Vital points for local football team

On Saturday **Epsom and Ewell FC** secured an extremely important three points against promotion rivals Selsey, defeating them by the same score line of 3-2 that we had in deepest Sussex back in March. As with that match, this encounter contained some twists and turns but ultimately went our way due to another late winner, this time from **Lewis Pearch**, whose first goal for our club may turn out to be one of the most important of the season.

Going into this contest, we already knew that two wins from our remaining three matches would guarantee us the second playoff spot, barring a very unlikely swing of goal difference, but we also knew that Selsey still had aspirations to qualify themselves, so this was always going to be a tight encounter. With current Manager Barry Gartell away, Matt Chapman again took charge and we made just one change to the starting eleven from Wednesday's draw against Mile Oak with Steve Springett coming in for the absent Kevin Moreno-Gomez. However, Springett was not played in his regular left back slot in this match, instead playing in the centre of defence with Gideon Acheampong reverting to right back and Johnny "Sonic" Akoto moving over to the left, maybe as a design to try to use his speed to keep visiting danger man Shane Brazil as quiet as possible, and the pair of them had a decent battle today.

We needed a good start and for the first time in weeks, we got one in the ninth minute. A superb interchange of passes between Jaan Stanley and Jaevon Dyer on the right resulted in a ball across the edge of the penalty area to Athan Smith-Joseph, who took a touch, headed back across to the right before suddenly drilling the ball back across Syd Davies into the Selsey net from 18 yards.

Unfortunately that would prove to be the extent of Smith-Joseph's involvement as he aggravated his hamstring a few minutes later and limped off, to be replaced on the left wing by Pearch. Hopefully he will not be out for very long as it was clear that our replacement didn't really carry the same threat in a position that admittedly isn't his primary one.

Another injury would also prove pivotal in the 28th minute as a couple of our players went up with Davies for a right wing cross and Stanley collided with the keeper, catching him around the knee. I'll be honest, it looked fairly innocuous at the time but despite treatment Davies would require another bit of work with the physio shortly after and was strapped up for the remainder of the half before being replaced at half time by Ryan Matlock.

At this point, I was hoping that our players would get a chance to test him out with a couple of shots, but the visitors were actually getting back into the match and kept the ball away from him for a while. Then things got worse for us as they equalised from a harmless looking free kick over on the Selsey left wing in the 40th minute as Corey Burns nipped ahead of Tom Theobald to reach the near post delivery and flick it past him from close range, although it would have been nice to have seen a defender somewhere near him!

However, before half time we were back in front. Jamie Byatt collected the ball around twenty yards out in the third minute of injury time and decided that he did indeed want to test their limping keeper out, striking a beauty from twenty yards that just sailed over the rather stationary Davies. It was a superb piece of opportunism and of all the 40, yes 40 goals Byatt has now scored for us in under two seasons, this was probably the one that was from the furthest distance!

We were arguably a little fortunate to be ahead at the half, but it was irrelevant soon after anyway as the visitors equalised in the 51st minute. We had already had a scare when Brazil's shot had gone wide of the goal, but from a corner shortly afterwards, Theobald tried to punch the ball clear, only to knock the ball straight onto the shoulder of Bradley Vaughan from where the ball rebounded into the net.

At 2-2 this match really could have gone either way. We wobbled for a few minutes and Theobald redeemed himself with a superb double save after a Selsey shot had rebounded back to a striker off the foot of his right hand post, blocking the subsequent header and then a follow up shot which he turned wide for a corner.

With the clock on 68 minutes we brought on Thompson Adeyemi and Rory Edwards to give us fresh legs and Adeyemi set up Dyer who crumpled under a challenge from Matlock, even though there was no contact and was fortunate not to be booked for simulation, although Burns did pick up a card for Selsey around the same time for a handball.

As we started to enter the closing stages though, we began to get a little more possession and Springett sent a thirty yard free kick just wide of the post. With George Owusu already on for Dyer, Alex Penfold then came on for Nick Wilson with Springett moving over onto the left wing and releasing Pearch to a more central position alongside Byatt. This tactical move would prove pivotal in the 91st minute as a deep Penfold free kick was only headed half clear by Bradley Higgins-Pearce under pressure from Adeyemi and the ball fell to Pearch, standing just beyond the penalty spot and he guided his header over everyone and into the net for what proved to be the winner.

