

AFC Waverton U12 Bees v Cuddington & Sandiway U12s

The Bees had the chance to put last week's uncharacteristically below-par performance behind them against a good Cuddington & Sandiway side.

When Cuddington's left winger delivered a cross early on for one of her three unmarked team-mates hanging round the penalty spot to turn in, it looked like Waverton might have been in for another disappointing morning. The Bees had other ideas, however, the early setback galvanising them to turn in their best performance of the season.

This started with the defence, who seemed to take personal offence at having conceded so softly. Right back Evie, making her first start of the season, ensured that that was the last time her opposite number got away from her with a series of committed tackles followed up with increasingly confident passing to her team-mates. Left back Daisy muscled the right winger off the ball quite impressively before launching a dangerous run forwards, and centre-back Amelia was simply outstanding coming from deep to beat Cuddington's centre-forward to the ball almost every single time, and there in the middle to make vital clearances when Cuddington did get down the wings. Right winger Ella also had her work cut out, having to spend more time tracking back than going forward. However, this all helped to give goalkeeper Sarina little more to do other than fielding long balls and then dispatching it back upfield, although she did have to make one very good save with her feet. As such, her concentration throughout was a credit to her.

This solidity at the back enabled Waverton to attack with a little more freedom. Central midfielder Emma, playing in an unusual deeper role, spurred the Bees forward, always looking to join striker Raphi up front, and her co-midfielder Millie was always looking to put the pair of them through on goal. It was only a couple of good tackles from Cuddington's defenders that kept the Bees goalless in the first half, left winger Sophia being particularly unlucky to have the ball nicked off her toe just as she was about to shoot having burst into the box.

A goal down, but seemingly determined that the end result wouldn't come down to a lack of effort, the Bees played the second half as they had finished the first. Sophia didn't let the considerable size difference prevent her from winning the ball back, and she was not alone in making every effort to regain possession. Chief amongst the ball-winners was the perpetual motion machine that was Ruby. She never let any of Cuddington's players settle on the ball and continually won it back - even an accidental stud on the top of her foot couldn't diminish her influence, and she also gave warning of her intention to shoot with a long-range effort that just missed the left-hand post. Coming on at right back, Amelie kept up Evie's good work in shutting down Cuddington's left wing, making the winger go the long way round before making the vital tackle, occasionally assisted by Amelia covering across from the middle. At left back, Elsa displayed her usual unhurried composure to extricate herself and her team from some difficult situations when running back towards her own goal-line, as well as showing off her capable left foot to find Ella in the left-wing channel, as well as advancing the Bees up the pitch with her excellent throw-ins.

The game entered the final quarter with the Bees getting closer to an equaliser all the time. Striker Raphi kept Cuddington's defenders occupied by playing high up the pitch, making space in the middle for Emma to drive into, and out wide for winger Menna to do the same. The pressure finally told when Ruby smashed home a loose ball in the Cuddington box, her thoroughly deserved first League goal for the team seeing her swamped by her team-mates.

With the Bees' coach shouting himself hoarse to remind the team to concentrate from the kick-off to hold onto a hard-earned point, the girls completely ignored him and promptly set off in search of the winner. This almost came when the relentless Ruby won a foul about 20yds from the Cuddington goal: Daisy launched an Exocet free kick destined for the top corner that the goalkeeper did well to parry, but shortly after this pair were again involved when the winner did come with two minutes remaining.

Daisy dispossessed Cuddington's left back on the edge of their box with a thunderous tackle, the ball breaking to Ruby who fired in a wicked cross towards captain Raphi attacking the near post on the edge of the six-yard box. As the ball came to Raphi though, under pressure from Cuddington's last defender, she cleverly let the ball pass

between her legs, and Menna, following up equally intelligently, had the simplest of tasks to tap in the winner – her first goal of the season also. Cue a second pile-on of excited Bees.

If the girls were nervous with such a short time remaining, it didn't show, with Amelia displaying the same leadership and confidence she had all game to smash the ball clear before the referee blew the final whistle, prompting a raucous round of applause from the girls' proud parents.

Having been a goal down, the Bees showed great belief and determination to not just get back into the game, but keep pushing to win it, victory being nothing less than such positivity and teamwork deserved.

Player of the Match was Menna, selected by Ruby for scoring the winning goal.