

## Wasteful Ashford made to pay

Contributed by Gareth Coates  
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Ashford Town (Middlesex)1Burgess Hill Town2Suburban League Premier Division,  
Short Lane Stadium  
16th August 2008

Ultimately, Suburban League is not about winning every week. Which is just as well. Ashford's young squad had enough chances to have won this opening game by half-time, yet it was their visitors who took the points. What the Tangerines must take from this defeat is knowledge, specifically to always play to the whistle, but also that, at this level, chances must be taken. The side should also take a lot of confidence from what was essentially a good performance.

Reece Jackson had two good chances to open the scoring for the hosts before the Tangerines took the lead in the 22nd minute. A low cross from Symon James was turned in by George Baldock, whose finish was redolent of Gary Lineker in the 1986 World Cup.

Ashford took complete control of the match, with Wes Goggin (pictured) unlucky not to score with a low drive, while Reece Jackson had three good chances to double the home side's lead. Youngster Jimmy Stanford also had a good opportunity, which was well saved by Jason Downer. Stanford also missed the target twice as the Hillians struggled to stay in touch with the Tangerines.

The second half was scrappier, with the Sussex side determined to stop the hosts playing, and succeeding for long periods. Eleven minutes after the interval, Baldock was denied by Downer and, from the counter-attack, a mix-up between Ross Bennett and Dan Cox allowed Louis Pople a simple finish.

Ashford were not too disheartened by this setback, with both James and Jackson testing the visiting defence, but not really making Downer work, although the visiting 'keeper was brave in stopping Jackson in a one-on-one.

With eighteen minutes remaining, the Hillians took the lead in bizarre fashion. Wes Goggin won a challenge in the visitors' half, but the ball ricocheted back into Ashford territory and to visiting forward Peter Martin. Assistant Referee Beard raised his flag for offside and the home defence stopped. However, referee Kyle Kirkbride, who was excellent in his first game at this level, waved play on. Martin capitalised on the confusion to fire past Cox.

Although Ashford were somewhat shell-shocked by the goal, they continued to play good passing football, without ever testing Downer. In a torrid end to the match, James and Jackson again had chances to score, but the only flashpoint came in the 89th minute. Having hooked an attempted clearance into the air, visiting skipper Charlie Cook blatantly pushed George Baldock inside the 18-yard box, but the referee was unsighted and did not give the penalty.

If Ashford can produce this quality of football week-in, week-out, they will do well this term. However, a cutting edge in front of goal is essential.