

HOW WE REACHED THE FIRST ROUND

Halstead Town 1 Blues 5

Blues under-18s marched into the first qualifying round of FA Youth Cup with a 5-1 win at Halstead Town. Apart from the hosts' initial threat, the Stortford youngsters cruised through at the Milbank Stadium to book their place in the next round that will see a short trip to Royston Town. Once Morgan La Force's team had gone ahead just after the half-hour there was really going to be one winner of this contest.

In an entertaining tie played at a fast pace the Humbugs almost scored first when Ryan Mahon struck the bar from 25 yards in the fifth minute. Lewis Wicker was close for the Bishops in the 13th minute following a corner and with Stortford beginning to take control of the match Callum Taylor saw his low effort at goal saved by Town keeper Taylor Nicholson.

Then an incisive attack in the 25th minute ended with Max Hutchinson driving inches wide of the far upright. It was just six minutes later that Stortford scored the opening goal. Alfie Mason gained control of the ball on the right just inside the Halstead half after the bounce of the ball had cleared the head of a defender. Mason made tracks a short way down the wing before passing low into the middle where Callum Taylor with just the keeper to beat slotted into the net from the edge of the box.

There was more Stortford pressure before the break with a near post header from Taylor close to the target.



The visitors couldn't have had a better start after the break as they doubled their lead in the 46th minute. Max Brassington's deep free-kick from

inside his own half reached Rhamar Garrett-Douglas on the left who crossed into the near post where Callum Taylor headed home for his second goal of the night.

Apart from a long range attempt at goal from Town's Harrison Yates Stortford had few problems and extended their lead in the 57th minute. The ball ran loose to Lewis Wicker, some 25 yards out and close to the left sided angle of the box, and his looping shot went over keeper Nicholson and into the far side of the net. The fourth goal arrived in the 78th minute when a long ball down the middle from Marcus Crowther was collected by Alfie Mason who ran through to score. Both substitutes Isaac Durand and Jack Walker nearly added to the scoreline soon afterwards with a header and shot respectively. Stortford's hopes of keeping a clean sheet were thwarted in the 89th minute as Miles Peacham scored for the hosts after a corner wasn't cleared. However, virtually straightaway Stortford's four goal winning margin was restored with Taylor's deep cross from the left touchline netted at the far post by Isacc Durand with a shot into the roof of the net.

BISHOP'S STORTFORD: Jarvis Monk; George Brand; Rhamar Garrett-Douglas; Freddie Oakham; Max Brassington; Marcus Crowther; Max Hutchinson (Jack Walker 78); Ethan Barton; Callum Taylor; Alfie Mason; Lewis Wicker (Isaac Durand 72). Unused substitute: Joe Chadd. Referee: Mr Ricky Johnson Attendance: 77

Royston Town 0 Blues 2

Blues comfortably beat the Crows on Wednesday evening to progress further to the FA Youth Cup. second qualifying round.

Callum Taylor netted from a rebound off the post after Alfie Mason had struck the woodwork in the 28th minute.

Stortford's winning margin was doubled two minutes after the break when skipper Ethan Barton scored with a 20 yard drive.

The young Blues should have added to their tally but the score remained unchanged to the final whistle.

Blues: Jarvis Monk, George Brand, Rhamar Garrett-Douglas, Freddie Oakman, Max Brassington, Marcus Crowther, Max Hutchinson (Danny Wickenden 84), Ethan Barton, Callum Taylor, Alfie Mason, Lewis Wicker (Jack Walker 73). Substitute not used: Isaac Durand.

Referee: Mr E Stone Attendance: 78

Thurrock 0 Blues2

Blues' youth team continued their FA Youth Cup run with a third successive away victory after beating Thurrock at Ship Lane, on Wednesday. Against a team that were nearly all older than them it was a difficult tie for Morgan La Force's side but they deserved to get through in a contest that was really only settled by a goal from Alfie Mason two minutes from the end of normal time.

Unfortunately the victory was somewhat soured by an ugly mass brawl almost immediately after the Blues second goal. Substitute Jack Walker and Thurrock's Billy-Lei Burvill, who punched Walker, were sent off in the chaos whilst Stortford keeper Jarvis Monk was shown a yellow card.

For the first half-hour the hosts looked the better side and in the third minute Monk had to come quickly off his line to take the ball off the feet of home striker Albert Keith.

Shortly afterwards a Mason shot from the edge of the area produced a good save by stopper James Scammell. However, there were few openings created by either team.

Then in the 33rd minute a fine run on the left by Rhamar Garrett-Douglas saw him cut in and have his shot from an acute angle saved at the second attempt by Scammell.



