Evo Stik Southern League South & West

Wednesday 19 August 2015

North Leigh 4-2 Slimbridge

The Swans' unbeaten run in their first season in the Southern League may have come to an end, but there was no disgrace in matching a team who are surely going to be title contenders for over 70 minutes last night, and leading twice, before the experience of the home side won the day. There was a bit of naivety which cost the side towards the end of the game, but it was good learning so early on in the campaign as to the performance level needed every week this season.

Goals by Paul Fahy and Alex Hoyle, both memorable in their own way, saw the visitors looking good as the game approached the final quarter, but North Leigh, in a side containing some Oxford United Youth players, reshuffled and found an extra gear, with two goals from Kieran Sanders, and one each from Elliott Osbourne-Ricketts and George Seacole eventually swinging a very entertaining encounter the way of the home side.

The hosts made a bright start, and Swans' Stopper Dave Evans was twice called into action early on - firstly using his feet to keep out a good strike from Jamie Cook, and then dealing with another effort from Seacole.

At the other end, Alex Hoyle and Jack Twyman were both off target as the home side controlled the game early on.

With 11 minutes gone, North Leigh had a great opportunity to go ahead when Rich Thwaite was deemed to have handled a cross in the box by Referee Shaun Barry. Although it was very much a case of 'ball-to-hand', the Swans protests were to no avail. Osbourne-Ricketts sent his spot kick to Evans' left, but Evans guessed right and pushed both the original shot, and then the follow up to safety.

The Swans took the lead on 27 minutes, with the best move of the game so far - Adam Mace drilled a crossfield ball from the left flank to Sam Blackie, and he played the ball first time into the path of Paul Fahy, who lobbed North Leigh Keeper James Foster to score a superb opening goal and put the visitors ahead.

The home side continued to press though and Evans was forced into another good save, pushing Lewis White's header over as the game approached the break. Just as the Swans thought they may have made it through to half time unscathed, Leigh struck back - a shot from Sanders crept in off the far post with Evans stranded to even things up at the half.

After Seacole had again gone close for the home side just after the interval, Slimbridge took the lead again with a quite remarkable strike from Alex Hoyle on 52 minutes. On the edge of the centre circle in the North Leigh half, he spotted Foster off his line, and lobbed the Keeper from a good 45 yards to record a genuine contender for Swans' goal of the season.

This saw a sustained period of North Leigh pressure, and the Swans' held out until 68 minutes, when the hosts took advantage of some sloppy play as Slimbridge were breaking forward to launch an attack of their own. The ball eventually fell to Sanders, who drilled the ball home to even things up and record his second goal of the game.

Eight minutes later, the home side took the lead for the first time - Osbourne-Ricketts' shot taking a deflection on its way into the net, and the home side had their tails up.

A fourth goal on 81 minutes from Seacole was probably harsh justice for the visitors, but there was no doubting the quality of play from North Leigh, and they deserved their victory on the night. Assistant Manager Freddy Ward said afterwards that North Leigh were 'easily the best team we've played this season so far, but we move on.'

Slimbridge host Yate Town on Saturday at Wisloe Road, 3.00pm.

Team: Evans, Turl, Mace, Tunnicliff, Rich Thwaite, Twyman (Turner 81), Hoyle, Ward, Lawson (Martin 81), Blackie (Ryan Thwaite 68), Fahy

Supporters Man of the Match: Paul Fahy