

Oxford Hawks 1 Hampstead 3

Sunday 30th January 2000

With the Carlton looking like JJB Sports as the newly coated squad tried on the Medium, then Large and then Extra Large Pinnacled Rain Jackets, with many realising that, perhaps, they had made an improper size selection (see size does matter!) the Men's 1's set off for the M40 and a trip to Oxford for the start of the second part of the season after a long break, the first game after the excellent win against St Albans.

The hot news of Division Two over the New Year was the unexpected return (before the transfer deadline of 1st January) to Beeston of former St Albans player coach Craig Keegan, who had joined the Saints, as they like to be called, in September with the aim of securing promotion, dealt a big blow by Rob Thompson's pre Christmas hat trick.

Maybe it was this loss that prompted his return to Nottingham or a home sickness (even though Keegan is Tasmanian!) that young Mikey must feel, stuck in the mountains of Switzerland and facing unexpected exams that have curtailed his anticipated return to play in this part of the season's matches. Or is it that Snowboarding has a stronger grip on his free time?

Whatever, Will Hayes was drafted into the squad and Phil Pearson made a welcome return to the National League bench. Rob Thompson was missing with a bad back, so Tom Matthews, back from Oz (and looking well on it), led the line, with Simon Moffat taking the left midfield and Bruno the right.

It was a slip streaming trip behind a pustule looking boring Bora virtually all the way to Junction 8, with people wondering how the driver might ever had chosen that colour. From Banbury Road then to St Edwards School on the Woodstock Road where there is a brand new private Health Club-cum Douglas Bader Sports Hall for the school, so select (£200 odd to join was it?) that Turner could only secure a pee in their toilet (there being no facilities on the ground at all) by taking his shoes off first - no, it was not Muslim run either. It did mean that his shoes stayed dry, which was just as well probably after all.

The pitch was more sandy than our last trip and there was a strong gale that blew the chairs over and the subs numbers away - and more than once. After re-acclimatisation the game opened with Hampstead unable to get a stick on the ball for the first 90 seconds. Andy von Mayer rescued the act with a strong tackle and we were on our way. In the 7th minute Hawks had their first short corner and then ball was cleared to Craig Carolan who burst away up an inside right channel and sped through their defence, connecting with Matt Hetherington at the top of the dee and his reverse push-flick was slotted home for 1-0.

This prompted a New Year Pearl of Hockey Wisdom from beaver brained/attired Turner, "Let's hope they get more short corners!" Then there were queries, prompting the Umps to confer. Had Diego Hetherington struck with the hand of God? Had he missed it and gently palmed it in at close range? The debate rages on today; not that you'd notice, that is.

Rob Turner's wish was almost answered a minute later when another classic sucker counter attack saw a huge gap open in the home defence, with Tom Matthews leading the charge from Craig's pass but the ball was struck wide of the right post.

Matt came over for more builder's tape for his ankles the new-fangled shin guards cutting him to ribbons but two applications (about 4 yards of the stuff) saw him right. It

is rumoured that Homebase will soon be in with an offer of sponsorship - if tape take-up continues at this alarming rate.

Oxford equalised in the 20th minute through Styles after a valiant double block from Steve Dodson in the Hampstead goal came to nought. Hawks had split the defence along its inside right channel and had two men free at the top of the dee. However, at the other end, the home side defence had its hearts in its mouth momentarily as the defender lost control and let the ball skid goalwards only for the keeper to have to skip back and kick it away.

Then in the 26th minute Hetherington slotted home his 20th League goal of the season after a mazy, skilful run from Tom Matthews, fed by a great ball from Soma. This was vintage Big Horse. How he managed to bobble the ball at the top of the dee, few will know (probably including Tom himself) but it was one of those "come and have a go" Matthews runs that defenders seem to love. A minute later another Soma inspired shot into the dee from a free hit was met on the deflection by Craig but skimmed just wide with no defender anywhere near.

Hampstead could then have finished the game off before half time but seemed tentative. Tom had another good effort saved by a twice blocking 'keeper after Bruno had opened up some space. At then other end, Oxford Hawks pressed twice just as the half ended. On the first occasion, Dan and Steve met at the top of the circle and the Ump gave us the considerable benefit of the doubt and a minute later Dan masterfully steered the ball away to the left from in front of goal but unfortunately aimed it straight at their man!

The half ended with another bit of football inspired trickery as Craig found himself steaming up the middle with a single defender to beat. Pele-like, he sent the ball right and rounded the defender on the left but alas a yard too far and the 'keeper was able to narrow the angle and got to the ball first to shovel it to safety.

At half time Soma outlawed the short pass that Hawks were picking up at ease and demanded more effort: too many Christmas puddings still being felt. He asked for early short corners to bury the match and true enough they came in the 35th and 36th minutes. Dan's satellite navigational skills were left on the boat and with Tommy otherwise on duty at the top of the dee, ready for a strike, the push out was slightly askew.

Andy von Mayer then opted for some footie magic of his own, with an Emlyn Hughes run from deep left as he scorched the turf with three jinks past each defender but when he passed to Bruno, the latter's flick was saved. On came Gun Gun Mayer to prowl up front and show us those striking skills, so well known to the Elephant Man.

Then in the 42nd minute, Moff's stick was unceremoniously chopped in the 25 and Soma was just wide with the ground force flick that skimmed the right post after the resulting short corner. Oxford Hawks then pressed hard but good work from von Mayer and Dodson kept them out, a special stop from Andy being particularly noteworthy. Hampstead defended another short corner as Ump David Thomson tried to even the game out and it was not until a set piece move from a free hit for Carolan saw him score the third in the 56th minute with a strong push. Soma deftly pushed the ball from the free to Craig who ran across the dee to inside left from where there was room for his shot on target.

Hampstead then rather hung on. Will Hayes came on for a Hampstead NHL debut. Tommy had to leave the spot of warmth on the side of the pitch and get back to right

half, whereupon Turner, doubtless impressive with the Yak lined headgear, took his eye off the ball and went over to keep the spot warm.

Steve pulled off an excellent save with the glove. Mild mannered Phil Meakin was then yellow carded with four minutes to go and the game ended with the visitors concentrating on ball retention to keep the lead intact. Ump Alan Notman reckoned that Hampstead had also broken up an attack with another body check and that he would have yellow carded another Hampstead player, so it was as well that it was something in David Thomson's half that he felt he should not interfere with.

So, all in all a bit of a lacklustre display from the Boys, with Steve tipping Andy von Mayer for Man of the Match, despite Turner's attempts to rig the ballot announcement (as ever, we know). There will always be a job for him at the General Election.

Also noteworthy, praise be, was that acting skipper Dallas' green arm band so affected him that he stayed on the pitch for the full 70 minutes; wonders will never cease. Who would have guessed that Phil would beat him to the chair in 2000?

TEAM: Dodson; von Mayer, Meakin, Watts (captain), Williams; Moffat, Singh, Solaun; Hetherington, Matthews, Carolan

SUBS: Hayes, Mayer, Hall, Bodey, Pearson

SCORING

Hetherington	F	8 mins	0-1
Styles	F	20	1-1
Hetherington	F	26	1-2
Carolan	F	56	1-3