

## Blues 2 Gosport 1

Blues came from behind to make it four straight home wins on Tuesday evening as goals from Jordan Westcott and Darren Foxley gave them the points against basement side Gosport.

The fixture always looked a potential banana-skin for Stortford and they struggled to find the rhythm that had marked their play in the second half of the previous match against Redditch United.

They found it hard to get going against Gosport even though they edged the possession throughout and a lot of their attacks, particularly in the first half, looked disjointed.

Manager Kevin Watson fielded an unchanged starting 11 while Callum Taylor was on the bench after serving his three match suspension following a red card at Hereford.

Borough striker Ben Wright was close with a 20 yard shot in the third minute but generally it was Stortford who were calling the tune in the early stages.



In the sixth minute Westcott was just beaten to a Jamie Cureton pass by a Borough defender at the near post who conceded a corner and the resultant Darren Foxley flag-kick was punched away at the same upright by keeper Patrick O'Flaherty.

Three minutes later Alfie Mason, having intercepted some loose passing by the visiting defence, linked with Cureton down the middle but then shot straight at O'Flaherty.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> minute George Casey had a shot well saved by the Gosport stopper who diverted away for a corner.

In a rare attack Borough's Pat Suraci shot into the side-netting in the 14<sup>th</sup> minute but

Stortford came back with Cureton and Casey going close.



Following on a period of scrappy play the visitors took the lead in the 23<sup>rd</sup> minute. Suraci crossed into the box from the right and when the ball was deflected out to Rowan Vine he connected perfectly first time from 20 yards distance to smash the ball into the bottom right hand corner.

After this set-back the Blues fought back with Mason having a shot blocked in the area while Foxley had an effort held by O'Flaherty.

Then in the 36<sup>th</sup> minute Westcott caught defender Edward Wakeley in possession and when the ball ran free Cureton cut in from the left but delivered his shot narrowly wide of the near post.

Vine had an opportunity to extend Borough's lead three minutes before the break but shot straight at Callum Kitscha whilst at the other end a minute later Foxley saw his effort tipped over the bar by O'Flaherty.

The Blues seemed fired up immediately after the restart as an early long range shot from skipper Mark Hughes produced a good save by O'Flaherty diving to his right.

An incisive attack involving Hughes and Cureton led to Foxley making tracks goalwards but the falling O'Flaherty managed to scramble the ball away.

Cureton headed wide from a Foxley cross from the left flank in the 53<sup>rd</sup> minute but three minutes later the Blues were successful in forcing an equaliser although the goal was controversial. Foxley played a short free-kick to Tom Clifford who delivered the ball across the box from the left. Jamie Cureton dummied over the ball and it ran on to Westcott, in space

at the back post, and he gave O'Flaherty no chance with a powerful drive, The referee signalled a goal but an assistant referee had his flag up apparently on the basis of Cureton being in an offside position. After consultation with his colleague referee Bloy awarded the goal and pointed to the centre circle much to the annoyance of the visiting players and officials.

Stortford were close to adding a second goal in the 69<sup>th</sup> minute as a great pass from deep in his own half by Casey sent Cureton through on goal but O'Flaherty denied the striker pushing the shot round the post. Blues' winner arrived in the 74<sup>th</sup> minute. Westcott sent a long pass up the right flank to Mason who did well to maintain possession before laying the ball short inside to Foxley whose shot from the right edge of the box flew past a statuesque keeper and inside the far post.

Foxley then nearly added another goal in the 77<sup>th</sup> minute when, receiving the ball from a Hughes free-kick, his effort was held by O'Flaherty. Cureton surprised the Gosport defence with a shot that went across the six yard box while Ben Wright's free-kick ten minutes from time was straight at Kitscha.

But Stortford were largely in control and comfortable in the closing moments. After good work by Foxley on the left Hughes had a drive that was blocked away by a defender for a corner and in added time substitute Callum Taylor struck a good effort that was stopped by O'Flaherty.

Kitscha was only extended late on when he had to stretch to catch a cross from Edward Wakeley.

