

BISHOP'S STORTFORD 1, EBBSFLEET UNITED 1

(VANARAMA CONFERENCE SOUTH)

Watched by their biggest gate of the season so far a much changed Blues line up shared the spoils with play-off hopefuls Ebbsfleet United at the ProKit UK Stadium. After a three week break Rod Stringer's men fought hard throughout the contest to worry their opponents who had a number of players with a wealth of Football League experience.

Stortford included three players making their debut. Jake Larkins after several showings in pre-season friendlies was between the sticks, former West Ham United Academy player Kenzer Lee was in the left back berth whilst loan signing from Cambridge United Bobby-Joe Taylor operated further forward on the left flank. Another newcomer Nick Salapatas was an unused substitute and another new signing Nicky Nicolau was unavailable due to sustaining a knee injury in training two days prior to the match.

The Blues, attacking the Airport end, took the game to the Fleet early on and in the 4th minute Taylor crossed low through the six yard from the left and Frankie Merrifield just missed connecting with the ball. Then a succession of corners were forced one of which from the left by Sheldon Sellaars resulted in George Allen heading not far over the bar.

For a couple of minutes the Kent side seemed to be beginning to get a grip in midfield but Stortford took the lead in the 11th minute after another attack on the left featuring Bobby-Joe Taylor. He linked with Frankie Merrifield and when Merrifield cut inside to the angle of the box the former Hayes & Yeading midfielder drove a goal bound shot that Fleet keeper Preston Edwards saved well but the ball fell loose to **SHELDON SELLEARS** who slotted into the net from ten yards for his sixth Vanarama goal of the season (1-0).

With the Blues maintaining their high tempo, shortly afterwards Edwards had to stretch at his near post to hold on to another squared grubber from Taylor on the

left after good work by the goalscorer Sellears. But the visitors showed their threat when in the 22nd minute George Allen robbed Tyrone Marsh when he had almost broken clear. Former Stortford favourite Matt Johnson was close with a shot past the post two minutes later. However, the Blues lead was then almost doubled by Sellears when, after receiving a pass across the edge of the box from Taylor, his shot on the turn was fractionally wide of an upright.

United's equaliser on the half hour came as something of a surprise. They were awarded a free-kick just inside the Stortford half and Theo Lewis' deep delivery found **DANNY KEDWELL** to power a header wide of Jake Larkin and inside his right hand post (1-1).

After the equaliser play was fairly even up to the break although following an Ebbsfleet corner the Blues broke upfield swiftly and when Frankie Merrifield laid the ball into space in the box for James Walker an opportunity seemed to be there but a visiting defender got across quickly to make a good block.

Half time: 1-1

On the restart Edwards again had to be alert to hold the ball at the near post following a Taylor cross. Generally both sides in the second half had periods of the play when they shaded the possession although clear cut opportunities in front of goal were limited.

Stortford had a good spell just after the hour mark. In the 62nd minute a Bobby-Joe Taylor free-kick into the box caused problems for the visitors' defence and the resultant corner by Sheldon Sellears travelled across the face of the goal with the ball evading Anthony Church's boot by inches.

Rod Stringer replaced James Walker with Donovan Simmonds up front after 63 minutes and nine minutes later a half chance was missed. Frankie Merrifield cut the ball back from the left and it seemed to bobble as Sheldon Sellears miscued his 15 yard shot wide of the target.

There was another near miss for the Blues in the 81st minute when George Allen was close with a diving far post header following a Sellears corner on the right. However, with just five minutes of normal time remaining they had to be thankful to debutant stopper Larkins who had

had a relatively quiet afternoon. Matt Johnson crossed into the nearside of the box from the right and Danny Kedwell's header was well turned aside by Larkins and fortunately the loose ball just ran past the oncoming substitute Sean Shields.

The Blues pressed strongly in the remaining time that included three minutes stoppage time but weren't able to clinch a winner.

Referee Steven Plane booked Anthony Church, George Allen, Kenzer Lee and Joe Tabiri along with Fleet's Theo Lewis, all in the second half.

Full time: 1-1

BISHOP'S STORTFORD: Jake Larkins; Ashley Miller; Kenzer Lee; Joe Tabiri; Adam Bailey-Dennis; George Allen; Bobby-Joe Taylor; Anthony Church; James Walker (sub Donovan Simmonds 63 mins); Frankie Merrifield; Sheldon Sellears.

Unused substitutes: Rickie Hayles, Nick Salapatas, Spencer McCall and Luke Milbourne.

EBBSFLEET UNITED: Preston Edwards; Dean Pooley; Ben Jefford; Matt Johnson; Kelvin Langmead; Tom Bonner; Theo Lewis; Stuart Lewis; Danny Kedwell; Adam Cunnington; Tyrone Marsh (sub – Sean Shields 70 mins).

Unused substitutes: Mark Gower, Brendan Kiernan, Kenny Clark and Jamie Turner.

Attendance: 605