

29/02/20: AFC Waverton Bees vs Winsford

The Bees took their unbeaten run to Moss Farm this week to take on a Winsford team that had inflicted a surprise reverse on them before Christmas.

With Storm Jorge gusting straight across the pitch, the Bees got their passing game going and immediately put Winsford on the back foot. Millie was instrumental in this, the ball seemingly glued to her toes as she turned defence into attack with a couple of beautiful turns and numerous neat passes in central midfield that allowed Ruby alongside her to show off her new-found dribbling skills to surge through the centre. With Georgia seeing plenty of the ball on the right wing, the Bees virtually camped on the edge of Winsford's box. Strikers Emma and Raphi were complementing each other well with Emma staying on the last defender's shoulder and Raphi coming short and wide. Emma pulled off a couple of glorious drag-backs to retain possession and Raphi – when found with some great first-time passes from Sophia – was a threat in the inside left channel, but Waverton couldn't fashion any really clear cut chances with Winsford's defenders seeming to get a foot in at the last minute. As such, shots were limited to difficult long-range efforts from Ruby and Georgia that went well wide in the wind and one that Daisy caught very sweetly that flew just the wrong side of the keeper's right-hand post. All this pressure brought several corners, but these were of limited benefit as the wind put them straight of play from one side and over everyone's head from the other.

From one such corner, Winsford launched a rapid counterattack that saw their skilful striker burst free. Goalkeeper Sarina – in her only action of the very one-sided first half – blocked the first effort and was able to snaffle the follow up too. Sarina's inactivity was mainly down to the work of captain Amelia and co-defender Lottie. They were both strong, assertive and both increasingly confident in bringing the ball forward. Amelia in particular showed great composure to win the ball back, beat any strikers in close attendance, surge forwards and find a pass to put Winsford on the defensive once more. Alongside her Lottie showed great aptitude in dealing with bouncing balls, especially when running back towards her own goal, and good understanding to shepherd balls out of play. Providing a shield in front of them, Sophia and Daisy anchored midfield with strong tackling. Amelie – despite her reservations at playing up front – maintained the pressure and a couple of good touches almost put Emma away. The half-time whistle saw Waverton well on top, but without the goal their dominance deserved.

The Bees put their foot down even further in the second half, play virtually one-way traffic towards the Winsford goal. Winsford's forays into the Waverton half were limited to two long balls early on that Sarina, on at left back, cleared competently, and a single dangerous break that was foiled by Amelie bravely coming off her line to block the striker's shot; this, and the subsequent lengthy kick from her hands, being testament to the work she has put in with Orla, the U18s' keeper.

Other than that, the Bees' bombardment continued. Menna, now on the left wing, was the main threat and was impressive in picking the right option between when to beat the defender on the outside and when to pass inside. Georgia, now playing in attack, also had Winsford's defenders backpedalling repeatedly as she ran at them, Winsford's centre-half doing well to keep her off the scoresheet.

Behind her, Ruby simply owned midfield. She won tackle after tackle and powered past defenders to rain shots down on the Winsford goal. Two efforts were well saved by the keeper, another rolled agonisingly wide of the right-hand post with the keeper finally beaten and a well-struck effort from the edge of the box just cleared the bar. With Winsford struggling to clear their lines, Georgia met a goal-kick with a first time shot that also flashed just wide, and on the right wing, Ella maintained the pressure, linking well with Raphi as both played intelligently to play the other into space and fire dangerous balls into the box. Several lengthy scrambles in and around the six yard box saw Winsford hanging on for dear life, succeeding through a

combination of good saves, last ditch tackles and the fact the ball just wouldn't sit down for Waverton players: Menna, Raphi, Emma and Ella all just having to take that extra touch that allowed a defender to close the door. The wind wasn't helping either: a first time volley from Ella flew out for a throw-in 40yds away, and when Emma finally had the space to get a shot away that was seemingly destined for the far corner, the wind caught it and allowed the keeper to pluck it from the air as it held up in front of her.

Desperate to not see such dominance go unrewarded, first Amelia and then Lottie, Waverton's only defenders for the last 10 minutes, also pushed forwards. With two Winsford players remaining on the halfway line, they were only tested once, both racing back to quickly and confidently dispossess them and launch another attack.

It wasn't to be though, and the full-time whistle went on the third draw in a row. Credit to Winsford who defended heroically – and especially to their keeper who was excellent – to become only the second team to keep the Bees goalless all season.

The girls were disappointed at the end, but they were a credit to themselves in that they didn't become frustrated on the pitch and that they kept going, kept playing and kept trying to find the goal that would have brought three points. Equally, they should be very pleased with a clean sheet.

Player of the Match, selected by Emma, was Menna for her excellent play on the left wing in the second half.