

10 man away win a turning point?






12 February 2023



Hailsham Town 2 – 4 Epsom & Ewell FC. Southern Combination League – Division One. Saturday 11th February.

Cast your mind back to the 19th of November. It was the day we made our last visit into Sussex when we made the journey to Wick and came away with a 2-0 win. That was also the last time we won a match, so it’s pleasing to report that we now have another positive result to our name after this 4-2 win at Hailsham Town.

What made the result even more impressive after this chaotic week at the club is that there were more new faces on show, replacing others who had departed, including a new keeper in Toby McKimm. However, he was harshly sent off after just 27 minutes of his debut and the ten men, including emergency keeper Nick Wilson managed to produce the goods when we really needed it.

Pos		Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	Diff	Pts
1		Shoreham	21	16	5	0	60	17	43	53
2		Dorking Wanderers B	23	13	4	6	40	24	16	43
3		Epsom & Ewell	20	13	2	5	46	22	24	41
4		Wick	22	12	3	7	45	36	9	39
5		Godalming Town	20	11	5	4	41	23	18	38

http://www.scfl.org.uk/halton.php?comp_id=2

McKimm was not the only player making his debut this week as new signing from Raynes Park Vale Jaan Stanley played up front and later on George Owusu from Sutton Common Rovers would come on to score on his first appearance.

We were missing Gideon Acheampong, Jamie Byatt and Johnny Akoto who were all advised as injured, while Josh Owen became the latest player to leave the club. Also on the bench was the returning Alex Penfold; a decision which surprised me, but will have annoyed other supporters, given his sending off and subsequent suspension and release from the club last season. I have always found Alex to be a decent chap, but bearing in mind the tumultuous events of the previous match against Oakwood, his arrival just in time for the next one could definitely have been timed better.

With Steve Springett coming in for the released Aaron Bogle, Kevin Moreno-Gomez retained his position at left back, while Wilson played at right back for the first time, although of course, not for that long as it turned out and later on the spot would be filled by another unlikely full back in Jaevon Dyer.

Another knock to our club history and traditions occurred when we took the field in our red third kit, seeing as our club colours have been blue for 105 years, and on a pitch likened by one of our supporters to a crumpet, the ball took a number of odd hops and bounces so it was clear that passing football was not going to be the order of the day. We would have to be a little more direct. We had a little scare on the quarter hour mark when the home side sent the ball in from the right, but the striker failed to make a decent contact and it drifted wide of McKimm’s goal. A Ryan Smith corner was headed on, but over the bar by Springett at the near post before Ryley Tate picked up an early booking for a cynical trip on Athan Smith-Joseph with just eighteen minutes on the clock.

Two minutes later we nearly went ahead in bizarre circumstances. The referee allowed a good advantage and Smith-Joseph attacked down the left wing, with his low ball in being deflected onto the post by George Whitley and then out for a corner. However, from the corner in the 21st minute we went ahead anyway after Smith’s corner was met by the giant Adeyemi and his header landed at the feet of Stanley who simply laid it back for Ollie Thompson to poke the ball into the opposite corner from around six yards out to register his first goal for our club.

Unfortunately celebrations were short lived as just four minutes later a harmless enough long ball led to a miscommunication between Thompson and McKimm and under pressure from a Hailsham striker an arm struck the ball just outside the area, for which McKimm would receive his marching orders a couple of minutes later. However, the view I was given by a number of people nearer the incident than I advised that the Hailsham player pushed Thompson into the ball where his arm then knocked the ball. Either way, it appears that McKimm was harshly dealt with and Wilson then took over between the posts; a job I’m told he had done before at Croydon in similar circumstances. Our defenders would protect him fairly well in this match, but he did well when called upon.

The resultant free kick was deflected off our wall for a corner amidst some appeals for a penalty and the corner was then cleared to Smith-Joseph, standing just inside his own half, from where he promptly ran fifty yards at goal from an angle down the right wing and from about twelve yards out literally lashed the ball as hard as he could past Ed Cooper and into the roof of the net for our second goal with 29 minutes on the clock. It was a fantastic strike and provided that little cushion a team needs when it is low on confidence and down by a player. The game continued in a fairly stop start fashion until the break with the only notable item to report being a yellow card awarded to our Manager in the 41st minute, presumably for something he said.

As the second half got going Adeyemi picked up an early yellow card for a handball, but the match settled into a pattern, with the home side trying to break through, but not having much success. Wilson was forced into a decent save in the 67th minute from a shot out on the right, with the rebound bouncing up a little too far for the incoming striker who couldn’t keep the shot down from close range.

In the 73rd minute though, we saw another brilliant goal as Smith-Joseph fed Dyer on the overlap and his cross was met by a stunning scissor volley from Adeyemi which flew into the roof of the net from fifteen yards to become the second Epsom player in this match to register his first goal for the club and put us three – nil up.

And another would follow as Owusu forced in a great low Smith-Joseph cross six minutes later after only being on the field for nine minutes. However, in between these strikes Hailsham had pulled a goal back through Tate after the ball reached him a few yards out after Wilson and / or a defender had done well to keep the original threat out, with a little help from a post in the 77th minute.

The final words went to the home side as Luca Bish, better known to younger supporters as a partner of footballer Michael Owen’s daughter Gemma on TV’s Love Island in 2022, but this time he did manage to score! It was another decent strike from just inside the area and gave Wilson no chance, although with the clock already showing the third minute of injury time, there was to be no further fightback and the match ended in a 4-2 victory to maintain our perfect record at the Beaconsfield of four wins from four visits dating back to 1993.

This result may just re-start our season on the field and may prove to be one of the most important results of the year when we look back.

Epsom & Ewell: Toby McKimm, Nick Wilson, Kevin Moreno-Gomez, Ryan Smith (c), Steve Springett, Oliver Thompson, Jaevon Dyer, Gavin Quintyne, Jaan Stanley, Thompson Adeyemi, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Alex Penfold for Moreno-Gomez (51), George Owusu for Stanley (70), Musa Beegun for Adeyemi (81)

Poor play spoilt by “Cantonesque” antics

12 February 2023



Epsom & Ewell FC 1-2 Oakwood, Southern Combination League – Division One. Saturday 4th February 2023.

Ten weeks to the day since we last had a League contest on a Saturday and nearly five since we had a match of any kind, we emerged from our hibernation with an absolute shocker of a performance as we lost 2-1 to Oakwood; a team we had beaten by five clear goals on their own ground in August and who were sitting in the bottom four of the table. This was our fifth defeat in a row, which represents our worst run of form since 2019 and our first defeat on this date since 1995 after six previous straight wins.

Unfortunately, this awful performance is only one half of the story as our club's name was sullied further by a frightening incident at half time when one of our players chose to leave the field of play to "have it out" with a spectator, who just happened to be the father of our goalkeeper Kamrun Zain. He was then promptly and correctly sent off by the referee whilst both were actually standing in the main body of terracing on the clubhouse side of the ground; a quite bizarre sequence of events quite unprecedented in our club's history.

But back to the start. The club had heralded the arrival of three players in the last few days, yet none of them were in the squad, while our Coach Jack Porter was named as one of the subs, which, with no offence to Jack, usually happens when we are short. The irony here was that only one man actually made his debut in the starting eleven, Thompson Adeyemi and the club hadn't ever mentioned him joining! Our Manager Anthony Jupp was unavoidably absent for this match so Matt Chapman and Kevin Espinosa took charge in the dugout.

