



Exeter City Website

Match Report

One of our Own, Sonny Cox, coupled with a stoppage time penalty save from Vil Sinisalo ended City's rotten winless run as they secured their first three points since September with a 1-0 win over Wycombe Wanderers.

Cox's second league goal for the Grecians was just reward for City's heart to grind out a result as he knocked in Jack Aitchison's delivery, before Sinisalo correctly guessed the direction of Luke Leahy's spot-kick which was controversially given against Harry Kite.

A packed-out St James Park played host to Exeter City's Boxing Day match against Wycombe Wanderers. Following City's loss away at Cambridge on Friday, three points remained elusive for the Grecians who, prior to kick-off, were in 20th position in the League One table. City's opposition were without a win in ten league matches, sitting three places above the Grecians in 17th.

Manager Gary Caldwell named five changes from Friday's defeat with Cox leading the line, making his first start since returning from loan. Will Aimson and Zac Jules came back into the defence, whilst Tom Carroll and Aitchison's return to midfield completed the changes.

Wycombe kicked off, playing towards the Big Bank, and quickly lost possession to City's captain, Reece Cole who played the ball back to Sinisalo for City to settle into the game. Following recent form, City would want to get a foot hold on the game and the man that looked to do that from early was City's number 19, Cox. Cox was proving to be a tricky customer for Wycombe's defence as he was fouled twice in the opening five minutes.

In the seventh minute, Yanic Wildschut had his first and last run at Wycombe's Jack Grimmer. Released by Cole's pass, Wildschut ran 40-yards with the ball, forcing Grimmer back, but eventually Wycombe's right back blocked Wildschut's attempted cross. This missed opportunity proved to be more costly to City than the Grecians had first believed; at some point in the attack, Wildschut picked up an injury.

This injury forced Caldwell into making his first substitution of the afternoon, bringing Ilmari Niskanen on as a left-winger in a direct swap. Unfortunately for Grimmer, Niskanen quickly showed him that his afternoon was not about to get any easier as City's number 14 skipped past him to deliver a delightful, unanswered cross into the back-post.

At the half-hour mark, Jack Aitchison orchestrated a wonderful City attack. Combining with both Cole and Rankine, Aitchison played a one-two with both players on his side of the pitch to eventually run in-behind and win City an unfruitful corner. The match began to fall flat as the half-time whistle loomed closer, with defences coming out on top; however, City looked the most likely of the two sides to score – seeing good chances with Aitchison, Cox, and Niskanen impressing with quick footwork and passing. Despite creating decent chances, City continued to fail to find the final ball – this was showcased by a piece of miscommunication between Aitchison and Jules. After dribbling past one, Aitchison got his head up and saw Cole in space across the pitch. Looking to find City's captain, Aitchison played a hard pass across the floor that was quickly interrupted by the leg of Jules, who was making an under-lapping run, and the ball went out of play.

Just before the break, Cheick Diabate picked up a yellow for a foul at the centre circle. The subsequent free kick had Sinisalo scrambling as the ball was played into the box from deep and, following a melee in the area, a Wycombe attacker hit a volley just over the bar – which was threatening to dip under the woodwork.

Following a back-and-forth half, the sides went into the break with the game hanging in the balance. Either side could take it, and with both in need of three points, the second half promised to be a spectacle.

City's first opportunity of the second half came only after a couple minutes. City played a short corner from the left and, after some dazzling footwork, Dion Rankine played the ball off to Carroll. Carroll then whipped a cross into the danger zone and the ball fell to Alex Hartridge who volleyed straight at the keeper from close range.

Following that, Carroll played a perfectly weighted lobbed pass to Niskanen, who brought the ball down and darted into the box, winning City a throw-in. City were dominating the chances at this point in the match. From the aforementioned throw-in, Jules juggled the ball past one player and sat the ball down for Cole. Cole struck the ball hard and true, forcing a low, diving save from Max Stryjek

City's sustained pressure eventually paid dividends as Cox put the Grecians ahead. Aitchison picked up a long ball, took it past one defender into the box and played the ball back to Cole. Cole then lit up the Big Bank, dancing through a sea of blue shirts, evading any challenge as he edged closer to the goal mouth. Cole's eventual shot was blocked and fell to the feet of Aitchison on the right of the Wycombe area. Aitchison got his head up, dribbled deeper into the box and delivered a chest-height ball across the goal mouth – right into the path of Cox, the fox in the box. Cox was in the right place at the right time as he directed the ball past the keeper in front of an erupting Big Bank, putting City into the lead.

Shortly after, City were saved by the ref's whistle as Wycombe had the ball in Sinisalo's net, courtesy of Kieran Sadlier handling the ball to bring it under his control. Then, Cox was substituted off to chants of "he's one of our own", as St James Park was feeling the Christmas spirit.

The Grecians continued to feed off SJP's energy as they began to berate the Wycombe defence with relentless attack. The best of a handful of chances was a sweet volley hit by Aimson from the edge of the box. Aimson's volley forced an impressive save from Stryjek – leaping to his left to deny City's defender.

Caldwell's third and fourth substitution of the afternoon came on with the same fight and desire shown by the rest of the team in the second half. James Scott and Harry Kite came on with ten minutes remaining of the 90 minutes. Scott pulled off an impressive overhead clearance and then, not to be outdone, Kite slid in to deny a Wycombe chance on the edge of City's box as onlookers had their hearts in their mouths.

The fourth official indicated six additional minutes as Wycombe upped the tempo, playing long balls into City's area. Wycombe substitute, Dale Taylor hit the post as Wycombe continued their barrage. Kite then pulled off another wonderful tackle in the area, winning the ball – although the referee deemed there to be a foul as he pointed to the spot – to the bemusement of onlookers.

Wycombe's Luke Leahy stood over the penalty as SJP felt as though they were about to witness their hard work disassembled. Leahy struck a strong penalty low to the keeper's right – but it was no match for Super Sinisalo! City's number one went the right way and saved the penalty with an outstretched hand, heroics at the St James Road end.

Following two more intense minutes of courageous defending, the referee's whistle blew one last time and City secured three incredibly hard-earned points. A jubilant SJP sang in chorus to all the clichés as the sounds of Neil Diamond, Status Quo, and Dexy's Midnight Runners indicated, what felt like, an enormous three points for the Grecians.