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WEALDSTONE 3, BISHOP'S STORTFORD 1 (VANARAMA NATIONAL LEAGUE SOUTH)

After two successive wins the Blues hopes of maintaining a consistent early successful run were extinguished by defeat in a match that could easily have ended in their favour at Grosvenor Vale. In a first half that Stortford hit the post twice the hosts were a goal in front at the break. However, with skipper Anthony Church heading an equaliser just past the midway point of the second period they were on the ascendency only for Wealdstone to retake the lead from a poorly defended free-kick. Then the Stones, whose first victory of the season this was, netted a third from a penalty deep into stoppage time.

Certainly the crucial moment of the match was the home side's second goal with their striker Josh Hutchinson being allowed a free run and header in the box.

Stortford were without the unavailable Johnny Herd and also Kenzer Lee who had a hip problem. Christian Smith came into the left back position and Adam Bailey-Dennis was alongside George Allen in the centre of defence. Also, Rod Stringer brought Michael Thalassitis into the starting eleven with Frankie Merrifield dropping to the bench. Another substitute, although not coming on in the match, was Anthony Furlonge who had been out of action since being injured in pre-season.

In gloomy conditions the Blues kicking up the slope in the first period made a promising start. An early corner on the right by Kieran Bywater was hooked wide at the far post by George Allen and following a free-kick after six minutes taken by Bywater the ball found its way to Matt Johnson whose shot found the back of the net but the goal was ruled out for offside against Allen.

The Stones scored the first goal of the game in the 15th minute. Central defender Tom Hamblin climbed the highest to head Scott Davies' right wing corner under the bar. The Blues went on the offensive and midway through the half a Bywater free-kick, after he himself had been fouled by Ryan Watts, ran loose to Mason Walsh just inside the box and the on-loan player's low shot was saved by Wealdstone keeper Jonathan North.

Stortford had an escape a few minutes later as Bywater had to clear the ball away from his own line after a shot on the turn by Bradley Hudson-Odoi. On the half-hour North launched himself forward to punch away a deep ball into the box from Walsh and then when Christian Smith delivered another long cross towards the far side of the box home defender Watts seemed to handle the ball in his attempt to clear. However nothing was given in the Blues favour. The Blues' midfield was seeing a lot of the ball with Anthony Church and Matt Johnson prominent and in the minutes approaching the break came very close to levelling the

scores. Firstly, in the 42nd minute, a strong run and cross from the left by Mason Walsh saw the ball reach Kieran Bywater on the edge of the box and the wide player fired a shot against North's right hand post. Then in the last action of the half the same player won a good challenge for the ball inside Wealdstone territory and when it ran free to Elliott Buchanan the League's leading marksman's half-volley smacked against the base of the other upright.

On the restart Tom Lovelock was forced to make an excellent save in the 53rd minute diving to his left to push away an effort from Hudson-Odoi who had cut in from the left wing but Stortford were getting the better of the exchanges. A corner from Bywater led to a shot from Anthony Church that was cleared away by defender Joshua McLeod-Urquhart and when the ball was returned into the middle Michael Thalassitis saw his shot tipped over the bar by stopper North at the near post. Although Stones' striker Josh Hutchinson headed over from a good position in the 63rd minute it wasn't long before the Blues' equaliser materialised.

Mason Walsh struck a deflected shot for a corner after a good run and although that flag-kick came to nothing when Anthony Church did likewise after a run in the inside right channel and his goal-bound shot deflected off defender Wes Parker the resultant corner produced the equaliser. It was the Blues' skipper who stooped to head home Bywater's corner from the right and give the visitors hope.

Rod Stringer brought on Matty Fanimio in place of Michael Thalassitis but Stortford were behind again with fifteen minutes left. De'Reece Vanderhyde fouled Hudson-Odoi close to the left touchline and when Scott Davies delivered a deep free-kick into the box Josh Hutchinson ran a long way to power a header past Lovelock.

Ten minutes from time Fanimio left a number of home defenders in his wake as a searing run took him down the middle but the substitute's deflected 20 yarder was deflected wide for another corner. Fanimio was in the action again with three minutes of normal time remaining when after good work on the left he crossed to the far post where Church's nod goalwards was caught high by the stretching keeper North.

Into four minutes of stoppage time Lovelock saved an angled shot from substitute Jefferson Louis. Then at the other end after Fanimio was fouled and Kieran Bywater's free-kick was cleared away from near the goal-line for the hosts to break quickly allowing Jonny Wright to send Jefferson Louis running into the box. Frankie Merrifield appeared to tackle the Stones' striker fairly but Referee Ian Rathbone thought otherwise and Louis netted the spot-kick and Stones' third goal.

TEAM INFO AND MATCH DETAILS:

BISHOP'S STORTFORD: Tom Lovelock; De'Reece Vanderhyde; Christian Smith (Frankie Merrifield 83); Matt Johnson; Adam Bailey-Dennis; George Allen; Kieran Bywater; Anthony Church; Elliott

Buchanan; Michael Thalassitis (Matty Fanimio 68); Mason Walsh (Josh Ekim 85).

Unused substitutes: Anthony Furlonge and Ejiro Okosieme.

WEALDSTONE: Jonathan North; Joshua McLeod-Urquhart; Ryan Watts; Wes Parker; Tom Hamblin; Scott Davies; Matt Ball; Elliott Godfrey; Connor Calcutt (Jonny Wright 68); Josh Hutchinson; Bradley Hudson-Odoi (Jefferson Louis 80).

Unused substitutes: Shaun Lucien, Carl Martin and Michael Corcoran.

Half time: 1-0

Goalscorers: Bishop's Stortford – Church 67.

Wealdstone – Hamblin 15, Hutchinson 75 and Louis (pen) 90+4.

Referee: Mr Ian Rathbone

Attendance: 663