

SATURDAY, 1 DECEMBER 2007

HITCHIN TOWN 2-0 TIVERTON TOWN

BGB Southern League Premier Division

Hitchin's Top Field ground is a peculiar place. Deceiving in its largeness and quite unorthodox in design, it wouldn't be too critical to suggest it is in need of a lick of paint, but more of concern to the home supporters was the makeover their team needed as they sat firmly rooted to the foot of the table entering the relegation battle with Tiverton Town last Saturday. The Canaries facelift had begun in earnest in the week leading up to the clash with Hitchin replacing Darren Salton at the managerial helm with Darren Hay, and the new gaffer had already reinforced his faltering squad with the addition of midfielder James Edgerley and striker Paul Armstrong.

In torrential conditions it was Tiverton that were the first to settle but the attacking frailties that served them so poorly three days earlier were apparent again as they failed to test Richard Perks in the home goal. In an act that appeared desperate Tivvy lined up with Nathan Rudge playing as a striker in a 4-4-2 system but the plan what totally ineffectual, and barring a couple of decent bits of link-up play when dropping deep Rudge and Tom Knighton failed to show the guile required to open up a defence that were generally quite solid at home. Town's best chance fell to Chris Vinnicombe but the left back found Perks equal to the task, and Hitchin edged into the lead after 32 minutes thanks to a debut goal from Armstrong. Edgerley threaded the ball between Matt Villis and Tom Gardner and Armstrong raced clear to calmly place the ball beyond Ray Johnston. He was offside by two yards, but the linesman was out of position and missed it - that's the way life is for Tiverton lately.

Rudge might have equalised but for the crossbar being a fraction too low, but the captain's header from Vinnicombe's corner bounced over for a goal kick, while Hitchin's Colm Keirans pulled a shot inches wide and Johnston maintained his excellent current form with a splendid save to deny Richard Pringle on the stroke of half time.

Will Gardner, who had improved immeasurably after a shaky start was booked for a late tackle and then replaced by Chris Young as Tivvy switched to a 4-3-3 formation, but the extra man up front did little to change the pattern of the game as Hitchin, determined to give their new boss a first league victory battles for everything and won most things in the midfield battle. Flowing football wasn't helped by the treacherously wet conditions, and Rudge twice headed high and handsome as Tivvy chased the game without conviction. Sean Szabo was also introduced, for the quiet Paul Wyatt, but fresh young legs made no difference and the home side sealed the win two minutes into stoppage time at the end of the game with a fabulous curling strike from twenty-five yards by Keirans.

If the Team Bath game highlighted the gap between Tiverton and the top end teams than Hitchin went some way to showing that Tiverton will face a hard struggle to maintain their place in the Premier Division. The Canaries showed the hunger and desire that often goes hand in hand with the appointment of a new manager, they showed that little bit of extra skill, much more belief that they could win the game, and with the late introduction of Leon Simpson they showed that they had something a bit different on the bench. Poor Tom Gardner's face when he realised he would have to mark the giant forward for the last ten minutes was a picture. Seriously, Tiverton need to start believing they can win football matches - they are a team desperately low on confidence, and they are showing it in the manner in which they approach games.

Hitchin Town: Ricky Perks; David Deeney, Nick Mountford, Ryan Frater, Lance Gentle-King, Carl Williams, Moses Olaleye (Matt Childs 80), Colm Kierans, Richard Pringle (Leon Simpson 80), James Edgerley

Goals: Armstrong 32, Kierans 90

Booked: None

Sent Off: None

Tiverton Town: Ray Johnston; Will Gardner (Chris Young 71), Chris Vinnicombe, Matt Villis, Nathan Rudge, Tom Gardner, Radley Veale, Paul Hinshelwood, Tom Knighton, Darren Mullings, Paul Wyatt (Sean Szabo 84)

Booked: Veale 20, Will Gardner 44

Sent Off: None

Attendance: 235