Despite our healthy league position and the fact that we had been without competitive football for so long, only 84 were present on a perfect day for football and it was a shame that there was so little of it on display. The club described the figure in their brief report as "good", but on a day when mid table Selsey registered 192, and with title rivals Shoreham getting 182 at home the week before, I would beg to differ. We were missing our main striker Jamie Byatt, Ben Bauchop and Johnny "Sonic" Akoto while Ryan Smith took over the armband, following the departure of Brad Peters to Step Five Broadbridge Heath, where according to our Chairman's programme notes he is now playing Step Four football! There was no Josh Alder to take Byatt's place after he joined Alfold and so Josh Owen took on the central striker's role.

The first half was without doubt, the worst forty-five minutes supporters will have witnessed at this club this season as we failed to impose ourselves in any way against a team that were extremely limited in their ambitions at first, and understandably so, following our August win and a 6-0 drubbing last time they visited us. However, it became apparent after around fifteen minutes that we were only able to play one way; sideways, followed by balls down the flanks to either Athan Smith-Joseph or Jaevon Dyer, both of whom failed entirely to create a single delivery of note for Owen. With few other midfielders appearing willing to join the attacks, they were seen off with relative comfort.

Nick Wilson sent a powerful shot over the bar after Dyer's pull back to the edge of the area, but in the 23rd minute the visitors took the lead from a completely innocuous free kick way out on their left flank. The ball in looked like it would reach Zain, but Adil Raman nipped in front and poked the ball past our keeper from eight yards. Whose fault was this? It's hard to know for certain, but the absence of the commanding presence of Peters was instantly noticed as no one took charge of the situation and we paid for it.

This was concerning. Neither team had really looked like scoring to this point and it was a horribly frustrating half of football to watch as passes went astray. Oakwood were no better, but for a team like ours with substantial experience of playing at a higher level it was extremely disappointing to witness nobody really taking control of the situation. The referee was also being a bit fussy by this time and Wilson and Owen both received warnings for complaining about decisions before the latter picked up a petulant yellow card for raising his boot to try and block a goal kick; the sort of thing you learn not to do in kids football.

The whistle blew for half time and the crowd began to conduct its own post-mortems. However, something was going on in the opposite corner of the ground to me. It transpired that a spectator had been loud and abusive throughout the first half, so much so that it could be heard on my side of the pitch by some spectators. Most of the abuse being given out was in the direction of Aaron Bogle, and it was from our keeper's father who was clearly upset with some of the communication Bogle was giving to his son between the posts. As the players went off for the break it spilled over and although Bogle was originally escorted away from the area, he returned and confronted the spectator on the terracing with an altercation between them resulting right in front of a number of our supporters, some of whom feared for their safety.

Almost out of nowhere the referee appeared and he had no alternative but to send our player off for this atrocity. There is no excuse for leaving the field of play, even under provocation and we await further news of what further actions will follow, once the referee's report is studied.

The second half commenced, quite probably with many people being completely unaware of what had actually happened while they had their half time pints! Strangely, despite being a man down we were actually better in the second half, although admittedly that wasn't hard to achieve! Smith-Joseph was much more prominent in this period and was involved in most of the attacking threats we created, setting up Dyer for a low shot in the 50th minute which was just wide. A corner shortly afterwards was met by an Owen header that was well tipped over by the Oakwood Captain, Andrew Graves and then Smith-Joseph's ball in was only punched clear to Adeyemi in space just fifteen yards out, but his powerful strike at goal flew inches over the crossbar and hit the fascia of the Bernard Edwards stand instead.

Almost immediately we paid for this miss as the visitors scored a second goal, when from just short of forty yards Darrell Agyemang spotted Zain a little off his line and struck the ball over him and into the net in the 65th minute. It was a superb goal and the absolute highlight of a match of such low quality. In response, we threw on Musa Beegun for his debut and Gavin Quintyne and in the 76th minute we had a goal back as Beegun and Dyer linked well before threading the ball to the advanced Gideon Acheampong. His deep cross caught Graves out and looked like it may go in on its own, but the ball was bundled over the line by Smith-Joseph who admitted after the match that it may have gone in off his arm!

Our winger almost scored again after a wild defensive pass went straight to him in the 86th minute, but his shot was well blocked and cleared. The Oakwood bench made it quite clear to their player what they thought of the wayward pass as it had nearly cost them two points, but apart from a late Wilson header that just missed the far post, we were all out of ideas and Oakwood claimed all three points to give them an excellent chance of escaping relegation.

I wrote after the Chessington defeat that we had worked hard to get up the League, but that another poor performance would not receive such a forgiving report. Quite simply this one was completely unacceptable to our extremely patient supporters and bearing in mind that our visitors are one of many clubs in this league without a playing budget, our players should be handing their wages back after this one. There was not a single redeemable feature to take from this match, yet worryingly, this was not the worst part of the day.

So what happens now? Well, for starters I can advise that our keeper has chosen to leave the club, as a screenshot of his message saying so was put out on social media in the last 24 hours. Maybe this is not a surprise, but either way, our Manager will have his hands full finding replacements in time for our trip to Hailsham Town next weekend. Be clear of one thing though. Promotion from the play offs is not the biggest disaster, particularly as Shoreham are now way clear of us at the top. However, further performances like this one will see us start to slip out of the playoff positions, which would not be acceptable to supporters.

What happens to Aaron Bogle is less clear as I write this some twenty-four hours after the event. Our club have belatedly put out a statement advising that the incident was unacceptable and will be dealt with accordingly. You would therefore draw the conclusion from this that he is to be released, but it is bizarre in the extreme that this hasn't happened yet. It is easy to think back to December 2021 when the club's decision to release Alex Penfold was publicised within a couple of hours of that match being abandoned, yet in my opinion, this Cantona-esque episode was worse and can only result in his release and subsequent long period of reflection from the sidelines. Concerningly, and as evidence of the club's disjointed Media policy, there is no appearance of the statement on the club's "official" website, and literally just one sentence in its match report covering the half time fracas, almost as if the club want to bury things and pretend they didn't exist. Our club seem quite simply unable to grasp the situation and the number of times they have "read the room" wrongly is embarrassing in the two and a half years since the "new regime" and its new culture came in.

At a time when our club is about to ask for help from its supporter base with reference to its plans for the Hook Road Arena sporting hub, this club cannot afford to have such a situation hanging over it. Supporters at the game genuinely feared for their safety and I have had a number contacting me to express their disgust and explaining how the matter could have been handled better. Rather oddly I have also seen one occasional supporter has commented along the lines that the club could do no more at this time than to issue what was a vague and poorly written statement. That is their opinion, but I vehemently disagree with it. The Surrey FA will be watching and waiting for an extremely quick response here as charges will surely follow and our club's reputation needs to be protected. We need to be doing something and should have done this already.

