

SATURDAY, 3 NOVEMBER 2007

TIVERTON TOWN 1-1 HALESOWEN TOWN

BGB Southern League Premier Division

Having despatched Brackley with a scratch team there was a degree of optimism ahead of the visit to Ladysmead of Halesowen, and the build up was markedly more settled; Jak Martin was available again having sat out the previous week's victory at St. James' Park due to suspension, Lee Groves, Chris Young and Luke Clarke also returned to the squad, and Richard Fey had been drafted in to cover the still injured Ray Johnston between the sticks, meaning that Tom Gardner was able to return to defensive duties.

But the optimism was wiped away no more than eleven minutes into the match when the visitors took the lead in what had, to that point been a game flatter than Keira Knightley in a sports bra. A hopeful ball forward from deep in the midfield saw Nathan Rudge and Dean Brennan engaged in a sprint, and with Fey slow off his line Brennan won the race and lifted the ball over the stranded 'keeper and into an unguarded net. Fey's lackadaisical attempt to move off his line and clear the ball can be excused as moments earlier he has strained a thigh muscle when taking a goal kick, and injury that would see him fail to get through the first third of the game.

But before he left the action he was alert and fit enough to push Stuart Pierpoint's powerful header over the bar. In the event the linesman had his flag raised at full mast indicating offside anyway, so the save was essentially meaningless. With twenty-eight minutes on the watch Fey eventually had to give up the fight and was replaced on the pitch by Martin, and in goal by Gardner. This was Tivvy's second change of the game as Paul Wyatt was also forced out of action with a painful dislocation of the finger to be replaced by Groves.

Tiverton were struggling to get into the match and were lucky not to be two behind when Rudge lost the ball to the experience of Paul Devlin, but when fed with the ball Brennan was not able to trouble the scorers and the slender Yeltz one-goal lead remained. Martin struck a low shot from distance which was easily held by Mark Osborn as the opening period eased towards its natural anticlimax.

The second half was better in every way, more urgency and skill from both sides, a higher pace, infinitely more creativity, and ultimately an equalising strike from Rudge. Sean Szabo, making his home debut on his eighteenth birthday saw his burst through the defence stopped as Osborn smothered at the striker's feet, and Will Gardner saw the same end result after Szabo's neat flick had released him.

At the other end Devlin hit one just wide and Darren Caskey shot wildly over the top following a neat exchange with Brennan. Tom Gardner then belied his lack of goalkeeping experience to save well with his legs from Devlin as the match continued to be an open affair. Substitute Lee Williams chipped wide for Halesowen before the Yellowlegs began to really lift the pace in search of the equaliser. Radley Veale, another player making his home bow let one fly from twenty yards and it is still flying now having cleared the stand (and probably the leisure centre complex too) before Tivvy finally brought the game level.

Martin picked the ball up in his own half, took a stride or two forward and played a ball towards the left corner for Tom Knighton to chase. Jay Denny seemed to have matters in hand but Knighton's persistence saw the Tivvy player come away with the ball. Knighton crossed towards the penalty spot where Rudge, pushed forward, was waiting to hit a tidy shot on the turn which scraped inside Osborn's right-hand upright.

Tivvy were level and flying, and in the closing fifteen minutes could consider themselves unlucky that they didn't take maximum points. Glen Gould shot over from the edge of the area while Chris Young put Knighton's cross agonisingly wide. Chris Vinnicombe had Tivvy's final effort, but his free kick was a foot too high, and Caskey again came off second to Tom Gardner as the match closed at one-apiece.

Tiverton Town: Richard Fey (Jak Martin 28); Tom Gardner, Chris Vinnicombe, Matt Willis, Nathan Rudge, Glenn Gould, Will Gardner, Radley Veale, Tom Knighton, Sean Szabo (Chris Young 80), Paul Wyatt (Lee Groves 25)

Goals: Rudge 75

Booked: Rudge 13, Veale 68, Knighton 77, Vinnicombe 90

Sent Off: None

Halesowen Town: Mark Osborn, Jay Denny, Davion Hamilton, Dennis Pearce, Stuart Pierpoint, Nick Amos, Shane Paul (Andre Francis 72), Guy Lopez (Lee Williams 44), Dean Brennan, Paul Devlin, Darren Caskey

Goals: Brennan 11

Booked: Devlin 60

Sent Off: None

Attendance: 384