

The Under 18's Representative team of the Worcestershire FA could consider themselves unlucky not to have shared the spoils from their final Midland Youth Championship match with high-flying Staffordshire.

The hosts, boasting an unbeaten record in this year's Championship matches, were taken to the wire in a keenly fought contest at Staffordshire's Walsall Wood ground. However, Staffordshire started brightly and took the lead as early as the 4th minute, when Josh Brown popped up to score with a clinical finish. The writing certainly looked on the wall for the visitors in the opening exchanges but Worcestershire slowly but surely began to become more assertive.

Worcestershire played the more fluent football and had long periods of possession, restricting Staffordshire to a more counter-attacking style of play. Tom Allard was in fine form and made several telling contributions with his clever close control. Lucky Nwosu was a constant threat with his power and pace. It was no surprise at all when the visitors equalized in the 18th minute. A left sided free-kick from Jack Cullity was headed home by Paul Hurrell, a player who had just been voted his Counties player of the season.

Worcestershire continued to assert more pressure on their hosts and were unlucky when a superb volley from Ben Hayes dipped just over the crossbar. On the half-hour mark the visitors had a strong penalty appeal waved away by the excellent young referee Oliver Bickle, when Nwosu fell under challenge in the penalty area.

Staffordshire were restricted largely to set-plays and threatening long-throws from Ashley Southall. Indeed, it was a set-play that led to Staffordshire taking the lead in the 34th minute. A free-kick from the left by Jack Sherratt was floated into the penalty-area and Cliff Moyo leapt unchallenged to head home, largely against the run of play. Another volley, this time from Allard, saw Worcestershire go close again but the half-time whistle went with the hosts holding a 2-1 advantage.

The second period was less pacy and intense in comparison to the earlier play, although Worcestershire again started where they had left off in the first-half. Both teams made changes in personnel, which possibly had a worse affect on Worcestershire than their counterparts. The home side seemed to step up a gear but chances for either side were limited as play seemed to stall in midfield for both teams. In the 49th minute Sherratt shot wide of the left-hand upright and on the hour Staffordshire's Matthew Burnett headed just over the bar from a cross from the right flank.

Staffordshire had much the better of the exchanges in the second-half, with their opposition rarely troubling the home goalkeeper. However, players began to tire; Worcestershire seemed to get a second wind and launched a foray of attacks during the final ten minutes. The game had become very stretched as both teams sensed further opportunities to score. Worcestershire gained reward for their efforts with just three minutes left. Chris Smith used his fresh pace to chase down what seemed a hopeless cause. His robust attempt to gain possession when a defender was shepherding the ball out of play on the goal-line paid dividends as he won the ball. He rounded the defender and squared a pass into the path of Daniel Pitt, who slotted the ball home calmly from ten yards out with only the 'keeper to beat.

The draw would have seemed a fitting result to a well-fought encounter but the hosts put paid to that with an injury-time winner. A cross from the right deep into time added on bounced high in the penalty-area and defenders and 'keeper watched without challenge as Josh Brown leapt to loop a header into the net to hand Staffordshire a late win.

The hosts were very generous post-match in acknowledging that a draw would have been just reward for Worcestershire's efforts from a match that didn't really show that one side was challenging for the Championship and the other were at the foot of the table.