**STORTFORD:** Calum Kitscha; George Casey; Tom Clifford; Mark Hughes; Marvel Ekpiteta; Joe Robinson; Jordan Westcott; Jack Thomas; Alfie Mason (Callum Taylor 78); Jamie Cureton; Darren Foxley.

Unused substitutes: Freddie Oakman, Max Brassington, Chad Cruse and Marcus Crowther.

**GOSPORT BOROUGH:** Patrick O'Flaherty; Edward Wakeley; Harry Medway; Charlie Ten-Grotenhuis; Harvey Read; Ed Sanders; Ryan Pennery (Stephane Bomelenga 61); Jordan

Brooks; Ben Wright; Rowan Vine (Joe Lea 70); Pat Suraci (Joel Jackson 78).

Unused substitutes: Josh Warren and Zak Sharp.

Referee: Rick Bloy

Attendance: 211

## **BISHOP'S STORTFORD 2 SLOUGH TOWN 2**



A

FRANTIC second half saw Blues forced to settle for a point against play-off chasing Slough at a snow-bound ProKit UK Stadium, on Saturday. With a coloured ball and blue lines, the efforts of Stortford's ground crew to get the game on and willingness of the referee to play the match were rewarded with an excellent game, and none of the 289 crowd could go home thinking they had been short-changed.



While the game saw the end of Blues' four game winning streak at home, they have proved to be a thorn in the side of the Rebels having taken four points from arguably their oldest rivals in the Evo-Stik South Premier.

After a quiet start there then were plenty of near misses. Jamie Cureton hit the side netting quickly followed by Slough's Manny Williams striking the bar.

On the half-hour George Casey for the hosts hit the far upright with a shot across the six yard box but it was the visitors who shaded the play in the first half.



But Kevin Watson's half-time team-talk clearly worked, and Stortford were the brighter side on the restart.

Darren Foxley went close before youngster Alfie Mason put the Blues ahead in the 53<sup>rd</sup> minute with a powerful shot past keeper Jack Turner's dive.

The celebrations by Mason's older team-mates for his first senior goal for the Blues epitomised the team spirit that Watson appears to have built despite a season that has seen budget cuts and being forced to rely on young players.

Two minutes later Perry Coles hit the base of a post for Slough and Calum Kitscha produced an excellent save to keep out a James Dobson free-kick.



Mason had an effort deflected narrowly over the bar before the visitors equalised in the 75<sup>th</sup> minute when the Blues failed to clear and substitute Ben Harris found the bottom corner. Stortford battled back strongly and retook the lead in the 81<sup>st</sup> minute when Darren Foxley's low 23 yard drive beat Turner. Ben Harris struck the bar two minutes later from close range but Slough took a share of the point when Perry Coles, who looked clearly offside when collecting a Mark Nisbet through pass to run on, but ran on and beat Kitscha with just two minutes of normal time remaining.

STORTFORD: Calum Kitscha; George Casey; Tom Clifford; Mark Hughes; Marvel Ekpiteta; Joe Robinson; Jordan Westcott; Jack Thomas; Alfie Mason (Callum Taylor 77); Jamie Cureton; Darren Foxley.

Unused substitutes: Freddie Oakman, Max Brassington, Chad Cruse and Marcus Crowther.

SLOUGH TOWN: Jack Turner; Josh Jackman; George Wells; Nathan Smart; Mark Nisbet; Lee Togwell; James Dobson; Simon Dunn (Matthew Lench 73); Manny Williams (Ben Harris 67); Chris Flood (Perry Coles 38); Warren Harris.

Unused substitutes: Alan Inns and Guy Hollis.

Referee: Elliott Kaye. Attendance: 289

## ST NEOTS TOWN 2 BISHOP'S STORTFORD 2

GEORGE Casey rescued a point for ten-man Blues as he netted four minutes from time to stretch their unbeaten run to five games..

Casey's first goal of the season gave Kevin Watson's side a deserved share of the points from this contest at the Premier Plus Stadium.

Eleven minutes earlier Jack Thomas had been shown a straight red card after an incident with the Saints' skipper Luke Knight.