At the end there was a lot of celebration from our players, perhaps too much when considering that we still have much work to do

to gain promotion. However, part of this probably came from the relief of winning a match that looked like it was turning against us and also guaranteed us a playoff spot, so it was understandable. Now we have to make sure that we get three more points to ensure that this home match wasn't our last ever at Fetcham Grove. We're not quite ready to leave just yet!

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong, Johnny Akoto, Nick Wilson, Dylan Merchant, Steve Springett, Jaevon Dyer, Gavin Quintyne, Jamie Byatt, Jaan Stanley, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Lewis Pearch for Smith-Joseph (17), Thompson Adeyemi for Stanley (68), Rory Edwards for Quintyne (68), George Owusu for Dyer (78), Alex Penfold for Wilson (85)

All level after quick return

Epsom & Ewell 1-1 Mile Oak. Southern Combination League - Division One. Wednesday 12th April 2023

For the first time since 2006 we played consecutive fixtures against the same team when Mile Oak visited Fetcham Grove on Wednesday evening for their return fixture, following a disappointing goalless draw back in March. It was only the eighth time in club history that we had played both League matches on a Wednesday against the same team, and stats like that will tell you that I have very little to write about this latest encounter, a 1-1 draw!

For those who are interested this was our 101st ever League match played on a Wednesday, but it won't live long in the memory as the visitors led through a harsh looking penalty only to equalise before the half, although only rarely did we really threaten to take the lead. On another day we might have pinched the points, but ultimately both teams had to settle for just the one.

This match nearly didn't take place, due to further torrential rain and it is to the club's credit that they delayed the match inspection in the hope that the pitch was able to deal with the water in time for kick off. It is amazing how many people don't seem to understand that the weather we are facing is the worst we have seen since the 2012/13 season and sometimes you have to take a chance to get the games played.

In terms of personnel, Nick Wilson came into the starting eleven ahead of Rory Edwards, while Kevin Moreno-Gomez returned for the absent Alex Penfold and Johnny "Sonic" Akoto came in and moved Gideon Acheampong over into central defence in place of the missing Chris Boulter. Up front Athan Smith-Joseph returned after a couple of games away while Lewis Pearch moved to the bench.

We nearly scored in the opening minutes of the match when Jaan Stanley's strike was blocked, before a quick episode of pinball took place in the Oak six yard area, but the danger was cleared. Jamie Byatt then sent an Akoto cross goalwards, but the offside flag was raised and it wouldn't have counted.

In the 17th minute the visitors scored with their first attack on goal. A low left wing cross was blocked by Akoto who was adjudged to have used his arm in the process. It looked harsh, but I was a long way from the action and Marriott tucked away the penalty a minute later. We nearly produced an immediate response when Smith-Joseph sent a ball in from the left where Byatt was there to knock the ball in from close range, only to see the offside flag raised in his direction once again.

Mile Oak headed a free kick wide before Smith-Joseph dragged a shot across goal and then on the half hour Byatt was brought down on the edge of the area but Wilson sent the free kick over the bar. We were getting closer though and in the 38th minute Smith-Joseph weaved his way along the edge of the penalty area before unleashing a powerful shot that was met by a top drawer save from Stenning who was then well-placed to deny Wilson as he headed Stanley's subsequent corner goalwards.

Fortunately though we didn't have to wait much longer for the equaliser which came in the 39th minute when Stanley produced a slide rule pass across goal from the left which was met by a close range shot under Stenning from Jaevon Dyer. The final threat of the half came from a harshly awarded free kick against us, but our defensive wall did its job and we went in at the break level.

We were a little better in the second half as the visitors appeared to lack a bit of ambition. Byatt saw his header from a Stanley free kick blocked before Smith-Joseph dragged a shot across goal from a good position. However, the game began to meander and very little of note happened until Byatt lost his defender who then pulled him down from behind to earn a yellow card. Wilson's free kick was then well saved by Stenning who also made a good save to keep out Akoto's angled drive a couple of minutes later.

