

## **Hellenic League Premier Division**

**Monday 9 April 2012**

### **Oxford City Nomads 0-0 Slimbridge**

After a performance as impressive as Saturday's was disappointing, Leon Sterling and Freddy Ward must be delighted with the response of their side to the setback at Ardley on Saturday. Rightly predicting that Oxford City Nomads, needing seven points from their final three games to clinch the title, would be nervous in their final three games, Sterling's instruction to press and allow their opponent no room were spot on - The Swans turned in one of their best performances of the season, and should have left Marsh Lane with all three points.

Nomads, who have scored 117 goals this season, including matches where they have scored 10, 9 7 and 6 goals, failed to net at home for the first time, a measure of the quality and workrate of the Slimbridge team, who all contributed to a performance that delighted the travelling fans.

Will Wellon said before the game that teams such as Nomads are the teams that Slimbridge should be measuring themselves against, and on the evidence of today, the Swans can feel optimistic of achieving a second top six finish on the bounce, and can certainly look forward to moving forward again next season.

On a cold, wet and windy day, it was the away side who made the first decent chance - with just over a minute on the clock, Micky Bryant and Jamie Martin combined well to set up Marvin Roberts, who scuffed his shot under pressure from Nomads Centre Half Kamran Abbaisi. It was to be the first tussle between the two that became a full blooded torrid battle of attrition throughout the whole 90 minutes.

Nomads were playing some neat football despite the conditions, and Mark Bell, who had a superb game on the left wing for the home side, was starting to create early problems for Shane Anson, but the Swans back line looked solid as a unit and held firm.

With five minutes on the clock, a promising break by Martin was halted by a clumsy challenge by Kynan Isaac, and the Nomads defender found himself the first entrant in Referee Simon Maynard's book.

Slimbridge had a great opportunity to take the lead with eight minutes gone, when a lovely move involving Roberts and Liam Harding played Ross Langworthy on the right side of the penalty box, but the youngster's strike was well saved with his feet by Nomads Keeper Alan Foster to keep the scores level.

Slimbridge continued to press in an impressive start, and Martin's break on 13 minutes should have produced a better reward, but his through ball was just too far ahead of Langworthy and Foster collected for Nomads.

Nomads demonstrated why they hold the League position they do with a lovely flowing move on 15 minutes, when Jermaine Ferreira's jinking run set up a chance for Pablo Haysham, but his shot drifted just the wrong side of the post as far as the hosts were concerned.

Langworthy's pace was proving effective in unsettling an obviously nervous Nomads side, and he brought another good save from Foster on 20 minutes, trying to finish off a good move involving Bryant and Roberts.

As Nomads began to settle, they started to build a little period of pressure, and, after Dave Evans had made easy work of a shot from Albi Skendi, another sweet passing move forced Evans into a good save as Adam Morris' shot looked destined for the top corner with 23 minutes on the clock.

Langworthy continued to impress, and after being played in by a neat flick on from Roberts, his own header was gathered by Foster as the game reached the half hour mark.

Nomads wasted the best chance of the game so far on 34 minutes, when a charged down Slimbridge clearance bounced high to Haysham with the goal in front of him. His effort, with only Evans standing in the way, was both high and wide, much to the frustration of the home bench.

Five minutes later, it took a superb block from Andy Sheppard to stop a shot from Skendi, who had been set up with a chance after good work from Morris.

The final chance of the first half went to the visitors - Langworthy's shot being blocked after good work from Bryant had set him up in good position, but the first half remained goalless.

Bell continued to cause problems for the visitors down the Nomads left flank, and Sheppard found his way into the book with a clumsy challenge on the winger with 51 minutes gone. The resulting Free Kick was overhit, and Nomads' frustration continued to grow.

Sheppard was penalised in the 58th minute for a foul on Haysham, leaving Nomads with a free kick in a dangerous position just outside the box, and Evans was again called into action, pushing Conor McDonagh's strike for a corner, which the Swans cleared easily.

One of the best chances of the match fell to the visitors with an hour on the clock - a storming run by Alex Higgs, who had replaced Jamie Martin, down the left flank saw a superb cross fall to Roberts in space, but a bobble just as he was about to collect the pass allowed Nomads to regroup and the opportunity was lost.

The Swans continued to press, as the home side got more and more frustrated, and Will Wellon's surging run from the back created a good chance for Langworthy on 61 minutes, but his shot drifted just wide of the post.

Slimbridge continued to look the most likely side to score, and Langworthy again was involved in a move involving Ward and Bryant, which saw Ward's cross just a little too long and safely gathered safely by Foster.

Nomads were still making chances of their own, but some poor finishing let them down - on 69 minutes, James Dobson made a telling run from midfield to create an opportunity, but then scuffed his shot well wide

when he was well placed to take advantage of the space he had created for himself.

Bryant had a further opportunity for Slimbridge on 75 minutes as the game drifted towards its conclusion, but his shot after a Ward free kick was punched clear by Foster, and was diverted for corner which came to nothing.

The Swans continued to look the most likely to break the deadlock, and a minute later, Liam Harding was played in by another pinpoint pass from Ward, and again a block resulted in a Slimbridge corner which came to nothing.

Roberts and Abbaissi were continuing their battle, and the Swans man got the better of his opponent on 79 minutes, turning the Nomads centre half superbly, before playing in a ball which was just a little too far in front of Higgs, allowing Foster to gather.

With seven minutes remaining, Nomads had a glorious opportunity to nick all three points, but Morris skewed his shot wide when well placed.

The chances continued to come right until the final whistle - with the clock on 90 minutes, Rob Hine set himself up for a power drive across the Nomads box, but unfortunately, he managed to put the ball a yard wide of the post.

At the other end, Nomads found themselves with a great opportunity to steal the game well into stoppage time, when Ward was deemed to have committed a foul on the edge of the Slimbridge box, but Dobson's dipping free kick cannoned off the bar, and was cleared. It would have been very unfair on the visitors if they had lost the game at the death, and Nomads frustration was clear at the final whistle.

Andy Sheppard was voted Supporters Man Of The Match at the end of the game, although the number of contenders being discussed by the away fans demonstrated the overall consistency of the team performance, and the contribution of the entire team to a thoroughly deserved result.

Slimbridge finish their campaign with two home ties - on Saturday they entertain Thame United (3pm), before Henley Town come to Wisloe Road the following Saturday (3pm), for a game that looks like the last one at this level for the visitors, as they are looking to close down, and restart further down the pyramid.

Team: Evans, Anson, Cole, Sheppard, Wellon, Ward, Harding, Bryant (Hine 85), Roberts, Martin (Higgs 55), Langworthy (Wilton 72)

Supporters' Man Of The Match: Sheppard