Evo Stik Southern League South & West

Saturday 11 March 2017

Didcot Town 1-0 Slimbridge

A frustrating afternoon saw the Swans fail to build on their previous two wins, losing a game they should have picked up at least a point from. Falling behind to an absolute peach of a Free Kick from Didcot's George Reid, Slimbridge failed to capitalise on a penalty ten minutes later, with Diddy Keeper Leigh Bedwell making his second spot kick stop of the week to keep out Lee Smith's effort. The loss sees the Swans slip to 20th in the League, but they still hold a fourteen point advantage over Wantage Town in 21st place, with just seven games left for the Oxfordshire side to pull off a highly improbable escape.

The pitch at Loop Meadow Stadium was definitely suffering from already having hosted two games this week, and both sides early on struggled to cope with the erratic bounce of the ball. The opening minutes were very disjointed from both sides, and the earliest opportunity went to hosts on six minutes, when Andy Ballard's effort was way too high and didn't trouble Swans Keeper Marcus Beauchamp.

Lee Smith, who worked well with Joe Stokes, especially in the first period, forced a corner for the visitors with 13 minutes gone, but Adam Mace's delivery of the kick was cleared to safety.

Stokes was proving particularly influential for the Swans, and he was involved in some Slimbridge's best moves, setting up Smith for a cross which was overhit, and then bringing a save from Bedwell after good work from Mace.

Marley Thomas was the next to try his luck, but again the ball was overhit, and ran harmlessly out as the Swans pressed.

Didcot were struggling with the conditions as well, and Reid tried to play in Louis Joyce on 19 minutes, but again the ball was overhit and drifted out for a goal kick.

Slimbridge were still creating the better chances at this point in the game, and Stokes saw his effort blocked before Mace was off target as the visitors continued to create opportunities.

The standard of finishing on display was summed up neatly by a snatched shot from Sam Barder for Diddy on the half hour, which nearly put the corner flag out of commission as both sides struggled to really threaten.

Two minutes later, Stokes played Smith in well, but the ball held up and got caught under his feet as he shaped to shoot, and the chance was lost.

The litany of misses continued to the break, with Smith again off target for Slimbridge, while Reid, Ben Whitehead and Joyce were all off target for the hosts, leaving the scores level at the half.

Four minutes into the second period, the deadlock was broken in spectacular fashion. Freddy Ward may have been unfairly penalised for handball 25 yards from the Slimbridge goal by Referee Tom Reeves, who had a superb afternoon in the middle, but Reid's pearl of a free kick was worthy of winning any game, leaving Beauchamp no chance, and putting the hosts ahead.

Spurred on, Diddy started to apply a little pressure, and Callum McNish was next to see his effort off target as the home side looked to increase their advantage.

Reid thought he had doubled the lead on 58 minutes when through on goal, but his superb shot brought an equally magnificent save from Beauchamp and his effort was cleared.

Freddy Ward replaced Brad Martin with Ryan Thwaite on the hour mark, and he had an immediate impact, being felled in the Didcot box to give the Swans a spot kick chance to level things up

Bedwell dived well to his right, and beat away Smith's kick to maintain the home side's lead.

Two minutes later, Joyce had a glorious chance to put the game to bed from six yards out, but again, the bounce of the ball on the uneven surface saw him scuff his effort well wide, and Slimbridge breathed again.

The last ten minutes saw Nick Grimes and Mace both have goal bound efforts blocked, and Rich Thwaite and Grimes have headers off target from Mace Free Kicks, but Diddy held firm to record the victory.

The Swans now have a run of three home games at Thornhill Park - they host Paulton Rovers (Saturday 18th, 3.00pm), and Larkhall Athletic (Saturday 25th, 3.00pm), before AFC Totton make the long trip from Southampton on Wednesday 29th (7.45pm), a set of games which should see the Swans mathematically ensure their survival at Southern League level for a second season.

Team: Beauchamp, Turl, Mace, Grimes, Rich Thwaite, Twyman, Stokes (Lewis 79), Ward (Oakes 71), Smith, Martin (Ryan Thwaite 60), Thomas

Supporters Man of the Match: Marcus Beauchamp