

24th October 2020: AFC Waverton U13 Bees vs Appleton Avengers

The Bees' tough run of fixtures continued against Appleton Avengers, arguably the best team in the U13 age group.

Waverton were up against it from the off, and with a fairly strong breeze blowing in Appleton's favour as well, it was a struggle to get any foothold in the game or apply any pressure on the Appleton goal, but fortunately, Waverton's commitment picked up where it left off last week. Appleton's central midfielders displayed their quality to monopolise possession and free their dangerous wingers. Unfortunately for left back Elsa, a shocking case of copyright infringement saw the *actual* World's Fastest Girl™ playing on Appleton's right wing in the first half. She was a danger throughout, but the Waverton defence was very sharp on the '16' call and pushed up enough to catch either the winger or a teammate offside more than once. On the couple of occasions that offside wasn't given, the Bees were saved by excellent last ditch tackles by Amelia and Elsa, alert covering across from Daisy, brave closing down from goalkeeper Sarina and they also benefitted when Appleton had a goal chalked off for handball in the build-up. Going forward, the Bees were severely hampered by the headwind and the quality of their opponents. Daisy's goal-kicks provided momentary respite with enough height and distance to get up towards the half-way line, unfortunately despite Ella's best efforts to get the ball under control and the Bees on the front foot, Appleton's aggression soon had them advancing on the Bees' back three almost immediately. Millie did get free briefly wide on the right, an excellent touch both controlling a goal kick sprayed to the opposite side and taking it past an advancing Avenger, but before she could free Georgia ahead of her, she too was crowded out and Appleton advanced again. As shot after shot rained down on the Bees' goal, Sarina, in her best display of the season, showed good hands to make a couple of good saves, and the Bees were again assertive defending corners, Georgia selflessly spending more time defending than attacking. The only chink of light in the first half came when Ruby, combative as ever, broke through Appleton's midfield chokehold to advance on their box, but she too was forced off the ball, giving Appleton's goalkeeper her only touch of the half. It was probably no surprise that she had an enormous kick as well, and the Bees were back-peddalling once again. More shots were fired in, more saves were made, more corners were conceded: the constant pressure eventually broke Waverton's concentration, the girls almost shell-shocked as, following a corner, an Appleton midfielder advanced unchallenged to the penalty spot to dispatch a fierce shot high beyond Sarina to open the scoring.

At 1-0 at half-time though, the Bees were somehow still in it, no mean feat in a game in which the girls knew it was going to be a backs-to-the-wall fight throughout, a position earned by their commitment to defending. The second half was no easier. Lottie brought added energy to midfield, but with Appleton's dangerous winger swapping to the left flank, it was now Evie, on at right back, who found herself clutching thin air more than once. Evie more than made amends though, doing very well, in conjunction with Amelia and new goalkeeper Amelie, to get the better of two or three goal-mouth scrambles to keep the scoreline respectable. New wingers Menna and Sophia also had their hands full defending. Menna relieved pressure with some excellent throw-ins and also managed to wriggle away from her marker on the halfway line a couple of times to give the Bees a sniff of attacking, and she was also intelligent in attempting to retain possession with some backwards passes. Sophia put excellent pressure on on the left wing and also made a couple of interceptions that enabled her to feed Raphi behind Appleton's advancing defenders. Appleton's superiority however saw ever more shots and crosses peppering Waverton's goal, and having found their range, they added three goals in quick succession during the middle period of the half, the pick being a shot dispatched from the left side of the box into the far top corner, giving the unsuspecting Amelie no chance.

The Bees dug deep on their reserves of pride and commitment though, and the last ten minutes was the most even part of the game. Amelie pulled off a stunning diving catch to keep out a fifth, and Amelia was starting to get the upper hand over all of Appleton's forwards, racing across to snuff out danger in the box or winning forceful tackles. Daisy relieved some pressure with an excellent header to cut out a cross-field pass, Emma dropped back into midfield to get involved and won more than her fair share of tackles, and Lottie's driving runs started getting Appleton back-peddalling for the first time. One run saw her burst through a couple of tackles and deep into the left side of the Appleton box, but she just couldn't find a team-mate in the

middle. A handball on the edge of the centre circle saw Waverton finally register a shot on target with Daisy smashing a 30yd free kick towards the bottom corner, and she was unlucky for the second week running to see the keeper just about equal to it. The pick of the Bees' forays forward came when Raphi, playing her last game for the club before she joins Tranmere Rovers next week, retained possession well on the half way line, beat one defender there and then beat a second with a glorious nutmeg that had everyone on the sideline holding their tongues – a fitting way for Raphi to finish her Waverton career.

The Bees could easily have given up and folded when the score went from 1-0 to 4-0 in such a short space of time in the second half, but they didn't, showing great resilience and determination against a team that, since the start of last season, has lost just one League game and averaged 5 goals a game. Such resolve will stand both players and team in good stead as the season progresses.

Raphi also had the honour of choosing Player of the Match, and she picked co-captain Amelia for her determined performance.