

## Saffron Walden Town 4 – 3 Comberton Crusaders

A low lying and eye piercing sun bathed the remote pitch in light as Comberton lined up against a high flying Saffron Walden Town. A carpet of mushrooms greeted the players together with a good group of supporters.

Comberton started brightly and had some good early possession. Tom Dawes and Ciaran Coyle combined well in midfield but couldn't get to a shooting position. Saffron Walden had some quick players in the middle of the park and gradually they began to take some control of the game. The usually slick Comberton players couldn't get the ball under control and with passes going wayward they handed the initiative to Saffron Walden. The sloppiness continued and a lot of pressure fell on the defence as the reds exploited space in midfield.

Ten minutes in and Crusaders lost possession from a casual throw-in on the centre line. Saffron Walden drove forward and as has happened in previous matches the Comberton defence seemed to offer no resistance. A player drifted into the box behind the defenders and redirected the cross with a superb header into the net to open the scoring for Saffron Walden.

The goal seemed to wake up Comberton because the effort level rose considerably and some of the signature passing and movement appeared. The Saffron Walden defence stood up well but they were under the cosh for long periods and something had to give. Josh Price fired in corner, two minutes before half-time. It fell directly at the feet of Tom Dawes who guided it gently into the net to equalise and set up an interesting second half.

From the start of the second half Saffron Walden were pressing from the front in an attempt to force Comberton into mistakes. It worked. A poor goal kick was intercepted by the left winger and he shot from close range to beat the keeper and push the score to 2-1.

Comberton responded by upping the tempo yet again and pushing forward. Despite the pleasing football they didn't threaten the keeper and when it broke down Saffron Walden counter attacked in numbers. In one incident they carried the ball to the edge of the box and Joe Cary came flying out of goal to clear but it struck a defender and allowed oncoming Saffron Walden players to force it into the net to make it 3-1.

It was an all too familiar pattern and they went further ahead moments later when another Saffron Walden counter attack was met with a shambles at the back. They did finish well though and deserved to be 4-1 up with ten minutes left.

Comberton didn't panic and kept playing their stylish football. Felix Serby moved the ball along the right wing and threaded it though the defence to Joe McNally in the box. His shot was saved by the keeper but only as far as Tom who was alongside. Tom tried to place it but the goalie got a hand to it again and it bobbed

out once more to left winger Harry Newman who was following in. Harry found the net for the third time in two games and suddenly the crowd got excited as tight finish loomed.

Time was ticking away and Comberton were in the ascendancy. Ciaran Coyle trapped the ball in midfield and made a long pass through to Aaron Biggs. Aaron touched it to Felix who flicked it on to Tom. As usual his control was perfect and he took it down and shot hard and low into the net to close the gap to 4-3.

In the final minute Comberton continued to press but Saffron Walden had just enough in the tank to see out the game. The supporters had been treated to an exciting battle with some good technical football from both sides.

Once again the Comberton players seemed to lose concentration in a game and hand control to the opposition. Maybe it was a late night in front of the TV but the lethargic start to each half ultimately cost them the game. When they started to play it was a joy to watch and the coaches need to figure out a way to get the players doing for 30 minutes rather than just in short spells. Saffron Walden gave a measured performance and were excellent on the break. They will score many goals against teams in this league and their early season success is due to good concentration and keeping it simple.

**Player of the week:** Tom Dawes