



Saturday 14th January 2012

BISHOP'S STORTFORD 3, HARROGATE TOWN 4
(BLUE SQUARE BET NORTH)

This was a seven goal thriller for the neutrals at Woodside Park but a disappointing result for the Stortford faithful after the recent successful run that had seen them win three games in a row. The Blues were always behind in this contest but had fought back to level on three occasions. The Sulphurites, who leapfrogged over the Blues in the league table thanks to this result, played at a high tempo from the start and gave Stortford players little time or space to dwell on the ball. With a tall side they also won a greater percentage of the aerial challenges.

Having kept a clean sheet four days earlier the Bishops' defence looked strangely fragile and were not helped by Sean Francis having to leave the action in the 55th minute with a hamstring problem. Also, the midfield wasn't able to gain a substantial or prolonged grip on the proceedings. Manager Rod Stringer was unable to call upon the unavailable Ricky Sappleton and Daniel Subuola was also missing due to illness. This meant that Merrick James-Lewis made the starting eleven whilst Arron Wickham, returning from an FA Youth Cup tie with Peterborough United, was on the bench.

There were few openings for either side in the opening quarter-of-an-hour but the Yorkshire visitors had edged that time possession wise and they took the lead in the 19th minute. A long crossfield pass from the left found Paul Brayson on the far side of the box and when the striker played to the ball inside Jonny Allan's shot was inadvertently diverted past Jordan Archer by ALLI ABDULLAHI for an own goal. Archer made a despairing lunge to stop the ball from crossing the line but failed to stop it entering the net (0-1).

Dwight Gayle had a low shot pushed round the post by keeper Mark Cook for a corner four minutes later and Stortford equalised for the first time in the 27th minute. Phil Anderson sent the ball upfield and Gayle flicked it on into space and REECE PRESTIDGE ran through in the inside right channel to beat Cook with a low shot into the bottom corner (1-1).

When Gayle was fouled just outside the box shortly afterwards, Scott Shulton's free-kick was held by Cook and Stortford fell behind again in the 35th minute. A deep cross from the right towards the far post by Jake Picton resulted in Jonny Allan's header being parried away by Jordan Archer but it fell nicely for PAUL BRAYSON to nod past the keeper from a few yards (1-2).

In the 41st minute Alan White's header from Rob Youhill's corner for the Town was held under the bar by Archer and then the Blues equalised from the penalty spot. Reece Prestedge found Dwight Gayle with an excellent pass and after chesting the ball down he made tracks into the area between defenders Jake Picton and Richard Pell. When the number nine went sprawling Referee Ian Crouch ruled that Pell had fouled him and showed him a yellow card and awarded a spot-kick to the Blues. There was a long delay during which time Harrogate's Alan White was booked for dissent. However, DWIGHT GAYLE kept his nerve and sent the penalty into the corner of the net (2-2).

There was three minutes stoppage time before the break and during this time a glancing header by Alli Abdullahi from a Reece Prestedge cross wasn't far off target.
Half time: 2-2

On the restart, there was little between the sides but ten minutes into the second half Sean Francis came off with a hamstring injury and was replaced by Junior Dadson. The side was re-organised with Harry Milton moving to the centre of defence and Sebastian Dunbar dropping back on the left.

At this stage the Blues were creating the better chances as a Milton glancing header at the near post from a Prestedge corner went across the face of the goal in the 57th minute and then Gayle headed on an Archer clearance for Junior Dadson to cut in from the left at goal only for the substitute's shot to agonisingly skim across the six yard box past the far upright.

On the hour, Alan White was narrowly wide with a header following a Paul Bolland free-kick and they retook the lead in the 67th minute when Blues concentration lapsed at a corner. Rob Youhill's flag-kick on the left towards the near post was met by JONNY ALLAN and his header entered net via the underside of the bar (2-3).

That lead didn't last long as, just two minutes later a fine ball into the box from the left by Reece Prestedge saw DWIGHT GAYLE's stooping header at the near post find the back of the net. This was his 16th Blue Square Bet North goal of the campaign and his 22nd in total (3-3).

Junior Dadson went close with a shot saved by Cook and at the other end, in the 73rd minute, the visitors took the lead for the fourth and last time with a goal that could have been prevented. Rob Youhill gained possession of a loose pass and progressed up the right wing before cutting the ball low into the area. The Blues' defence was stretched and although the ball was cleared it only reached JONNY ALLAN who blasted it into the roof of the net from 15 yards (3-4).

The Blues had most of the play until the end but the nearest they threatened to equalise again was a minute from normal time when substitute Arron Wickham nodded forward for Dwight Gayle to cross low from the right and yet again the ball skidded across the six yard box with no one able to convert it into a goal.

Dwight Gayle and Scott Shulton collected bookings in the second half.

Full time: 3-4

BISHOP'S STORTFORD: Jordan Archer; Ritchie Jones; Harry Milton; Alli Abdullahi; Phil Anderson; Sean Francis (sub – Junior Dadson 55 mins) ; Scott Shulton; Merrick James-Lewis (sub – Arron Wickham 67 mins) Dwight Gayle; Reece Prestedge; Sebastian Dunbar.

Unused substitutes: Bai Mass Lette Jallow, George Artemi and Matt Gill.

HARROGATE TOWN: Mark Cook; Jake Picton; Paul Heckingbottom; Michael Brough; Richard Pell (sub – Peter Bore 46 mins); Alan White; Robbie Youhill; Paul Bolland; Paul Brayson; Jonny Allan; Craig Radcliffe.

Unused substitutes: Paul Beesley, Lee Elam, Will Turl and Stephen Turnbull.

Attendance: 433