

SATURDAY, 5 JANUARY 2008

TIVERTON TOWN 0-0 GLOUCESTER CITY

BGB Southern League Premier Division

The home game against Gloucester City marked the first time this season that Tiverton were able and elected to field an unchanged starting line-up from their previous match, so despite the return from suspension of Club captain Nathan Rudge, Dan Bulley retained his place in the back three, while Glen Gould also kept his place even though Will Gardner was once again match fit. Gloucester were flying, having beaten Chippenham Town 3-0 but replaced Neil Mustoe with Matt Rose as they looked to continue the fine form that had seen them unbeaten in their last eight matches.

With two teams on a good run something had to give, and both sides began the match with a degree of caution, meaning that goalscoring opportunities were few and far between during the opening forty-five minutes. The Tigers had the bulk of possession, and a series of half-chances, but on the whole they were reduced to speculative efforts from well outside the penalty area, and Ray Johnston wasn't called into full action until after the break.

The first of these hopeful shots came vial the boot of tricky winger Lee Smith after ten minutes of play, but the ball sailed harmlessly high and wide, and the game settled into a battle of the midfields for the next quarter of the match. That in itself is testimony to how far Tiverton have come in recent weeks; prior to Christmas the Yellows would have lacked the nous, not to mention the self belief to scrap toe-to-toe with any team, let alone a side performing well. But James Fraser, Matty Bye and Glen Gould, with a combined age of just 52 were equal to the task.

A second misplaced effort failed to trouble Johnston just past the half-hour mark, Jamie Reid slicing his shot wide of the mark after Alex Sykes had teed up a free kick, and Tom Webb saw his snapshot ease the wrong side of the upright as the game approached its midpoint. Tiverton, to this point had offered little in the other third of the pitch, but Chris Young did manage to breach the offside trap, only to seem surprised himself that the linesman's flag stayed down, and after galloping a few yards forward he placed his shot into the side-netting. The first half finished with another wasted chance from City, with the disappointing Will Morford volleying well over the top.

On the whole the game was stale, but Tivvy upped the ante after the change of ends, and with Glen Gould pulling the strings they were unlucky not to eventually seal all three points. Webb shot straight at Johnston and then the first good move of the game from the home side, involving Fraser and Young resulted in Gould shooting agonisingly wide of Kevin Sawyer's upright. Smith then skied one for Gloucester before Gould audaciously lobbed the ball goalwards from thirty yards, only for Sawyer to back-peddle and tip the ball onto and over the crossbar.

Fraser missed with a free kick when in a good position, and with a little over fifteen minutes still to play the visitors should have taken the lead. Bulley and Tom Gardner were both caught flat footed, allowing Morford to make an unchallenged beeline for goal. Johnston kept his nerve, however, stood up, made the Tiger hesitate, and then beat the ball away when Morford finally decided the time was right to try and get a shot in. Johnston has made numerous similar saves this season, notably in the recent game again Merthyr and up at Swindon in September, but this was the best of the lot, and kept Tivvy in the hunt. Morford will be disappointed not to have scored, but in a fair fight he came out second best and was replaced five minutes later.

Johnston, recently on the receiving end of some very public criticism was again the hero of the hour with just a minute or two remaining when he saved bravely at the feet of Smith, and collected Gardner in the process, and with almost the last roll of the dice Fraser prodded his close range effort just an inch wide of the Gloucester goal, meaning the game ended in a stalemate.

Tiverton Town: Ray Johnston; Danny O'Brien, Chris Vinnicombe, Matt Willis, Daniel Bulley, Tom Gardner, Matt Bye, Chris Young (Tom Knighton 63), Simon Bochenski (Paul Wyatt 82), James Fraser, Glenn Gould (Will Gardner 88)

Booked: Bye 79

Sent Off: None

Gloucester City: Kevin Sawyer; Jamie Reid, Matthew Walsh, Matt Rose, Ashley Thomas, Marc Richards, Alex Sykes (Alex Allard 75), Tom Webb, Jack Pitcher (Darius Morgan 70), Will Morford (Jody Bevan 79), Lee Smith

Booked: Pitcher 45

Sent Off: None

Attendance: 385