

SATURDAY, 18 AUGUST 2007

MERTHYR TYDFIL 2-0 TIVERTON TOWN

BGB Southern League Premier Division

Tiverton Town stumbled to defeat at Penydarren Park last Saturday, their first defeat on the opening day of the season since back in the days when shorts really were short, and permed hair was the standard. Back in 1987 it was Warminster who took the spoils in the Western League First Division with a 3-2 victory, and this time Merthyr Tydfil consigned Tivvy to their second successive defeat in the valleys in the matter of only seven competitive matches.

Hope springs eternal, and a solid pre-season gave supporters of the Yellows a good deal of optimism - Ray Johnston had looked more than capable between the sticks, Matt Villis was perfectly solid in defence and Will Gardner alongside Jak Martin in midfield had given Tivvy plenty of bite and a fair amount of skill in the engine room. Pre-season wasn't so productive for Tiverton's star man Mike Booth, who after a near perfect season had been unfortunate to pick up two injuries and was thus ruled out of the opening match in the Principality. Will Gardner was also absent, leaving Tiverton short of numbers in midfield and forcing Martyn Rogers' hand somewhat, meaning that Paul Wyatt was deployed in an offensive midfield role behind the strike pairing of Carl Cliff-Brown and Chris Young. James Turner was brought into the squad at the eleventh hour, loaned from Bristol Rovers and played alongside Martin in tricky conditions as the rain persistently teemed down over South Wales.

The opening exchanges confirmed the optimism that had been built up over the past six weeks, and although clear-cut chances were at a premium it was the visitors that were playing the more constructive football. Wyatt and Young both looked particularly eager, chasing and charging as if their lives depended on it, and the Martyrs looked shaky, even rocked across their defensive line. It was Young that set up the first real goalscoring opportunity for Tivvy, sliding an inch-perfect through ball to Cliff-Brown, but the front man could only chip his shot into the side netting when one-on-one with the highly rated Ashley Morris in the Merthyr goal.

Chris Vinnicombe also suffered the same fate as he saw a curling free-kick go inches wide of the mark, and a Palmer free kick from a similar position also missed this time wide right. At the other end there was very little to be concerned about as the Tiverton back line handled the awkward looking Mike Jones and the dynamic Craig Steins with comfort. But as the game wore on so it became clear that Tivvy would rue the earlier missed chances as the hosts upped the tempo after the break. Tivvy's three centre-backs contrived to fluff a clearance, Villis playing his way into trouble, Tom Gardner racing in and almost conceding a penalty, and then Nathan Rudge adding to the comedy of errors, all of which allowed Ryan Dorrian to nick the ball near the corner flag, breeze into a better position and curl a delicious shot into the top corner, well out of Johnston's reach.

It was a goal that Merthyr deserved on their showing since the interval, and a lead that was doubled a little over fifteen minutes later when Steins caught Gardner flat footed and drilled a low shot beneath Johnston. Gardner might have reduced the Town arrears seconds later, but after Morris had failed to hold a shot from Martin the centre back showed why he plays in defence by stabbing the ball ten yards wide from six yards out. In fairness the chance happened so quickly that even a natural striker would have had difficulty adjusting his feet, but it was a chance nevertheless. One more opening was to come as Tivvy rallied and Tydfil ran down the clock - a neat interchange between Vinnicombe and Tom Knighton resulted in Luke Clarke finding himself on the corner of the area with only the 'keeper in front of him. But the wingback didn't realise how much time and space he had, and his shot was easy for Morris to field.

Yellow cards for Rudge, Villis and Martin were all justified as was the pointless trek back home to Devon. After a promising first half Tivvy were clearly second best after the break, and the best team won. But hope springs eternal, and Tivvy can and have played much better. Onwards, and hopefully upwards!

Merthyr Tydfil: Ashley Morris; Tarrant Watkins (Matthew Glassey 70), Darren Davies, Kris Dimond, Jamie Rewbury, Dale Griffiths, Steve Williams, Dean Clarke (Ryan Dorrian 48), Craig Steins, Gary Shephard, Michael Jones (Matthew Harris 80)
Goals: Dorrian 62, Steins 80
Booked: Watkins 38
Sent Off: None

Tiverton Town: Ray Johnston; Luke Clarke (Oliver Wake), Chris Vinnicombe, Matt Villis, Nathan Rudge, Tom Gardner, James Palmer, Jak Martin, Chris Young (Tom Knighton), Carl Cliff-Brown, Paul Wyatt
Booked: Villis 25, Rudge 35, Martin 64
Sent Off: None

Attendance: 410