

Bedford Hockey Club win the England Hockey Mixed National Plate

Bedford Hockey Club became England Hockey National Mixed plate champions for the first time in their history after defeating Wisbech Town 3-1 with Alyn Meredith scoring a double at Abbeydale Sports Club, Sheffield. Bedford disposed of Riverside comfortably 7-1 in the last four showdown on Saturday with a fantastic team performance paving the way for a second consecutive finals appearance in the annual competition.



BHC Mixed Champions – (back row) Rob Moulam, Rob Tarrant, Alyn Meredith, James Bilham, Alex Drummond, Simon Dolan, Richard Evans, Dan Mason, Simba Chigwada, Dave Langley, (front row) Kate Costin, Becky Childs, Kelly Bingham, Harri Kinnear, Connie Mason, Katherine Winger, Natalia Norford.

Bedford had a strong squad of men's and ladies first team players assembled including debut appearances in the competition this year by Kelly Bingham, Natalia Norford and Rich Evans. Indeed it was Evans who struck first in the semi final- skillfully dribbling through the Riverside defence before tucking the ball home. Bedford dominated the first half possession, but chances were few and far between in the early exchanges with just short corners testing the Riverside keeper. Bedford however made the pressure tell after half an hour as the mixed player of the season Simba Chigwada finished from close range to give Bedford a cushion. The closing stages of the first half saw Riverside have their best spell of the game and they clawed a goal back with a penalty stroke after Simon Dolan in the Bedford goal was harshly adjudged to have taken out a Riverside forward.

After the break Bedford raised the intensity and put on a fine display of attacking hockey as they hit 5 goals without reply. Strong defending from Dan Mason and Rob Tarrant ensured any Riverside breaks were cut out quickly and Katherine Winger and Alyn Meredyth in the centre of the midfield kept possession well finding Bedford's wide midfielders in plenty of space.

Bedford make the decisive break one minute into the half as Evans set up captain Kate Costin with a simple finish at the back post and it wasn't long before Evans again broke through this time finding player

of the match Connie Mason who slid the ball under the onrushing keeper. As Riverside tired Bedford pushed on with conviction with Evans, Norford and captain Costin adding further goals to secure a place in Sunday's final where they were to face Wisbech Town who beat Preston 3-2 in their fixture.

On a rainy morning Bedford arrived at the final in confident spirits. Bedford rotated their starting line up with Rob Tarrant coming in at right back, Harri Kinnear moving to the left and James Bilham linking up with Ex Wisbech player Dan Mason in the centre of defence. The early exchanges were tight with neither side wanting to make any mistakes. Bedford enjoyed a lot of possession in defence looking to keep the ball but it was Wisbech who had the best opportunity missing a guilt edged chance at the back post before striking the cross bar with a reverse stick effort and seeing a short corner magnificently cleared off the line by Mason.

Midway through the first half, Bedford got the break they were looking for as Alyn Meredith dribbled across the D before unleashing an unstoppable reverse stick shot into the bottom corner. Bedford continued to be the better side as the first half wore on with the defence particularly player of the match Dan Mason and Harri Kinnear impressing with some excellently timed tackles and interceptions. Kate Costin and Kelly Bingham were denied space out wide with Wisbech looking to control Bedford's free flowing attacking hockey with only Norford going close in a rare goal scoring opportunity. With Simon Dolan looking sharp between the posts Bedford took a 1-0 lead into the break.

The game livened up considerably in the second half with several contentious umpiring decisions creating tension between the players. A stroke awarded to Wisbech was reversed and Bedford made them pay shortly after from a short corner which Meredith swept home at the left post before being sent off for 15 minutes in a bizarre decision by the officials. Bedford reshuffled with Alex Drummond coming into the midfield and Chigwada deployed as the lone forward. Despite the numerical disadvantage Bedford kept it tight with Becky Childs, Dave Langley and James Bilham outstanding in defence. Bedford just kept it simple although Wisbech did get a goal back to make the scores 2-1 and increase the tension with a fantastic individual effort.

When back up to full compliment Bedford pushed forward again. Evans sent a great ball to Kelly Bingham but her shot was smothered by the Wisbech goalie; still moments later Bedford did score the goal to put the game out of reach of Wisbech with Natalia Norford finishing at the back post after great build up play from Bedford.



Alyn Meredith, Rob Moulam and Kate Costin



Player of the Match- Dan Mason

After running the clock down Bedford secured a fantastic 3-1 win and a national title which caps a really great season at the club. After the game Chairman Rob Moulam commented – “winning this competition has capped one of the most successful years in recent history of the club. This squad has come back from the massive disappointment of losing in the final last year and returned stronger to prove that we really are one of the best mixed hockey squads in the country. “