

Saturday 23rd April 2022

Bristol & West 1 ABs 2 (Game 1)

Taking on a youthful looking Bristol and West Vets team looked quite a challenge as both sides warmed up, but once play got underway the ABs settled quickly into a pattern of play blending experience and skill with organisation and discipline.

Steve Taylor, Mike Handley & Paramjit Hayre moved the ball confidently around the back all comfortable on the ball and waiting for the chance to move forward through the midfield which was excellently marshalled by **Bruce Baron** sitting just in front of the back three transitioning via **Steve Li, Mike Verity & Trevor Denison** to a dynamic front line of **Brian Hopkins, Balbir Singh and John Peirce** the latter opening the scoring with a sweet finish as early as the third minute. It was the culmination of a delightful passing move that, as with many, started at the back before going from side to side finally reaching **Mike Verity** who injected a little pace before crossing for **John** to control and strike cleanly past the B & W keeper.

In seven minutes, one became two; again, a composed build up but with their defence packing the D the ball fell to **Trevor Denison** just inside the circle and the next anyone knew was hearing that satisfying thud of a ball smashing into the backboards.

And so the game proceeded, Bristol and West's attacks being well marshalled by the AB defence and then patient build up by ABs – a familiar pattern disturbed twice in the first half; the first when a free hit was given on the halfway line – quickly taken whilst B & W complained – driven into the D for **JP** to collect and take around the keeper to claim his second only for play to be called back -apparently the free hit had not been properly taken (a subject for much debate over a pint later in the day). The second was when **Mike Wingent** got in behind the AB defence to cross sweetly for a tap in as the first half drew to a close.

The second half saw the AB debut of **Lawrence McCran** (Mac to his friends) making the long trip down from Chesterfield, he came on for **JP** (trying to nurse an injured body through a two-match afternoon) on the right side of defence as we switched to the 4 – 4(diamond) - 2 formation. The transition was seamless, and **Mac** was soon launching **Steve Li and Balbir** down the right whilst **Trevor and Brian** were linking equally well down the left. Sadly, no more goals but a very pleasing 2 - 1 win.

We left the pitch with a great sense of a team job well done – everybody had played their part and it had been an impressive display of passing hockey - so most enjoyable – and when the 10 in front had failed to contain B & W, **Richard Boucher** was there keeping out all but the one where he had no chance!

And of course, a big thank you to **Graham Reynolds** for another excellent umpiring performance (notwithstanding the controversy of the alleged third goal !!).

The team also owe special thanks to their “Captain for the Day” (**Bruce Baron**) whose ceaseless & selfless running and distribution in the role of pivot, plus his leadership on the pitch, enabled those around him to look good!” If he hadn't been involved in the choice of Player of the Day, then he would have won that accolade.

Author: Mike Verity.

ABs 1 Southampton Cockburns 0 (Game 2)

ABs started this game rather slowly probably due to the pre-match glasses of port kindly supplied by Southampton. The first attack by Southampton resulted in a rather harsh short corner but **Richard Boucher's** well set-out tactics for defending shorts worked well and the ball was cleared. ABs soon organised and got into their rhythm.

Skipper **Bruce Baron** started controlling midfield from the base of the diamond with distribution varying left and right through **Trevor Denison and Steve Li**; linking well with **Mike Verity** at the top of the diamond. **Balbir Singh and Brian Hopkins** found space up front and pressured the opposition defence. When Southampton pressed forward the defence was in control with **Steve Taylor, Mike Handley, "Mac" McCran and Paramjit Hayre** standing firm and moving the ball from side to side until an opening set the attack moving. Southampton did manage to get 2 shots on goal but on each occasion **Richard Boucher** was well positioned to stop the shot and the defence calmly cleared the ball. A smart move up the right with an excellent dummy by **Steve Li**, found **Balbir** in space and he attacked the D and popped the ball onto a defender's foot to win a short corner.

A well-rehearsed short corner routine, injected by **Brian Hopkins** was stopped by **Steve Taylor** and **Mike Verity** stepped up to return the ball to **Brian** for a near-post tap in but unfortunately this time the ball evaded **Brian's** stick!

ABs started the 2nd half with good inter-passing through the midfield and **Trevor Denison**, from wide on the left, drove forward and won a short corner. **Mike Verity's** well struck shot from the short pinged off the post. ABs started to dominate but the Southampton keeper was having a fine game, saving **Trevor's** excellent flick just inside the left post.

John Peirce substituted for **Balbir** and found space in the D but was unable to capitalise on some swift passes from **Mike Verity**. Another short corner was won following sustained pressure, but the resulting shot was straight at the keeper.

Bruce, Mike Verity and Steve Li worked well down the right and **Steve Li** received the ball in the D, waited for the keeper to commit, and then calmly lifted the ball over him to open the scoring; 1 - 0.

Southampton counter-attacked and won a short corner which **Bruce** cleared and then ABs played out the game in a positive manner to achieve a well-deserved win.

Author: Mike Handley.

Bruce Baron (Captain), Richard Boucher (GK), Steve Taylor, Paramjit Hayre, Steve Li, Trevor Denison, Mike Handley, Mike Verity, Brian Hopkins, John Peirce, Mac McCran and Balbir Singh.

Player of the day: Mike Verity.

Graham Reynolds (Umpire).

Supporters: Clive Kendall, Diane Boucher and Lou Handley.

ABs thank Mike Wingent for his assistance in organising the games, Bruce Baron for his Captaincy and authors Mike Verity and Mike Handley.