This horrible incident at what tries to portray itself as a family and community club could and should have been prevented by its officials. Committee members advised supporters that they had not heard the extremely loud abuse going on during the first half, but this is hard to believe as evidenced by people hearing it across the other side of the ground. Then, when it all happened, the player was removed from the area rapidly enough, but the supporter was not. In fact, he then wandered to the other side of the pitch. The person concerned was finally escorted from the ground by our Vice-Chairman Barry Gartell midway through the

second half, but the moment he walked away from the entrance, the supporter just walked back in and watched the remainder of the match.

Epsom & Ewell: Kamrun Zain, Gideon Acheampong, Kevin Moreno-Gomez, Ryan Smith (c), Oliver Thompson, Aaron Bogle, Jaevon Dyer, Nick Wilson, Josh Owen, Thompson Adeyemi, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Musa Beegun for Adeyemi (72), Gavin Quintyne for Owen (72)

Landlord thrashes tenant in friendly fight

12 February 2023



Epsom and Ewell FC 0-5 Leatherhead FC - Mid-Season Friendly - Saturday 21st January. An Epsom and Ewell team that hadn't played a match for nearly three weeks came up against a Leatherhead side that had played fairly regularly during that period and in front of a crowd of 79, the score line of 5-0 to our opponents came as no real surprise.

With our League match against Arundel postponed, a friendly against our landlords on the artificial surface at River Lane, Fetcham was hastily arranged and kicking off at 2pm we gave a run out to our new signings Roan Strong, Musa Beegun and Rory Edwards while the majority of our regulars all played too, but for large parts of the game we found chances extremely limited. A change in formation just after the half hour made things a little more even for a while, but by then we were already two goals in arrears and three more followed in the second half.

The first goal came courtesy of a slight deflection, enabling the ball to creep past the wrong footed Strong in the 13th minute and a second followed after a great turn from the Leatherhead 10 which put him through to find the 9 with a good pass and he guided the ball past Strong into the bottom far corner.

The second half produced a slightly harsh score line for us as the Leatherhead keeper made three superb saves in the second half, two of which came from Nick Wilson, but to be fair, they also had other chances that weren't taken and could have had a couple more themselves. The third goal came in the 49th minute and was harsh on Strong who made a good save, only to see an opponent reach the loose ball first for a simple finish. A spectacular fourth goal then followed in the 67th minute with a strike from the edge of the penalty area that grazed the bar on its way in. All we had in response was one near post shot from Athan Smith-Joseph after he had received a long kick from Strong, but the keeper kept it out.

We then had three chances in a minute; the 75th, as it turned out. Firstly, Wilson struck at goal with a slight deflection on the way, requiring a great full stretch save to claw the ball away. From the corner, Thomson Adeyemi's header from point blank range was also kept out and the from the next corner Aaron Bogle struck over the bar from just inside the box.

A great deep cross from Athan Smith-Joseph was met by a superb volley from Wilson, but this was also acrobatically kept out by the Leatherhead keeper and an 86th minute penalty from Junior Kadi, after Bogle had brought a striker down just inside the area, completed the scoring. You couldn't argue with the decision and seeing as the referee was our former Captain Alex McKay, it is only fair to say that he had an excellent game.

We now face another two weeks without a competitive match before hosting Oakwood, but this should give time for our new signings to become a little more familiar with the rest of the players as we finally commence the second half of our season against teams of not such a high standard.

Epsom & Ewell: Roan Strong, Johnny "Sonic" Akoto, Gideon Acheampong, Ryan Smith, Oliver Thompson, Aaron Bogle, Athan Smith-Joseph, Nick Wilson, Jamie Byatt, Josh Alder, Gavin Quintyne

Subs: Rory Edwards, Thomson Adeyemi, Musa Beegun, Josh Owen all on for Quintyne, Smith, Alder, Wilson (at HT) Lawrence O'Donoghue for Acheampong (62), Wilson back on for Byatt (69), Quintyne back on for Akoto (81)

Caught hook, line and sinker

12 February 2023



Epsom & Ewell FC 1 - 3 Chessington & Hook United - Southern Combination League - Division One - Tuesday 27th December.

Oh no! Not Chessington again! Historically, we have a superior won lost record against our opponents, yet this defeat was our sixth at home in the last eight encounters dating back to our days at Merstham. Indeed the last fifteen matches between these two clubs have produced just ONE home win between them, which I suppose bodes well for our return fixture at Chalky Lane in April! Seriously though, most of our home defeats against them have followed a similar pattern that we seem to struggle with, regardless of our playing personnel or Management; that of a team defending solidly as a unit at the back, working energetically to deny space and pinching their chances when they came.

Equally worryingly, we have started to see a similar script occurring in home matches. Worthing United and Deportivo Galicia also conceded first, yet we have allowed all of these teams back into the match from a position of strength and appear to be unable to stop them once they have gained their own momentum. We have not won at home since 29th October and this is not going to be good enough if we are to remain at the top of the table for much longer. Indeed we are now clinging to that position on goal difference alone, with the imposing threat of Shoreham now looming large in our rear view mirror.

So, if not exactly a terminal hammer blow to our title hopes due to the strong position we had created in recent months, Tuesday's defeat must have sent some very large alarm bells ringing across the club and the next couple of matches will give supporters an indication of whether it has been heeded.

I referred in my match preview to the kick off being delayed an hour to 12pm instead of the traditional 11am and how much this decision might cost us financially. Our attendance, independently counted by two people from two different positions in the ground was 127 (although the club advised 138 in their official figures). Either way, Forest Row v Oakwood (at 11am) recorded 113, well over double the average attendances for those clubs and this was noted on Twitter by Oakwood with comments as to how their ground had been swelled by a large number of ground hoppers. It is conjecture of course, but for our often feisty and entertaining local derby at a venue with great facilities, close to a train station and motorway on a Bank Holiday when there were very few other local matches, you have to wonder how many of those extra sixty or seventy supporters would have chosen to come here instead, but chose not to because of the added difficulty in getting to a 3pm kick off after our game as many of these floating supporters tend to do, and that's not including people who didn't fancy the trip to Sussex, but who might have come here. This was an opportunity to get close to, if not over 200 missed by our club and is a lesson we must learn quickly. Moving the fixture back a day from Boxing Day = "A Plus - great idea". Moving the kick off back by an hour = "E Minus - Could do better".

In terms of personnel, there were a few changes from our defeat last Wednesday. Aaron Bogle and Zach Powell returned at the back, while Brad Peters was missing, so Gideon Acheampong took the Captain's armband on and moved into the centre of defence with Johnny "Sonic" Akoto coming in at right back. Further forward Athan Smith-Joseph and Jaevon Dyer returned to the starting eleven in place of Josh Owen who was absent injured, and Steve Springett, Josh Alder and

Ryan Smith, who would have to wait for their opportunities from the bench.

And things started well once again. Smith-Joseph skipped down the wing in the opening twenty seconds and his ball into the danger area caused panic, leading to a corner. However, our service would be particularly poor in this match and the delivery was weak. Then Smith-Joseph made a great exchange of passes with Nick Wilson who then set up our winger for a shot, but he delayed it after drawing the keeper and was smothered out by Chessington defenders. Dyer's shot was then deflected wide for a corner but in the 11th minute a visiting striker broke through and we were fortunate that he shot directly at Kane Charles who made the save.

