

## 5<sup>th</sup> December 2020: AFC Waverton U13 Bees vs Glenavon Athletic Belles

The Bees had their first 'home' game, their first 11-a-side game and their first Cup game at Christleton on Saturday – and the girls marked such an auspicious occasion with a hard-won victory against a committed Glenavon Athletic Belles side.

It was also the Bees' first game on a muddy grass pitch for almost two years, and the first thing they had to get to grips with were the conditions: a slow and undulating surface with variable bounce and energy-sapping patches of mud. However, after four football-free weeks the girls sprang out of the traps and began the brighter of the two teams. A strong central midfield partnership of Lottie and Ruby were the catalysts for this, with Lottie tenacious in the tackle and Ruby driving deep into Glenavon's half. Ahead of them, Millie, in a deep attacking role, and Georgia, leading the line, further stretched Glenavon's defence with typically good link play and it was only some strong defending by their centre-half on the edge of the box that kept Waverton at bay. Emma was using her pace on the left to cause further worry, and Menna on the other flank was getting joy of her own; eventually, one of her passes into space down the right flank was collected by Georgia and she got around her opposite number to hammer a dangerous cross into the six-yard box that was too hot for the goalkeeper to handle. Emma's goal-sniffing ability was undiminished by lockdown and she was perfectly placed to tap in the rebound to open the scoring, it being no more than the Bees deserved.

Glenavon were stung into action though, and other than a shot from Amelia, up for a corner, and a free kick that Daisy whipped dangerously into the box, it was the visitors that looked the more threatening for the remainder of the opening period. Playing with a back four for the first time was proving trickier than anticipated for the Bees, and the line of four defenders over the wider pitch was becoming crooked, playing Glenavon attackers onside. Amelia was required to competently snuff out danger more than once, including from team-mates' hurried clearances across the face of goal, and Daisy also managed to just about get back to make a vital clearance with Glenavon's striker ready to pounce. Behind them, Amelie's handling was assured, claiming numerous crosses confidently. A number of Glenavon corners also came to nought, and two free-kicks in dangerous positions just cleared the bar. With Glenavon encouraged that their increased aggression was drawing them nearer to an equaliser, Waverton just about hung on to their lead to half-time, the biggest escape coming when a ball flew beyond Amelie and across the six yard-box, only for it to bobble cruelly in front of Glenavon's right winger, who couldn't get a clean enough touch to equalise with the open goal yawning in front of her.

Waverton regrouped at half-time, and the back four in particular were better organised and better able to deal with their opponent's threat. Sophie, playing up from the U12s, was growing into the game against older opposition, attacking the ball and making vital interceptions; Elsa at left-back was as dependable as ever, solid in the tackle, thunderous with clearances from her trusty left boot, and relieving pressure with her throw-ins down the line. Captain Amelia was similarly obdurate, leading by encouragement as well as by example, always in the right place at the right time and always cool and composed to bring the ball forward into midfield when the time was right.

Glenavon weren't out of it though. Amelie's concentration was immaculate when she advanced to the edge of her box to block an onrushing attacker, and Daisy proved to be just as alert as she made a strong challenge behind the stranded goalkeeper to deny another Glenavon player who was poised to tap into the open goal. Waverton's luck held when they failed to deal with a corner and Glenavon did finally get the ball in the net, only for it to be chalked off for handball.

With the away side committing more players forward to try to attain parity, counter-attacking opportunities for the Bees arose. With Lily providing fresh legs and focus at centre-forward, and Georgia now marauding down the right wing, Glenavon were indebted to their own goalkeeper whose handling was faultless in the second period. She clutched several of Georgia's crosses, whether they were head-height or bobbling across the mud, and she deserved her luck when Millie's close range effort came back off the post, struck her back and went behind for a corner. Lily was running the channels and providing an outlet for Waverton with her

determination to beat defenders as the game became even more nervous as the clock ran down. Ella, on for Emma on the left wing, kept up the good work, calmly linking well with both Elsa behind her and Lily in front of her to keep the Bees going forward; Sarina, on for Millie in the middle of the park inside the last 10 minutes, did her bit tracking back and also sprayed one lovely pass out to Georgia on the right wing. Of all the girls though, Lottie and Ruby in the engine room epitomised the Bees' performance: they were still ferocious in the middle of the park, winning crunching tackles and bringing the ball forwards through the mud, even 70 minutes into the game.

With less than 5 minutes remaining, Georgia settled everyone's nerves with Waverton's second, as she latched onto Daisy's long throw-in down the right flank to fire into the Glenavon net from the edge of the box – almost a carbon copy of her goal in the Bees' last game a month ago. Credit to Glenavon and their impressive attitude: they didn't let this late setback diminish their attacking intent, and Sophia, on at right back, had to make one vital interception to deny their left winger running onto a slide-rule through-ball and maintain the Bees' first clean sheet of the season.

The Bees deserved their 2-0 victory based on their application and unleashing of 4-weeks'-worth of pent-up enthusiasm, the larger size and poorer condition of the pitch, and the extra 10 minutes duration, proving no obstacle to progression to the second round.

Special mention to the girls that were substitutes, as some of them spent a long time doing their bit for the team on the side-lines without complaining, and then maintained the team's high standards when they did get on. Thanks also to Sophie and Lily from the U12s for helping out – both looked comfortable playing up a year.

U12s Coach Julie picked Lottie as Player of the Match for her all-action, non-stop performance, and Glenavon picked Menna and Lily as their Players of the Match – all well-deserved. Roll on Round 2!