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FOOTBALL: Wingate & Finchley rivals to visit for semi-final tie

Town draw positives before play-offs

By Ronan Sullivan

london/community@newsquest.co.uk

ENFIELD Town drew 2-2 with second-placed Chatham Town despite some unsporting interference from the crowd to seal a third-place finish and a home semi-final play-off against Wingate & Finchley.

After guaranteeing a play-off place the weekend prior, a win against Chatham would've seen the Towners leapfrog their opponents into second to secure a home draw for the final too.

For Town, a couple of notable absences stood out in league top-scorer Marcus Wyllie and midfielder Sam Youngs, who have scored 30 and 23 league goals, respectively.

"I rested them", Town manager Gavin Macpherson told the Enfield Independent. "I made the decisions beforehand that I wouldn't bring them on the pitch unless I needed to because I didn't want to lose them.

"We've got a lot of knocks around the camp at the moment and they were fit. So, if I start losing my fit players and I don't get those mended in time [for the semi-final], then we are desperately short - it's not a big squad."

The game itself proved tough for Town without Wyllie and Young, with Chatham applying all of the early pressure and the hosts struggling to create.

Against the run of play however, Town scored through winger Ollie Knight, who slid in at the back post to convert a cross by Bernie Tanner.

A wonderful double save by keeper Adi Connolly preserved Town's lead, but Chatham were level as Jamie Yila's cross was converted by Kareem Isiaka.

Chatham continued dominating the ball, as Yila caused problems on the left, but honours were even at the break.

Town began the second half brightly, with much more intensity in their play, and on the 50-minute mark, their inten-



DELIGHT - Ollie Knight celebrates scoring for Enfield Town. Image: Phil Davison

sity was rewarded as a volleyed pass by Joe Payne gave Knight the space to lob Chatham's onrushing goalkeeper and restore Town's lead.

But controversy was just around the corner as, in the 67th minute, confusion over a whistle in the Chatham crowd saw Town's Sam Robins poke the ball

past keeper Connolly into his own net.

Despite protestations from the Town bench and Macpherson, the goal stood.

"My view was the referee had blown the whistle", Macpherson said. "But he [the referee] said, 'it was down by my side'. It's an element of cheating, but it's the fans, so the referee does not have

jurisdiction over them, as he put it. The referee has to give the goal."

With the game drifting towards its denouement, Knight smashed a volley from outside the area onto the crossbar in agonising fashion, before the final whistle.

Macpherson urged his players to seal promotion for the fans, starting with

their tough semi-final against Wingate.

"I said to the boys, we've got to do it for the supporters. They are the best fans in the league," he added.

"I'm sure they [the fans] realise there's so much hard work to do and we've got to do it: we've got to leave them knowing that we haven't left any stone unturned."

RUGBY: Cluster side battle in loss

Tigers in hard-fought clash

ENFIELD Tigers were one of five teams in a Harpenden under-18 cluster squad which pushed a strong Eton Manor outfit all the way in a 35-29 defeat at Redbourn Lane on Sunday.

Manor roared out of the blocks in the early exchanges and, such was their dominance, they rocketed into a 20-0 lead at the home of Harpenden.

However, any notions this was about to turn into an easy ride for the Wanstead side, were given short shrift as the cluster side, which also included players from Old Grammarians, Watford and Welwyn, fought back tenaciously.

Enfield's Niamh Gallagher, harbouring ambitions of playing for Ireland U-20s, loomed large in this game as her successful chip and chase, followed by a further try from a Welwyn player trimmed the deficit to eight points.

It set the tone for a helter-skelter second half with the cluster team, through the efforts of another Welwyn player who went over in the corner, giving Manor further cause for concern.

The frantic nature of an exciting game saw both teams taking it in turns to score and, after Manor had crossed, Gallagher again opened

them up with a second successful chip and chase, having also converted her own handiwork.

The cluster team were now within a point and after a lapse in concentration again let in Manor for a further try, Gallagher's pinpoint crossfield kick set up Megan Cawte-Davey, as the cluster team continued to cling to their rivals' coat-tails.

It was still anyone's game at this point, however; a couple of handling errors from the cluster side were seized upon by Manor as they finally carried the day in what proved a fine advertisement for the women's game.

Borough bag final point, Enfield end with rare win

ENFIELD Borough's hopes of ending the Thurlow Nunn League Division One South season with an eighth straight win were foiled last week. They completed their campaign with a trip to mid-table rivals Basildon Town, but had to settle for a share of the spoils after a 1-1 draw. Alex Awobimpe was on target for Borough, who saw 17-goal Marco Magunga finish as their top scorer for the season.

And, considering they had gone 14 games without a win in the early part of the season, the point gained left them in 13th place in the final table, two points behind their hosts. Enfield finished their Isthmian North season on a winning note against relegated Stowmarket Town.

They had not tasted success in 15 games, since a 1-0 victory at Wroxham in late January, and scored just four times in that run. But after a goalless first half at the RDA Stadium, they managed to score four times in the space of 16 minutes to run out 4-0 winners. Robert Clark opened the scoring eight minutes after the break, with Adam Vyse doubling the advantage on the hour.

And Sam Bantick bagged a quickfire brace to complete the tally and ensure only a sixth win in 36 league outings.

Frankie Franz was named supporters' player of the season for Enfield, who will play home matches at Hertford Town in 2024-25.