

F.A. Vase Round Three

St Neots 3 Soham Town Rangers 4 (*after extra time*)

In the final analysis this match was probably won and lost as early as the 23rd minute when an outrageous but unpunished late challenge by Steve Bugg inflicted on St Neots keeper Steve Corry a thigh injury that left the keeper to play the rest of the game on one leg. His courage was tremendous coming out after the break with a heavily bandaged right leg that restricted his mobility and distribution and it was ironic that it was to be Bugg who netted the winning goal four minutes from time. St Neots seem to be saving their best performances for the FA Vase for after coming back from two goals behind to win in the previous round they came back twice from behind this time and led 3-2 but two goals in the second half of extra time saw the Ridgeons League side through to the last 32.

St Neots had the first chance after three minutes when skipper Damian Matthews saw his shot from a Russell Lawes free kick deflected into the side netting. However two minutes later Soham were ahead in their first attack as Cameron Clark missed a defensive header leaving Lawes to attempt a saving clearance but he and Steve Bugg collided with the ball finishing up in the net from the Soham player's touch. Soham now exerted great pressure and in the space of thirty seconds Corry made two outstanding saves to deny headers from Andy Coleman and Bugg. The injury to Corry resulted in a lengthy delay after which St Neots clawed their way back into the game. Coleman diverted a Steve Webb free kick past his own keeper and the post and Barry Dellar had a shot on the turn blocked by a defender. Visiting keeper Ashley Gillings then spilled a Lawes free kick and Tom Hobbs managed to put the rebound high over the bar from six yards. Hobbs was then denied a second time when Gillings produced a brilliant reaction save to push his near post header from a Steve Jelley corner over the bar. However two minutes before the break from another Jelley corner Russell Lawes powered in his second goal in successive games to see the sides level at the break.

There was some surprise that Corry returned after the break and it was noticeable in the early stages of the second half that St Neots priority was to protect their goalkeeper. However the decision to allow him to continue was fully vindicated as he made several important saves punching the ball clear because of his immobility. After 61 minutes Soham were back in front when Alan North scored direct from a corner with Corry unable to cover the full extent of his goal line. However St Neots were in no mood to submit and from a Barry Dellar cross on 75 minutes Marcus Cumberbatch scored the goal that sent the game into extra time. Substitute Jason Meeds was making a welcome return to the home side and two minutes into extra time he showed all the calm skill of a striker as he collected a Steve Webb pass to put St Neots in front. Three saves by Corry from Rob Allis, Michael Simpson and Ricky Dear gave St Neots hope of holding out for another famous victory but as the game moved towards its two hours duration the visitors looked the stronger and when another St Neots substitute Paul Bryant failed to clear Michael Simpson levelled the scores for the third time. The winner after 116 minutes scored by Steve Bugg came from an Allis cross and the striker excessive time wasting celebrations in which he removed his shirt led to Soham's fifth yellow card compared to just one for dissent for the home side. To add insult to injury the Referee blew the final whistle at least two minutes early as St Neots strove for another equaliser but regardless of the defeat the home side can take great pride from an outstanding performance.

St Neots: Corry (S), Clark, Lawes, Webb (S), Matthews, Gatti (Bryant 73m), Hobbs, Jelley, Dellar, Cumberbatch (Kingsbury 114m), Corry (D) (Meeds 64m).

Subs (not used) Griggs and Cavilla