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91st minute strike wins for Epsom and Ewell FC

8 September 2024

Camberley Town 0-1 Epsom and Ewell FC. Combined Counties League – Premier Division South. Saturday 7th September 2024

In my preview for this match, I wrote that on this day in history we had played a club record of 21 matches without a draw, but that sequence came under serious threat at Krooner Park where we required a 91st minute winner from Ali Fofahan to break the stalemate and clinch all three points with the only goal against Camberley Town.

On a personal note, this was my thirty-fourth visit to Camberley Town's ground, and the 66th time I had watched these two teams do battle. These clubs have now met each other on 95 occasions, which by some distance makes the Krooners our most regular opponent. However, it has been a long time since we had been this superior against them, as the last dozen or so results hadn't been great, with exception of a 2-1 win here last February. More relevantly, this win was our second in a row and also our second clean sheet in a row, which we had not achieved in the League since October of 2022.

Warren Burton made just one change from the eleven that defeated Chipstead on Saturday with Fofahan returning to the starting line up on the left hand side of midfield after being absent on Tuesday. Stefan Aiwone made way, although he was unavailable for this match, so it isn't clear whether he was injured, or indeed, whether he'd have made way for Fofahan had he actually been here! Kionte Gillfillian-Waul moved from the left wing to left back with Toby Young moving into the centre of defence as we unsurprisingly retained the same formation that had looked so solid against Chipstead.

The opening exchanges were fairly even as we kicked off heading up the Krooner Park slope. The hosts had a first chance as early as the eighth minute when Stan Jones ran onto a ball over the top of our defence, only for Gillfillian-Waul to get across and block his shot. Then Camberley's Captain Regan Hitch got on the end of a Luis Hamblin free kick at the far post, but his header was easy enough for Dan O'Donovan to field without undue alarm. O'Donovan was looking confident after recording his first clean sheet for the club four days previously and was often out to claim the ball with minimal fuss.

Our first real opportunity came just after the twenty minute mark when Adam Green's free kick was headed out by the first man to Axel Kodjo whose strike was not far wide of Ben Grummitt's left hand post from twenty yards. This heralded the start of some good Epsom pressure and Gillfillian-Waul and Fofahan produced some good interplay, ending in a shot from the latter that was blocked by a defender, with Green's follow-up being deflected wide. From the corner Green received the ball back and his shot from an angle was on target, only for another defender to get in the way.

Green appeared to be pulled back in the area, but the referee wasn't interested, although Luke Miller was then fouled in a similar way just outside the area, which was given in our favour. However, Green's free kick cleared the crossbar by about a yard. During this time though Kodjo picked up an injury and had to limp off, being replaced by Luke Taylor.

Grummitt punched clear a Salts corner which then led to a Camberley break, but Gillfillian-Waul did well to recover the situation before it got too serious. Our new signing has looked most impressive in recent weeks, particularly in the first half of matches, and it is almost easy to forget that Ethan Nelson-Roberts has been missing for these last three games. We also looked dangerous on the right wing with fit again Ethan Brazier linking well with Miller who sent a ball right into the danger area, where Taylor and Carl Oblitey were inches away from turning it into the empty net, although the Assistant's flag was up for offside anyway.

Craig Dundas picked up a yellow card for kicking the ball away and we had one final scare in injury time when O'Donovan came out of his area to clear and instead of putting it in row Z, he struck it against Hamblin and was most fortunate to see the ball rebound off him and out for a goal kick. Moments later, he showed he had learned his lesson as he sent the ball flying way over the Krooner Park clubhouse as the referee blew the half time whistle!

This was our tenth match of the season and it is important to note that we haven't scored in the first half of any of these matches! For those who love a stat, this is now our joint second longest run in club history, matched in 1972/73 and 1992/93 and only exceeded in 1981/82 when we went for twelve matches without scoring in the opening forty-five minutes. Strange really, as we had arguably the strongest team in modern times at that point, and matches against reigning non-League Champions Altrincham and Quadruple winners that season, Leytonstone and Ilford were both part of this twelve match run.

Going down the hill in the second half Louis Lindsay picked up a yellow card for a similar offence to that of Dundas in the first half, although Dundas then did it again moments later and despite the protests from the home team, he was fortunate indeed not to pick up what would have been one of the softest dismissals of his career. However, the game gradually began to tilt in our favour and although Fofahan and Hitch picked up yellow cards for the dictionary definition of "handbags" we were creating most of the pressure, but with one issue; we weren't actually causing Grummit any trouble in his goal. In fact the hosts probably should have taken the lead in the 68th minute when a left wing cross was flicked on to Hamblin at the far post, but he got it all wrong, spooning the ball over our bar from close range. Maybe emboldened by our escape, we were back on the attack soon after and Taylor made a good overlap on the right, although Oblitey was

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unable to get his header on target from Taylor's delivery.

The temperature of the game went up a few degrees in the 74th minute as a long ball down the right found Miller and his ball across goal was turned into the net from twelve yards by Fofahan, but celebrations were then muted by the raising of the offside flag. There were a few Epsom supporters in different places who thought the decision was a wrong one, but none were level with the incident, which the Assistant quite clearly was. However, a cringe worthy episode then followed as both our Vice-Chairman and Chairman, who were also out of line, both literally and metaphorically, were both clearly heard giving a lot of grief to the Assistant about his decision, followed by that feeble plaintive shout we've heard before of "we've got the video", almost as if they thought the referee would turn around and say, "you know what, thanks for this, you're right, I'll just allow the goal!" Memo to our people who really should know better, it won't happen, stop embarrassing yourselves and set a better example!

Fortunately, the incident didn't stop our momentum as we were in full flow by now although another contentious incident followed when Grummitt punched clear after a collision with his own player, only for the free kick to be awarded against us! Still we attacked and Oblitey sent his header from a Miller cross wide. O'Donovan had to be alert to come out of his area to head a break off, literally, with his head before Camberley sent a header wide at our far post. It would be their last opportunity and in the first minute of injury time Miller's low ball in struck Oblitey and fell kindly for Fofahan to stick the ball away at Grummitt's near post from eight yards out to register his first goal for our club and clinch the points.

Maybe the goal had a touch of fortune about it, but it was a deserved winner and we now sit in sixteenth position, level with the recently vanquished Chipstead, who only sit above us on goals scored. I'm still a bit puzzled about our lack of substitutions at present, with just three made in three matches, but the early season form that left us at the foot of the table has now been netted off with these two wins and to use a football analogy, we are back in the game. Saturday's trip to Tooting & Mitcham United; a team that haven't beaten us at home since they were playing at Sandy Lane, are on paper, a better team than Camberley Town and will provide a better idea of how good we are currently, but for now we are outside the relegation positions for the first time this season, which is pleasing to report!

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Ethan Brazier, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Toby Young, Callum Wilson, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Axel Kodjo, Ali Fofahan

Subs: Luke Taylor for Kodjo (29)

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