

## 08/02/20: AFC Waverton Bees vs Runcorn Linnets

Having proved themselves against the team second in the League last week, a Bees team full of confidence took on top-of-table Runcorn Linnets at Hartford.

The game almost got off to an incredible start when Georgia struck the keeper's right-hand post with the kick-off – players of both teams standing like statues for three or four seconds until someone finally woke up and dealt with the rebound. Sensing Runcorn were slightly taken aback by this direct approach, Waverton attacked relentlessly. With Ella resolute on the left, Menna dangerous on the right and Millie and Raphi using the ball intelligently in the middle to feed Georgia up front, the first fifteen minutes was one-way traffic. Just five minutes into the game and Waverton had been denied by the woodwork twice as Raphi's shot from the right struck the opposite post, but the girls got the reward their pressure merited when Georgia's corner from the right was unfortunately headed into Runcorn's net by their own captain – a real shame for her as she was the only player brave enough to try and head it.

To their credit, Runcorn galvanised themselves following this setback and took the fight to Waverton, this coinciding with a slight reshuffle of the Waverton line-up. Lottie, already belligerent at right-back, moved across into central defence to give Amelia a rest, and she impressed with her discipline in a position she had never played before. She was assisted by Millie, who brought the tracking back she had worked well on in training to delay attacks down Runcorn's left, and Daisy who took some intelligent goal-kicks to find Ella unmarked on the left wing. Runcorn though, 2-1 winners in the reverse fixture and four points clear at the top of the League at kick-off, showed their qualities with another quick attack down the left. Waverton were outnumbered four to three and Runcorn found the extra player on the right who smashed a rocket finish over Amelie's head. The Bees fought hard in the remainder of the half, with Amelie getting to show off her much-improved kicking from hand, and Emma, coming on at centre-forward, being unlucky when her driving run through the middle, taking her past three defenders, was just about stopped by Runcorn's last defender.

In the second half, Runcorn were a different proposition from the whistle. Evie and Amelia resumed their very effective two-girl defensive partnership, and with Sarina unbeatable behind them, the three of them extended their magnificent personal form to not conceding a goal in the last 100 minutes that they have been on the pitch together. They were truly tested this week though with Runcorn starting to win the midfield battle: both Amelia and Evie were forced to do a lot of tricky defending running back towards their own goal, and Sarina – frequently a spectator behind them in the last three games – confidently caught half-dozen difficult airborne balls that flew at her from all angles, sometimes under pressure from nearby Runcorn players.

Aside from an excellent first-time strike from Menna from Emma's cross that nearly squirmed through the legs of Runcorn's keeper, the Bees were hanging on at this point, but a midfield reshuffle for the last quarter saw the tide turn once more. With the instructions of "remember to track back" ringing in their ears, Raphi, Daisy and Millie in particular came on and helped Ruby wrestle back a bit more possession. Captain Raphi demonstrated great discipline and selflessness in basically playing left back rather than left wing to annul Runcorn's attacks down the right. Ruby now had a bit more freedom to drive forwards, and she did so, joining twin strikers Emma and Georgia in pressing Runcorn back, and for the last 5-10 minutes it was the Linnets defenders and goalkeeper who had to work. Great pressure at goal-kicks saw both Ruby and Raphi almost get clear chances, and another great run from Emma fizzled out at the last second when she just couldn't find the final ball for Georgia. Runcorn defended well though, and for all their pressure, the Bees could only really muster one more shot, Daisy meeting a clearance first-time with such force that it cleared the 6m fence behind the goal.

A great game finished in a draw, a fair result with both sides equally happy. Unlike last week, the Bees had really had to work and defend to keep their point, and they certainly hadn't shirked that hard work.

With Sarina being asked to pick Player of the Match, team captains Raphi and Amelia spoke up to suggest that Sarina should be Player of the Match for her excellent performance in goal, a suggestion roundly supported by all her team-mates and coaches alike. Sarina had her say too, selecting Daisy as her Player of the Match.

The Bees are now six games unbeaten – looking forward to seeing them continue displaying such confidence when the League resumes after half-term.