We then made a rash of substitutions, but this seemed to kill the momentum we had been building and although one of these, Lewis Pearch nearly earned us a penalty when he appeared to be brought down, the spot kick wasn't given and his lack of real protest told me that it had been the right decision. A couple of yellow cards for Wilson and Steve Springett followed in injury time before the match ended with the anti-climax of a 1-1 draw.

The draw is not a disastrous result and we know that two wins from our three remaining matches at home to Selsey and away at Chessington & Hook United and at Billingshurst will be enough to secure a home run in the playoffs, but we will have to play a lot better than this if we are to actually come out of those playoffs with any glory.

Oddly enough though, for all the importance of the result there was a bigger story quietly advised in the match programme which was that Leatherhead have terminated their ground share agreement with us after applying a break clause. Why we would have agreed to a clause that could leave us vulnerable to such a short notice termination is beyond me, but it would appear that we will be looking for a new ground to play at in 2023/24. This is especially problematic as any move back eastwards could end with us being moved into the Southern Counties East League if we failed to gain promotion, which I do not imagine we'd want to do. It is hoped that the club will announce something on this urgently.

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong, Kevin Moreno-Gomez, Nick Wilson, Dylan Merchant, Johnny Akoto, Jaevon Dyer, Gavin Quintyne, Jamie Byatt, Jaan Stanley, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Thompson Adeyemi for Stanley (72), Lewis Pearch for Byatt (77), Hamoud Salum for Dyer (77), Steve Springett for Moreno-Gomez (85), Theo Lukyamuzi for Smith-Joseph (90)

Goalless draw a relief from 4 goal defeats for both sides.

Mile Oak 0-0 Epsom & Ewell. Southern Combination League - Division One. Wednesday 29th March.

On Wednesday evening two teams came together, both low on confidence and nursing 5-1 defeats from the previous Saturday, and they battled each other to a standstill with a competitive, but goalless draw.

I asked in my Arundel report just exactly who is in charge and we got our answer a couple of hours before the match as it was advised that our newly appointed Director of Football Anthony Jupp had left the club. In addition, Assistant Manager Matt Chapman was no longer in charge, but was still in the dugout while Vice-Chairman Barry Gartell took over again as Manager. Some may recall him having a successful stint following the dismissal of Sam Morgan in August of 2021, although these were different circumstances, as last time we were sitting near the foot of the table. The club finally advised that it was "still looking for a new long-term Manager" which tells me that they are not looking to advertise the position, or you would think they'd have said so!

On a heavy pitch we finally managed to get the match underway at the fourth time of asking, following three previous postponements, and as usual we had changes to our line up. Gartell decided that the midfield needed changing up, so club Captain Ryan Smith and Nick Wilson started on the bench, having been replaced by Rory Edwards who made his first start for the club, while Jaan Stanley came back in on the left wing in what appeared to be a slightly different formation with Athan Smith-Joseph still absent. At the back Chris Boulter and Alex Penfold came back into the line up in place of the absent Kevin Moreno-Gomez and Oliver Thompson, both of whom had failed to complete the match at Arundel.

We started brightly enough and had the majority of the possession in the first half. An early Penfold cross was met by a Jamie Byatt header, but it was a tough chance and he was unable to get the ball on target. The ball stayed mainly in the Mile Oak half as the predicted heavy rain began to come down, sheeting across the ground and the home side then had a couple of chances, firstly when a free kick was headed over from close range, but then in the 25th minute when a right wing cross was met by the head of Zak Kladis who directed his header back across goal. Tom Theobald made a great diving save to divert the ball on to the post and then as it bounced back towards him, he clawed the ball away before it crossed the line. It was a fantastic save and one that ultimately would earn us a point.

Gavin Quintyne saw his shot deflected wide for a corner and Jaevon Dyer produced a low shot that was well saved by the foot of Aaron Stenning in the Oak goal before he had to be alert to parry a Stanley free kick to safety. Stenning also had a slice of luck as the pitch bobbled on him and he produced an air shot, just getting back in time to save a corner. As the half ended Quintyne was only just over the bar from twenty yards, so you could argue that it was a fairly respectable first half from an Epsom perspective as the teams went for their half time break.

Regrettably the second half was nowhere near as interesting from an Epsom point of view. Mile Oak had a header at goal in the early stages which was deflected over and Theobald then had to make a low save on the hour mark. He had a lucky escape in the 66th minute when he came out to clear a ball near the edge of the penalty area but missed it. Fortunately we had defensive cover.