Although the hosts shaded possession for most of the game the Blues showed their now familiar grit and determination to battle all the time in a fixture that was at times physical.

The Blues squad showed just one change to normal with Chad Cruse coming in at left back in place of Tom Clifford who had played for Southend United's under 23 side the day before. The Saints included Kyran Wiltshire, who played a few games for Stortford a couple of seasons back, whilst former Woodside favourite Johnny Herd was not quite fit and was on the home bench.

Watson's men were on the back-foot at the start and in the fourth minute Tom Wood's cross from the right resulted in a glancing header from Nabil Shariff that went wide of the far post.

In the eighth minute Dylan Williams advanced to drive a shot from the edge of the box against Calum Kitscha's right-hand upright as the Blues took time to settle.

Stortford first threatened in the 24<sup>th</sup> minute when Darren Foxley saw his shot deflected off

target after an attack on the right and a lay-back by Alfie Mason. Soon afterwards a shot on the turn by Mason was close before home keeper just held the ball in front of Jamie Cureton after Mason had crossed the ball into the middle.

It was Stortford who took the lead three minutes before half-time. Another attack up the right side involving Jack Thomas and George Casey led to Darren Foxley and Jamie Cureton exchanging passes and when Cureton laid the ball back on the edge of the box Foxley fired a low shot into the far bottom corner.

The Blues nearly extended their lead straight after the break as an early Foxley cross towards the near post was headed wide by Jordan Westcott. Unfortunately the midfielder suffered a groin injury in the process and was to take no further part in the game and was replaced by Callum Taylor.

There was more woe for Stortford when, in the 47<sup>th</sup> minute, defender Jordan Norville-Williams advanced on a run from his own half and planted his drive against Kitscha's left-hand upright and striker Nabil Shariff netted from the rebound.

The Blues stopper was then in the picture soon afterwards holding a shot from Shariff followed by a flying save to tip a rising shot by Williams over the bar.

Marvel Ekpiteta cleared well near the goal-line after Dion Sembie-Ferris crossed from the right after a sustained attack by the Saints.

Just after the hour mark there was a 'Geoff Hurst World Cup Final 1966' moment featuring Stortford that didn't end in their favour. George Casey crossed in towards the near post from the right and Jamie Cureton's first time effort sent the ball crashing against the underside of the bar and appeared to rebound down over the goal-line but the officials didn't

award a goal. The Blues lack of luck was compounded as within a minute the hosts had attacked upfield and Dylan Williams shot low into the net from outside the box past Kitscha. Sembie-Ferris went close shortly afterwards and then fourteen minutes from time the incident between Jack Thomas and Luke Knight in the centre-circle occurred with the Blues midfielder sent off and the hosts' skipper yellow carded.

Matters didn't look great for Stortford but they celebrated an equaliser in the 86<sup>th</sup> minute. Jamie Cureton retrieved a loose ball over on the left and swivelled to deliver a cross into the middle where Callum Taylor's glancing header sent the ball towards the back post and Casey making a perfectly timed run from the right met it and his angled low shot hit the net inside the far post.

Darren Foxley had a shot from the edge of the area blocked late on whilst the Huntingdonshire side's substitute Stefan Broccoli was narrowly wide with the last kick of the match.

STORTFORD: Calum Kitscha; George Casey; Chad Cruse; Mark Hughes; Marvel Ekpiteta; Joe Robinson; Jordan Westcott (Callum Taylor 48); Jack Thomas; Alfie Mason (Freddie Oakman 81); Jamie Cureton; Darren Foxley.

Unused substitutes: Max Brassington, Tom Clifford and Marcus Crowther.

ST NEOTS TOWN: Finlay Iron; Tom Wood; Jordan Norville-Williams; Luke Knight; Liam McDevitt; Taylor Parr; Dion Sembie-Ferris (Scott Sinclair 90); Dave Bridges; Nabil Shariff; Kyran Wiltshire (Stefan Broccoli 87); Dylan Williams.

Unused substitutes: Jonny Butler, Dan Buddle and Johnny Herd.

Referee: Alex Rayment