Stortford's growing confidence led to the opening goal six minutes before the break. Lewis Wicker was fouled close to the left touchline and Max Hutchinson's free-kick towards the near

upright was headed into his own net by Thurrock's Wyan Reid.

Thurrock fought back and their number nine Kane Hearn had a shot blocked and then Monk saved from the same player before skipper Keith was narrowly off target.

The Blues started the second half brightly and in the 49th minute Mason, collecting a Freddie Oakman pass, forced a full length save from Scammell who turned the ball away for a corner. On the hour a Mason free-kick was well held by Scammell high up at the angle of the goal. Then, a few minutes later Mason had two opportunities to double Stortford's lead. Hutchinson did well to intercept a pass in the middle of the park and release Mason towards goal but the striker pulled his shot wide and then seconds later the same combination were involved that led to Scammell saving Mason's close range shot.

Thurrock brought on Burvill in the 68th minute and almost immediately the substitute hit the bar with an effort from 20 yards, However, apart from that occasion, Stortford had few alarms and extended their lead in the 88th minute.

It was really a goal out of nothing as the ball came out of the home box to Alfie Mason some 25 yards out and he was allowed time to turn and strike a shot that, with the aid of a strong deflection off a defender, looped over the despairing Scammell and under the bar.

Within another minute the fracas began with Burvill punching Walker and it was almost another ten minutes before the match restarted. In the added time there was still time for a couple of near misses at either end with Max Brassington making an excellent tackle to prevent another Thurrock substitute, Louie Lowdell, shooting at goal and when Lowdell did manage to release a shot Monk parried the ball away. In the dying seconds Mason almost scored again but his close range effort was saved on the line by Scammell.

Both Mason and skipper Ethan Barton were cautioned early in the second period.

BISHOP'S STORTFORD: Jarvis Monk; George Brand; Rhamar Garrett-Douglas; Freddie Oakman; Max Brassington; Marcus Crowther; Max Hutchinson (Jack Walker 74); Ethan Barton; Callum Taylor; Alfie Mason; Lewis Wicker. Unused substitutes: Isaac Durand and Joe Chadd.

Referee: Andrew Simmonds. Attendance: 79

Woodbridge Town 0 Blues 2

The Blues youngsters will now host Boreham Wood in the first round of the FA Youth Cup after winning through in Suffolk thanks to two goals late in the tie against the Woodpeckers.

It was the third successive 2-0 victory for Morgan La Force's side and the fourth win running away from home in the competition.

The performance by Stortford wasn't their best in the competition so far and they seemed a little flat at times but even so they always seemed to have the slight edge over their opponents and looked a little livelier up front.

Stortford were on the front foot in the early stages and Max Hutchinson was just wide from a free-kick and then, in the 6th minute, when a free-kick from Callum Taylor on the right wasn't completely cleared by the home defence Marcus Crowther struck the bar from 15 yards.

The Blues continued to shade the possession but midway through the half keeper Jarvis Monk had to stretch backwards to keep out an inswinging corner from Jake Conway. Callum Taylor tried a low shot from the edge of the box in the 27th minute that was held by Woodbridge keeper John Steel but Stortford were getting frustrated by getting caught offside on too many occasions and weren't helped by some inaccurate passing. They also forced a number of corners that weren't utilised to good effect.

However, Stortford were close to taking the lead in the 38th minute when a Crowther downwards header bounced over the bar following a Lewis Wicker corner.

The nearest the home side came to scoring in the first half was in their last attack before the interval as a rising shot from Joe Berry just cleared the bar.

On the resumption Callum Taylor was close, twice, with shots from the edge of the box but the match seemed to become a midfield battle until the 76th minute when the deadlock was broken. A promising attack up the left saw Ethan Barton receive the ball with his back to goal and no real danger to the Woodbridge goal but defender Jordan Cox somewhat naively fouled the Blues skipper from behind and referee Reeves immediately pointed to the penalty spot. Marcus Crowther stepped up and sent Steel the wrong way from the spot.

The Blues then became stronger as the hosts seemed to tire and Ben King forced a good save from Steel and the Blues doubled their lead five minutes from the end of normal time. Good work by Callum Taylor on the left led to the striker delivering the ball low in towards the edge of the box where Barton flicked it on to Ben King who fired an unstoppable shot into the roof of the net.

Stortford could have extended their lead further before the final whistle as Taylor smashed the ball wide in the 89th minute after Barton had crossed in from the right.

BISHOP'S STORTFORD: Jarvis Monk; George Brand; Rhamar Garrett-Douglas; Freddie Oakman; Max Brassington; Marcus Crowther; Max Hutchinson; Ethan Barton; Lewis Wicker (Joe Chadd 90); Callum Taylor; Ben King. Unused substitute: Isaac Durand. Referee: Kenneth Reeves. Attendance: 7