For our part, we seemed to be restricted to sending long balls up to Byatt, who tried his best with the limited service he had. In the 68th minute a nice one-two with Lewis Pearch gave him a shooting opportunity, but he dragged his shot beyond the far post from twelve yards and our best chance of the night had gone.

As so often happens with tight encounters, a little bit of niggle started to enter the contest and after Kladis had been fouled, he then clattered into Gideon Acheampong who reacted; both players earning yellow cards for their trouble, following the obligatory player scuffle. However, the game was beginning to deteriorate by this stage and our threats were becoming less and less. Dyer and Stanley became non-factors on the wings, although Dyer nearly pulled a moment of magic out in the 86th minute with a good run and powerful strike that missed the far post by inches.

In truth though we were beginning to lose the game in midfield as the home side kept pushing us back and it did seem odd that on such a heavy surface we waited until the 88th minute before making a substitution. We appeared to be crying out for fresh legs in the middle of the park, yet with two players that could do just that job on the bench, Wilson would only get on in the fifth minute of injury time, while Smith wouldn't take the field at all. We did nearly pinch a winner when a long throw bounced up, but I don't think Byatt expected the ball to reach him and he only managed to get the faintest of glances to the ball literally two yards out, which Stenning still caught anyway.

In reality the longer this game went on, the more it looked like Mile Oak would pinch the win, but ultimately neither team really did enough to deserve all three points and we had to settle for the goalless draw.

These dropped points mean that the opportunity to finish in second place is now no longer exclusively in our hands, with both Wick and Godalming Town now three points behind us and holding a game in hand. Godalming also now have a better goal difference than us and are clearly in a better run of form, although they have a tough finishing schedule so there is still hope if we can win our final four fixtures. Who do we face this Saturday? It's Mile Oak again!!

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong, Alex Penfold, Rory Edwards, Chris Boulter, Dylan Merchant, Jaevon Dyer, Gavin Quintyne, Jamie Byatt, Lewis Pearch, Jaan Stanley

Subs: Musa Beegun for Pearch (88), George Owusu for Stanley (91), Nick Wilson for Edwards (95)

Salts give Mullets taste for big victory

Arundel FC 5-1 Epsom & Ewell FC. Saturday 25th March.

Arundel, nicknamed the Mullets, secured their first ever competitive victory over us in comprehensive circumstances at Mill Road on Saturday afternoon with a 5-1 drubbing, and make no mistake, we could have no real complaints here.

Top of Southern Combination League Division One

We made some changes once again from our narrow but comfortable win over Montpelier Villa two weeks previously. Jaan Stanley and Athan Smith-Joseph were not available and originally Jaevon Dyer was listed as a substitute, due to a breakdown on route to the picturesque ground. Fortunately he arrived in time and was then added to the team sheet at the expense of Steve Springett who dropped to the bench. Alex Penfold also joined him there, while Lewis Pearch came in for his first start and we had another new centre back pairing of Dylan Merchant and Oliver Thompson with Kevin Moreno-Gomez also returning to the starting eleven alongside them.

On a blustery day we made an awful start and went behind in the eleventh minute as a harmless enough attack on the left suddenly turned dangerous with a ball across goal that was turned into the net by Carl Brown. Six minutes later Tom Theobald made a decent punch clear of a looping header and appeared to be fouled in the process, yet a corner was awarded and in the 18th minute the inswinging delivery caught Theobald out in the swirling wind and he dropped the ball over the line for Arundel's second goal.

We had created little to this point although Jamie Byatt fashioned a half chance a couple of minutes after the goal, only to see his shot blocked by a defender. Dyer then made decent progress down the right flank but his pull back was behind both Byatt and Pearch.

Regrettably we then went three nil down in the 33rd minute as a clever pass floated over the top of Moreno-Gomez where Brown was waiting to drill the ball into the net from an angle and it nearly got worse six minutes later when James Crane then hit the bar as we were carved open again. The half ended with the home side having another good chance from a corner but the unmarked Harry Russell headed over the bar.

