Oxford City 2 Leamington 3
Zamaretto League Premier Division
Court Place Farm Satdium, Oxford
Saturday 23rd April 2011

Brakes put their supporters through another roller coaster afternoon, coming from behind twice before making a second half breakthrough which, coupled with Weymouth's victory over Chesham United, means Paul Holleran's side have secured a place in the play offs with a game to spare.

With Lee Downes' suspension kicking in Alex Taylor was bought into the starting line up, Michael Tuohy continuing at left back and Stephan Morley in the centre of defence, with Jamie Hood now banned having missed the match at Truro due to his wife giving birth. Leamington's intent was clear from the kick off as they started at pace. Nick Stanley was unfortunate to catch Richard Batchelor's cross on his shin, and the ball flew over the bar. He had another opportunity from a free kick, but shot straight at City keeper Joe White. Tony Breeden claimed a header from Lee Steele at the other end as the home side eventually found their way into the Leamington half.

Oxford moved in front after 12 minutes, somewhat against the run of play, but former Leyton Orient striker Steele was not going to pass up the kind of chance presented to him after Marvin Martin's cross shot was pushed away from goal by Breeden, and after one touch the ball was in the back of the Brakes net.

Fortunately the lead was short lived, and it was thanks in no small part to superb persistence by Jacob Blyth to win back the ball in midfield, and with a smart turn he moved towards the penalty area. His pass was deflected through perfectly to James Rowe, who ran on to smash a shot across White into the net for the equaliser.

Breeden saved a shot on the turn from Andy Ballard, and Stephan Morley smashed a free kick into the defensive wall, but despite Brakes' evident determination to get a second goal they found themselves behind again 8 minutes before half time. There were furious protestations as Steele fed Jerome Anderson to score, as moments beforehand Oxford keeper White had ventured from his penalty area to handle a bouncing ball with James Rowe closing in. Amazingly the officials let it pass, and the keeper's long kick up field led to his side's second goal.

Nick Stanley was so close to cancelling this out before half time when he battled to keep the ball in play on the right, before turning inside his marker and side footing the ball wide of White, only for a desperate boot to fly in from nowhere to poke it behind for a corner.

Brakes may have been aggrieved at going into the relative sanctuary of the dressing room behind, but they refused to lie down, and continued to push their hosts back in the searing heat. They passed the ball around well on the hard, dusty surface, and Jacob Blyth's stooping header whistled inches wide, before a good lay from Rowe to Neil Barnfield inside the area saw Joe White block with his legs at the expense of a corner.

It was from a similar set piece that Leamington earned their equaliser 6 minutes into the second half, as Scott Lycett rose unmarked to plant a header inside the far post. Rowe then latched onto a lovely lay off from Blyth to smack a rising drive that was pushed away from the top corner by a flying save from White. Tony Breeden produced an equally telling stop to keep out a goal bound header from Andy Ballard, diving full length to push the ball round the post and prevent his side from going behind for a third time.

Leamington continued to push for that all important winner, in the knowledge that with their closest challengers being well beaten at Weymouth, it could secure the final play off position. It finally arrived with 12 minutes remaining, and what a strike it was. Bearing down on the Oxford goal, James Rowe unleashed a powerful low drive the curved around the despairing dive of Joe White and inside the post to the biggest roar of the day from the noisy travelling fans behind the goal.

James Husband provided another boost as he made a welcome return from the recent injury that had threatened to put an end to his season. Leamington continued to enjoy the lions share of possession as the minutes ticked by, and held the ball well to see out the most important victory of the season so far. The players celebrated with the supporters after a brief word from the manager, and deserved every bit of it for giving us a memorable season, whatever happens from hereon in. Paul Holleran and Lee Williams have masterminded a huge improvement on last season;s 10th place finish, and the determination of this side might just see them clear that final hurdle, with promotion now the ultimate prize.

Oxford City: Joe White, Michael Lyon (2 Adam Morris, 80), Wayne Blossom, Jerome Anderson (15 James Dobson, 70), Andy Ballard, Dave Savage, James Clarke, James Organ, James Knight, Lee Steele [C], Marvin Martin (12 Felipe Barcelos, 36).

Sub not used: 16 Paul Davis.

Leamington: Tony Breeden, Scott Lycett, Michael Tuohy, Alex Taylor (15 Jamie Sheldon, 86), Liam Daly, Stephan Morley, Nick Stanley (12 Luke Corbett, 75), Neil Barnfield, Jacob Blyth (14 James Husband, 82), James Rowe, Richard Batchelor.

Subs not used: 16 Chris Knight, 17 Tom Cross.

Attendance: 373

Referee: J Scott

Assistant Referees: P Nemeth & I Lowe

Man of the match: James Rowe