Our next attempt involved a good run from midfield by Gavin Quintyne, but Chessy keeper Andrew Osei was out quickly to save after our man had received a Smith-Joseph pass. We then took the lead in the 21st minute. A ball down the right found Jaevon Dyer who made tracks before pulling the ball back to Quintyne. Feeling confident after his super strike on Wednesday, he took aim from just inside the penalty area, but only side footed the ball towards Osei who strangely failed to gather the ball and experienced goal poacher Jamie Byatt nipped in to lift the ball over the stretching keeper from close range to score his 35th goal for us in 35 appearances; a stat that moves him onto our club Hall of Fame chart for the top fifty scorers on our history.

Byatt was just wide with a header from a free kick shortly after this and we looked good value for our lead. Byatt then shrugged off a weak challenge on the half hour and was through on goal, but the referee called him back for a foul which looked very harsh. It was a pity as he would probably have given us a two goal lead, yet in the 33rd minute the visitors were back in the game with an equaliser. The play built up well on the right and we got dragged over a little, so that when the ball was sent over, Aaron Cole-Bolt had time to control the pass and get it onto his right foot before drilling the ball into the bottom far corner from just inside our penalty area.

It was not a deserved equaliser at the time, but by the time the half time whistle had blown they were in the ascendancy and Ben Bauchop's attempt from 40 yards then went way wide of the goal just before the break gave a hint as to how the play had been going. Interestingly at half time the Chessington team were back out after just a few minutes and were doing a bit more ball work. They seemed to want to send a message that they were keen and eager to fight for the points. Having said that, we were the first team to fashion a good chance just a few seconds into the second half when a short corner between Dyer and Bauchop resulted in a shot from the latter that deflected to Byatt some eight yards out, but his snap shot on the turn cannoned back off the Chessington crossbar and away to safety.

This chance would come back to haunt us as soon as the 50th minute when they broke away after being pushed back and a right wing delivery to Cole-Bolt was struck at goal, only to rebound kindly for former Salt Hakim Griffiths to slot home the loose ball past our helpless keeper from a few yards. This was such a frustrating goal to concede and our heads appeared to visibly drop.

We would still make chances for a while though and Smith-Joseph did well on the left, having switched wings with Dyer, but his pull back was just behind the incoming Byatt before Byatt himself had a shot at goal but his connection wasn't the strongest and provided an easy save for Osei, who was by this time beginning to waste a lot of time and picked up a yellow card for time-wasting shortly after. Smith-Joseph then provided a mazy run, beating three men before seeing his shot deflected for another corner which came to nothing.

We made a few substitutions but the pattern of the game was changing more in favour of the visitors and we only created one real chance after this when Byatt chased a through ball in the final minutes, forcing a poor clearance from Osei, but Ryan Dacres-Smith was unable to take advantage of the vacant net from thirty yards out with his attempt at goal not getting past a covering defender. Of course, by then we had already conceded a third goal in the 78th minute when a ball in from the right found another former Salt in space, Fabian O'Brien and he guided the ball past Charles and into the far corner from ten yards. It is notable that a lot of recent goals conceded have come from the opposition right hand side and as with our previous loss to Deportivo Galicia it is my opinion that their winger was the best player on the park, in this case Ben Anderson, giving us a lot of trouble throughout the match. However, we have looked extremely vulnerable at the back recently, with as many goals conceded this week (seven) as we have in the previous nine matches, and this must be a real concern.

Those who regularly read my reports will know that I am honest and critical where required and for sure this was a poor performance, although 3-1 was a flattering score line. However, It is more important to see how our group of talented players respond before being too harsh. After all, we are top of the table still, so many things are being done well. Next up though is another opponent we have had terrible struggles with in recent years, the Dorking Wanderers B team at the new Meadowbank; a ground we haven't won competitively at since it was rebuilt. If that challenge, added to our performance here doesn't motivate a good response, then maybe the next report won't be so forgiving.

Epsom & Ewell: Kane Charles, Johnny "Sonic" Akoto, Zach Powell, Ben Bauchop, Gideon Acheampong (c), Aaron Bogle, Jaevon Dyer, Nick Wilson, Jamie Byatt, Gavin Quintyne, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Steve Springett for Powell (65), Ryan Dacres-Smith for Dyer (73), Ryan Smith for Akoto (73), Oliver Thompson for Bauchop (83)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Lost in the fog

12 February 2023



Epsom & Ewell 2-4 FC Deportivo Galicia - Surrey Premier Cup - Second Round - Wednesday 21st December 2022.

A contest that started in farcical circumstances and ended in fairly thick fog ended with our opponents clinching this Surrey Premier Cup tie with three late goals to progress 4-2 in their defence of the trophy in front of a pitiful independently counted attendance of 46.

The most disappointing aspect of this contest was that we had done the hard work to take a deserved lead towards the end of the match, only to then throw it away with some horrible defending.

We were missing a few players from the regular squad in Zach Powell, Oliver Thompson, Johnny Akoto, Aaron Bogle, and Kevin Moreno-Gomez, who were all absent, while Kane Charles came back in between the posts for Kamrun Zain. On the bench we had the returning Mario Quiassaca and also a new debutant in Ryan Dacres-Smith, not to be confused with Ryan Smith, who was back in the starting line up after spending the Dorking Wanderers B match on the bench. This meant that Nick Wilson played in the back four for the first time while Steve Springett played his first match since completing his suspension.

The match was delayed to an 8pm start because the visitors had only eight players at the arranged kick off time of 7.45. Even when the match finally commenced at 8.06 FC Deportivo Galicia took the field with ten men, although an eleventh joined them in the third minute. A full bench of substitutes were named, but only one in playing kit ever appeared there.

And with Matt Chapman in charge due to the absence of our Manager Anthony Jupp, we could and should have gone ahead in the third minute when a poor clearance from the keeper presented Jamie Byatt with a chance, but his shot from 15 yards went wide. Two minutes later we absolutely should have opened our account after a delightful pass from Gavin Quintyne was perfectly in stride for Josh Owen, clean through on goal, but he hurried his shot straight at the advanced keeper, only to then have the ball rebound kindly back to him, yet with an open goal in front of him from 18 yards, he scuffed his shot which was then cleared by a defender and also seemed to injure his groin at the same time, which ultimately led to his replacement just before half time.

All of that didn't seem important at the time though as we took the lead in the ninth minute anyway when a poor clearance went straight to Josh Alder who set up Byatt to bury his shot low into the bottom corner from just inside the penalty area. The visitors, maybe understandably after their difficult journey, looked all at sea, but against the run of play they then equalised in the 12th minute as their right winger was allowed too much space at the far post and his shot from an angle took a wicked deflection off Springett onto Charles' left hand post and across into the far side netting.

Despite the goal, we continued to do most of the pressing and Alder's shot was fumbled before a Springett overlap and dangerous delivery appeared to be sent goalwards by a defender where the keeper made a fantastic double save, firstly from the defender and then secondly to claw the ball away as Byatt lunged for the loose ball.

However, after 20 minutes of dominance the pattern of the match began to shift and the visitors looked the more dangerous as the remainder of the half played out. Springett did well to block a dangerous chance after a Charles clearance had gone to the opposition. They then had another shot at goal, only to hit a team mate and just before the break Charles made a good low save as the shot came in from just outside the box. As the half concluded, Dacres-Smith came on for the

limping Owen and it is hoped that the injury is not a serious one.

