

AFC Waverton U12 Bees v Alex Soccer Centre U12s

The Bees got back to winning ways with a simply outstanding performance against an Alex team that stood second in the League before the match.

A flurry of late withdrawals due to illness saw Waverton reduced to just eight players at kick-off, and Amelia and Evie, playing as the team's only defenders, had their work cut out against Alex's rapid and skilful centre-forward. The latter carved out an early chance for herself and goalkeeper Amelie responded with a fine save.

Playing a player short against a physical team that inflicted a 3-1 defeat only a month ago meant the girls really had to put a shift in, especially in midfield with extra tracking back required to help-out the understaffed defence. Wide players Menna and Sophia certainly did this: Menna was the main outlet for the Bees all game with numerous fine runs down the right wing that relieved pressure while also making good use of Wednesday's tackling practice to help Evie wrest the ball from Alex; following many of Amelia's fine interceptions, Sophia was regularly there to pounce on the loose ball and retain possession for the Bees with cool, simple passes to her team mates.

In the middle of the park, Millie and Daisy complemented each other well. Millie was another catalyst for the Bees, repeatedly finding Menna and centre-forward Raphi with nice touches into space, while also getting her foot in and using her strength to win the ball back. Daisy was equally strong in the tackle when required, while also driving forwards, either with the ball at her feet or to join in counter-attacks.

The Bees deservedly took the lead when Menna found Raphi running into the right side of the box. Raphi showed great strength to beat the last Alex defender and then blast a fierce shot towards the near post. Alex's goalkeeper blocked the shot, but Millie was following up – as she has done so many times this season – and tapped in her fifth goal of the season.

With Waverton in the ascendancy, Menna was unlucky to shoot wide having been put through by Raphi, and Raphi herself and Daisy were only denied by brilliant saves from Alex's goalkeeper. At the other end, as Evie and Amelia consistently denied Alex's attackers by getting themselves between the ball and their opponent, running them out of play, or flattening them with well-timed tackles, Alex had to raise their game and their own physical commitment to press the Bees back. Despite some excellent long throw-ins from Menna to relieve pressure temporarily, Alex equalised from long range just before half-time.

Enthused by their first-half performance, and encouraged to compete physically, the Bees put in another great effort in the second half. Being a player down, the game became more stretched, and Alex began to find their extra player as they went forward. Despite some judicious shoulder charges from Daisy, and Amelia and Evie's constant efforts to successfully dispossess Alex's centre forward, she eventually found a way through to fire home past Amelie to give Alex the lead.

The Bees continued to attack. Sophia and Raphi combined well down the left to force a succession of corners, one of which saw Daisy shoot wide from Raphi's short ball. On the right, Menna and Raphi, who was simply everywhere, defended from the front to pen Alex in at goal kicks and create more chances. Two great crosses from Menna flew across the six-yard box, with Raphi being unlucky not to get a firmer touch on one of them. With Daisy winning headers in midfield, and Millie pulling all the strings, another goal for Waverton always looked on the cards. Millie thought she'd got her second of the game when she returned an Alex clearance with interest, her firmly hit shot nutmegging one player and evading the goalkeeper to see the ball nestle in the back of the net. Unfortunately, it was chalked off for offside, but the Bees were not to be denied. Evie and Amelia, who were concentration and obduracy personified, continued to keep Alex a long way from their own goal. Amelia in particular led by example as she left Alex's centre-forward in a heap three or four more times to complete a real captain's performance. When Alex did get through one final time, Evie and goalkeeper Amelie did just enough to deflect the ball behind for a corner.

This came to nothing though, and the Bees poured forward again as Millie, Menna and Raphi combined for the umpteenth time. Alex's goalkeeper was called on more than once to maintain their lead, but with her team stuck

on the edge of their own box, she was eventually beaten as Raphi produced a very composed finish into the bottom right corner with five minutes to go.

With momentum on their side, the Bees then showed even greater determination to not just protect their point, but to actively go after two more. More good defending saw a free-kick awarded to Waverton for offside, and the Bees were on the attack again. Again, the ball broke to Raphi and she kept her cool to squeeze an effort just inside the right-hand post despite the close attentions of two or three Alex players. With confusion over whether the referee had awarded a goal or not, the girls nonchalantly ambled back to their own half, at which point realisation dawned on coaches and parents that it was indeed a goal, and that the eight players of Waverton had come from behind to take the lead. Very shortly after, the final whistle went confirming a 3-2 victory for the Bees.

The team had spoken about concentration, commitment and simply trying their best before the game, and they were rewarded for their efforts with a richly-deserved win. Due to those efforts, the girls were too tired to give themselves a round of applause after the game, but eight smiling faces revealed their satisfaction for a job well done.

Any one of them could have been Player of the Match, but Menna selected Raphi for her determination and scoring the winning goal.

Final word to parent Steve who has composed a fantastic Bee-themed haiku.

Waverton Bees.

Each one a queen, each one a worker.

Honey to watch.

The girls certainly lived up to that today.