

## RAF FA Veterans vs Thames Valley Air Ambulance Select XI, 10 Nov 18 played at Oxford City Football Club



...and so it was that the Vets travelled to the beautiful city of Oxford for a game at the home of Oxford City Football Club. Arriving a good few hours before kick off, (there was a children's tournament being played on arrival and the kick off for our game was put back to 12.30pm), the boys looked fit and the rain was staying away. Oh, if only!!

Just as the RAF were about to kick off the heavens opened and boy did it rain. I think we were right in the middle of a storm cloud and the rain just hammered down incessantly, so much so that if you could hear what I have on my voice recorder, you'd be shocked at the noise. I had to shout to make myself heard in order to bring you this match report although I had taken cover in the stand by then.

Did it affect the players? It certainly didn't look that way. Right from the off the RAF went onto the attack and with McCormick pulling the strings and looking as though he played in this weather daily, it didn't look as if we would wait long for a goal. However, as in previous games, the finishing was to let the boys in blue down a number of times. TVAA had a couple of breaks but the RAF defence was stoic in its application and Taylor in the RAF goal was left to deal with just back passes and goal kicks. Robertson, making his debut, had to be replaced by Donnelly following a hamstring pull but it didn't dampen the RAF spirit (the rain was doing that).



After 15 minutes it looked as though the RAF had broken the deadlock after a long ball saw Wanless give chase. He beat the offside trap, beat the last defender and then beat the goalkeeper but ran slightly wide. No matter, Stewart was coming in from the left and it would be a simple tap in. Not a bit of it. Whether or not there was a call, what happened next was like a scene from of a keystone cops movie. Stewart and Wanless tackled each other and the ball went out harmlessly for a goal kick. Still 0-0. A corner for the RAF then saw McCormick get in a header but it landed on top of the net and the TVAA goal was living a charmed life. The rain got worse!!

The TVAA keeper then spilt a long shot and Stewart was on it like a flash. Fair play to the keeper though

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as he was up and at the feet of Stewart in a nano second. The resultant thud could be heard above the battering rain with the keeper coming off the worst for the collision though the ref deemed it a free kick for TVAA.



After 32 minutes, Bartley made way for Laing and the RAF attacked again. Wanless charged down the left and into the box where a mistimed tackle saw Wanless hit the floor...PENALTY!! No one was going to take the ball off him as he got up, placed the ball and then slotted it right footed with the keeper rooted to the spot and it's 1-0 RAF. The rain eased slightly and a bright sky started to overtake the black that had been there since kick off. An omen of brighter things to come? Possibly. In the 36th minute the RAF get a free kick about 30 yards out. Robison, who had been having a solid game at the back

stepped up to take and decided to hit it. To everyone's surprise, the ball went through the wall, through the mass of bodies in the box and through the goalkeeper. 2-0 RAF.

The team in blue were bossing this game. The conditions were horrendous but the boys kept playing football. Nice passing, control, upping the pace or slowing the game down when necessary, it was a joy to watch. Even with players changing positions during the game there was a fluidity to the RAF game with all the players knowing what their jobs were irrespective of where they found themselves on the pitch. Pressing so high that centre halves were getting in shots from the edge of the box, full backs raiding down flanks, midfielders dominating and creating and as I said, a joy to watch. In the 40th minute TVAA got their first shot in on goal but Taylor was down to his left smartly to save. Another free kick for the RAF, this time from 25 yards, saw Robison on the ball again. Would he try his luck once more? He ran in and dinked a lovely little ball beyond the wall but as Stewart tried to get out of the way for the inrushing forwards to pounce, the ball hit him on the backside and fell to a defender to launch clear. A rainbow appeared and the ref blew for half time. 2-0 RAF.

TVAA to kick off and immediately, the RAF won the ball back and attacked but a foul on the keeper brought the attack to an end. Pugh was then replaced by Coull as the RAF searched for the goals that their play deserved. It was wave after wave of RAF pressure but the finish was lacking. It started raining again. Then, against all odds, TVAA scored. After 65 minutes, a mistake over on the right saw the forward into the box. Taylor came out and tackled but the ref deemed it as over the top and penalty to the reds. It was struck firmly past Taylor and 2-1 RAF. Another free kick from Robison, out wide on the right was swung into the far post. There was Coull to head back across the keeper and it's 3-1 RAF with 67 minutes on the clock. A great response to conceding that penalty. Again, the RAF came and chances



went for Coull, Wanless, Laing and Stewart before a poor corner from Dales got himself another nomination for Harry the Horse. A better corner from Wanless minutes later saw Coull rise above everyone to head home again and it's 4-1 RAF with 84 minutes gone. In the 89th minute the RAF extended their lead when Wanless received a pass from the back, out on the left hand side. He brought the ball forward before Coull made a diagonal run from right to left taking defenders with him. Wanless then cut inside and stroked the ball past a helpless keeper to make it 5-1. And that's how it stayed.

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Another brilliant performance by the RAF FA Vets in the most difficult of conditions. Everyone got some part of the game and all performed admirably. Admiral is the right word here as that much water fell it was like playing at sea. (Steve Tindle was weather watching and informed us at half time that 31 inches of rain had fallen in that first half alone though we don't know where he got his stats from). Anyways, what can be learnt from today? Well, the boys are on fire!

The squad has strength depth and whoever comes in to fill a position knows exactly what they have to do and they're doing it. Matt Beattie and his coaching team are really firing the boys up, challenging them to perform in every game and play a system that three months ago they would never have dreamed of. Steve Tindle, who had not been for a while due to work commitments, stated after the game that in the 18 months he has been involved with the Vets side, that is the best he has seen them play by far. Praise indeed from the big man.

Starting XI: Taylor, Barker, Robison, McCormick, Robertson, Shanks, Bryan, Pugh, Bartley, Stewart, Wanless.

Subs: Milam, Green, Dales, Laing, Donnelly, Findler, Butt, Letch, Coull

Other RAF FA Vets representatives: Beattie (RTM), Hancocks (Mr A), Salkeld (Coach), Wilkinson (Coach), Payne (Therapist), Bones (Photo), Sheehan (Comms), Kerr (Water Boy), Tindle (Weatherman).



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