

BISHOP'S STORTFORD 3, BRAINTREE TOWN 4  
(FOOTBALL CONFERENCE YOUTH ALLIANCE – DIVISION 'C')

The Blues Academy came close to holding one of the Division front-runners in an entertaining contest at the ProKit (UK) Stadium. Playing their first match since early December, Tim Moylette's side led 2-1 at the break and then 3-2 just after the hour mark. However, Braintree equalised and netted a winning goal from the penalty spot with eighteen minutes left to take the points.

In a fast flowing opening half full of near misses at both ends the Blues showed little rustiness despite their long lay-off. The Essex side's striker Romaro Dyte had an early effort tipped aside by keeper Stephen Robinson before the visitors went ahead in the 8<sup>th</sup> minute. A corner on the right eventually resulted in the ball being crossed into the middle and PALVY MANDUAKILA, in space, fired his shot wide of Robinson's dive from eight yards (0-1). Attacking the Airport end Jordan Handscomb saw his header held by keeper Devon Jeggo following a Callum O'Brien corner in the 10<sup>th</sup> minute and just sixty seconds later Stortford were level. A fine long ball out of defence by skipper Bryn Thorpe reached Aaron Thomas in space on the left flank. Thomas cut in towards goal and his low shot-cum-cross found JORDAN HANDSCOMB tracking in at the back post and the number nine easily tucked the ball into the net (1-1).

Shortly afterwards Aaron Thomas was close with a shot close past an upright whilst, at the other end, it took an excellent clearance off the line by Callum O'Brien to deny Braintree's Abu Soloku scoring in the 23<sup>rd</sup> minute. There was then a short period of play when Aaron Thomas, twice, and George Bartlam were very close to taking the lead for the Blues and Stephen Robinson saved well to stop a close-range shot from the visitors' Dyte.

The Blues looked threatening every time that they went forward at this stage and they went in front for the first time in the 31<sup>st</sup> minute as Jack Thomas sent a through ball for brother AARON THOMAS to fasten on to and place low past the advancing Braintree stopper (2-1).

Braintree came back strongly before the interval and Robinson saved at the near post from Luke Mallett and then a header from Dyte grazed Robinson's left-hand upright. Three minutes before the break, after a good run on the right by Mallett, Dyte saw his shot cleared off the line by Bryn Thorpe.

Half time: 2-1

The Iron pressed strongly on the restart and were rewarded with an equaliser in the 49<sup>th</sup> minute. HARRY WATKINS collected a loose ball centrally just outside the box and went on a diagonal run to the right and finished with a shot across Robinson into the far corner of the net (2-2). The game again swung Stortford's way in the 55<sup>th</sup> minute when they retook the lead. Awarded a free-kick a dozen yards inside Braintree territory Bryn Thorpe lofted the ball over towards the far post and Ross Gill headed it across the six yard box for AARON THOMAS to find the net from a few yards range (3-2).

The lead lasted eight minutes before Braintree levelled the scores again. TJ Akinkunle crossed from the left to the edge of the box and Michael Folkes' deflected pass forward found fellow substitute JACK ROLFE with a clear run to easily beat Robinson (3-3). Then in the 72<sup>nd</sup> minute Braintree netted the winner from a penalty after Bryn Thorpe fouled Jack Tyrer on the left-hand side of the area. PALVY MANDUAKILA gave Stephen Robinson no chance from the spot-kick (3-4).

The visitors had the edge in the remaining minutes with the Blues coming closest to snatching an equaliser in the 83<sup>rd</sup> minute when Ross Gill far post header from a Callum O'Brien corner was narrowly over the bar.

Bishop's Stortford: Stephen Robinson; Lewis McDonald; Callum O'Brien; Danny Palmer (Ted Dean 90); Ross Gill; Bryn Thorpe; Alex Rogers (Joe Senior 81); Jack Thomas; Jordan Handscomb (Sam Philpot 79); Aaron Thomas; George Bartlam.  
Unused substitute: Sam Brown and Tom Beckett.