

Hellenic League Premier Division

Saturday 24 September 2011

Slimbridge 3-2 Merthyr Town

The Swans progressed in the Carlsberg FA Vase this afternoon after an intriguing and thoroughly entertaining encounter with Merthyr Town at Wisloe Road. After Marvin Roberts' early goal was swiftly cancelled out by the Martyrs' Player Manager Garry Shephard, Micky Bryant and Brad Martin seemed to have wrapped the game up for the home side. An Ian Traylor effort reduced the deficit with 17 minutes remaining, but the Swans' held on for a deserved victory, which sees them travel to Larkhall Athletic in the next round of the competition.

A large Merthyr travelling contingent contributed, as always in fixtures between the two sides, to a great atmosphere in the ground as the kick off approached on a warm sunny afternoon at Wisloe, and it was the home side who had the first effort on goal - Alex Higgs' snap shot drifting just wide of the Merthyr goal with less than a minute on the clock. The visitors responded almost immediately, with Ryan Prosser's effort from outside the box landing in front of Dave Evans as he went to gather, and bouncing uncomfortably away from him. Evans recovered and gathered the ball before any Merthyr striker could reach it.

With still under five minutes on the clock, a well struck free kick from Martyrs' man of the match Marcus Griffiths was cleared behind for a corner by Rob Hine, and the resulting corner was eventually cleared from the Slimbridge box as the game hit an end to end rhythm which was a feature of the full 90 minutes. Merthyr were playing the ball around well, and their neat interplay suggested it was going to be a testing time for the home side, but it was The Swans who fashioned the next chance after six minutes - some good interplay between Freddy Ward and Alex Higgs played Marvin Roberts through on goal, but the chance was lost as Martyrs' Keeper Joe Perry did enough to put the Swans' Captain off his stride as he approached the target.

Griffiths continued to cause all sorts of problems for the Swans' full backs, and he was at the heart of a sweet move on eight minutes involving Prosser and Shephard which required some efficient defending from Brad Martin to clear the danger for the home side as the early exchanges continued to provide great entertainment for the two sets of fans.

It was perhaps inevitable given the early exchanges that the first few minutes would produce a goal, and it was Slimbridge who provided it to the delight of their fans- with nine minutes on the clock, Leon Cornwall lofted a ball into the Merthyr box, and Swans' captain Marvin Roberts beat Perry with his headed to put the hosts into the lead.

Merthyr continued to look dangerous despite falling behind, and Griffiths' run on 11 minutes won a corner after a good tackle from Alex Higgs, and Roberts was on hand at the other end of the pitch to clear the danger as the visitors looked for an equaliser.

With 15 minutes gone, parity was restored after Ryan Dorrian got the better of Jamie Inch on the Merthyr left flank, and his cross into space was steered home by Shephard to level the scores.

Still the game flowed from end to end, and Slimbridge responded well to being pegged back, with Freddy Ward's free kick on 17 minutes being just missed by Rob Hine as he went for a header. The ball went back out to Ward, whose delivery to Alex Higgs saw a shot which brought a good save from Perry. Two minutes later, Jamie Inch's header from Brad Martin's cross went high over the Merthyr bar as the home side pressed.

For the visitors, Griffiths continued to torment the Swans' defence, and his cross on 21 minutes saw Dave Evans make a good catch under pressure. Still play bounced from end to end, and the home side nearly regained the advantage when Martin's cross saw Roberts hold his man off superbly and feed Higgs. His pile driver shot brought a great save from Perry to keep the scores level.

At the other end, Dave Evans was called into action on 26 minutes, making an impressive point blank stop from Prosser. As the home side cleared the ball, Higgs had another effort which drifted just wide of the Martyrs' goal as each side looked dangerous every time they had the ball.

Shephard missed a good opportunity to put the visitors ahead on 28 minutes when he shot high and wide, following a swift break down the left flank from Griffiths, who saw his cross played back into the Swans' box by Alun Griffiths' header.

With 32 minutes gone, the home side regained the lead, when Ward's corner was headed home by Micky Bryant, who found himself in space in the Martyrs' box as the ball came in. Two minutes later, Martin and Higgs combined well to create an opportunity, and Higgs' shot brought another good save from Perry.

Merthyr fashioned one last chance to level the scores before the interval, but Leon Cornwall shepherded a dangerous ball for a goal kick, holding off the attentions of Alun Griffiths to leave the home side with the advantage as the half time whistle sounded.

As expected, Merthyr came out of the blocks at the start of the second period, and their early pressure nearly paid off immediately when they visitors' won a free kick on the edge of the Slimbridge box on 46 minutes. Prosser's shot brought another good save from Dave Evans - the resulting goalmouth scramble producing two corners on the bounce for Merthyr, but the home side held firm.

With nine minutes of the second half on the clock, the Swans increased their lead - Alex Higgs made a dangerous break down the Slimbridge right and fed Micky Bryant, whose shot brought a great save from Perry in the Merthyr goal. The ball ran free to Brad Martin who netted to put the Swans' two goals to the good.

Merthyr again retaliated, and Dorrian's run and shot on 59 minutes looked destined to reduce the deficit, until Hine's great block saw off the danger. Slimbridge created the next decent opportunity, but Jamie Martin, who had replaced Alex Higgs, saw the ball picked off his toe by Perry after Ben Wood and Ward had crafted an opportunity for him. Slimbridge continued to press, and a minute later, Hine's header saw another smart save from Perry.

With 65 minutes on the clock, Slimbridge missed a golden opportunity to finish the game off, but Jamie Martin's lob cleared both Perry and the Merthyr crossbar, after Martin had been played through by Wood's classy through ball.

The momentum swung back towards the visitors, and after misses from Griffiths and Andrew Thomas, a mix up at the back on 73 minutes saw Ian Traylor take advantage of the confusion in the Swans' back four as they tried to deal with a through ball, rounding Evans and netting to reduce the deficit to a single goal.

Merthyr pressed forward in search of an equaliser, and Evans made another smart save from Traylor, before Jamie Inch showed composure to deal with a cross from Adam Carpenter.

With ten minutes remaining, a pile driver from Dorrian looked as if it would bring the scores level, but the ball drifted just over the Slimbridge bar, to the relief of the home fans.

Chances continued to be created at both ends of the pitch, and after Martin's effort was blocked as he was about to shoot, the Martyrs' had two more decent chance when Shephard's shot flashed across the Slimbridge goal with no-one available to provide the final touch, and Steve Williams shot went just over the bar.

Jamie Martin had two opportunities to seal the game for the home side in the final minutes, but both his efforts were off target, while Carpenter's shot which cleared the Slimbridge bar was the final effort for the visitors before Referee Bruce Rogers, who had a very impressive afternoon dealing with a game played in great spirit, brought the curtain down on a pulsating afternoon's entertainment.

Team: Evans, Cornwall, Wellon (Sterling 77), Hine, Inch, Wood, Ward, Bryant, Roberts (Nash 64), Higgs (Martin 56), Martin

Goals: Roberts 9, Bryant 32, Martin 56