

Hellenic League Premier Division

Saturday 21 April 2012

Slimbridge 4-1 Henley Town

It was an emotional afternoon as the Swans finished their UHlsport Hellenic League programme with a victory that saw them secure a fifth place spot in the final League table. The win was tempered, however, with the occasion of Henley Town's last game at this level, and with the strong possibility that the club may shortly cease to exist.

After having been applauded onto the pitch through a Slimbridge Guard of Honour, the visitors understandably started at a pace - with 28 seconds on the clock, the visitors created a good chance when Dave Hoar set up Alex Bruce down the right flank, but Bruce was pulled back for offside.

In a frantic opening, the home side responded, and Liam Harding saw his goalbound shot blocked on the goalline after good work by Jamie Martin with just one minute on the clock.

Henley continued to fight their corner, and took the lead on four minutes, when a cross from the left saw Adam Jefferies poke the ball home past Dave Evans to give the visitors the lead.

After Jamie Martin's cross following good work down the Swans' left by Alex Higgs and Marvin Roberts was collected by Henley Keeper Ryan Latter, the home side equalised with their next attack.

Dispossessing his man in midfield, Martin went on a searching run, before laying the ball off to Higgs, who drilled the ball home to level the scores.

The visitors showed no signs of capitulation though, and fashioned probably what was the chance of the half on 18 minutes, when Higgs' miscontrol in midfield let in Elliott Whitehouse, but the Henley man skied his opportunity and the home side escaped. Two minutes later, a rare

sloppy clearance from Andy Sheppard saw Jeffereries play in Hoar, but again the chance was spurned.

The chances spurred Slimbridge into a response, and, on 23 minutes, Tom Cole's clever pass nearly put Higgs in on goal, but he was ruled offside, before Martin's adventurous lob from distance sailed over Latter, but also just over the Henley bar a couple of minutes later.

As the home side began to assert themselves, Higgs and Martin were again guilty of missed chances, but just before half time, Slimbridge took the lead. After a goalmouth scramble following Fred Ward's corner, Tom Cole saw his initial effort well saved by Latter, but forced home the rebound to put the Swans ahead at the break.

Slimbridge had a couple of early chances to increase their lead as the second half progressed - Firstly, Roberts' header drifted just wide of the Henley post before Mickey Bryant rattled the post with a superb volley on 49 minutes.

The game then lost a bit of steam, and developed into a battle of attrition, with neither side able to take control of the game, until the tussle exploded back into life with ten minutes remaining.

Firstly, on 81 minutes, an overhead kick from Jamie Martin was blocked on the goal line by Whitehouse, and the Henley man saw red. It was absolutely the right decision by Referee Simon Wales, but in the context of the circumstances at that point in the match, it would have been preferable if another option had been open to the Referee within the rules of the game.

With Tom Cole off the pitch, it was left to Swans Captain Marvin Roberts to drill home the spot kick to extend the home side's lead.

Slimbridge completed their season with a final goal with five minutes remaining, when Jamie Martin's clever shot finished off a neat move involving Mickey Bryant and Liam Harding.

Henley were warmly applauded off the pitch by supporters of both sides, and, regardless of the off the pitch politics involved, the players on the pitch can be proud of their performance on the day, and everyone at Slimbridge would like to wish Henley Town FC, in whatever guise they continue, all their very best wishes for the future of the club.

Manager Leon Sterling was understandably proud of the performance of his team at the conclusion of the season, and the team can now enjoy their close season break, before they return to pre-season work in July. Pre-season games are still being formalised, and will be announced as soon as they are confirmed.

Team: Evans, Anson, Cornwall (Hine 45) , Sheppard, Wellon, Wood (Bryant 45), Harding, Cole (Ward 45), Roberts, Higgs, Martin

Goals: Higgs 13, Cole 42, Roberts (Pen) 81, Martin 85

Supporters Man of the Match: Tom Cole