Western League Premier Division

Saturday 1 March 2014

Ilfracombe Town 0-3 Slimbridge AFC

Two goals in four minutes either side of Half Time saw the Swans bring back the points from their longest trip of the season as they travelled to North Devon to meet Ilfracombe Town at Marlborough Park.

After taking a while to settle on a heavy and sloping pitch, with the home side missing a series of good chances, things changed just before the break when Harry Fenner put the visitors in the lead. Two minutes into the second period, Jack Twyman doubled the advantage, and Danny Chandler's third ten minutes from time sealed the victory, which saw the Swans finish the game with ten men after injury forced Dylan Ford off the pitch with no substitutes remaining.

Assistant Manager Freddy Ward was delighted with the display - 'It was a great team performance' he said after the final whistle, 'our two Centre Halves were outstanding. Up front, Harry Fenner and Danny Chandler worked well together, and the timing of the goals were crucial. The first came at an ideal time, and the second really killed the game. The third goal was a bonus, but I was very pleased all round.'

With the pitch at Marlborough Park dipping in the middle of the park, both teams had to contend with playing up the hill for both halves, and it took a while for Slimbridge to settle on a surface that was very heavy and well sanded. All the early chances went to the home side - Mark Clunie would have wanted to do better when he blasted over after good work from Ross Middleton and Steve Holland had set him up in space after four minutes, while, two minutes later, Edward Yeo went close after another passing move, only to see his effort would not have counted due to an offside flag.

As the home side continued to press, Middleton and Holland combined again to create an opportunity for Shaun Lewis, and Yeo then forced a

save from Dave Evans, all before the clock had reached ten minutes. Ilfracombe were looking dangerous, but must have wondered whether their failure to take these early chances would rebound on them at some point.

Just before the quarter hour, Slimbridge had their first effort on goal, a long range effort from Liam Harding which Bluebirds' Keeper Kurtis Parkin dealt with comfortably.

Ilfracombe continued to make the running, and Kevin Darch's long range effort went close, before Middleton's left foot effort drifted just the wrong side of the post to keep the scoreline blank.

Slimbridge's best chance of the game so far came on 28 minutes, when Harding's free kick was headed back across goal by Twyman. It took a magnificent challenge from Dejan Maric to clear the ball from under Jamie Martin's feet as the striker sought to convert the chance in front of goal.

The home side responded, with Lewis putting in a good cross for Yeo, but again his header was wide of the target.

Slimbridge were beginning to look more dangerous though as they started to break, and Parkin made a good save at Chandler's feet after some neat work from Twyman and Martin has set him up with a probing through ball to chase.

Just before the break, Slimbridge took the lead, when James Mayne was dispossessed by Harry Fenner, and the striker held off his man and slid the ball neatly past Parkin to give the visitors the lead.

Three minutes into the second half, the Swans scored again - Adam Mace put a superb back post cross in from the left flank, and Twyman's header back across the goal gave Parkin no chance to double the Swans' advantage.

The second strike saw confidence visibly drain from the home side, and the Swans took control of the match - Ilfracombe were reduced to long range efforts as the central defensive partnership of Ben Tunnicliffe and

Matt Thornton put in very impressive performances dealing with everything thrown at them, while Harding and Channing in particular were beginning to look dangerous every time the Swans broke.

On 64 minutes, a powerful run down the right from Harding saw a dangerous cross drift across the Ilfracombe goal, with no-one on hand to convert. As the Swans' pressed, Martin shot wide after more good work by Twyman, while, at the other end, another long range effort, this time from Clunie, saw another simple save for Evans.

The game was held up for over ten minutes when an accidental collision between Dylan Ford, who had only been on the pitch for three minutes as a Slimbridge substitute, and Ilfracombe's Kevin Darch saw both sustain nasty looking leg injuries. Ford was carried off the pitch by his teammates, while Darch left the field on a stretcher. As Slimbridge had used both their available substitutes, they were forced to play the last 13 minutes with ten men.

Ilfracombe pushed forward to try and use their man advantage, but left gaps at the back as they pressed - clearances were played towards Chandler, who was now the lone striker for the visitors, and his running was proving problematic for the home side.

With ten minutes left, it took a goaline header from Dan Robinson to keep the home side out, before Chandler, freshly recovering from a bout of cramp, put the seal on the performance with the third Slimbridge goal.

A Free Kick was lofted towards Chandler, who ducked under it, playing keepie-uppie with his back for a while, and saw the ball then fall at his feet beyond the last defender - Chandler drilled the goal home past Parkin to put the game to bed.

Ilfracombe should have got themselves on the scoresheet in the last minute, when Clunie's superb effort beat Evans and bounced back into play off the post, but the visitors held on for a clean sheet and three very important points.

The Swans travel to Bath on Tuesday night (March 4th, 7.45pm) to meet Odd Down, before entertaining Buckland Athletic at Wisloe Road next Saturday (March 8th, 3.00pm) in two League encounters.

Team: Evans, Stevenson (Ward 56), Robinson, Thornton, Tunnicliffe, Twyman, Martin, Harding, Chandler, Fenner (Ford 74), Mace

Goals: Fenner 45, Twyman 48, Chandler 81

Supporters Man of the Match: Ben Tunnicliffe