

## AFC HAYES 2 PAULTON ROVERS 2

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Frustrating afternoon for Rovers - Match report from Andy Harris

What looked an easy task on paper (after all Rovers won 6-1 here last season and Hayes had conceded 9 without reply in their two opening defeats) turned out to be anything but and Rovers can consider themselves fortunate to have left with their unbeaten record intact.

There was no sign of the struggle to come as Rob Claridge's flicked header from a Rob Cousins's free kick in the opening minute sent Ricky Hulbert clear but rather than test the keeper he opted for a delicate lob which cleared the bar. Two minutes later and Ben Cleverley's quick free kick to brother Dan, saw his dangerous cross well cut out by the home keeper, Mark Phillipott. The play began to switch from end to end and Rovers were fortunate not to concede a penalty on 9 minutes as the lively, Ricky Pither went down under a challenge from the advancing Kyle Phillips but fortunately for the visitors play was waived on and they broke down the right where an excellent run and cross from Dean Pendry saw Claridge head over. Josh Jefferies forced a save from Phillipott and Pither was off target as both sides spurned chances but Rovers came close on 18 minutes as a free kick from the left glanced off a defender's head and onto the cross bar.

However Hayes's indiscipline proved their undoing 5 minutes later as another free kick from Cousins was only partially cleared and Dan Cleverley chested the ball down before volleying home from 20 yards out.

Dean Clark missed a good chance to equalise and only a great block from Pendry prevented Pither restoring parity but on 36 minutes the home side had another penalty claim turned down as once again Phillips dived at Pither's feet. However the hosts did level a minute from the interval as Clark and Pither combined well and the former rounded the keeper to set up an easy chance for Pither who tucked it away neatly.

The second period began exactly like the first with Hulbert failing to hit the target, this time with his head, in the opening minute. Rovers were finding it difficult to cope with the runs of Victor Osubu and he went close with a run and shot on 52 minutes. Pete Sheppard who scored a hat trick here last season found the net again a minute later but it was disallowed for offside. Osubu at one end and Ben Cleverley at the other then had shots saved before Hayes missed a great chance to take the lead. Jay Pereira's run down the right ended with a cross to the far post where the unmarked Osubu somehow missed from 5 yards out!

It was to prove costly as Rovers restored their lead on 71 minutes as Ben Cleverley's corner from the right dropped to Ollie Price and his shot from 10 yards gave the keeper no chance. Jon French almost sealed victory but his shot went just wide while Osubu missed the target again with 3 minutes left.

However in the 4th minute of added time an innocuous looking through ball saw Phillips charge from his line and somehow fail to connect leaving Ross Ahir a simple tap in to earn his side their first point of the season which overall they thoroughly deserved.

The failure to convert chances into goals that haunted Andy Jones's men last season was clearly back in evidence and if Rovers are to mount a serious challenge this season it is an area they will need to improve on, starting on Monday against Taunton Town.

Team: Phillips, Pendry, Boys (Lane 66 mins), Jefferies (French 45 mins), Price, Cousins, B Cleverley, Hulbert, Claridge, D Cleverley (C), Sheppard (Jacobs 88 mins)

Referee: Alf Field  
Assts: Michael Barnes / Boris Zbirka

Attendance: 61

Star Man: Dean Pendry