

BISHOP'S STORTFORD 1, CHELMSFORD CITY 2 (VANARAMA NATIONAL SOUTH)

City stretched their unbeaten League run over the Blues to nine games and have clearly taken over the mantle of the Stortford's local hoodoo opponents from Braintree Town. As in the past few meetings of the two clubs there were plenty of incidents particularly in the first half that by the break had seen both the Blues and the visitors reduced to ten men. Stortford took the lead on the half hour but saw this wiped out by an equaliser a couple of minutes before the interval and then the Clarets clinched what proved to be the winning goal early in the second half. The Blues came close to sharing the points but it was City who travelled home the short distance with three points.

Rod Stringer's squad was lacking a few players – Mikel Suarez had an eye problem, Matty Fanimio had a hamstring injury and Billy Lobjoit was ill. On the bench and making their debuts in the second half were Mason Walsh on loan from AFC Bournemouth and former West Ham midfielder Kieran Bywater.

Stortford had the edge early in the match and in the first minute a deflected drive from 25 yards by Elliott Buchanan flew inches wide of an upright.

Anthony Church headed over at the far post following a Sheldon Sellears' corner in the 12th minute. Four minutes later visiting defender Rory McAuley's climb over Michael Thalassitis to head the ball away a yard or so inside the box looked questionable. It was a great through ball by Thalassitis in the 26th minute to send Buchanan away down the middle and when the striker was brought down by Ashley Timms as he tried to go round the stopper referee Rob Mackay awarded a penalty and showed Timms a red card. Buchanan duly netted from the spot with a shot down the middle past substitute keeper Connor Pearce.

Stortford nearly extended their lead against the ten men in the 36th minute when Thalassitis was a foot over the bar with a glancing header following a cross from the right by De'Reece Vanderhyde. The Blues looked comfortable at this stage but the visitors hit back with an equaliser in 43rd minute. Former Stortford left back Aiden Palmer took a corner on the right and Marvin Ekpiteta's powerful header found the net.

A couple of minutes later and just before break the hosts suffered another blow. A long ball down the middle from out of the Chelmsford half skimmed over the top of Kenzer Lee's head and City number nine Billy Bricknell ran clear. George Allen was battling to keep up with him and eventually hauled him down outside the box. Referee Mackay had little option but to dismiss the central defender. Aiden Palmer's resultant free-kick cleared the top of the bar.

There was little between the two sides on the restart but Anthony Church struck a fine low drive from 20 yards that struck Pearce's right hand post in the 54th minute. However, just two minutes later Clarets' skipper Mark Hughes headed the winning goal. Kenzer Lee was ruled to have fouled

substitute Hugo Skepelhorn on the right and from Aiden Palmer's free-kick towards the near post a glancing header from Hughes finished in the net.

A back-header by Buchanan from a long throw by Vanderhyde in the 68th minute almost produced an equaliser but it went inches past the far post. Moses Makasi was close with a free-kick for City but the Blues were enjoying a good spell and when Church made a great challenge in the box to set Frankie Merrifield on a run on the right side of the box there seemed to be a great opportunity. However, Palmer tackled the midfielder and although there were calls for a penalty Merrifield was shown a yellow card for assimilation.

With the contest entering its closing stages Pearce was called into action in the 81st minute when pushing aside a low effort from substitute Walsh and within another minute or so Church again hit the woodwork after a concerted attack saw the skipper strike the outside of a post.

Keiran Bywater with a free-kick deep from the left was wide of the target in the 88th minute and this was really the Blues last chance. Deep into stoppage time Clarets' substitute Lee Sawyer shot over the bar from a good position that could have widened the visitors' winning margin.

BLUES: Tom Lovelock; De'Reece Vanderhyde; Kenzer Lee; Frankie Merrifield; Adam Bailey-Dennis; George Allen; Sheldon Sellears (Christian Smith 57); Anthony Church; Michael Thalassitis (Mason Walsh 66); Elliott Buchanan; Johnny Herd (Kieran Bywater 71).
Unused substitutes: Josh Ekim and Ejiro Okosieme

CHELMSFORD CITY: Ashley Timms; Marvel Ekpiteta (Hugo Skepelhorn 46); Aiden Palmer; Mark Hughes; Marvin Ekpiteta; Rory McAuley; Moses Makasi (Lee Sawyer 85); Luke Daley; Billy Bricknell; Charlie Henry (Connor Pearce 30)); Harry Morgan.
Unused substitutes: Jonah Gosling and Bagasan Graham
Attendance: 662