Lions make Oxford see stars

Oxford City Stars 5
Lee Valley Lions 7
(ENIHL South League)

THE trip to mid-table Oxford always looked a test for Lee Valley Lions, languishing at the foot of the league despite a confidence-boosting draw against Swindon, but the visitors proved they were up to the challenge.

The game started badly for the London side as Andy Cox took the lead for Oxford after just 53 seconds. The goal was scored on a delayed penalty against Romanas Fedotovas who would have sat out two minutes for slashing.

But undeterred the Lions seized a powerplay opportunity after five minutes and Paul O'Neill scored his first of the night, with assists going to new boy Andy Watt and Mark Saunders.

And it was Saunders who put Lee Valley 2-1 up seven minutes later, assisted by Scott Beeson.

In the second period, Beeson stepped up to the mark and scored unassisted.

Patrick Knightley clawed a goal back for the Stars, ably assisted by Paul Donohoe, on 22 minutes and Oxford's equaliser came at 28 minutes when an unfortunate error saw the puck to slip past netminder Stefan Nubert.

The hosts had escalated their game, but the Lions were determined.

Fedotovas broke away for a fine unassisted goal on the half hour and James Hatfull redeemed himself after two minutes in the sin bin for holding, scoring with a powerful slapshot on 35 minutes.
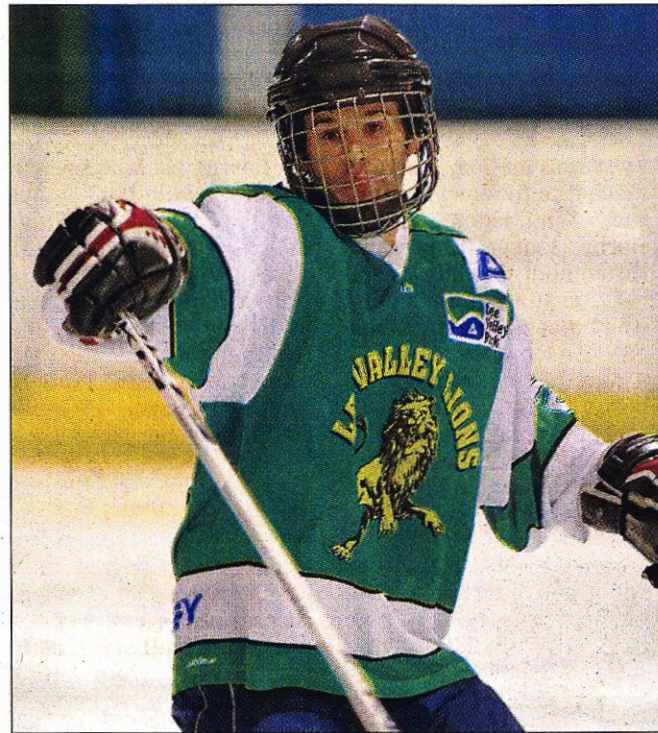
Dean Francis brought the Stars back to within one goal a minute later and it was all to play for in the final period.

Grant Hutcheon scored his first point of the season assisted by James Scott-Joseph and Andy Watt.

Oxford pushed forward, netting once again, but their decision to sacrifice netminder James Skaife for an extra outfield pressure, proved costly as O'Neill hit the puck into the empty net from the far end of the ice, sealing the Stars' fate and securing Lee Valley their first victory.

Assistant captain O'Neill said: "For the first time it all seemed to come together. When it came down to the line we showed that we have the nerve and ability to step up a gear. Obviously this was an important step for us as a team and it will be great head-lifter before the big local derby next Saturday against Romford."

Lee Valley Lions play Romford Spitfires at the Lee Valley Ice Centre Saturday.

IT CAME TOGETHER: Paul O'Neill who scored two goals for the Lions
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