

## 01/02/20: AFC Waverton Bees vs Cuddington & Sandiway

Starting the day fourth in the League, the in-form Bees were asked to play with bravery and belief as they took on second-placed Cuddington & Sandiway, and parents and coaches were treated to 50 minutes of both in a fairly one-sided game at Hartford.

Waverton refused to be intimidated by their larger opposite numbers, with Ella in the middle and Menna on the right using their quick feet and coolness on the ball to outmanoeuvre physically stronger opponents, repeatedly playing the ball into the space behind slowly-turning defenders to send striker Georgia away. The Bees forced a series of corners and from one of them Sarina, playing well on the left of midfield, was unlucky not to score her first of the season when her first-time effort at the back post went just the wrong side of it. However, it was from another corner that central midfielder Raphi opened the scoring, turning well to hit a half volley over the keeper from 10 yards.

Cuddington were committing players forward when they had the chance though, and the Bees' defence needed to be on their toes. Right back Sophia displayed her trademark excellent jockeying and blocking to slow down numerous attacks down the left, Daisy at left back was physically strong, and in the middle, every element of the Amelia Defending Masterclass was on display: first to every ball – tick; last-ditch shoulder charge – tick; clearing the ball while running back towards her own goal – tick; flattening the centre forward – tick. New this week was bringing the ball out, a surging run through midfield almost getting her into a shooting position. With Ruby coming on up front, and debutante Lottie coming into midfield, the Bees' own physical presence grew – the former being the pest she'd been asked to be, the latter claiming difficult bouncing balls and disrupting Cuddington's possession. In goal, Amelie had little to do bar showing great judgement in carefully watching a shot bobble past her left post, but she could do nothing about Cuddington's equaliser as the ball was thumped home following a corner that wasn't cleared.

At half time, the strong wind that had been blowing straight across the pitch changed so that the Bees would be playing straight into it for the remaining 25 minutes, however the girls nullified any advantage this may have given Cuddington. Evie and Amelia in defence were committed and strong, Evie showing great awareness to cover behind Amelia to clear Cuddington's single dangerous attack, and goalkeeper Sarina was quick off her line to thump clear the only through ball that evaded the pair of them. Using offside as a third defender, Cuddington's second half attacks yielded no shots and just a single corner.

At the other end it was a different story, one parent commenting after the game that if it had been a boxing match, it would have been stopped. The Bees' attacking was relentless, literally straight from kick-off as Georgia fired the restart at the Cuddington goal. With Ruby and the equally belligerent Lottie now paired in central midfield, and Elsa energetic on the left, an abundance of possession launched attack after attack. Twin strikers Georgia and Raphi ran riot, only some strong defending just about doing enough to force a succession of shots from both just wide. There was no respite from goal-kicks, with Elsa capitalising on the strikers' pressure to get the ball back into the box, causing panic in their opponent's defence: the ball was repeatedly kicked out of play, just anywhere, and more great pressure from Raphi forced their keeper to pick up a back-pass. The angle didn't help the free-kick though and Cuddington managed to clear. Both Ella and Menna reprised their first half performances with great interplay with their strikers on the halfway line to send team-mates away; Georgia was unlucky not to be awarded a penalty after one very 'handy' challenge, and Raphi fired a dangerous ball across the six-yard box that somehow evaded everyone.

When she repeated the feat shortly afterwards, Menna was there to tap home – déjà vu as she had scored the winner in identical circumstances in the reverse fixture. With players, parents and coaches alike all jumping about, the referee awarded a free kick for offside: bearing in mind where Raphi's cross originated

from, Menna and her team-mates could certainly count themselves very, very unlucky indeed. Waverton showed great maturity to accept the decision and to not let it affect them, renewing their onslaught immediately. Lottie smashed a left-footed effort wide from the edge of the box, Ruby was similarly off-target with a right-footed effort, and two free kicks from Georgia also fell just wide. Daisy maintained the pressure on the right dispossessing Cuddington's defender and firing in a dangerous cross, and with two minutes remaining, she was denied by the woodwork when the ball fell to her inside the box and she hammered a fierce drive against the keeper's right-hand post. Even as the referee put the whistle to his lips in readiness to blow for full-time, the Bees had two more shots and forced a final corner, captain Amelia joining the attack to try to force the winner their performance merited.

It wasn't to be though, and credit must be given to Cuddington for some heroic defending that gained them an unlikely point. Waverton's 13 were outstanding to a girl and had played exactly as they had been asked: like the very good team they are.

Captain Amelia selected Lottie as Player of the Match for her very competent performance on debut.