

BISHOP'S STORTFORD 1, EBBSFLEET UNITED 2 (VANARAMA NATIONAL LEAGUE SOUTH)

Two first half goals from the league leaders' recent signing from Sky Bet League Two Barnet, Aaron McLean, set the Fleet on course for victory number twelve on the road this campaign. Morgan Ferrier pulled a goal back for the Blues on the brink of half-time but despite another good display by Rod Stringer's men they were just unable to get level with the visitors after the break. Whilst the Kent side continue unbeaten on their travels in the league and have stretched their lead to a margin of eleven points at the top, the result brought to an end Stortford's nine game unbeaten run since the first Saturday in December.



As anticipated skipper Anthony Church was missing from the squad following his midweek thigh injury but Elliott Buchanan did return to the front line. Josh Ekim remained absent with his hamstring problem but there was a place for Alli Abdullahi in the midfield. Of the new signings prior to the match Luke Milbourne and Byron Lawrence were on the bench alongside De'Reece Vanderhyde, George Allen and Tom Lovelock.



Despite the cross-field gale which caused awkward

swirling conditions both sides entertained from start to finish.



In the fifth minute Morgan Ferrier and Frankie Merrifield combined on the left before the latter crossed into the middle where Corby Moore couldn't get enough purchase or direction on his shot and the effort finished wide of the near post. Then, at the other end, a pass from Dean Rance for Aaron McLean drew Ross Fitzsimons off his goal-line and when the experienced striker's low shot passed the keeper Chris M'Boungou was on hand to clear the goalbound away from danger close by the near post. However, shortly afterwards, in the 11th minute, United took the lead with a touch of luck. Alli Abdullahi spread a pass out from the middle of the park for Ashley Miller on the right flank near the halfway line but Fleet's Bryan Van Den Bogaert closed Miller down quickly and the ball rebounded off of Van Den Bogaert's shin to loop over Miller and set Aaron McLean free down the left flank. McLEAN then cut inside to clinically beat Ross Fitzsimons with a low shot (0-1).



Midway through the half Stortford has justified

claims for a penalty as Merrifield, receiving a pass on the left from Johnny Herd inside the angle of the box, seemed to be wrestled to the ground by Fleet defender Matt Fish but Referee Josh Smith waived away the spot-kick claims. In the 29th minute Fleet keeper Brandon Hall saved well turning a drive from Ashley Miller away for a corner after a long throw from Herd wasn't cleared. Fleet doubled their lead, though, in the 36th minute when the Blues defence lost concentration with McLEAN latching on to Dean Rance's through pass and getting past M'Boungou's challenge and again slipping the ball wide of Fitzsimons (0-2).

Stortford gave themselves a life-line a minute from the break. Frankie Merrifield and Johnny Herd did well on the left before MORGAN FERRIER gained possession and running along the front-edge of the box struck a great shot that beat Hall at his near post. (1-2)

Half-time: 1-2



Soon after the restart Elliott Buchanan was bundled over by keeper Hall when going to reach for a cross and then the Blues' top marksman was narrowly wide with a shot on the turn from 20 yards. Ebbsfleet's number nine Danny Kedwell had a header held high under the bar by Fitzsimons but it was the visitors' stopper who was seeing more of the action as he made a fine diving save to his left in the 59th minute to prevent a Buchanan free-kick from entering the net. Then, two minutes later, Fitzsimons made his best save of the game after Aaron McLean had set-up Stuart Lewis just inside the area for a shot on goal and the keeper had turned it over the bar.

One of Stortford's best attacks in the match came in the 77th minute as a number of players were involved before Frankie Merrifield cross low from the left and the ball carried through the six yard box without anyone making any contact. It proved to be Merrifield's last action as he came off injured to be

replaced by newcomer Byron Lawrence. The end-to-end action continued to the final whistle with a Johnny Herd free-kick being punched out well by Hall in the 83rd minute and then at the end of normal time skipper Mikel Suarez saw his header from a Herd cross safely pouched by the keeper. Deep into added time Fitzsimons made a good stop at his near post from substitute Matt Godden and the score-line remained unchanged.



There were no yellow cards for Stortford but the visitors collected three as Bryan Van Den Bogaert, Anthony Acheampong and Danny Kedwell were cautioned – all for fouls on Morgan Ferrier.

TEAM MATCH DETAILS:-

BISHOP'S STORTFORD: Ross Fitzsimons; Ashley Miller; Johnny Herd; Alli Abdullahi; Kenzer Lee; Chris M'Boungou; Corby Moore; Frankie Merrifield (Byron Lawrence 78); Mikel Suarez; Elliott Buchanan; Morgan Ferrier.

Unused substitutes: De'Reece Vanderhyde, George Allen, Luke Milbourne and Tom Lovelock.

EBBSFLEET UNITED: Brandon Hall; Matt Fish; Bryan Van Den Bogaert; Stuart Lewis; Anthony Acheampong; Tom Bonner; Dean Rance; Jordan Parkes (Danny Haynes 63); Danny Kedwell; Aaron McLean (Matt Godden 72); Anthony Cook.

Unused substitutes: Joe Howe, Jean-Paul Kissock and Jonathan Miles.

Goalscorers: Bishop's Stortford – Morgan Ferrier 45.

Ebbsfleet United – Aaron McLean 11 and 36

Referee: Mr Josh Smith

Attendance: 504