

EAST ANGLIAN COUNTIES – Women ESSEX 2 v 1 SUFFOLK

HARWICH & PARKESTON FC - Thursday 3rd April 2008

Suffolk say good-bye to the title.

The Suffolk Ladies team, having lost their last match, were determined to try to retain the League Championship as they took the field against Essex. They needed to take at least a point from this fixture and then to beat Cambs in the final fixture to keep the title, but were again without their influential striker, Helen Bass, due to injury.

Suffolk started brightly, and should have scored after only 2 minutes – but Blake headed a cross from the left over an empty net from close range. 3 minutes later, another chance went begging, when Turner slid a great pass through the channel to Allum who delayed until the keeper committed herself before chipping the ball over her towards the goal. However, the delay allowed a defender to get back and scramble the ball clear. In the 8th minute, another chance came the way of the visitors – this time Turner met a cross from the right, but her header was too high, and the chance was lost.

After this opening spell, Suffolk were to find it difficult to create openings as the home team grew in confidence and determination. Indeed the next chance for the visitors came 10 minutes later – not from an opening, but a fine long range drive from Everett which went just wide. Essex were by now beginning to see more of the ball in midfield, and mid-way through the half created their first chance. A surging run down the left by Longhurst, followed by a fine cross to Rushen, whose shot from 15 yards struck the bar, came back to Longhurst who also drove against the bar, before the defence scrambled it to safety. In her efforts to defend the goal under this onslaught, Suffolk keeper Lunn injured her back and required lengthy treatment.

The remainder of the first half was a midfield struggle, with neither side gaining control, and the visitors were restricted to 2 attempts at goal – both of which were well saved by Essex keeper, Bridgeman. First Allum found herself in space close to goal, and Bridgeman did well to block her shot. Then she saved well from Parnell whose low drive was goal-bound. Out of the blue, for Essex, full-back Binks shot from the half-way line – seeing Lunn off her line – but the keeper got back to tip over for a corner. This seemed to inspire the home side and they took the lead 7 minutes before half-time. The ball was played out to Longhurst on the left, and, although Smith defended well by showing the winger towards the corner flag, she managed to turn and lay the ball back to Carty whose fine angled drive found the far corner of the net. At this point the home team introduced 2 substitutes due to injury, but in first half injury time they doubled the lead when a free-kick from Prior found Binks, who beat Lunn to the ball and out-jumped the defenders to head in from close range.

The half-time score may have flattered the home team, but they came out in the second half and completely dominated the game. They had the ball in the net in the 1st minute, but a hand was used and the goal disallowed. During the early stages of this period, Carty and Longhurst caused the Suffolk

defence problems with their incisive movement and fine combination play. However, for the most part, they failed to find the target and when they did, keeper Lunn denied them.

In an isolated Suffolk attack, Allum lobbed the keeper from 40 yards, but the ball dropped onto the top of the net. Meanwhile, at the other end, a corner from Prior beat Lunn, but somehow the defenders scrambled the ball off the line. Then Lunn pulled off a great save – diving to her left to deny Longhurst, who had beaten the Suffolk off-side trap, to carry the ball fully 30 yards before unleashing a drive from 15 yards. Mid-way through the half, Lunn put her team in trouble with a poor kick which went straight to Brown, and as the keeper lay on the floor, obviously in pain, Gordon somehow got back to block the shot from Brown and turn the ball for a corner. It seemed that Lunn was struggling with back pain, and she was replaced by Topper.

The home team continued to dominate, and Topper showed up well throughout the remainder of the game. She quickly established some confidence among her defenders and in truth, the home team seemed content with their 2-goal lead. Their best chance was a fine free-kick by Prior which was well saved by Topper. In the final minutes, the Suffolk team seemed to raise their game and suddenly showed a much greater determination, which actually saw them reduce the deficit with 2 minutes to go. Parnell was the scorer, when, following a good move down the right, the ball was played across the edge of the penalty area by Bitten to Parnell whose angled drive beat Bridgeman and went in off the post. Suffolk finished the game strongly, and if the game had lasted another 5 minutes, might even have stolen the point they needed from the game. However, it was not to be and the better team won on the night.

Essex moved into second place in the table – 2 points behind Cambs. The top 4 teams all have 1 game to play – Suffolk (3rd) play Cambs (1st), while Essex (2nd) play Norfolk (4th). A win for Suffolk may secure only 3rd place – but they must show the same quality as did in the early stages of this match and as much determination as they showed in the latter stages.
