

# SUTTON UNITED 2, BISHOP'S STORTFORD 0 (VANARAMA NATIONAL LEAGUE SOUTH)

Stortford were unable to stop the Sutton juggernaut on its rise to the top of the Vanarama National League South table as a goal in each half stretched the hosts' unbeaten league run to 23 games since November.

The South London side was strong throughout the contest and whilst creating little in the way of openings apart from Johnny Herd's long throws into the area, the Blues did well to keep the score down to one goal until three minutes from the end of normal time when the U's netted their second from the penalty spot. It was the first time that Stortford had lost at Gander Green Lane at the National League South level and the first time in a league game there since the 2002/2003 Ryman League campaign.

Rod Stringer's squad was limited for this contest with Jack Fowler and Byron Lawrence not recovering from their weekend injuries. Anthony Furlonge and Bradley Fortnam-Tomlinson were in the starting line-up and Josh Ekim replaced Alli Abdullahi in midfield. Newcomer Oliver Humphrey and Academy midfielder Ben Smith were on the bench.

The home side's direct style on the 3G pitch was evident from the start and, watched by a crowd of over 1,000, Tom Bolarinwa slipped Dan Fitchett through in the first minute to break inside from the right flank but Furlonge came across from a central position to clear the danger. The early pressure continued in the ninth minute when Kevin Amankwaah's long throw into the box was cleared out to the edge of the box where a Louis John volley goalwards was held by Tom Lovelock.

The Blues threatened for the first time in the 11<sup>th</sup> minute with Ekim not far off target from a low 25 yard effort after dispossessing Sutton's Craig Eastmond.

However, Lovelock was getting busy saving well to his left from a Jamie Collins' free-kick in the 14<sup>th</sup> minute. After holding a header following a corner the Blues' stopper then saved full length after Fitchett had run centrally and finished with a low drive in the 25<sup>th</sup> minute. On the half hour Fitchett just missed connecting with a Bolarinwa cross in the six yard box and a minute later the same player headed over from a Ross Stearn corner.



Stortford's cause wasn't helped by the loss of Furlonge in the 34<sup>th</sup> minute as the unlucky defender departed the action with a suspected hamstring problem. He was replaced by Abdullahi who moved into a central position alongside George Allen.

The substitute was soon in action clearing the ball away near the goal-line after more pressure. Sutton's dominance told in the 38<sup>th</sup> minute as the Blues' defence was unable to clear away a cross from the right and when eventually the ball reached Eastmond on the edge of the box he hammered a fierce low drive into the bottom corner of the net. Eastmond nearly added a second goal for his side five minutes after the restart when the Stortford defence got itself in a muddle. With Lovelock out of his goal Robbie Willmott misplaced a header and when the ball fell to Eastmond the goalscorer's volley narrowly went wide of a gaping goal.

A Willmott long range attempt shortly afterwards at the other end wasn't far off but the hosts were soon

back imposing pressure. Substitute Dean Beckwith headed wide from a Nicky Bailey cross from the right whilst Eastmond headed over following a Stearn centre. Then, two minutes past the hour mark, Eastmond sent the ball forward into the box to Craig Dundas whose shot deflected off of Lovelock for a corner.

Stortford's best chance to equalise came with 20 minutes remaining. Sutton defender Dan Spence fouled Bradley Fortnam-Tomlinson on the right and when Willmott's free-kick was dispatched in towards the far post Abdullahi headed over the bar from six yards.



A long range free-kick from Ross Stearn was inches over the top and a little later a fine interception by Johnny Herd cut out a through pass from Sutton's ever-dangerous Bolarinwa on the right. With the match moving into the final ten minutes of normal time the home side looked increasingly nervous and

in the 81<sup>st</sup> minute Anthony Church was almost on the end of a Johnny Herd diagonal cross into the box. However, Sutton guaranteed the points with a penalty in the 87<sup>th</sup> minute. The Blues defence was guilty of allowing Eastmond to make a virtually unchallenged surging run down the middle and when Ekim made a tackle in the area referee Ian Cooper ruled it to be a foul and awarded a spot-kick. Ekim and Lovelock who was too strong with his protests were both cautioned by the referee and skipper Jamie Collins duly netted the penalty.

Sutton therefore completed a treble of 2-0 wins against the Blues during the season.

Apart from Ekim and Lovelock being shown yellow cards, Abdullahi was also booked during the match as were Sutton's Louis John, Jamie Collins and Dan Spence.

---

#### TEAM DETAILS AND MATCH DETAILS:-

**BISHOP'S STORTFORD:** Tom Lovelock; De'Reece Vanderhyde; Johnny Herd; Josh Ekim; George Allen; Anthony Furlonge (Alli Abdullahi 34); Corby Moore; Anthony Church; Elliott Buchanan; Robbie Willmott (Frankie Merrifield 75); Bradley Fortnam-Tomlinson.

Unused substitutes: Kenzer Lee, Oliver Humphrey and Ben Smith.

**SUTTON UNITED:** Ross Worner; Kevin Amankwaah; Dan Spence; Louis John (Dean Beckwith 46); Craig Eastmond; Jamie Collins; Tom Bolarinwa; Nick Bailey; Craig Dundas; Dan Fitchett (Shaun Cooper 86); Ross Stearn (Jamie Slabber 79).

Unused substitutes: Tommy Wright and Denzel Gerrar.

Goalscorers: Sutton United – Craig Eastmond 38 and Jamie Collins (penalty) 87.

Referee: Ian Cooper

Attendance: 1,061