

HITCHIN 1 – 2 RTFC COLTS

With a long run of consecutive home games completed, the Colts finally had an away match this morning when the boys took on Hitchin Pumas in the return fixture of one we played just under a month ago. Royston Colts came away 3-1 winners in the home game but it was a win they had to work hard for and today's match was bound to be as equally competitive between two fairly evenly matched sides. So with both teams being able to field a full starting eleven and on a lovely, sunny December morning with a large, tidy looking pitch to play football on, we were under way.

Royston began the match in a positive manor and it only took two minutes before our first chance was created when Jems shot from close range was pushed behind by the Hitchin keeper. Ollie floated the resulting corner in and the defensive clearance fell to Ed who drove in a decent shot from 25 yards that flew just over the bar. The Pumas first meaningful attack broke down quickly at the other end five minutes later as Marcel came off his line to comfortably avert any danger and gather the ball. A huge boot forward from our goalie bounced once on the halfway line and over a few Hitchin Players heads which gave Harry the perfect chance to use his strength and pace to bulldoze his way through and latch on to the ball, get himself in behind the Pumas defence and into a one on one position with the home keepers goalie. Harry took the chance with good composure and the Colts had themselves an early one nil lead. Mid way through the first half the game became a bit scrappy and at times we were losing our shape but the sheer guts and determination from the boys in defence and midfield kept the home sides scoring chances down to a bare minimum and the frustration of the Hitchin teams lack of success in breaking us down was clear to see at times as several fouls were given against the Pumas. Despite some niggling challenges going in on them, the likes of Jesse and Stan Foster, battling away and making some crucial challenges in midfield still provided our front players with more half chances to score although with just five minutes of the first half remaining, Christmas came early for the Colts as we got a huge helping hand to finally extend our narrow lead. A foul from around ten yards outside the Hitchin penalty area led to a free kick that Fred drove in from distance. Fred's dead ball delivery was decently struck but it didn't really look like troubling the keeper until the Hitchin defender made a slight fumble (that's being polite) of his clearance and knocked the ball into his own net. All gifts gratefully received, we'll take that thank you! Two nil up at half time!

The first real chance of the second half fell to Royston once again as Harry and Jem linked up well with a one two that Jem almost converted into a goal but the chance was well parried away for another Colts corner. Ollie's corner kick was met by Jesse who nearly got a much deserved goal but that too was stopped by the Pumas confident keeper. For long periods of the second half the Royston boys had to dig deep and work hard to try and grind out a result from this game because at two nil down and under some serious pressure, this result of this game looked far from being decided yet. Hitchin could have scored fifteen minutes into the half after playing some direct football when a long ball found a Pumas forward in space. The lad hit a sweet looking lob which fortunately for us, sailed just over the crossbar. A few moments later the home side got the breakthrough they probably deserved in all fairness when they opened up our back lines to find the net with a low strike and suddenly things looked very iffy. Hitchin won a free kick two minutes after scoring which was struck firmly and on target but Marcel made a comfortable save. At the other end Ollie came close to scoring but his shot was saved and just moments later it was nails in the mouth time again as the big lad in the home sides midfield seemed to waltz past the Colts boys far too easily but his dangerous run ended with a shot that went just wide. With their tails up and Hitchin playing on the front foot there was always the hope that we would catch them on the counter attack as the home team began to play a

much higher line and with about twenty minutes remaining Harry found himself in a chase for a ball that had beaten all the Hitchin defenders. With our number ten and the Pumas keeper in a 50/50 race for a loose ball that neither player was going to back out of, the two players collided heavily and unfortunately for Hitchins goalie, he looked like he'd come out of it far worse off. The ref, who up until this point seemed to be having a reasonable game, decided to show Harry a yellow card for the challenge to the bewilderment of pretty much everyone looking on including those in the Hitchin camp as there was no malice in the challenge what so ever but most importantly, the keeper was able to get back to his feet after some treatment and he bravely played on and all fears of snapped bones, severed heads etc. were quashed.

Back on with the game and within the last fifteen minutes, Jem burst through the Pumas defence and carved out another half chance for the Colts but his shot missed the target by just a couple of feet. As we went into the last five minutes it seemed like we'd have to settle for a draw as Hitchin looked certain to score when a hectic spell of shots, clearances and goal mouth drama in our box was finally brought to end thanks to a brilliant finger tip save from close range by Marcel, which ultimately meant the Colts hung on to take all three points.

There's no doubt this wasn't the prettiest game ever, nor the best the Colts have ever played but the sheer dogged determination and will to win and not give up has paid dividends for us yet again. As Adam said in the post match talk, you sometimes have to win ugly and grind out results and at times when you haven't played great but you still come away with all three points, then you know you are definitely doing something right. There were special mentions for Harry this week who continues to cause headaches for our opponents defenders, for Marcel who's crucial late save meant we didn't drop points, for Stan Foster who worked tirelessly yet again in midfield and for man of the match Jesse who, despite being slightly younger and smaller than the players he was marking this morning, was never intimidated as he helped us gain another hard earned win.

The Colts may have played more games than the teams below us now, but with just one game to play before Christmas, the boys sit 4th in Division one tonight, nine points clear of the bottom three and just three points behind second and third spot which is a massive achievement halfway through our first ever season in the top flight.