

TUESDAY, 29 JANUARY 2008

ILFRACOMBE TOWN 2-5 TIVERTON TOWN

Westinsure Devon St. Luke's Bowl Second Round

What better way to try and return to form than a sodden evening in North Devon to play a County Cup game that generally fails to enthuse even the most ardent supporters? That was the privilege that lay ahead for Tiverton Town, and while six months ago the Westinsure Devon St. Luke's Bowl would have been far from the top of the priority list, it now stood as the only chance Tivvy had of lifting silverware this season, and the game on top of the hill at Ilfracombe's Marlborough Park gave the Yellows an early chance to banish the memory of the disappointing weekend display against Cheshunt.

As the teams stretched their limbs prior to kick-off the rain fell metronomically - not heavy but constant nonetheless, and standing water gradually appeared on the surface. However, a quick strokey-beard meeting between the officials and the captain's of the teams took place and the game went ahead almost as scheduled - five minutes later than originally planned. And it was Tiverton that were the first to show, with Steve Oliver pulling off a double save from Chris Young and Radley Veale with just a minute played. However, Town didn't need to wait long for the breakthrough, with Young showing the sharpest reactions when James Fraser's pass squirmed and slid between the Ilfracombe defence line. Young poked the ball beneath Oliver from ten yards to put Tivvy ahead, and it was a lead that they would never relinquish.

Veale sent a screamer agonisingly wide of the post and Young saw his claims for a penalty turned down when he was shouldered away from the ball after twenty minutes. Ilfracombe Player/Manager Barry Yeo was called into action as a replacement from the hobbling Ross Middleton, forcing the home side to reshuffle their pack, and gradually they were able to gain some momentum and ask a few questions of the Tiverton rearguard. Stephen Hobbs was unlucky to see his powerful effort strike Matt Villis in the chest after a teasing left-sided free kick had been swung in by the superb Karl Madge, and then Madge himself should have done better when he was released by Leon Taswell but only managed to pull his shot well wide of the mark. Stuart Hutchings immediately had a half-chance scrambled away, and with the interval approaching Tiverton hit a second to give them a small comfort zone. Neat work between Veale and Chris Vinnicombe allowed Young the space to turn and shoot, and with the ball heading for the bottom corner Fraser tried to get out of the way, but his heel made contact a foot or two in front of the goal line the Rovers loanee claimed the goal!

The pick of the goals was Tivvy's third three minutes after the restart - Veale dropped deep into his own half to collect the ball, turned forward and started galloping. Initially the Combe defence stood off, and with both Young and Tom Knighton to Veale's right the Tivvy midfielder was never short of options. The option he chose was just to keep going, and he brushed off the challenges of Yeo and Mark Hughes before unleashing a ferocious left foot drive that struck one post, rolled the width of the goal, struck the opposite post and bobbled sympathetically into the net.

0-3, game over, or so it should have been, but Ilfracombe are no mugs and kept their heads held high. After Knighton had seen a goal ruled out for offside the home team narrowed the margin thanks to Danny O'Brien's exquisite own goal. We can laugh about it now, but O'Brien was clearly upset despite the quality of the finish, so perhaps it's best to leave him alone! Either way, Ray Johnston had absolutely no chance from such a well placed effort, and O'Brien was probably thinking at that stage that he would need to reimburse the goalkeeper's clean sheet bonus.

Those worries were soon dispelled when Ilfracombe scored for the second time within four minutes, but restless worries of an altogether different kind began to surface. Hobbs met Madge's corner with power and nodded the ball firmly into the top corner, and now we had a real game on our hands. Combe were the team with the momentum and Tivvy looked a little uneasy at the prospect of throwing away a three-goal cushion against a lower league team. However, the Yellows rode out the storm, and with fifteen minutes remaining Knighton weaved a little bit of magic to set up Young for his second, Town's fourth, and to put the result beyond reasonable doubt.

Sean Szabo returned to Tiverton action after almost two months in the wilderness when he replaced O'Brien at the restart, and notched his first goal for the club in the final minute, prodding home Bye's corner with the outside of his foot. Ricky Marinaro spurned a good chance for Ilfracombe towards the end, firing straight at Johnston but despite the defeat the Northerners can take a lot of credit for their performance, as both teams should be applauded for playing an open and entertaining match of a very difficult surface. Tiverton advance into the last eight of the competition, and have an excellent chance of reclaiming the trophy that they won most recently in 2006; Barnstaple Town offer the next hurdle, the Western League outfit having overcome Plymouth Parkway 2-0 in South Devon.

Ilfracombe Town: Steve Oliver; Mark Hughes, Johnny Vooght, Steve Hobbs, Karl Baggaley, Ricky Marinaro, Stuart Hutchings (James Davey 68), Ross Middleton (Barry Yeo 30), Shaun Lewis, Leon Taswell, Karl Madge
Goals: O'Brien 60 (og), Hobbs 64

Booked: None
Sent Off: None

Tiverton Town: Ray Johnston; Danny O'Brien (Sean Szabo 75), Will Gardner, Matt Villis, Nathan Rudge (Chris Vinnicombe 65), Tom Gardner, Matt Bye, Chris Young, Tom Knighton, James Fraser, Radley Veale
Goals: Young 3, 74, Fraser 43, Veale 48, Szabo 90

Booked: None
Sent Off: None

Attendance: 132