The second half started with little wisps of mist starting to appear above the pitch which would get worse as the evening progressed but fortunately we were back on top again. In fact a large part of this second half consisted of through balls against a Deportivo high line which our boys would chase, only for the sweeper keeper to kick the ball clear. It wasn't a perfect plan though and Byatt broke the offside trap in the 49th minute, but his ball in was met by an Alder shot that lacked power and dribbled wide. Then it was Byatt's turn to slice wide after Smith had broken through with a well timed run two minutes later, but pressure was building and Quintyne was desperately unlucky to see his shot from 20 yards crash down and away off the crossbar with the loose ball not coming down in time for Byatt who headed the ball wide as he ran in.

The visitors were creating little to this point and Byatt broke through once again, only for his touch to let him down. Charles needed to make a good save after Wilson lost the ball at the back, but by and large it appeared just a matter of time before we took the lead.

Finally it came in the 72nd minute when a corner was headed out to the edge of the box where Quintyne hammered a rocket back past the keeper into the roof of the net. It was a superb strike which deserved to win any match, but maybe our players thought that it was won at this point, because from this point we switched off and four minutes later a close range finish enabled the opposition to draw level out of nowhere.

Brad Peters flicked a low corner towards goal, only to see the ball cleared off the line, but Charles was forced to tip a powerful shot over the bar as Deportivo began to fancy their chances of pinching the match and on the break that's exactly what they did after an 86th minute shot was originally blocked before the loose ball was forced in. Six minutes later another ball in from the right wing was tapped in at the far post to make the final score 2-4.

We had a couple of chances in the closing minutes with Quiassaca forcing two good saves out of the visiting keeper, but in the end we had to admit defeat and face the fact that we have just sixteen league fixtures remaining in our season now, assuming that we can avoid the need for the playoffs. However, on this performance, that looks unlikely and a massive improvement will be required before we face Chessington & Hook United on Tuesday; a team we have only beaten once at home in our last seven meetings.

Epsom & Ewell: Kane Charles, Gideon Acheampong, Steve Springett, Ryan Smith, Nick Wilson, Brad Peters, Ben Bauchop, Gavin Quintyne, Jamie Byatt, Josh Alder, Josh Owen

Subs: Ryan Dacres-Smith for Owen (44), Athan Smith-Joseph for Alder (66), Jaevon Dyer for Acheampong (71), Mario Quiassaca for Byatt (74)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

World Cup injury time knocks Epsom and Ewell out of local cup

12 February 2023



Dorking Wanderers B 2-1 Epsom & Ewell FC – Southern Combination League Division One Cup – Second Round – Saturday 3rd December 2022.

A controversial 97th minute winner from Ben Aubrey secured passage through to the Quarter-Final of the Division One Cup for Dorking Wanderers B and denied our boys the chance to repeat their run to the Final from last season.

I'm not sure what it is about these two teams, but they seem to bring out the worst in each other! Although a neutral might well have enjoyed this match; played at speed, full of commitment, heavy challenges and erratic refereeing, this was a frustrating encounter to witness as an Epsom supporter.

To me, it seemed like these teams always cancel each other out and this contest had very few real chances of note within the ninety minutes before the home side scored a late winner, that numerous sources told me was offside in the build up.

It was clear from the starting line up that our Management had chosen to give a few of our regulars some time off for this cup tie. Before this match three players had taken part in all of our previous twenty matches, yet none of them even took the field for this contest. Both Ryan Smith and Zach Powell missed their first starts of the season, with Powell not even on the bench and Brad Peters also sat this one out with the subs. I had posed the question in my preview as to how important this match was, and the answer was clear, and understandably so. However, it was important for Camrun Zain who finally made his debut in goal after performing well for us in pre-season. He also became the first player in our club history to have a surname beginning with Z!

That said, there was still enough quality on the field to win this match. Josh Alder started ahead of Jamie Byatt, while Ben Bauchop, Oliver Thompson and Kevin Moreno-Gomez made their first starts for the club and all contributed well. We then got off to a fine start in the tenth minute when Jaevon Dyer's square ball in from the right was well dummied and Alder ran onto it and smashed the ball low past Joshua Wilson from twelve yards, although there was doubt about the goal for a few seconds as an old issue re-appeared.

Back in December 2018 we scored three goals in four matches where the ball had hit the diagonal stanchion supporting the post and bounced back into play. It had never happened before or since. Until now! At first it wasn't clear that the goal had been spotted by the referee or his Assistant, but thankfully common sense prevailed and the goal was given. Seriously though, who designs goals like this!

Anyway, Alder's goal against his former club had us in control and we continued to hold the balance of play as the half progressed. Bauchop's free kick was blocked before Alder went down in the area, only to then pick up a yellow card for simulation, which, judging by the lack of complaint from the players, appeared to be the right decision.

Alder's shot was saved easily enough by Wilson and Bauchop's next free kick was a couple of feet wide of the post. As we approached the half Alder got a toe to Dyer's ball in, but was at full stretch and was unable to direct it on target. In response the home side showed little except for a couple of long range strikes, one of which Zain had to palm away just before the break.

What we really needed in the second half was to retain a bit more control in the middle of the park, but gradually we found ourselves holding less of the possession and Dorking were level in the 55th minute after a harmless enough looking ball was played in to Mark Soares, who then lobbed the advancing Zain who watched the ball drop down and bounce up into the net for the equaliser.

The home side sent a free kick wide but we were soon back on the attack and just after the hour Alder was put through again. He cut back onto his right foot and sent a curling strike towards the far corner where Wilson made an excellent save at full stretch to tip the ball over. From the corner Dyer shot wide after the original delivery was punched clear and we then brought on Byatt and Athan Smith-Joseph in an attempt to force the win.

In reality though, neither were able to stamp their authority on proceedings and a succession of injuries and niggly fouls ensured that the contest would become broken up and lead to quite a few minutes being added on. And in the seventh minute of injury time with penalties looming, a crossfield ball over to the right wing was squared low into the six yard box where Aubrey was there to knock the delivery past Zain. There were protestations from our boys over the offside claim and the game ended with a lot of heated discussion between players and even Management as some from the home team had run on to the pitch after that late goal.

But it was too late to do anything about it and it is Dorking Wanderers B that now progress to a Quarter-Final at home to Arundel, while we still haven't won a competitive match at the new Meadowbank Stadium in six attempts. We will of course have another chance soon as we return here on 2nd January for a far more important League match.

Epsom & Ewell: Camrun Zain, Gideon Acheampong (c), Johnny "Sonic" Akoto, Nick Wilson, Aaron Bogle, Oliver Thompson, Jaevon Dyer, Ben Bauchop, Josh Alder, Gavin Quintyne, Kevin Moreno-Gomez

Subs: Athan Smith-Joseph for Quintyne (73), Jamie Byatt for Alder (73), Josh Owen for Bauchop (84)

Top teams level at the end

12 February 2023



Epsom & Ewell 1-1 Shoreham Southern Combination League – Division One Saturday 26th November 2022.