This was a horrible first half to watch and whilst you always feel that a good start to the second half could spark some sort of comeback, it really looked as though the only win we were likely to celebrate at Arundel was when long-serving supporter John Bonner won a crate of lager in the club raffle!

The other item of note at the half time break was the sight of our entire Management team standing outside the dressing room as the players clearly had some sort of discussion without them. Whatever was said, it seemed to work for a while. We made two substitutions with Rory Edwards and Springett coming on for the limping Smith and Moreno-Gomez respectively and nearly scored straight away as a Springett corner was flicked just over the bar by Nick Wilson. Next up with a decent chance was Gavin Quintyne who tried his luck with his weaker foot and sliced the opportunity wide. However, he made amends in the 50th minute when he weaved his way across the edge of the penalty area before threading a pass through to Byatt, who guided the ball back across Oliver Howley in the Arundel goal from twelve yards which then crept in off the far post to get us back in the game.

Another Springett corner caused trouble as Merchant headed the delivery towards Thompson, whose header was just over the bar, but our only period of superiority in the match was about to end. Thompson limped off with an injured knee and whilst it was good to see Johnny "Sonic" Akoto returning after a few weeks out, his introduction required a defensive reshuffle. Whether this had a bearing on the next Arundel goal in the 63rd minute is hard to say, but a harmless ball in from the right was struck at goal by an unmarked player, and whilst Theobald made a good save from the first shot, Will Breden was also in acres of space and he drove the loose ball home from a few yards out with our defence absolutely nowhere in sight.

In the 72nd minute it got worse still as a low ball in from the right was tapped in at the far post for a fifth goal by Breden once again, and we were lucky not to concede more with Wilson being our latest sin-bin visitor around this time, while Byatt and Quintyne both picked up yellow cards for fouls to go with the first half issue to Smith. Our afternoon was then summed up when Dyer put substitute George Owusu through on goal ten minutes from time, only for him to tread on the ball in the act of shooting!

Now that ten man Shoreham's victory over East Preston has virtually guaranteed them the title, it is imperative we cling on to second place to guarantee the home playoff matches. The players kept trying in this contest, even at the end and I'm aware that some more new signings are likely as we approach the transfer deadline on 31st March, but if we don't get back to winning ways on Wednesday at Mile Oak, we could slip out of that position. We cannot make any more mistakes now.

This is not just about us though. We didn't play well but full credit should also go to Arundel who played with a lot of energy and just appeared to cover a lot more ground per player than we did and will no doubt chase Selsey all the way for that final playoff spot, in which case we may well see them again before the end of the season. However, this is a massive reality check for us. Are we actually good enough to go up? We'll probably find out the answer to that question on Wednesday as we face a Mile Oak team that have also lost 5-1 this weekend.

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong, Kevin Moreno-Gomez, Ryan Smith (c), Oliver Thompson, Dylan Merchant, Jaevon Dyer, Nick Wilson, Jamie Byatt, Gavin Quintyne, Lewis Pearch

Subs: Steve Springett for Moreno-Gomez, (HT), Rory Edwards for Smith (HT), Johnny Akoto for Thompson (58), George Owusu for Byatt (76)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Epsom and Ewell FC form rising

Epsom & Ewell FC 2-1 Montpelier Villa. Southern Combination League - Division One. Saturday 11th March 2023

Some days they go in and some days they don't! Saturday's meeting with Montpelier Villa definitely fits into the latter category as we dominated proceedings throughout almost all of the match, creating a number of chances. However, only two of those were converted and it led to a bit of a nervy ending before we were able to properly celebrate clinching all three points.

With no information released by the club since Anthony Jupp resigned as Manager, but was then appointed Director of Football, it is still unclear whether Matt Chapman has the job now, or whether the club still intend to advertise for a replacement, or maybe have someone in mind. Either way, Chapman was in charge again for this match and despite the occasional flat period, we were good value for this win. Tom Theobald returned in goal, while Steve Springett came in at left back making his 50th appearance in place of the absent Kevin Moreno-Gomez. In fact we had three new defenders this week as Chris Boulter and Ollie Thompson were not available either, so Alex Penfold and Nick Wilson came in at the back and both looked solid there, even if Wilson would be somewhat harshly penalised later when being adjudged guilty of a foul in the penalty area.

