

BISHOP'S STORTFORD 0 HEREFORD 1

THERE was injury time heartbreak for Blues as champions-elect Hereford left the ProKit (UK) Stadium with all three points.

Substitute Mike McGrath headed home a corner in the 91st minute to deny a battling Blues side who played the entire second half with only ten men after skipper Marvel Ekpiteta received a second yellow card shortly before the break.



While Hereford dominated long periods of the second half, the result was harsh on a Stortford side –especially outstanding keeper Calum Kitscha - who produced one of their best performances of the season and received a standing ovation from the home fans as they left the pitch.

The same cannot be said for referee Michael Robertson-Tant who appeared to be swayed by the sizeable travelling support and enraged the Stortford support with some of his decisions.

Having completed his three game ban, Jack Thomas was back in Kevin Watson's starting line-up but the plans of the Blues boss weren't helped by Chad Cruse and Marcus Crowther being unavailable whilst Freddie Oakman was absent through illness. Watson was only able to name one fit outfield player on his bench, with injured player-coach Mark Hughes and back-up keeper making up the numbers.

The visitors took the early initiative with Pablo Haysham's low drive well held by Kitscha in the second minute and Thomas was soon back in the thick of the action producing a fine tackle to stop Hereford skipper Jimmy Oates on the right. A deep free-kick from Joe Robinson saw Ekpiteta gain possession at the back post but his

acute angled shot was held at the upright by keeper Will Puddy.



The Bulls, however, continued to have the edge and Mike Symons headed over when well placed and then a Rob Purdie free-kick was close past the far post. Ekpiteta collected his first yellow card of the afternoon in the 18th minute and ten minutes later the visitors were awarded a penalty after striker Jennison Myrie-Williams was grounded by Ekpiteta in the box. Kitscha guess correctly to save Mike Symons' penalty.

Eight minutes later a Haysham looping header from an Elliot Richards cross struck the bar. Shortly afterwards, with five minutes remaining of the half, Ekpiteta was harshly yellow carded for the second time after holding back Symons leaving Stortford down to ten men.



Three minutes after the restart Kitscha produced a great one handed save to push way a goalbound header from Symons following Oates' cross from the right.

Symons headed across goal in the 57th minute before the Blues stopper denied Haysham at point blank range.

At the other end, in the 65th minute, Max Brassington sent Jamie Cureton clear on goal

with a great pass and the veteran striker netted but the goal was disallowed for offside.



It was virtually one-way traffic in the closing minutes with Stortford defending stoutly to try and earn a point. With nine minutes remaining another excellent one handed save by Kitscha denied substitute John Mills from scoring with a header. Mills also had a chance with a late free-kick but his effort from 25 yards was over the bar.

The Blues resistance was then finally broken at the start of four minutes of added time after the visitors were controversially awarded a corner. Purdie's initial effort was cleared by another flag kick but McGrath rose at the near post to head home and break the hosts' hearts.



STORTFORD: Calum Kitscha; George Casey; Tom Clifford; Jack Thomas; Marvel Ekpiteta; Joe Robinson; Max Brassington; Jordan Westcott; Alfie Mason; Jamie Cureton; Darren Foxley.

Unused substitutes: Mark Hughes, Jamie Riley and Callum Lynskey.

HEREFORD: Will Puddy; Jimmy Oates; Cameron Pring; Elliot Richards (Mike McGrath 72); Dara O'Shea (Jack Dearman 79); Jordan Liburd; Keyon Reffell; Rob Purdie; Jennison Myrie-Williams (John Mills 64); Pablo Haysham; Mike Symons. Unused substitutes: Billy Murphy and Martin Horsell.

Attendance: 738

BASINGSTOKE TOWN 3 BISHOP'S STORTFORD 2

Second half goals from Mark Hughes and Marvel Ekpiteta weren't enough as Blues went down 3-2 at the Camrose on Tuesday evening.

Skipper Hughes returned after injury but they were without Jack Thomas who suffered a knee injury a few days earlier against Hereford and although named in the original starting line-up failed to get through the pre-match warm-up. It meant that Kevin Watson had to rejig his side with Chad Cruse coming in at left back with Tom Clifford on the left side of midfield whilst on the other flank Max Brassington was at the back and George Casey in midfield.



The Blues boss gave Jamie Cureton a rest although he was to come off the bench on the hour mark.

The mid-table Dragons were on the front-foot at the start and almost took the lead in the ninth minute when Marvel Ekpiteta was harshly ruled to have fouled striker Bunting 25 yards out and George Bennett's resultant free-kick struck Calum Kitscha's left-hand upright.

The first danger from Stortford came in the 15th minute as home skipper Guri Demuria slipped and let Clifford attack on the left and when the Southend United player cut the ball back to Hughes saw his shot blocked by defender Dan Bayliss.

Bennett was close with a rising shot from the left past the near angle of the goal and then Stoke went ahead in the 21st minute. The speedy Sam Smart who was a menace to the Stortford defence all night sped down the right flank and crossed for Bunting to net with a diving header.

Smart had a deflected effort held low by Kitscha six minutes later whilst at the other end Darren

Foxley's free-kick from the left in the 33rd minute was headed on by Hughes and Alfie Mason directed the ball narrowly wide of the far post.

Mason also had a low drive held by keeper Colm McAdden but Stortford dropped further behind in the 37th minute when Sam Smart struck with a low shot from just inside the box after Bunting had crossed into the middle and Jack McKnight had dummied over the ball.

Stortford had more of the possession on the restart but Smart was again in the limelight in the 61st minute when he hit the outside of the near post after cutting inside from the right wing and the ball rebounding out for a goal-kick.

With Cureton now on the pitch the Blues looked a more potent force and a Foxley free-kick bounced across the area without anyone getting a touch but soon afterwards, in the 67th minute, another deep free-kick from the right by Foxley was met by a firm header from ten yards into the net by Hughes.

