

Hellenic League Premier Division

Monday 2 January 2012

Highworth Town 2-2 Slimbridge

In freezing cold conditions and a sodden pitch, both teams served up a New Year's entertainment treat at The Elms Recreation Ground.

Highworth took an early lead through Gary Hill, but two Alex Higgs's goals saw the Swans go into the break ahead. Danny Hilder's penalty on the hour which also saw the dismissal of Jamie Martin levelled the scores. For the last 30 minutes, Highworth pummelled the Slimbridge goal, but a combination of luck and some superb full hearted defensive performances saw the points shared at the final whistle.

On a heavy pitch which bore the scars of recent activity, it was the hosts who made the early chances Swans Manager Leon Sterling was alert to block Sean McKean's dangerous run in the first minute, and Jamie Inch's header from the resulting corner completed the clearance.

With four minutes on the clock, the home side appealed for a penalty after McKean tangled with Inch in the box, but Referee Beveridge waved away the shouts.

The visitors went straight down the other end and created a good chance for themselves Marvin Roberts made a surging run which took him through on goal, and he was felled by a backtracking defender. With the advantage being played, the ball fell to Alex Higgs, who lobbed Highworth Keeper Kurtis Sharkey, only to see the ball, which may have been drifting just wide, land and stick in the mud around the goalmouth, where it was eventually cleared.

The chance seemed to galvanise the Swans, and a series of corners saw both Rob Hine and Karl Nash come close with decent efforts, Nash's coming when his corner caught the wind and very nearly went straight into the Highworth goal.

Some slack defending from the visiting defence was punished on 15 minutes, when Gary Hill was left unmarked to nod home a corner and put the home side ahead.

Seven minutes later, the scores were level Jamie Martin played a sweet ball down the right flank to send Marvin Roberts clear, and his cross was neatly finished by Alex Higgs.

Slimbridge had their own penalty appeal turned down on 24 minutes, when Jamie Martin was brought down as he burst through the Highworth defence. The offence was deemed to have taken place outside the penalty box, and Craig Curtis escaped with a yellow card. Martin's resulting free kick was easily saved by Sharkey.

Swans Keeper Dave Evans made a superb double stop on the half hour, firstly keeping out McKean's strong effort, and then blocking Rory Sproule's follow up.

As play continued to go from end to end, Marvin Roberts's header which hit the post and went wide, following Higgs brave charge down of a Highworth clearance ensured the entertainment continued to be provided for the crowd.

Evans was next in action again, with another pair of stops, this time thwarting Tony Joyce's free kick and then gathering the resulting shot from Steve Yeardley.

With virtually the last kick of the half, Slimbridge edged into the lead Jamie Martin's corner was played to the edge of the box by Rob Hine, and Higgs pounced to notch his second of the game and put the Swans ahead.

Highworth made a decent start to the second period, with captain Ritchie Saunders narrowly missing with two shots in quick succession, but the visitors came back into the game on the hour. A goal bound header following a corner was kept out by Jamie Martin's hand, and the referee

had little option than to dismiss the striker. Danny Hilder sent Evans the wrong way to level the scores.

Not unexpectedly, this galvanised Highworth, and they laid siege to the ten man Swans goal Will Wellon's intervention kept out Sproule's header, and Wellon then again threw himself bravely to block the follow up shot.

Saunders saw his shot beat Evans, but also go over the crossbar in the 70th minutes, and Evans was again in action a minute later, making a superb save to deny Josh Parsons.

As the chances continued to come for the home side, the team and their supporters were getting increasingly frustrated as the opportunities came to nothing Joyce came very close on 76 minutes, but his pile driver just cleared the bar with Evans beaten.

With three minutes remaining, it looked as if the home side were going to get the goal they were chasing, but firstly, Evans save from Ryan Thomas, coupled with another magnificent block from Wellon kept the scores level.

As the game crept into injury time, Highworth saw another pair of chances go begging Evans diving at the feet of Thomas to deny him the shooting chance, and Hilder breaking through, and beating Evans with his shot, only to see the ball run just wide of the Swans post.

It was the last action of a pulsating match which reflected great credit on both teams for the display they came up with in the conditions.

The Swans travel to Flackwell Heath on Saturday (3.00pm), before returning to Wisloe Road the following weekend, when they entertain Abingdon Town (Saturday 14th, 3.00pm)

Team: Evans, Cornwall, Wellon, Sterling, Inch, Ward, Martin, Hine, Roberts (Cole 76), Higgs, Nash

Goals: Higgs 22, 45