

Hellenic League Premier Division

Saturday 7 April 2012

Slimbridge 1-4 Ardley United

After two consecutive victories, the Swans came crashing back down to earth, when a skillful and highly organised Ardley side, smarting from two heavy defeats of their own in a week, delivered a lesson in finishing to the home side at Wisloe Road this afternoon.

After Slimbridge edged the early exchanges, the Swans were hit by two sucker punches in the 18th and 21st minutes, with Ryan Brooks nabbing a quickfire brace to put Ardley firmly in control of the match. Nick Thorne third just after the break sealed the victory for Ardley, and two late goals, one from each side, finished off a disappointing afternoon for the home side.

Slimbridge started the game brightly, with Ross Langworthy, back from college for the holidays, and Liam Harding combining well to create a couple of early chances - with just two minutes on the clock, Langworthy's shot was scrambled away for a corner, before Harding was penalised for pushing as the corner came over.

Four minutes later, the same two combined again - Langworthy's break down the left saw the youngster play a neat cross into the Ardley box, and Harding was unlucky to see his shot drift just over as he got his strike in under pressure.

The game seemed to be settling down to a midfield battle, with both sides cancelling each other out, when Ardley scored two quick goals to change the complexion of the game completely. With 18 minutes on the clock, Rob Hine misjudged a through ball which sailed over his head to leave Ryan Brooks through on goal, and the striker finished neatly past the stranded Dave Evans to put the visitors ahead.

Before the Swans had time to regroup, Ardley struck again - this time a swift short passing move took the Swans defence apart down the middle of the park, and put Brooks through on Evans again - for the second time, the Swans Keeper was given no chance by a strong finish.

The lead gave Ardley a stranglehold on the game that they rarely looked like conceding, as their passing football continued to prove troublesome to the home side.

The Swans had an opportunity to pull a goal back on 35 minutes, but Micky Bryant shot high and wide after being set up after good work by Marv Roberts, as Slimbridge struggled to find any sort of rhythm. Two minutes later, Lewis Wilton's header which drifted over was the result of a good passing move from the home side. In the end, the offside flag meant the effort would not have counted anyway.

Three minutes into the second half, it went from bad to worse for Slimbridge, when Nick Thorne drilled home after a goalmouth scramble to increase the lead to three goals, and effectively kill off the game with over 40 minutes remaining. Ardley could have gone further ahead three minutes later, when a cross from Nick Thorne drifted just over the crossbar.

As the home side continued to struggle, tempers began to fray and Freddy Ward and Will Wellon both found themselves in Referee Damon McCellin's book.

Manager Leon Sterling used all his subs in an effort to shake things up, but the introduction of Alex Higgs, Jamie Martin, and Karl Nash (for Micky Bryant, Ross Langworthy and Marv Roberts respectively) failed to alter the tempo of the game.

There were further opportunities for both sides - Brooks brought a good save from Dave Evans just before the Ardley striker was substituted, and Higgs blasted the ball over on 73 minutes when he was through on goal with a golden opportunity to get on the scoresheet.

Two late goals finished off the afternoon. Ardley went four up when Ben Thomas netted on 87 minutes, and Slimbridge went straight down the other end and got a goal of their own - Jamie Martin nodding home over Ardley Keeper Joe White.

White still had time to beat away a powerful strike from Nash as time ebbed away, but it would be difficult to argue that the result didn't reflect the balance of play at the final whistle.

The Swans travel to leaders Oxford City Nomads on Monday for a 3pm Kick Off, and Leon Sterling will be looking for a positive response from his side to what was certainly a bad day at the office for the Swans.

Team: Evans, Anson, Cole, Wellon, Hine, Ward, Harding, Bryant (Higgs 55), Roberts (Nash 65), Langworthy (Martin 61), Wilton

Goal: Martin 88

Supporters Man of the Match: Lewis Wilton