

AFC Waverton U12 Bees v Cheshire Blades Falcons U12s

The Bees finished the decade with a game of two halves against Cheshire Blades Falcons.

A bitterly cold, but a thankfully dry, Winsford saw the hard-as-nails Bees line up against a Cheshire Blades team kitted out in coats and woolly hats. Waverton started strongly with Menna repeatedly beating her opponent for pace on the right, however it was the team in red that took the lead when Waverton failed to clear a corner, with a fine strike from outside the box flying through a tangle of players and past the unsuspecting Amelie in goal.

As has happened so often this season, going behind seemed to wake the Bees up. The defence of Daisy, Evie and Sophia brought the marking they'd worked on in the week to the game to prevent the Blades' players from turning, and then having won the ball back were able launch counter-attacks with some lovely slide-rule passes into space: both Sophia and Daisy found Georgia running in behind, the former after a fine tackle and turn, and the latter following a trademark surge into midfield.

In central midfield, Millie and Ruby began to dominate possession, and with captain Raphi joining in from the left flank, some fine passing moves saw the Bees pressing for an equaliser. It eventually came when more slick interplay released Georgia in the inside right channel, and she made no mistake to bag her 16th goal of the season. The Bees were now firmly on top, passing round their larger opponents to create numerous chances. Menna and Georgia saw more shots saved, a brilliant cross from the right from Georgia somehow evaded all four of her midfield colleagues who had advanced into the Blades' box, and Millie was all set to score the Bees first ever headed goal until the goalkeeper got a vital hand to a corner.

Another corner finally saw Waverton take the lead their pressure deserved when Ella's shot proved to hot to handle and the Blades' keeper couldn't prevent it creeping over the line. Shortly after, Ella was then denied a spectacular second goal when her volley from ten yards came back off the crossbar, but the Bees finished the half the stronger team and in the lead.

A third goal would almost certainly have clinched victory for Waverton, but Cheshire Blades came out in the second half having re-jigged their line-up (and removed their additional layers!) and they proved much more competitive. Throughout the third quarter, the Bees were repeatedly forced to turn and deal with quick Blades' attacks, but their scramble defence was up to it most of the time. The rapidly improving Evie and Daisy both made vital clearances running back towards their own goal to cut out crosses heading for the penalty spot, but two pieces of defending stood out. Firstly, Millie, helping out at right back to cover defensive absences, was forced to track a ball rolling towards the corner flag with Blades' centre-forward in hot pursuit. She won the race and then – with her signature poise – produced an outrageous drag-back to turn away from her opponent and calmly advance up the right flank to clear. Secondly, Sophia – replacing Millie at right back for the final quarter – jockeyed the Blades' very quick right winger all the way from the halfway line to the left corner flag, a brilliantly composed piece of defending that negated a dangerous attack, and gave her team-mates time to get back and deal with the eventual cross.

In goal, Amelie was as busy as she's ever been, but she showed great confidence in using her hands at every opportunity and concentration to get to the through balls first. Her throw outs to the right-hand side were getting further every time, relieving some of the pressure. However, the Blades' threat eventually paid off when a short scramble saw Blades' centre forward score a fine goal from a tight angle to equalise.

Again, this seemed to galvanise the Bees, seemingly deciding that attack was the best form of defence. At the forefront of this was Sarina, showing what she can do outfield. One run down the right resulted in her delivering a fine cross into the box, and she also showed great awareness and touch to come short for two throw-ins to keep possession for her team on the edge of the Blades' box. Ruby's influence rose again towards the end, picking up loose balls and releasing Ella down the left with some impressive left-footed passes. With time ticking down, Ruby, Ella and Georgia all had shots that were well-saved or flew just wide. Daisy, coming up from the back to add numbers to the Bees' attacks, saw a shot from distance just swerve away from the goal, but this set up a scramble that saw the ball fall at several Bees' feet in the box; this included Georgia, but her shot from an angle on the right also came back off the bar, before the Blades eventually cleared the danger.

The game finished shortly after, another draw for the Bees in a very even game. Credit to Cheshire Blades for being so competitive with just eight players and getting the point their efforts merited. Their first-half goalkeeper especially made some great saves to keep her side in the game.

The passing, particularly in the latter stages of the first half, was a joy to behold, and there is no doubt the Bees create the majority of chances in almost all the games they play: they have not scored in just one game this season, and the fact that Ella is the eighth different scorer for the team this season shows just how strong the team is going forward: hopefully at some point they will play a game where the opposing goalkeeper has a merely average game!

Player of the Match, selected by Millie, was Raphi for another consistently high performance: a real captain's display.

A fine 2019 for the Bees that has seen all players improve individually, and come together collectively to form a strong and spirited team. Hope everyone enjoys the Christmas break and comes back raring to go again in January.