

BISHOP'S STORTFORD 2 ST ALBANS CITY 1  
(VANARAMA NATIONAL LEAGUE SOUTH)

Stortford claimed a welcome first National League South victory since early November and also their first Boxing Day win since 2001 with the deciding goal arriving with thirteen minutes to go in a close match with City. The Blues battled hard in the gusty conditions and were worth the three points they took from the contest which saw all the goals scored in the second half.

Rod Stringer's side showed just two changes from that which had picked up a point at Weston-Super-Mare a week before. Church, unavailable for several weeks due to work commitments, returned whilst De'Reece Vanderhyde was back in the side following his one match suspension. He replaced Ian Gayle who was carrying a slight injury but was named amongst the substitutes. Tom Beere's loan period from AFC Wimbledon had ended and was not renewed.

The game was largely uneventful before the break. However, attacking the Airport end, the Blues had started the brighter. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> minute a lofted cross from Kieran Bywater saw Mikel Suarez produce a flying header that was wide of the target and a few minutes later Saints' stopper and former Blues keeper Joe Welch finger-tipped an acute angled centre from Elliott Buchanan across the face of the goal for a corner. A Bywater corner from the left in the 11<sup>th</sup> minute fell to Church beyond the back upright and both his attempted shots at goal rebounded off of visiting defenders. Then a promising move ended with Frankie Merrifield slipping the ball out to the left for Johnny Herd to take in his stride but the defender, who had his best match for some time, drove his first time shot a foot wide of the near post. However, the hosts had an escape in the 19<sup>th</sup> minute when Ross Fitzsimons was caught out of goal and De'Reece Vanderhyde cleared close to the line from Harry Crawford's shot at an unguarded goal. On the half-hour Church was close with a 30 yard effort after a lay-off from Buchanan and with Stortford continuing to have the edge on proceedings a Merrifield header was held under the bar by Welch after another Bywater corner had only been half-cleared. In a rare attack striker Louie Theophanous broke down the right flank and finished with a low shot that fortunately deflected off of Fitzsimons' outstretched foot and flew close past the far stick.

Before the break there were strong Blues' appeals for a penalty as Bywater seemed to be pushed in the area by Tom Bender and then Merrifield was close with a shot from the left into the side-netting.

Half-time: 0-0

Again Stortford looked the stronger side on the restart and they went ahead nine minutes after the break when KIERAN BYWATER's diving header from a Vanderhyde deep cross from the right somehow squirmed underneath Joe Welch's attempted save (1-0). The goalscorer, hampered by a groin strain immediately came off to be replaced by Morgan Ferrier. The Saints were soon level in the 61<sup>st</sup> minute as ED OSHODI fired in at the far post after a James Comley corner (1-1). The Blues fought back and a minute later a Josh Ekim free-kick wide on the left found George Allen whose back post header wasn't far off the mark. In the 64<sup>th</sup> minute a Frankie Merrifield long range effort was tipped over the bar by Welch as the Blues were back on the ascendancy. Welch was again called into action having to snatch the ball off Morgan Ferrier's toes as the substitute tried to fasten on to a Buchanan through pass. The winning goal came in the 77<sup>th</sup> minute following two successive Elliott Buchanan corners. The first one saw Chris M'Boungou's far post header deflected off a defender for another flag-kick and then the second

produced the crucial second goal as a cluster of Blues' players attacked the ball and it ended up sailing into the back of the net. Both George Allen and Anthony Church claimed the goal but video evidence seemed to show that the ball came off the head of Saints' central defender BEN MARTIN for an own goal (2-1).

Louie Theophanous flashed a drive just wide and a shot from Saints substitute Jonathan Edwards was deflected close to the goal but Stortford held on to their lead comfortably until the end.

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TEAM DETAILS AND MATCH DETAILS:-

BISHOP'S STORTFORD: Ross Fitzsimons; De'Reece Vanderhyde; Johnny Herd; Josh Ekim; Chris M'Boungou; George Allen; Kieran Bywater (Morgan Ferrier 55); Anthony Church; Mikel Suarez; Elliott Buchanan; Frankie Merrifield.

Unused substitutes: Omar Rowe, Ian Gayle, Jon Muleba and Tom Lovelock.

ST ALBANS CITY: Joe Welch; Ed Oshodi; Lee Chappell; Sam Corcoran; Jorell Johnson; Ben Martin; Tom Bender; James Comley; Louie Theophanous; Harry Crawford (Jonathan Edwards 65); Billy Gibson (Jernade Meade 56).

Unused substitutes: Jack Green, Scott Thomas and Darren Locke.

Half time: 0-0

Goalscorers: Bishop's Stortford – Kieran Bywater 54 and Own Goal (Ben Martin) 77  
St Albans City – Ed Oshodi 61

Referee: Mr Elliott Kaye

Attendance: 514

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