combined to tee up Bochenski on the edge of the area, and the forward's (midfielder's) low shot was too hot to handle. Back came Barnstaple again, but Johnston made a splendid save to deny Steve Blurton when the nippy winger had beaten the offside trap, and any fears of a third equalising strike and therefore a penalty shootout were quashed with five minutes of the second period of extra time remaining. Knighton finally beat the linesman's flag and made a beeline for goal. With Jeff Parish in pursuit Knighton reached the penalty area and began to pull the trigger, Parish slid in, took the striker's right foot away and the only decision the referee had was whether to dish out a yellow card or a red. Strangely the decision was neither, just a penalty, which although against the laws of the game was maybe the best choice considering the game had been played throughout in a hard but fair and sporting manner. Knighton took a leaf from James Fraser's book three days earlier and took the spot-kick himself, and although Thorne guessed right (well, left) and got two hands on the ball he could only help it into the net.

And that was that, a 4-2 victory that Tiverton made much harder than it should have been, but at the end of the evening a home tie in the semi final was secured. It would be against Dawlish Town who dispatched a young Plymouth Argyle side 4-1 at Sandy Lane the following night, with former Tivvy forwards Jamie Mudge and Antony Lynch amongst the goals.

Barnstaple Town:

Goals: Squire 44, Thorne 90

Tiverton Town: Ray Johnston; Danny O'Brien, Chris Vinnicombe, Ed Weeks, Matt Villis, Will Gardner (Neil Pointing 26), Glenn Gould (Tom Knighton 74), Phil Walsh, Simon Bochenski, Dean Foot (Chris Young 80), Radley Veale

Goals: Bochenski 15, 103, Weeks, 57, Knighton 115 (pen)

Booked: Veale 67

Sent Off: None

Attendance: 151