Two very late goals after 85 minutes of attritional combat ensured that the best two teams in the League couldn't be separated on Saturday. However, as a spectacle, this match won't live long in the memory, with exception of a deserved 98th minute equaliser from our boys, which may turn out to be an extremely important goal in the grand scheme of things.

Shoreham were the visitors to Fetcham Grove and although they kicked off in third place in the table, they represented the largest threat to our title hopes, sitting six points behind us but with two games and boasting an unbeaten record. They also held a 100% away record in the League.

We made just the one enforced change from our win at Wick as Nick Wilson had to sit this one out after accumulating five bookings; he was replaced in the starting eleven by Gavin Quintyne, and that gap on the bench was filled by Tre Trowers. We made a bright start and had a half chance in the first thirty seconds when Johnny "Sonic" Akoto got down the right wing, but his pull back was skied by Athan Smith-Joseph.

We had another opportunity after Smith-Joseph was fouled around 25 yards out and Ryan Smith's set piece cleared the bar by around a foot, while in response Shoreham also had a couple of free kicks of their own, but without major threat. In reality this was to be a match with a number of half-chances, but very few really good ones.

There was no shortage of fight from both teams as the players knew that this was an extremely pivotal encounter. Neither team were getting very close to goal and we had another Smith free kick that just cleared the bar before Jaevon Dyer's ball in from the right was just ahead of Jamie Byatt. Brad Peters headed a Smith corner goalwards, but the danger was cleared, while at the other end Akoto headed a Shoreham effort on target clear from the goal line. As the match meandered towards half time Dyer tried his luck from twenty-five yards and Lewis Sheppherd in the Shoreham goal just about kept the ball out, while at the other end a misdirected header from Zach Powell was met by a wayward shot from the visitors from just outside the box.

The second half continued in a similar vein but with arguably even less chances. The game was a little niggly at times and the play was often stopped. We did have a very good chance in the 48th minute after Josh Owen won the ball and found Byatt who sent a great pass over to Smith-Joseph, who then cut back in, beat his man and saw his shot beaten away by Sheppherd, with the loose ball being fired at goal from Byatt but blocked by a defender.

Kane Charles had to punch away an Alex Fairs free kick from wide out and Harry Heath and Danny Jones picked up yellow cards for cynical fouls as the game degenerated. Charles then required treatment after appearing to get another knock that looked like it was also fairly deliberate before Quintyne picked up a yellow of his own and the game looked to be heading towards an uninspiring goalless draw. Until the 88th minute that is, when a visiting player got beyond Akoto who chased him but then brought him down needlessly for a penalty. Jones stepped up for the penalty, but Charles produced a good save, only for Marcus Richmond to nip in and fire the loose ball into the net from close range before our defenders could clear the danger.

This wasn't in the script! With just two minutes of normal time remaining we were in danger of losing our second home match in a row, but responded well. and got the ball forward a bit more frequently as time began to run out. As Shoreham players suddenly started to require treatment for injuries we tried to push them back. However, a Dyer free kick that went over the bar was all we could show for it as the clock ticked deep into injury time. Fortunately redemption was coming and it arrived in the 98th minute, Owen chased a ball into the far corner, retrieving it before delivering a great cross with his left foot. The ball was flicked on by one of our substitutes Ben Bauchop and was met at the far post by the outstretched leg of Smith-Joseph who found the net from about five yards out to secure the equaliser.

The match finally concluded after almost nine minutes of injury time and with the Shoreham bench saying that "this wasn't the World Cup" but looking back, there was quite a bit of injury time required in this half. Smith had required treatment before limping off, while injuries to Charles, Dyer and Smith-Joseph also took a while out of the forty-five, so maybe the extra time was justified in this case, although it did seem a tad generous.

Was it a fair result though? Absolutely! To lose this match would have been extremely harsh on our boys who were at least as good as our opponents. However, it must be said that we were not great and have played far better this season. Of course, the importance of the occasion almost ensured that this would be a tight encounter with neither team wanting to give anything away. It was just a shame that the match wasn't very well advertised by the club who seem to think that one tweet, repeated a few times in the week is sufficient. It clearly isn't, as an attendance of 94 counted by two different sources (inclusive of a few from Shoreham) testifies, although the club advertised it as 107. Maybe they were all inside the club house watching the World Cup instead!

This contest marked the halfway point of our League season and we have now completed both of our matches against Shoreham, failing to win either. However, we have a better looking run in and have nine of our remaining sixteen matches at home. Under the circumstances, I believe this point was better for us than for Shoreham, but only time will tell if that is the case. One thing is for certain in my opinion, which is that these are the best two clubs in the division and the title will go to one of them. However, it wouldn't surprise me if this battle goes all the way to the final day and this late equaliser from an otherwise forgettable match, may prove to be one of the most important we will score all season.

Epsom & Ewell: Kane Charles, Johnny "Sonic" Akoto, Zach Powell, Ryan 'Butch' Smith, Brad Peters (c), Gideon Acheampong, Athan Smith-Joseph, Gavin Quintyne, Jamie Byatt, Josh Owen, Jaevon Dyer

Subs: Ben Bauchop for Smith (63), Josh Alder for Byatt (71) Kevin Moreno-Gomez for Powell (82)

Wick burned at both ends

12 February 2023



Wick FC 0-2 Epsom & Ewell FC. Saturday 19th November. Southern Combination League – Division One.

A goal towards the end of each half was sufficient for our boys to see off the challenge from second placed Wick at Crabtree Park on Saturday; a result which extends our lead at the top of the table to five points.

However, this result was more than just the win. Last Saturday we threw in an awful performance against Worthing United. So poor in fact that our football club chose to hide away from even releasing a report, although obviously there was still one on this site, as supporters will always be kept informed of what is going on here. In that report I wrote that if we were able to defeat Wick and Shoreham in our upcoming matches that we would be able to write off last week's aberration as a freak result, and we are now half way towards being able to do just that.

Despite the substantial amount of rain in midweek, the pitch passed the inspection and looked in fairly good condition from pitch side. We took the field with two changes from the starting eleven against the Mavericks seven days previously; Johnny "Sonic" Akoto came in at right back with Gideon Acheampong moving across to cover the absent Aaron Bogle, who had only played 45 minutes of that Worthing United match before being replaced. Further forward Jaevon Dyer came

in for Gavin Quintyne, but found himself out on the wing with Jamie Byatt playing down the middle. Additionally, we would have three new Salts in this match as Kevin Moreno-Gomez (Horley Town, Burgess Hill), Ben Bauchop (Farnham Town) and Oliver Thompson (Colliers Wood United) would all see action off the bench.

The opening exchanges were fairly even, with a slight ascendancy in favour of the home team, although as the match progressed we began to hold a greater share of possession. Athan Smith-Joseph was giving a lot of trouble to the two defenders that were covering him, although the end product never found a team mate on this occasion. Balls in to the near post were cleared away by defenders, while deeper crosses just always seemed to elude Byatt in the middle.

Dyer was slightly quieter in the opening half, but actually appeared to carry more of a threat to goal when he had the ball. He was upended after quarter of an hour just outside the penalty area, and Ryan “Butch” Smith’s shot was well saved low to his right by Keelan Belcher. Byatt put Josh Owen through on goal with a clever ball, but the defender did well and forced him away from goal. Then Smith-Joseph sent a shot just over the bar after he cut in from the left. Just after the half hour a Wick clearance hit a team mate and rebounded kindly for Byatt, but he chose to pass instead of shooting and probably instantly regretted it as his ball was too far ahead of Owen.

