

SATURDAY, 9 FEBRUARY 2008

HALESOWEN TOWN 5-1 TIVERTON TOWN

BGB Southern League Premier Division

There are a couple of great misconception in football, both of which came to light over the last weekend on several occasions. The first is that Dennis Law's back-heeled goal on the final day of the 1973-74 season relegated Manchester United, and the other is that deliberately handling the ball should be punished with a red card. The truth is that on that April Day twenty-eight years ago Manchester United needed to win their derby match and also hope that Everton did them a favour by beating Southampton. Law's goal sealed a 2-1 victory for City, but the Saints comfortably beat the Toffeemen anyway, and United would have been relegated either way. And with regards to deliberate hand ball, a red card should only be shown if the offence denied a goalscoring opportunity, and as such Decio Gomes was correctly given a stay of execution late into Tiverton's match at Halesowen on Saturday. Gomes had petulantly jumped, hands aloft, to block James Fraser's quick throw-in down the left touchline and was cautioned, but the reality is that it was one of very few things that the Yellows' supporters could get worked up about on a sunny afternoon that saw the Yeltz comprehensively brush aside Tivvy and continue their promotion push.

Tiverton have had more than their fair share of difficulties this season, playing nearly two games without a recognised goalkeeper, having matches where players have failed to turn up, and suspensions all arriving together, but perhaps the biggest blow of the season so far was dealt less than 48 hours before the match at Halesowen with the disappointing news that Tom Gardner has moved to Truro City. Tom was arguably Town's best performer of the current campaign, even the last three seasons, and one of the most affable characters the club has had for many years, so his loss was a setback both on and off of the pitch. One can't blame Tom for taking the opportunity of full-time football at Treyew Road, and it is sadly a sign of the times that certain teams even in lowly ranked leagues can buy their way to success. All the same, Tom was gone, making his White Tigers debut as Truro were beaten 3-0 at home to Whitley Bay in the FA Vase, and Tivvy had to galvanise themselves as they prepared to face one of the favourite promotion candidates away from home.

The start of the match gave a good indication of the hour-and-a-half that was to follow as Halesowen pinned Tiverton deep inside their own half of the pitch and didn't allow the visitors a moment to settle into the match. Ray Johnston was called into action early on to palm away a shot from front man Dean Brennan but Shane Paul gave the home side a lead they had already earned with just fourteen minutes on the clock, neatly side-footing the ball beyond Johnston's reach. Halesowen didn't let up, and their neat passing from the back and through the midfield stretched Tivvy and saw the Yellows chasing the ever lengthening shadows as the afternoon wore on. Indeed Simon Bochenski and Chris Young were starved of any service up front and the midfield trio of Matt Bye, James Fraser and Radley Veale were unable to get their foot on the ball and begin creating.

After Bye lofted a thirty yard effort into the crowd behind Mark Osborn's goal Halesowen doubled their lead through their most local charge Stuart Pierpoint. Darren Caskey curled in a corner from the left and Danny O'Brien was unable to clear allowing Pierpoint the opportunity to race in and tuck the ball into the net from three yards out. Tiverton were soon handed a lifeline when Dennis Pearce and Gomes both stretched to clear an awkward free kick into the area, only for Gomes to lift the ball over Osborn and into the far corner of his own net, but it was a goal that only spurred the home side onwards, and a goal that Tivvy barely deserved on the balance of play. Caskey came within inches of restoring the two-goal cushion as the Yeltz raced back up the other end but his venomous free kick glanced off the head of Chris Vinnicombe and looped a foot over the crossbar.

The second period dished up more of the same, with only one team looking like adding to the score, and Jay Denny bobbed a shot wide of the mark while Johnston was alert to save at the feet of Brennan, and with twenty minutes to play the Yellows almost scored an unlikely equaliser after their best (and perhaps only notable) move of the match. Vinnicombe moved the ball down the flank and Bochenski played a swift and crisp one-two with substitute Tom Knighton, but when the Yorkshire man had wriggled his way beyond the defensive line and into the area he could only lift his shot over Osborn and onto the bar. Bochenski's miss signalled the end for Tiverton and Brennan scored with a stunning volley from twenty-five yards after Nathan Rudge and Will Gardner combined to hash a regulation clearance, and as the game drew to a close a couple of goals in quick succession gave the scoreline an unfortunate look. First Davion Hamilton fired into the net after the ball broke following what seemed like a foul on Eldon Maquemba by Gardner, and then Maquemba himself drove the ball home from the acutest of angles via the boot of Rudge and the despairing dive of Johnston.

The margin of victory could have been more, and Halesowen were able to open up the tiring Tiverton defence almost at will throughout the latter stages, with Johnston making a smart save from the lively Maquemba. At the death Knighton's header was palmed onto the post but by that stage the damage was done. Halesowen are a very good team and should make the playoffs comfortably. For their part Tiverton now need to regroup, rise from the setback of losing a Tom Gardner to the Cornish cash kings and losing heavily at The Grove, and start putting some more points on the board in what has all the signs of being a very tough group of games over the next four weeks.

Halesowen Town: Mark Osborn; Decio Gomes, Dave Perpetuini, Dennis Pearce (Nick Amos 63), Stuart Pierpoint, Jay Denny, Shane Paul (Davion Hamilton 76), Darren Caskey, Zema Abbey (Eldon Maquemba 86), Dean Brennan, Ikechi Anya
Goals: Paul 17, Pierpoint 27, Brennan 77, Hamilton 88, Maquemba 89
Booked: Maquemba 89, Gomes 90
Sent Off: None

Tiverton Town: Ray Johnston; Danny O'Brien, Chris Vinnicombe, Matt Villis, Nathan Rudge, Will Gardner, Matt Bye, Chris Young (Tom Knighton 65), Simon Bochenski, James Fraser, Radley Veale (Glenn Gould 72)
Goals: Gomes 35 (og)
Booked: None
Sent Off: None

Attendance: 462