

SAUTRDAY, 12 JANUARY 2008

## TIVERTON TOWN 1-1 MANGOTSFIELD UNITED

BGB Southern League Premier Division

Games against Mangotsfield in recent times have been close affairs; one might even suggest they have been particularly dull, and this would certainly be a fair reflection of our last two meetings both at Cossham Street. In the final game of last season the Mangos grabbed a 90th minute goal to take all three points, but little else of note happened, and the 1-1 share of the spoils in Bristol in August last year was equally as uneventful, but for a fabulous free kick and a well taken penalty. It might be that matches between the two sides are tight due to the familiarity - only two of the previous seventeen games between Tivvy and Mangotsfield have seen a winning margin of more than one goal - but if there is familiarity there certainly is no contempt. The teams grew up together in the Western League and were often closely matched in those days, and once 'Field caught up with the Yellows in the Southern League Premier Division the genuine friendship has been renewed.

Mangotsfield didn't start the game with friendship in mind and were ahead within four minutes of the kick-off thanks to Luke Ballinger's effort. Ballinger had scored a carbon copy of the goal King's Lynn scored at Ladysmead in September, latching on to a long ball, getting himself between the ball and the last defender, and slotting past Ray Johnston. By this stage Mangotsfield had already squandered a good chance but the lively wingback Jack Allward could only scuff his shot wide of the upright after Jon French's centre had caused panic in the Tiverton penalty area.

Ballinger's opener sparked the home side into life, as it would any team that were defending an unbeaten home record that stretched six games and almost two months. By the mid-point of the first half the forward momentum was confined to the Yellows, heading towards the Devco end of the ground, and Tom Gardner twice had goalbound headers clawed away by former Tivvy goalkeeper Josh Clapham as Town sought an equaliser. Moments after Gardner was denied for the second time Matty Bye unleashed a rocket shot from distance but this time Clapham was able to watch as the ball went well wide of the mark, and Glen Gould also joined in the target practice without reward when he benefited from some classy interplay between Chris Young and Danny O'Brien, the pair perplexing the left side of the Mangotsfield defence.

Ballinger was forced out of the action early with injury and James Crew, his replacement barely got into the game as Tiverton dominated the remainder of the first half without further threatening a breakthrough. Matty Bye's curling free kick from wide eluded defence and attack alike allowing Clapham to field with ease, and by the time Sam Bailey had worked his way into the referees notebook there was no more time to threaten the scorers before the half-time oranges.

Tiverton continued to make the running after the change of ends, but Chris Vinnicombe shot wide, and James Fraser blasted a well positioned free kick straight at the defensive wall as the Bristolians held firm, and their stoic approach and patience was nearly rewarded with a breakaway goal on the hour mark. The ineffective Crew beat the offside trap, headed towards glory, but for the umpteenth time this season Johnston stood firm and was able to beat the ball away when a two goal lead looked a certainty. For all the criticism the Tivvy 'keeper has received this season his remarkable ability to come out on top in one-on-one situations is impeccable, and I daren't even consider the number of times he has saved the team a point or three with his excellent stops.

Alan Griffin, who led the line strongly for the Mangos, dragged a shot wide before normal service was resumed, and following the introduction of Radley Veale in place of Nathan Rudge Tiverton finally got the goal they craved. Simon Bochenski wriggled his way into space inside the area and shot onto the post, and with the visiting defence at sixes and sevens the ball was cleared only as far as Fraser on the eighteen yard line. Fraser barged Veale out of the way and ripped in a low shot that beat the confused defenders and nestled in the net, brining the scores level.

Veale almost grabbed all three points for Tiverton but saw an initial shot hacked off the line and a second effort blocked, while at the death O'Brien forced Clapham to back-pedal and tip a hanging cross over the top and out for a corner. Another former Town player Paul Milsom was booked for a mistimed tackle on Veale close to the end, but neither side was able to score a decisive goal as yet again there was nothing to chose between Tiverton Town and Mangotsfield United.

**Tiverton Town:** Ray Johnston; Danny O'Brien, Chris Vinnicombe, Daniel Bulley, Nathan Rudge (Radley Veale 63), Tom Gardner, Matt Bye, Chris Young (Tom Knighton 63), Simon Bochenski, James Fraser, Glenn Gould (Paul Wyatt 71)

Goals: Fraser 73

Booked: None

Sent Off: None

**Mangotsfield United:** Josh Clapham; Sam Bailey, Jack Allward, Gary Thorne, Paul Milsom, Alex Ball, Ellis Wilmot, Ronnie Mowatt (Mike Kilgour 78), Alan Griffin, Luke Ballinger (James Crew 9), Jon French

Goals: Ballinger 4

Booked: Bailey 35, Milsom 84

Sent Off: None

Attendance: 419