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A comedy of errors - but it wasn't funny as Epsom & Ewell FC lose again

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Tadley Calleva 5-2 Epsom and Ewell FC. Combined Counties League - Premier Division South. Saturday 15th March.

"We are right in the s**t now" stated our Manager Warren Burton after Wednesday's awful loss at Guildford City and if he felt bad then, who knows what he is thinking now after this self-inflicted implosion at Tadley Calleva who defeated us 5-2 without really playing that well. In fact, this was a dreadful advert for the Combined Counties League with six of the seven goals scored as a direct result of bad defensive errors, whilst the referee also got into the act with the worst display I've seen in over a hundred matches watching Epsom and non-Epsom matches this season.

On a bitingly cold day in front of a pitiful crowd, Burton handed Brendon McVey his debut after joining from South Park, but before he had a chance to get involved we were already up against it in a big way after Stefan Aiwone miscontrolled the ball and Alex Miller got through, only to be brought down for a penalty. Worse was to follow as the referee then decided our man should also receive a red card! Now, I'm aware that the rules state that this can still happen, but thought that it needed to be in cases where the defender made no effort to play the ball, which Aiwone clearly tried to do. Either way, Kieran Rodgers stepped up and sent Sami Nabbad the wrong way from the spot in just the fifth minute. It's possible this may have been our earliest ever sending off in a match and in my opinion it was the wrong decision.

This was a nightmare start but we were nearly level just three minutes later when McVey tried his luck from thirty yards, only to see the ball cannon off the face of the Tadley crossbar. It would have been a great way to mark a debut! Then Luke Miller drilled the ball low into the net, only for a foul to be awarded against Jason Bloor in the build up.

From that point though, we began to struggle as the home side began to make the extra man count. Nabbad made a great save when the Tadley player got through on goal and then a few minutes later in similar circumstances the shot was fired wide. Unfortunately Nabbad then came out for an ambitious long ball, but misjudged the bounce and caught it just outside the penalty area. The moment I saw the Assistant's flag go up, I knew we were in trouble, yet for some reason the referee awarded only a yellow card. Any thoughts of having had a lucky escape were crushed moments later when the free kick was saved but not held by Nabbad and Ash Neal knocked the loose ball in from close range to make it 2-0 in the 35th minute.

Despite the deficit, we were still competitive. Then the home side started to make errors themselves, firstly when a pass was sent back to the home keeper Donny Burke whose touch let him down and allowed Carl Oblitey to take the ball round him, but his own touch wasn't the greatest and allowed Burke to recover and reclaim the ball. We went in at the break 2-0 down and a man down, but also fortunate to not be down to nine men.

The second half had been in play for just three minutes when the referee; clearly struggling with the contest and appearing to be out of his depth, stopped the game for an injury and restarted it with a contested drop ball, yet this rule was removed in 2019 according to Law 8!

We tried to reduce the deficit and with the wind in our favour McVey tried a lob from 40 yards, but Burke was able to catch it comfortably. Unfortunately, in the 56th minute the contest was as good as over with the only goal of the entire match that could truly be credited to the attacking side, as Rodgers scored his second and Tadley's third with a good run and cut back before almost stroking the ball beyond Nabbad into the far corner from 18 yards.

Yet within three minutes of their third goal, the home side started to be generous too. A hopeful ball towards the penalty area wasn't dealt with at all, and Oblitey ran through on goal, guiding the ball just inside Burke's left hand post to reduce the deficit. We then had another chance as the Tadley defence was opened up with substitute Sean-Michael Anderson setting up Adam Green for a shot, but it was a difficult angle and his shot was kept out by the well-positioned Burke. The match continued to be end to end though and in the 64th minute the home side restored their three goal lead with a slide rule pass through to Rodgers as our defence parted which left Rodgers a simple finish from fairly close range to complete his hat trick.

However, we were soon back on the attack and Green saw his shot brilliantly tipped over the bar by Burke, although Burke was fortunate when his next clearance hit Anderson and could have gone anywhere, but went across goal with our man requiring treatment for a ball to the face for his troubles. Burke would not be so fortunate in the 74th minute though, when he went to claim a simple catch, only to completely fumble it and leave another of our substitutes Ali Fofahan with an empty net to fire into from ten yards out and reduce the score to 4-2.

Despite being two goals behind, there were enough errors being made to give us some small hope of turning things around, but that was extinguished in the 81st minute after another bizarre decision. Oblitey clearly thought he had been fouled and said something, earning him a visit to the sin bin. However, Oblitey clearly was injured and as he walked slowly towards the touch line, he went down again, only to be shown a second yellow card! I'm still not entirely sure what



rule he broke here and many of our people were confused with the situation also. Either way though, we were down to nine men for the eleventh time in our history and any chance of recovery was gone.

There was still time for some more poor defending in the 88th minute when Nabbad kicked his clearance straight at Oliver Rowan who then put it straight back past him for a fifth Tadley goal. To be fair to Nabbad he then made two good saves in the closing minutes as we fell apart and these could be really important now, as goal difference may yet come into it, although we did ourselves no favours in this match. We could blame the referee for some of this, but he also let us off big time with Nabbad's handball, which was almost identical to the offence that led to a red card for the Guildford keeper on Wednesday.

So where does this leave us? Strangely enough, things have become a lot clearer after this week's results as Balham also lost. Quite simply this now means that a home win against them next Saturday will relegate them and require something miraculous from Spelthorne Sports to overhaul us, even if we were to accumulate no further points at all. However, a loss next week against Balham will leave us in a precarious position and it's clear that we are going to need at least three more points from our remaining seven matches, starting at Horley Town on Tuesday. We are not the only team looking over our shoulders though, as Chipstead, Sandhurst Town and Camberley Town are not safe either and all have played more matches than us. However, we can only focus at our own situation.

Epsom & Ewell: Sami Nabbad, Niall Stillwell, Ethan Brazier, Adam Green (c), Stefan Aiwone, Anthony Nazareth, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Brendon McVey, Jason Bloor

Subs: Sean-Michael Anderson for Bloor (59), Ali Fofahan for McVey (68), Conrad Essilfie-Conduah for Dundas (70), Kionte Gillfillian-Waul for Brazier (75),

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk