

TUESDAY, 1 JANUARY 2008

TIVERTON TOWN 0-0 MERTYHR TYDFIL

BGB Southern League Premier Division

Another opportunity of revenge presented itself just three days later with the arrival at Ladysmead of the underachieving Merthyr Tydfil, and side that had consigned Tiverton to their first opening day defeat for 20 years back in August at a rainy Penydarren Park. The Welsh outfit had been boosted a week or two earlier by the return from injury of their Welsh Under 18 International goalkeeper Ashley Morris, and with Craig Steins also recovered from injury they had a top quality player at either end of the pitch.

What they didn't have, though, was an inventive midfield, and it was soon clear that neither Steins nor his strike partner Darren Griffiths has donned their shooting boots, for if they had then Tiverton would have been out of contention long before the interval. Griffiths was the first to get a sight of goal, and although he hit the target he also hit Ray Johnston, and Steins was soon in on the act, but his shot faded across the face of goal with the Town custodian beaten. Merthyr were not enjoying the rub of the green, and two failed penalty appeals and a disallowed goal later they found themselves behind against the run of play. Danny O'Brien, doing what he does best turned Matthew Glassey inside-out before finding Simon Bochenski in the area. Bochenski, under pressure bundled the ball clear of the defence and Chris Young scampered in to prod the ball past Morris from close range.

The goal settled the Yellows to an extent, but still it was the Martyrs that made most of the running, and Jamie Rewbury missed a glorious chance when he hit the side netting from no more than six yards having stayed forward from a Merthyr corner that wasn't fully cleared. Steins then curled in a shot from the edge of the area that made Johnston work to keep his goal intact, and Matthew Harris struck wide in a carbon copy of Rewbury's miss.

With half-time approaching and Tivvy on the edge an unlikely second goal arrived, once again via the boot of Young. The sheer dominance of forward motion that Merthyr were enjoying led to their defence pushing forward, and Matty Bye exposed the gaps that had appeared by threading a splendid through ball into space, which Young raced on to. With the cumbersome and curiously shaped Gareth Wharton trailing in his wake Young kept a cool head to race goalwards and slot a neat finish below Morris to double the Tivvy lead.

Down the years Tiverton have become accustomed to throwing away healthy advantages, and just past the hour mark, with Merthyr on the offensive it looked as if this would be another such occasion. A long ball from defence found Steins in space and his perfect first touch killed the ball and allowed him to find Griffiths in space. Griffiths beat Johnston and reduced the arrears and the game was still alive, although the Welsh side then undid all their hard work just a minute later by conceding a third goal. Slack marking from Chris Vinnicombe's corner allowed Tom Gardner all the space he needed to crash home a header and restore the Yellows' two goal advantage.

It was an end-to-end affair and a fifth goal arrived shortly afterwards, a second for Merthyr, and another lifeline. Steve Williams swung in a free kick from wide on the left, Johnston, clambering over his defenders punched the ball straight to the feet of Darren Griffiths' brother Dale, and the big central defender smashed the ball into an unguarded net from ten yards out. Darren and Dale had both been amongst the goals in Merthyr's 3-2 victory against Bedford on their previous outing, but this time they would find themselves scoring in a losing cause, as for all their effort the equalising goal wouldn't come. Glassey hit the post with fifteen minutes still to play, while Morris added to his excellent reputation by pulling off a stunning save from Paul Wyatt on a rare Tivvy attack, and in injury time Darren Davies, never one to keep his thoughts to himself gave the linesman a piece of his mind and was granted the opportunity of warming the showers.

Tivvy took back-to-back league victories for their first time in eight months, and while it is fair to say they rode their luck a little there were certainly signs that a corner is being turned. There was a little concern about the number of goalscoring chances Merthyr carved out, and a better team would have punished the Yellows, but you can only beat what is in front of you, and for the last two games Tiverton have done this. The Gloucester and Hemel Hempstead matches will be reviewed in Saturday's edition when we entertain Mangotsfield United.

Tiverton Town: Ray Johnston; Danny O'Brien, Chris Vinnicombe, Matt Villis, Daniel Bulley, Tom Gardner, Matt Bye, Chris Young (Tom Knighton 52), Simon Bochenski (Paul Wyatt 73), James Fraser, Glenn Gould

Goals: Young 21, 43, Gardner 67

Booked: Vinnicombe 55

Sent Off: None

Merthyr Tydfil: Ashley Morris; Steve Williams, Darren Davies, Dale Griffiths, Jamie Rewbury, Gareth Wharton (Marcus Griffiths 46), Matthew Harris, Dean Clarke, Matthew Harris, Craig Steins, Matthew Glassey

Goals: Darren Griffiths 66, Dale Griffiths 71

Booked: Davies 77, Williams 90

Sent Off: Davies 90

Attendance: 384