However, it was apparent that we were the ones pushing more and more for the opening goal and it came in the only minute of first half injury time. Akoto got away down the right wing and he pulled the ball back to Dyer, standing around fifteen yards out. His shot went across Belcher but was blocked by a defender on the goal line, although Byatt was alert as ever and nipped in to force the loose ball into the net from around half a yard out before the defender could reach it.

This was a fair half time score and heading towards the evocatively named Condemned Tree end in the second half we continued to push. Dyer was brought down, leading to a bit of a scuffle, although nothing came of it. The home side sent a looping header wide of our goal from a deep free kick, but we were back on the attack soon after and Dyer beat a number of men as he ran across the edge of the Wick penalty area before striking a shot back across Belcher, which went just beyond the far post with Byatt steaming in and unable to reach it. The only thing that ended up in the net was the covering defender!

The game took a serious turn in the 62nd minute when Tommy Farr made a good run on the right for Wick, only to stumble over just outside the box. It looked comical when it happened, but it was soon apparent that he was in a lot of pain and the game stopped for ten minutes while Farr received treatment for an injured knee before being stretchered off. The home team advised after the match that it didn’t appear too serious, which was a relief to all.

The game restarted and was followed by the best chance of the match for the home team. They held some good possession down the right and as the ball came in, Aaron Tester appeared to almost flick at the ball with the outside of his foot from just inside the box and it cleared Kane Charles’ bar by inches.

Our first substitute Josh Alder replaced Byatt with ten minutes of official normal time to play, although due to the earlier injury it would become almost twenty-five. The match then saw a solid challenge from Brad Peters that Johan Van Driel reacted to and he got up and pushed Peters over from behind. However, the ball was up at the other end of the field by then and none of the officials saw it conclusively. The referee chose to award just the yellow card, which was probably the correct decision, although we have certainly seen red cards issued before for similar infringements.

A few minutes later Wick tried a long range dipping shot that cleared our crossbar by inches, rippling the net as it landed and convincing a few excited supporters that their team had equalised. In response Alder broke through on the left but his shot was well kept out by Belcher’s leg. However, he would get a second opportunity in the 96th minute as Wick pushed up and Zach Powell’s long clearance cleared the defenders on the half way line and Alder was through again. This time he ran in and finished clinically with a low shot across Belcher which just clipped a glove, but still nestled in the far corner for our second goal.

Both teams had a final chance as the time ticked down. Dyer was denied in the act of shooting by a superb block challenge from Harry Williams, while at the other end Dave Crouch tried his luck from distance, but Charles was able to tip the ball onto the post and away for a corner that ultimately came to nothing. Finally, after around fifteen minutes of injury time the whistle blew to confirm that all three points were Epsom bound.

Overall, this was a vastly improved performance on the previous one. Instead of a porous defence that looked like it might concede to Worthing United at regular intervals, we kept Wick at arm’s length for much of the match and restricted them mostly to long range efforts. Up front we created more opportunities, while in midfield we took charge of the match, which was something we had struggled to do in our previous contest. The only black mark on the day was a rather harsh booking for Nick Wilson who will now miss the important Shoreham match on Saturday through suspension. I’m not sure why the club chose to put this information in the public domain, but if we play as well next week as we did in this match, it shouldn’t make any difference as we have decent strength in depth across the squad.

Epsom & Ewell: Kane Charles, Johnny “Sonic” Akoto, Zach Powell, Ryan ‘Butch’ Smith, Brad Peters (c), Gideon Acheampong, Athan Smith-Joseph, Nick Wilson, Jamie Byatt, Josh Owen, Jaevon Dyer

Subs: Josh Alder for Byatt (80), Kevin Moreno-Gomez for Smith-Joseph (91), Gavin Quintyne for Wilson (97), Ben Bauchop for Owen (100), Oliver Thompson for Powell (102)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Maverick win over the Salts?

12 February 2023



Epsom & Ewell FC **1 - 3** Worthing United FC. Saturday 12th November 2022. Who said lightning doesn’t strike twice in the same place? Last season we hosted Worthing United with the knowledge that we had won easily away from home and on the back of an eleven game home winning run, only to lose that day by the only goal. Eight months on and with another 3-0 away win in our pocket from this season’s trip, we witnessed the end of our twelve match unbeaten run this time as the Mavericks travelled home from Fetcham Grove with a 3-1 victory. This was also our first loss at home on this day since 1949!

It would be very easy to look at the recent departures of our Joint Manager Liam Giles along with some of our players as a reason for this loss, but I don’t believe this was the case. Quite simply, this was just a very poor performance with all three goals coming as a result of defensive miscommunications and in a way it was very similar to the one we suffered on the opening day of the season at Shoreham.

The starting line up contained three changes from our win over Billingshurst. Aaron Bogle came in for Steve Springett at the back, while in midfield Nick Wilson returned and Jamie Byatt made his first start since re-joining the club, while Jubril Adamson had left for Croydon and Jaevon Dyer was sitting on the bench.

For the first quarter of an hour possession was mainly in favour of our boys, although there were hints of problems ahead as the visitors missed two good chances to open up their account when our defence parted rather easily. Then we took the lead in the 15th minute. I wrote in my preview of this match about how Byatt would fit in to the line up and the answer was easy to see as Athan Smith-Joseph got down the left and sent a low ball in for our striker to poach his first of the season and 32nd for the club on just his 30th appearance with a typical close range finish inside the six yard box.

We continued to press as we exerted more control over our opponents, but then in the 22nd minute the wheels fell off and we never truly got them on again. The visitors pumped a hopeful ball forward and Dan Hills just got a toe to it ahead of Kane Charles. The ball fell a little ahead of him though and it looked like Bogle would make the routine clearance, only for Hills to stick out a leg and block the attempt back into the net. I recall Matt Ferdinando doing something similar for us to win a match against Spelthorne Sports a few years back and I gave him credit for his innovation, and so I must also praise the scorer equally here. However, I couldn’t help but think that this was a completely avoidable goal to concede and it appeared to hit us very badly.

Worthing United nearly scored again a few minutes later as they broke through once again, but Charles stood his ground well and the shot was dragged across the goal. The remainder of the half contained little to write home about apart from a thirty yard strike from Ryan Smith which only just cleared the bar, but the period was mostly broken up by injuries and poor passing, although only two minutes of injury time were played, which was somewhat surprising.

Whilst it wasn’t clear whether it was tactical or injury related, Bogle did not reappear for the second half with Johnny “Sonic” Akoto coming on and Gideon Acheampong moving into the centre of defence, but the general pattern of play continued. We held possession for large periods but appeared extremely vulnerable to the counter attack. One of these resulted in a powerful shot just wide of our goal in the 48th minute, but eight minutes later a delivery in from the right was poked past his own keeper by Brad Peters and the visitors were ahead.

