

SATURDAY, 16 FEBRUARY 2008

## TIVERTON TOWN 1-0 BROMSGROVE ROVERS

BGB Southern League Premier Division

For the umpteenth time this season Martyn Rogers shuffled the Tiverton Town pack, and Matt Bye was sent on his way back to Exeter City in order to free up a loan vacancy which was filled by Bath City's Phil Walsh, the blond striker joining the Yellows for his second loan spell after a successful four games a little over a year ago. Walsh had netted three times in four appearances for Tiverton in December 2006 but was destined not to add to his tally as Bromsgrove Rovers visited Devon, although on another day he might well have scored another four in just ninety minutes. As it was he seemed to lack a touch of sharpness, and after an encouraging start Walsh faded in the second half as Tivvy were forced deep to defend a slender lead.

It might have been a different story - it might have been Bromsgrove defending a slender lead from early in the game, but Ray Johnston was switched on and showed sharp reactions and a strong wrist to divert Matt Birley's powerful drive around the post with less than three minutes on the clock. Birley was not only the visitor's main threat, in truth he was their only threat, and single-handedly gave Danny O'Brien a first half run-around down the Rovers left but his slight of foot and creativity was ultimately futile as the green and white clad side lacked the cutting edge ahead of him.

Tivvy started the game cagily but soon found their feet and assaulted an attack or two of their own on the opposite side of the field with the evergreen Chris Vinnicombe inevitably at the heart of proceedings. The left wingback curled in a teasing free kick which James Fraser could only help past the outside of the far post, and a few minutes later the same pair combined from a corner on the left but Fraser's double effort was blocked and then hacked away from the danger area. The match was not even a quarter of an hour old when Rovers were forced into a change as full-back Les Hines hobbled out of the action to be replaced by the follically flamboyant Gareth Visor, and the substitute initially used his pace and strength to good effect to moderately rattle the Tiverton defence, although Matt Villis soon got to grips with his new marquee and silenced him out of the match.

Walsh saw his first opportunity of the game at the midpoint of the opening period when he latched onto a long clearance, comfortably doing Chris Duggan for pace but his tame effort was neatly saved by Karl Lewis, and when Will Gardner flicked a free kick into the Bromsgrove penalty area Walsh again got behind his marker but could only blaze a shot over the bar when well placed. The pattern of the game had now been set, and Tivvy probed and stalked the Rovers goal relentlessly for the next twenty minutes, with Simon Bochenski rightly seeing an effort ruled out for offside, to the chagrin of the home supporters behind the goal, and moments later the same player was denied by Lewis, the goalkeeper palming a dipping shot over the top. Bochenski then cracked an effort a yard or two wide and Radley Veale launched himself full-length but couldn't hit the target with a spectacular looking header from Fraser's cross.

The deserved breakthrough finally arrived five minutes before the break as Fraser, who along with Glenn Gould was at the heart of most of the Yellows' momentum jinked between McHale and Gary Knight only to be upended just inside the area. The Bristol Rovers loanee picked himself up, dusted himself down, gave Lewis the eyes and sent the custodian the wrong way from the penalty spot. Barely sixty seconds later Mr. Gatzianidis the Cornish referee exercised rule 52.4b from the FIFA directives which states it isn't allowed to give two penalties in quick succession when he turned down the Tivvy appeals after Bochenski's shot was clawed off the line and over the crossbar by Duggan. As fine a save as it was there was an element of injustice, but two points are raised - Bochenski should have scored or laid the ball to Walsh for a simple tap-in, and the first penalty - the one that was given - was moderately generous. All Tiverton received as a reward for Duggan's 'heroics' was a corner kick that Veale nodded onto the terraces.

No matter, Tiverton led at the interval, and much like the game against Bashley six weeks earlier they produced a stoic defensive display in the second half which reduced Bromsgrove to long-range efforts that seldom forced Johnston into action. Mark Benbow was the first to miss the target, and Leigh Downing hit an audacious effort that sailed a couple of feet too high. For all their possession Rovers lacked the guile to penetrate and the Yellows never looked to be stretched; Nathan Rudge swept up quietly while Villis man-marked the lone striker out of the game, and Gardner had the freedom of the pitch and was often given licence to move out of the defensive line and stifle any Bromsgrove momentum in the midfield before it has even started.

But while the lead is only one goal there is always an element of concern, so a second goal would have been useful, and Tivvy certainly weren't happy to sit on their narrow advantage. Bochenski again saw a chance go begging as he volleyed high and handsome and Veale also joined the mile-too-high club by ballooning a shot from the edge of the area with twenty minutes still to play. A couple of minutes further on Lewis saved well from Walsh after Veale's typically bustling run down the right flank, and it seemed more likely that any further scoring would be done at the Swimming Pool End of Ladysmead. However, there was no more scoring, and Johnston saw to that by making a fine stop close to time from David Bridgwater, earning himself a clean sheet and his club a maximum three points for their afternoon's work.

Bromsgrove Rovers have now visited Tiverton four times and have yet to score a goal. More importantly in the context of the current season Tiverton Town move into the top half of the table for the first time since, oddly enough, the drawn match at Bromsgrove last October, and seem to be pulling away from the red zone despite having played more than any other team in the league. Chippenham will pose a much stiffer test than a Bromsgrove side that were wholly ineffectual in the final third, but before the visit of the Bluebirds comes a trip to the north of the county where a St. Luke's Bowl semi-final spot is up for grabs at Barnstaple Town.

**Tiverton Town:** Ray Johnston; Danny O'Brien, Chris Vinnicombe, Matt Villis, Nathan Rudge, Will, Gardner, Glenn Gould, Phil Walsh, Simon Bochenski, James Fraser, Radley Veale  
Goals: Fraser 40 (pen)  
Booked: O'Brien 43  
Sent Off: None

**Bromsgrove Rovers:** Karl Lewis; Chris Duggan, Les Hines (Gareth Visor 13), Chris McHale, Gary Knight, Daryl Burgess, Leigh Downing (Ben Albutt 81), David Bridgwater, Chris Cornes, Mark Benbow, Matt Birley  
Booked: McHale 39, Cornes 70  
Sent Off: None

Attendance: 362