

Match Report – Sunday 17th April
Boys Under 18 Mercian League Quarter Final
Oxford Hawks 4 Woking 3

For the second weekend in a row, the Under 18's faced a long and winding road in the hope of adding further honours to an already illustrious season. Joined by teammates Will Swain and Tim Ming, who had both been excluded by age restrictions from the National Plate, the team were in confident mood for their match with Oxford.

Another hot and sunny day again tested the fitness levels of both sides, especially Woking, as several players were turning out following their exploits at Club day. Oxford looked a strong team in the warm up and had topped their league with 5 wins out of 6, drawing their only other match. However, Woking started strongly and early pressure led to several fine saves from the Oxford Goalkeeper, Nas Zafar. A Will Farrer dribble past several defenders led to a Tim Ming flick, that seemed destined for the top right hand corner of the net, except for an exceptional stick save on the goal line. The pressure continued and a short corner resulted in yet another set of acrobatics from Nas. With Woking unrewarded, Oxford mounted a quick counter attack and a ball driven hard into the 'D' was diverted high into the goal, this despite Keeper, Patrick Haddad, getting a hand to it.

So, a familiar story, Woking pressing and getting caught on the break 0-1, however, it was to get worse, the confidence seemed to drain from the team and within moments an Oxford short corner resulted in a powerful drag flick, which left both Patrick and defender Tim Ming helpless. 0-2 Jack Biggs the scorer.

Coach Sam Ellis made a number of changes in the hope of restoring some balance, but yet another short corner was fired into the struggling defence and Patrick pulled off a magnificent save. This was again matched by Nas at the other end, denying Woking a route back into the match. Oxford were now pressing extremely hard and had gained control of the midfield. A further short corner saw them extend their lead with a fine finish by Sam Chilvers, for a 0-3 lead. The travelling supporters feared the worst at this stage and the home support displayed an air of relief following the early pressures of the game.

This Woking team must never be underestimated and they dug deep. From seemingly nowhere Chris Way reduced the deficit 1-3. The short corner routine that had been so good the previous week did not quite gel and despite several chances to further reduce the arrears, Woking went into the half time team talk at 1-3.

Nas again had to produce a super save within a minute of the second half. An Oxford breakout saw their effort narrowly miss the far post, with Woking again missing opportunities from a short corner. The game livened further by a double sending off within a few minutes. An Oxford midfield player received a yellow for a raised arm. This was followed almost immediately by a yellow for Will Swain for a stick tackle. Woking adapted better to the changes and within a couple of minutes had reduced the lead, again with a Chris Way strike, 2-3. A second yellow for the Oxford side, saw the away team raise their game still further, with Oxford at this stage content to punt the ball away off the far end of the pitch.

Despite Woking trying everything to break down a resolute Oxford defence, Oxford themselves were by no means second best in this match and from a quick counter attack, a disputed short corner was awarded. Sam Chilvers stepped up to score his second and Oxford's fourth of the match for a 2-4 lead.

Woking never gave up and almost immediately, they were back in the match with a strike by Tom Leggett, 3-4.

Still there was time for a Chris Way reverse shot, which just went over the bar. Tim Downes dribbled past two defenders, just failing to get a shot in, before the ball went behind for a long corner.

The final whistle went with Woking again forcing the pace and Oxford showing strong defensive qualities. This was a quality match with both sides in the ascendancy at different times during the game. Oxford deserved the win if only because their finishing was sharper, otherwise there was nothing to choose between the sides. It was well umpired throughout and kept all the spectators on the edge of their seats.

And so, we come to the end of the long and winding road, after eleven seasons of watching young Ming, Mole, Swain, and obviously Stone. Latterly joined by Way, Parker, Haddad, Leggett, Sugg, Rozier-Pamplin, Downes, Imrie, Patel, Humphries, Von Hanisch, Samuels, Camsey, Farrer, to name but a few, this exceptional team will go their separate ways. A number of these players will create the backbone of what will be undoubtedly a strong Under 18's for next season, many will be part of the Men's 1st and 2nd team squads, such is the talent of this young side.

It has been an absolute pleasure to watch and write the match reports this year and I shall miss the buzz of trying to get it all down accurately, (or anyway making up the bits I missed). The task next season will be in the very able hands of Steve Parker. Good Luck Steve.

With thanks to Rik Farrer, Sam Ellis, Andy Pike, Nora Leggett and Chris Burton-Brown.

Cue music 'The long and winding road'