

SATURDAY, 1 MARCH 2008

## TEAM BATH 0-1 TIVERTON TOWN

British Gas Business Southern League Premier Division

Team Bath are a team on the move, although unfortunately for the Students they are moving in the wrong direction. Defeats against Gloucester City and King's Lynn have everybody's least favourite team in the Southern League on the ropes, and Tiverton Town defied the laws of logic to consign Bath to their third defeat in four matches at Twerton Park on Saturday thanks to Phil Walsh's injury time winner on a blustery March afternoon. It was a victory that Tiverton worked for; they dug deep for long periods but didn't falter, and the concentration and effort that the defence showed throughout the game was rewarded at the death.

Team Bath gave Tivvy the run-around earlier in the season at Ladysmead and their two-goal margin of victory flattered the home side as the students dominated the match from start to finish. But the rematch in Bath was a vastly different fare, and neither side was able to carve out much in the way of meaningful and genuine goalscoring opportunities as the swirling winds made constructive football an almost impossible endeavour. The first attack of any magnitude came from the home side after five minutes, and Matt Lock's deep free kick was nodded over the top by Walsh - the truth is that the initial free kick was too deep having caught on a gust, and either Nathan Rudge or Will Gardner would have comfortably cleared the ball in a calmer climate. The resultant corner was pinged in, then out again only for Dan Dillon to centre and Sean Canham to rifle into the net. Canham, however, was well offside and the assistant referee stood unmoved, flag aloft, and the game remained in deadlock.

Takumi Ake, the one shining light in an otherwise decidedly average Bath side wasted a free kick that cleared a packed penalty area and bobbed harmlessly through to Ray Johnston in the Tiverton goal, and Canham was the beneficiary of the elements midway through the first period when Matt Villis misjudged the flight of the ball, but the league's top scorer saw his shot blocked as Villis scrambled in retreat and heroically threw himself in the way of the shot. Steve Abbott also had an effort blocked at point blank range after a short free kick involving Lock and Dillon had set up the Team Bath player, while at the other end Simon Bochenski skied one shot having latched onto an inch-perfect through ball from James Fraser, and on the stroke of half time the same player saw a hanging cross from the left drop onto the roof of the net.

Tivvy attacked down the hill and with the wind at their backs in the second half and should have taken the lead five minutes after the restart. Radley Veale picked the ball up deep inside his own half, rode challenge after challenge as he hustled his way to within shooting range, and on reaching the edge of the area spotted Bochenski in space in a more central position. Veale squared the ball but Bochenski snapped at his shot and the weak effort rolled along the turf and into the relieved grasp of Jake Meredith. Minutes later Rudge headed inches wide from Fraser's corner, and two excellent chances had gone begging.

It took Team Bath a quarter of an hour to get to grips with playing into the breeze, but once they did they were able to pressurise the Tiverton goal, and Sami El-Abd wasted a glorious chance when he met Mike Perrott's corner unchallenged on the edge of the goal area. On the hour mark Tivvy had another corner to defend and Walsh was back to hack away two efforts from off the line, the first from Bath captain Gary Warren and the second from Canham. Dogged defending and blunt finishing seemed the order of the day and the game at this stage had all the signs of ending goalless, but 62 minutes into proceedings there was a twist that opened the game immediately and for the remainder.

The Students had been awarded a free kick midway inside the Tiverton half of the field, the defence took up their positions and then Johnston, waiting patiently on his six-yard line hit the deck. Nobody was near him, so no questions of malpractice; this was a freak injury that will probably remain unexplained. A lengthy stoppage - at least six minutes - ensued and Johnston was stretchered off with what turned out to be a serious Achilles injury. The Town custodian said that it felt as if somebody had thrown a brick at the back of his leg - the fact that Team Bath games don't attract enough people to warrant the use of the terrace behind the goal indicated that there was no foul play from anyone. With Johnston out of the game (and possibly out of the remainder of the season) Villis took the gloves and watched Lock finally fire the free kick into the heavens.

With a defender in goal Bath took it upon themselves to step up the pace and peppered the Tiverton penalty area, only to find Rudge in exemplary form. The Tivvy skipper met everything that came his way with powerful headed clearances, and when the ball did elude him Abbott could only aim a header wide of the mark. The game reached the final minute of normal time and Tivvy had settled, with Adam Faux slotting into the defensive position vacated by Villis with consummate ease, and the Yellows in White found the confidence to push forward. Rudge once again headed inches wide from a Vinnicombe corner, with Walsh half a yard too slow to force the ball home at the far post, and Veale was tackled just as he was about to pull the trigger following a sweeping move involving Bochenski and Fraser.

The game was 97 minutes old, and about to end without the scorekeepers troubled when yet another Tivvy corner was awarded. From out on the right Vinnicombe once again aimed deep towards the far post. This time the ball sailed beyond Rudge but landed at the feet of Fraser. The on-loan Gashead took one touch to bring the ball under control and a second to aim the ball goalwards. Meredith had missed the initial corner and was in no-man's-land, Fraser's sweet curling effort didn't quite curl enough and rebounded off the left upright and back into the goalmouth. With the Team Bath defenders confused and disorientated Walsh stole in and threw his head at the ball, three yards out. The net rippled, Walsh wheeled away, as delighted as a dog with two tails, and Tivvy turned the Southern League championship fight on its head.

Bath complained about something, nobody knows what, and then kicked off again. The ball was pumped down their left flank where Danny O'Brien launched it back from whence it came. The referee blew the whistle and Tivvy were applauded off the pitch after the perfect smash-and-grab.

**Team Bath:** Jake Meredith; Matt Lock, Shaun Lamb, Steve Abbott, Gary Warren, Sami El-Abd, Dan Dillon, Dean Smith (Adi Adams), Mike Perrott, Sean Canham, Takumi Ake (Joe Arnold 90)

Booked: Canham 90

Sent Off: None

**Tiverton Town:** Ray Johnston (Adam Faux); Danny O'Brien, Chris Vinnicombe, Matt Villis, Nathan Rudge, Will Gardner, Glenn Gould, Phil Walsh, Simon Bochenski, James Fraser, Radley Veale

Goals: Walsh 90

Booked: Veale 7, Walsh 76

Sent Off: None

Attendance: 144