

BISHOP'S STORTFORD 1, WARE 0  
(HERTS SENIOR CUP – 3<sup>RD</sup> ROUND)

Mikel Suarez's 63<sup>rd</sup> minute goal proved decisive as the Blues won their way through to a Herts Senior Cup semi-final berth in freezing conditions, on Tuesday.

The visitors from the Evo-Stik Southern League Division 1 Central opponents gave Blues a tough test, but the conditions proved the biggest problem on the night. A frozen surface already looked problematic when the tie started but the players and officials did well to finish the 90 minutes on the increasingly icy and slippery surface. It is doubtful whether the game would have continued had it gone to extra time. One negative for Stortford, perhaps as a result of the surface, was the loss of skipper Anthony Church during the first half with an ankle injury.

Rod Stringer fielded a strong side with new signing Robbie Willmott making his debut and soon showing his class. Also in the starting line-up was the returning Ashley Miller whilst Tom Lovelock was between the posts. Midfielder Frankie Merrifield was absent due to a groin strain.

The Blues began the match on the front-foot but the majority of their attacks early on faltered and they were unable to create any clear-cut openings. Ware were a well organized unit and they gradually worked their way into the tie with skipper Alaa Oujdi's free-kick in the 23<sup>rd</sup> minute deflecting off of the Blues defensive wall and over the bar. After 33 minutes Church was unable to run off an ankle injury he had collected earlier and was replaced by Alli Abdullahi.

Former Blue Rod Young threatened occasionally and ten minutes from the break a low effort from him arrowed across the face of the goal and just past the far upright.

Stortford stamped more of their authority on the tie after the interval and began the second half well. A corner on the left from Willmott in the 51<sup>st</sup> minute was missed by everyone in the six yard box and then seven minutes later following a move up the right flank Miller played a short pass inside to Corby Moore who struck the bar with an excellent shot from 20 yards.

The breakthrough came just past the hour. Willmott was involved in an attack on the left and his pass was fastened on to by Elliott Buchanan and cutting in towards goal the leading marksman saw his acute angled effort saved at the near post by keeper Tom Coulton at the expense of a corner. When Willmott swung over the flag-kick George Allen headed goalwards and Suarez nodded in from close range.

Almost straightaway Young had a good chance to level the scores when running clear on goal but although his chip beat Lovelock it went the wrong side of a post as well.

The Blues then had a spell when it looked as if they were going to extend their lead. A Chris M'Bougou header after a Robbie Willmott free-kick in the 76<sup>th</sup> minute was held by Coulton and that was followed four minutes later by Suarez sending a far post header narrowly wide following another Willmott free-kick.

The closing minutes for Stortford were a little nervous as sloppy defensive play allowed substitute Jimmy Hartley to run at goal but he pulled his shot wide and then in the last minute of normal time Hartley's long range shot was held by the diving Tom Lovelock. The Blues will now host Boreham Wood or Watford at the semi-final stage in February.

---

TEAM DETAILS AND MATCH DETAILS:-

BISHOP'S STORTFORD: Tom Lovelock; Ashley Miller (De'Reece Vanderhyde 71); Johnny Herd; Josh Ekim; Chris M'Bougou; George Allen; Corby Moore; Anthony Church (Alli Abdullahi 33); Mikel Suarez; Elliott Buchanan; Robbie Willmott.  
Unused substitute: Kenzer Lee.

WARE: Tom Coulton; Karl Stevenson; Alaa Oujdi; Ryan Herve; Jack Fowler; Ben Crilley; Rod Young; Josh Oyibo (Khale Da Costa 71); Kieran Bishop; Elliot Bailey (Harley Haag 64); Murat Karagul (Jimmy Hartley 71)  
Unused substitutes: Albert Akinoemi and Jack Mace.

Half time: 0-0

Goalscorer: Bishop's Stortford – Mikel Suarez 63.

Referee: Mr Stephen Bates

Attendance: 112