

ANDOVER 2 PAULTON ROVERS 2

Contributed by Tony Walsh
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Rovers drop vital points as they squander a two goal advantage.

Match report from Andy Harris

If Rovers fail to make the play offs they will look back on this game as one where they shed two points they should have had wrapped up in the first half. While they were indeed unfortunate not to have been awarded a penalty, while the Andover equaliser was questionable, there is no doubt they have only themselves to blame for not killing this contest off early on.

The visitors had a scare in the 3rd minute as Danny Very raced clear, but keeper, Kyle Phillips, pushed out his shot for a corner. The resultant kick came right across the Rovers' defence to Ben Chambers who forced Phillips to make a good save low to his left before the ball was hacked clear. Rovers began to take charge as Josh Jeffries tested home keeper, David Hook, from long range and Matt Cooper blasted over from the edge of the box.

It was no surprise when Rovers went ahead on 9 minutes as Alex Ball sent the ball forward and the header out fell to Jeffries, whose 35 yard volley flew into the top corner giving Hook no chance.

Rovers should have had a penalty 3 minutes later as Ben Lacey was upended just inside the penalty area but after consulting the assistant the referee somehow awarded a free kick right on the edge of the box. The visitors were now playing some superb passing football and produced a move on 32 minutes deserving of a goal as Robbie Claridge sprayed a pass wide from the left across to Lacey and his cross was just behind Cooper who could only scoop the ball over from 8 yards out. Rovers did have a lucky escape on 36 minutes as a pass back to Phillips saw the keeper totally miss kick the ball straight to substitute, Dean Smith, who shot tamely into the keeper's arms.

Rovers doubled their lead right on half time as Charlie Rich sent over a free kick from the right which Claridge nodded down to Jeffries who clipped the ball over to Cooper who headed down for skipper, Dan Cleverley, to volley home.

Having looked very comfortable despite early pressure at the start of the second half Rovers conceded on 54 minutes as the ball broke kindly to Chambers just inside the visitor's half and he raced away to fire home across Phillips from a narrow angle.

Rovers responded as Claridge forced Hook to make a fine save low to his right and on 64 minutes Jeffries collected a ball into the box and rounded Hook only to shoot just wide.

Disaster struck for Rovers on 71 minutes as Ollie Price was harshly adjudged to have held back the advancing Chambers and the referee awarded the penalty. Lee Burch sent Phillips the wrong way with the spot kick and the sides were level.

Jeffries (header), Claridge (volley) and Lee Marshall (free kick), all failed to hit the target as Rovers pressed for a much needed third but it was substitute Joe White who came closest to breaking the deadlock. On 83 minutes Lacey ran at the defence before slipping a pass to the Bristol Rovers' striker who was denied by another fine save from Hook. From the resultant corner a header goal ward found White inside the 6 yard box but with ball under his feet he could get no power on his shot and again Hook came to Andover's rescue.

In the final few minutes it was the home side pressing as they forced two successive corners but the game ended in stalemate, a result which will give the young Andover side much encouragement but left Rovers frustrated on a night where results elsewhere had gone their way.

Team: Phillips, Ball (Cousins 45), Rich (Waters 62 mins), Marshall, Price, Cooper, Jeffries, Lane, Claridge (White 79 mins), Cleverley (C), Lacey.
Subs not used: Milsom, Lock

Rovers' Star Man: Josh Jeffries with his second contender for "Goal of the Season"!

Referee: W Bull
Assts: R Burton / C Burton

Attendance: 87

For an alternative view Andover's website is at:- <http://www.andover-fc.co.uk/index.php>