Stortford were having a good spell at this point and a first time drive by Hughes from the edge of the box flew wide. However, Watson's team was caught cold when the Hampshire side registered their third goal of the night in the 73rd minute.

There seemed little danger when Smart collected the ball out on the right touch-line but he played the ball inside to Sam Deadfield, a good 25 yards out, who drilled the ball low into the corner of the net with Kitscha motionless.

Stoke's Tim Wohlfiel had an acute angled shot held by Kitscha but it was Stortford who did most of the attacking in the closing stages. Keeper McAdden couldn't hold a Foxley corner and when the ball ran loose Mason's shot from the edge of the area was deflected over the bar.

From this corner in the 85th minute, again taken by Foxley, Ekpiteta headed in from close range

There was just three added minutes at the end of the contest and early on in that period Ekpiteta headed a Clifford cross from the left over the bar and that was to be the closest Stortford got to salvaging a point.

STORTFORD: Calum Kitscha; George Casey; Tom Clifford; Mark Hughes; Marvel Ekpiteta; Joe Robinson; Max Brassington; Chad Cruse (Jamie Cureton 60); Alfie Mason; Darrren Foxley; Jordan Westcott.

Unused substitutes: Jack Thomas, Jamie Riley, Marcus Crowther and Callum Lynskey.

BASINGSTOKE TOWN: Colm McAdden; Tim Wohlfiel; George Bennett; Dan Collier; Guri Demuria; Dan Bayliss; Sam Deadfield; Michael

Atkinson; Callum Bunting; Sam Smart; Jack McKnight.

Unused substitutes: Harry Long, Kieran Rodgers, Luke Richardson, Aiden Harris and Jack Martin.

Attendance: 211

HITCHIN TOWN 1 BISHOP'S STORTFORD 0

BLUES suffered injury time heartbreak for the second successive Saturday as Joe Robinson's 92nd minute own goal gave Hitchin the points.

It was harsh on the visitors who shaded the match for the majority of the proceedings and gave a hard working display before falling to a fifth defeat against the Canaries this season as they failed to convert their chances.

Marvel Ekpiteta was missing as he was starting his two match ban incurred after the sending-off against champions Hereford, with George Casey moving alongside Robinson in the centre of defence.

Jack Thomas returned to the starting line-up after missing the Basingstoke fixture in midweek through injury while Jamie Cureton also played the full 90 minute..

The Blues made a steady start and Thomas almost put Cureton through on goal in the second minute but then, four minutes later a long ball forward by Robinson did put the veteran striker through on but his lob over keeper Michael Johnson veered past the far upright by a couple of feet.

The hosts, who had won the Southern League Cup three days earlier, threatened for the first time after 14 minutes as a first time effort from Josh Bickerstaff was over the target following a Hugo Logan corner.

There was then a period of even play with few openings but Hitchin's Jonny McNamara nearly took advantage of a weak back-pass from Casey in the 25th minute but Calum Kitscha easily smothered an under-hit effort from the home midfielder.

When Jordan Westcott was fouled just after the half-hour a free-kick from Darren Foxley, making his 50th Blues appearance, swung just wide and then in the 36th minute Foxley and Cureton linked on the left with the latter making tracks for goal and seeing his angled drive scrambled away by Johnson.

Stortford continued to have the edge up to the break with a Robinson header going wide after a Foxley corner.

Skipper Mark Hughes' header was close but wide in the 62nd minute from a Foxley free-kick, however, the hosts then entered a good spell.

A Logan corner produced a goal-bound header from Dan Webb that Kitscha did well to tip over the bar. Then, another Logan flag-kick saw Webb's low shot deflected away near the goal-line for another corner.

Entering the final 20 minutes a Foxley corner fell to Alfie Mason a few yards inside the box and the youngster's shot was deflected for another corner.

The Blues were now creating some openings that should have seen them go ahead.

Tom Clifford's pass up the left flank gave Cureton some space to fire in shot from distance that Johnson saved high at his near post.

Two minutes later the striker came even closer as he collected a ball forward from Hughes and from a tight angle sent his shot agonisingly rolling across an unguarded goal and past the far upright.

In the 80th minute Mason found Cureton towards the back post but defender Toby Syme got back to block the shot away for a yet another corner.

The hosts went close when skipper Webb had his header turned round the post by Kitscha after a corner from Logan and then Donnelly's flick was cleared off the goal-line by a combination of Kitscha and George Casey in the 88th minute before, seconds later, the ball was in the Stortford net but the Stortford stopper had been fouled by Donnelly.

Three minutes stoppage time was added on at the conclusion of normal time and in the second of these the Canaries grabbed the winner.

The Blues' defence seemed to lose concentration as keeper Johnson blasted a free-kick from his own half deep into the Stortford box and when Dan Webb did well to stretch and divert the ball across the six yard box Robinson could only divert it into his own net to break the visitor's hearts again.

STORTFORD: Calum Kitscha; George Casey; Tom Clifford; Mark Hughes; Joe Robinson; Max Brassington; Jordan Westcott; Jack Thomas; Alfie Mason; Jamie Cureton; Darren Foxley.

Unused substitutes: Chad Cruse, Marcus Crowther, Jamie Riley and Callum Lynskey.

HITCHIN TOWN: Michael Johnson; Toby Syme; Daniel Olanrian; Josh Bickerstaff; Dan Webb; Kevin Byrne; Patrick Tshikala (Jack Green 61); Hugo Logan; Brett Donnelly; Robbie Burns; Jonny McNamara

Unused substitutes: Connor Vincent, Charlie Smith, Matt Spring and Desejado Da Silva

Referee: Tom Bishop

Attendance: 431