Jaevon Dyer entered the contest for Gavin Quintyne who had covered an enormous amount of ground and he created one chance on the right that Byatt poked at

with his left foot and sent over the bar. Further changes followed as Josh Alder and Warren Colman came on, but with the clock showing the 74th minute we conceded again in similar comedic circumstances as Charles flapped at the ball and half knocked a cross away, but then chased after the loose ball and lunged in, appearing to bring a striker down. However, as we appeared to freeze, maybe expecting a penalty against us, Kiko neatly chipped the ball back over everyone into an empty net from twenty yards.

This was serious. We hadn't created much of a threat throughout the second half and were now two goals down. Bad became worse after Springett came on but lasted only a few minutes before being sent off after kicking out. Whilst it probably wouldn't have made any difference by this stage whether we had kept eleven men on the field or not, this was our fourth red card of the competitive season, together with three sin-bins, and this indiscipline needs to improve before it costs us further points. I'd be surprised if we aren't right at the foot of the merit tables right now.

There was still time for Hadleigh de Vall to pick up a second yellow card for our opponents, but all we were able to produce was a decent Wilson free kick from an angle that was tipped away for a corner, while in the eighth minute of injury time Peters did well to get to a Zach Powell ball into the box, but he was at full stretch and couldn't keep the header down.

The good news is that if we are able to pick up wins at Wick next week and at home to Shoreham seven days later, then this result will be able to be consigned to the history books as just a bad day at the office. I'd like to think that we are good enough to make that happen, but we will have to produce a vastly improved performance in those matches if that is to be the case, as this one was awful!

Southern Combination League - Division One

Epsom & Ewell: Kane Charles, Gideon Acheampong, Zach Powell, Ryan 'Butch' Smith, Brad Peters (c), Aaron Bogle, Athan Smith-Joseph, Nick Wilson, Jamie Byatt, Gavin Quintyne, Josh Owen

Subs: Johnny "Sonic" Akoto for Bogle (HT), Jaevon Dyer for Quintyne (62), Josh Alder for Byatt (73), Warren Colman for Owen (73), Steve Springett for Smith-Joseph (80)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Ducks in a Row put Epsom 4 points on top

12 February 2023



Forest Row 0-2 Epsom & Ewell Southern Combination League - Division One Tuesday 18th October 2022

Five weeks ago we visited Forest Row and were heading for a goalless draw in a tame contest before the match was abandoned for a nasty injury to Andy "Woody" Hall. This time we did at least manage to complete the fixture and although we were well worth the win, the supporters couldn't really relax until a late second goal secured the points, which were then dedicated to Woody by the players after the match.

This third visit to Tinsley Lane this season means that we have now played as many League matches here as we have at Leatherhead this season. In fact, this eighth away fixture ensures that we have now completed half of our away schedule already!

We took the field in our red kit which might look nice, but is not our traditional colour and really shouldn't ever be used competitively, and we got off to a worrying start when a free kick was squared for a shot at goal that pinged off our crossbar in just the eighth minute, but were soon on the attack and broke through, albeit in fortuitous circumstances in the 14th minute when Ryan "Butch" Smith tried his luck from 25 yards and although the ball took a slight deflection off a defender, Ben Abbott, the Forest Row keeper will have been disappointed as he let the ball slip under him and into the net.

Josh Alder then broke through on goal and poked the ball wide of Abbott who brought our man down, earning a yellow card in the process, but he redeemed himself by saving Smith's penalty in the 19th minute. Then Jaevon Dyer, back again after being indisposed at Montpelier Villa on Saturday, had a good run and shot at goal but Abbott saved comfortably. He was followed by Gideon Acheampong, maybe remembering his left footed strike when he scored at Oakwood in August, and decided to have another go from distance, but this one sailed over the bar.

We had to make an early substitution when Alder was tackled and damaged his leg in the process and Athan Smith-Joseph came on in his place. Smith-Joseph had originally been named in the starting eleven ahead of Alder, before the line-up was switched just before kick off, and the new man's contribution was almost immediate as his ball in from the left was poked into the net ahead of Abbott by Dyer, only for the offside flag to be raised against him.

Brad Peters picked up a yellow card for a foul out wide, but from our next attack Dyer shot from an angle with Abbott doing just enough to divert the ball around the post and from the corner Josh Owen was waiting as the ball was half cleared, and saw his snap shot fly inches wide of the top corner. We nearly got a second in injury time as Smith-Joseph mishit his low left wing cross and it nearly crept in; Abbott keeping the ball out with a desperate lunge with his foot.

The second half opened in a similar fashion to the first half with the home side making a decent opportunity on the right, but the ball in was just in front of the incoming striker. We attacked again and Nick Wilson's shot appeared to hit a hand, but to be fair, the defender it hit was standing in very close proximity and it would have been a very harsh call to give the penalty.

Smith-Joseph was causing a lot of damage on the left wing, but then he was switched with Warren Colman and neither provided quite the same threat. The Row striker sent a decent chance wide of our goal from the edge of the area, but they were restricted to very few efforts on goal and their chances of taking anything from the match reduced substantially after their number 18 saw red for a foul on Athan Smith-Joseph in the 65th minute. It didn't appear to be particularly dangerous from where I was situated, but our players saw it from a different angle, clearly didn't like it and reacted as a group. Maybe this convinced the referee to issue the red card and there was really no way back for the home side from this point. Colman struck over after good interplay with Wilson before Smith's free kick had the power taken out of it by a defensive wall that was no more than six yards away from the ball. We really should ask referees to pace the ten yards out more often.

Eldi Baze came on for Colman and Smith-Joseph reverted over to the left wing. However, the game was starting to get a bit niggly and Dyer made a great run before his shot was blocked for a corner and while on the ground he was stepped on by a defender, which understandably led to a reaction. The referee decided to call both Captains over to tell them to calm down and to be fair this seemed to do the trick. From the subsequent corner, Smith-Joseph saw his goal bound shot blocked on the line by a defender and the danger was cleared.

We were then finally able to clinch the points in the 86th minute. Baze chased a ball on the right and just managed to keep his footing as he rode a challenge. He then cut in from the right before drilling the ball into the net from twelve yards with his left foot; the ball just flicking off both Abbott and a defender on its way in. It was his first goal for our club and one that could prove to be quite crucial in the grand scheme of things. Another substitute Johnny "Sonic" Akoto then made a good run and set up Baze for another shot, but this time a defender got in the way.

In the fourth minute of injury time we had one final chance when a loose defensive pass enabled Smith-Joseph to break through on goal, although he was unlucky to see his low shot cannon back off the post from twelve yards and the danger was cleared.

The final whistle went soon after and we now lead the table by four points and have dropped less points than any other club in the division. However, this match and the one before it have not seen us at our most clinical, bearing in mind that the matches were against the two teams at the foot of the table, and I believe we will need to step things up if we are to claim the points on Saturday when we are visited by Seaford Town. However, if that sounds a little critical, it should also be pointed out that this was our third straight clean sheet, which is a definite defensive improvement from our September results.

Epsom & Ewell: Kane Charles, Gideon Acheampong, Zach Powell, Ryan 'Butch' Smith, Brad Peters (c), Aaron Bogle, Josh Alder, Nick Wilson, Jaevon Dyer, Josh Owen, Warren Colman

Subs: Athan Smith-Joseph for Alder (28), Eldi Baze for Colman (74), Steve Springett for Wilson (88), Johnny "Sonic" Akoto for Dyer (88)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk