

## 17<sup>th</sup> October 2020: AFC Waverton U13 Bees vs Vale Juniors

The Bees put in their best performance of the season against a very strong Vale team in an enjoyable game at Hartford.

In stark contrast to their last outing, Waverton roared out of the blocks, determined not to be dominated from the off, and were the stronger team in the opening exchanges, with Ruby impressive in setting the tone with some strong tackles in the centre of the pitch that let Vale know they weren't going to have everything their own way. Having won the ball back, Ruby showed how much she had developed the offensive side of her game with a number of dragbacks and subsequent good passes that got Georgia free down the right. This was the catalyst for a number of dangerous attacks, with Georgia firing several crosses into the Vale box as well as smashing a couple of long-range efforts just wide of the near post. Striker Emma, living on scraps, ran her socks off regardless, putting pressure on Vale's defenders and drawing fouls, and was unlucky to be caught offside when eager to latch onto one particularly inviting through ball. Vale defended well though, and despite forcing a couple of corners, Waverton couldn't make this early spell of pressure count.

As Vale settled into their game, the Bees got ample opportunity to demonstrate their defensive qualities and tenacity, particularly the back three and goalkeeper. Amelia had her hands full with yet another battering-ram centre forward, as did Elsa and Daisy with marauding right and left wingers respectively. Amelia dealt with her opposite number in typically phlegmatic fashion, but either side of her Elsa and Daisy really stepped their games up, attacking the ball to either make important tackles or intercept passes. Behind them, goalkeeper Amelie was outstanding in keeping Vale out when they did get through with some confident handling and bravely closing down advancing strikers, keeping out one goal-bound rocket with her chest at point blank range, and going to ground at the striker's feet to snaffle the ball on another occasion. The work at training on defending corners also saw a vast improvement on the Bees' last game, with Millie and Sophia attacking the ball at the near post and just about effecting a clearance that saw the ball fly across the goal behind goalkeeper Amelie in a hearts-in-mouth moment before a team-mate hammered it clear.

All the midfield did their bit without the ball as well, with Ella, Georgia, Millie and captain Raphi all putting in commendable efforts to get back from any rare forays forward to help Ruby and the defence break up Vale attacks, but at the break, Vale led 1-0.

The second half was as open as the first, with Vale committing numbers forward, and the Bees attempting to exploit the space this left in behind. Vale had made some switches though that saw The World's Fastest Girl™ now playing on their right wing, and Elsa, one of the Bees' stand-out players, had her work cut out. After losing a couple of foot-races that resulted in dangerous crosses, Elsa had the wit to change her approach and attack the ball before it got the winger, cutting off her supply. Evie, on at right back, also had her hands full, but she too showed great tenacity, the bruises on her shins testament to the battles she was fighting.

New goalie Sarina was in the thick of the action too. Like Amelie in the first half she showed her courageous side, suffering a heavy collision with an onrushing Vale player, but this didn't deter her. Her best save came when she'd stumbled and was prone on the goal line when the shot arrived, but she somehow managed to flick the ball just wide of the far post. On another occasion, a combination of Evie, Amelia and Sarina somehow managed to crowd out two Vale players attempting to poke the ball into an open goal from about a yard out; again, such committed defending testament to the team's determination. As the Bees tired though, their high standards slipped slightly in the last quarter, exposing old frailties, and three more goals were shipped from lapses of concentration at goal kicks and corners.

The Bees kept the pressure on though. Sophia and then Ella at left midfield harried Vale players and both then played simple, effective passes into Millie to launch counter-attacks, and the Bees created more chances going forward as the game wore on. With a combination of aggression and skill Ruby and Georgia were a constant threat down the right, and only consistently good defending from Vale's left back averted the danger. Raphi, now playing centre forward was excellent with her hold-up play, allowing her midfielders to get forward. Ella was unlucky when the ball broke to her on the left side of the box, but it was slightly behind

her and the chance was lost; Daisy, in a similar position with two minutes to go, was also unlucky when her well-hit shot from 20yds, destined for the bottom corner, was saved by the fingertips of Vale's keeper sprawling at full stretch to her right.

A 4-0 loss sounds like a one-sided game, but it was anything but, with the Bees relishing the challenge of playing such a good team, and acquitting themselves well. To a girl the team stuck to their tasks: goalkeepers were brave and concentrating, defenders were assertive and alert, midfielders put the yards in tracking back and attacking, and attackers harried defenders and held the ball up.

Player of the Match was Raphi, picked by Elsa from a host of plausible candidates.