Up front we were almost the same as for the Godalming match with one notable exception; Jamie Byatt coming into the starting eleven for the absent Mario Quiassaca and although Quiassaca had played fairly well on Tuesday, we just do not possess another goal scorer like the ageless Byatt. It is no surprise that he was part of the reason why we were able to cause so many threats in this match as everyone knows where he will be!

The match started off in a rather odd fashion when Penfold picked up the ball, explaining to the referee that he thought it was damaged! Luckily the referee saw common sense and the game restarted once the ball had been checked!

We pushed the visitors back in the early stages and the concern on the visitors bench was clear with many instructions being given out. Athan Smith-Joseph worked a clever one-two with Byatt, but his final delivery was beyond his incoming teammates. This was followed up by a good run from the right by Jaevon Dyer who set up Jaan Stanley for a low strike that was fairly comfortably saved.

However, we took the lead in the 18th minute in rather "Sunday League" circumstances as a long ball from (I think) Theobald straight up the middle was chased by Smith-Joseph who just got a toe to the ball ahead of the advancing Toby Gardner in the Villa goal, diverting it into the path of Byatt who finished off into the open net from inside the six yard box. The Villa Management tried to gee their young team up, but seven minutes later we doubled our lead and this came from the wing play of Dyer who beat his man and cut in before laying the ball back to Stanley, who flicked the ball on for Smith-Joseph to tap in from a yard.

A tactical substitution followed for the visitors in an attempt to stop the damage and in the 29th minute they were back in the game, admittedly against the run of play when Wilson was adjudged to have brought down a striker. Mayckoi Sabino tucked away the penalty, giving Theobald no chance and it was 2-1. If someone had told me at that point that we'd already seen all the goals for the day I'd have been extremely surprised, but that is how it turned out.

It wasn't for the want of trying though. Stanley saw his shot from Byatt's pull back well saved by Gardner and then in injury time Dyer's ball in was inches away from a full stretch Byatt.

The second half also started with a strange incident as Sabino was grappling with Gideon Acheampong for the ball. It was a physical battle and our man ended up on the deck with a free kick awarded in our favour, but for some reason the yellow card was waved at Sabino, when I really couldn't see any reason for it.

In the 56th minute after some more pressure Dyer just got his toe to the ball ahead of a challenge which then took him out in the penalty area, but he then blotted his copybook by sending the penalty Harry Kane style, just over the bar to the keeper's right! Byatt then headed over from eight yards before a much better downward header forced Gardner into a smart near post save with his legs.

After 68 minutes he gave way to new signing Lewis Pearch and the new man had a good opportunity in the 74th minute when a clever pass put him through, only for his shot to hit Gardner's right hand post with Ryan Smith striking the loose ball into the side netting from a wider angle.

Despite the chances being missed, we were still well in control and just needed to see the game out sensibly, which made it all the more frustrating when Gavin Quintyne spoilt his good performance with a comment to the referee that earned him his second visit to the sin bin in five matches. This was worrying because we absolutely couldn't afford to drop any points in this fixture, particularly after being so much in the ascendancy. Luckily we were still well in control through this period and Stanley was really unlucky to see his piledriver from over thirty yards just dip over the bar, clipping the top of the netting.

We added George Owusu and Owen Higgins also came on after some time out, although Higgins was guilty of a clumsy foul just outside the penalty area in the 92nd minute, which was a concern until Sabino sent it flying over our crossbar. Stanley, by now playing at left back after an injury to Springett had forced him off, and our final sub Theo Lukyamuzi both picked up yellow cards for time wasting and you wondered whether these would have happened had we scored a third goal earlier in the match. Lukyamuzi forced a final decent save out of Gardner in the 98th minute and finally after eight extra minutes we were all able to breathe a collective sigh of relief. Everyone in the ground knew we had been the better team and we were more than worthy of the win, but it was one of those matches where you just couldn't quite relax until it was all over!

Six matches, or more likely eight matches remain as we continue to aim for promotion and with Shoreham remaining four points ahead and holding a game in hand with a far superior goal difference, we have to be sensible here and accept that second place is a more realistic target. Still, we kept on course for that spot and on another day we might have substantially boosted our goal difference. Maybe next time!

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong, Steve Springett, Ryan Smith (c), Alex Penfold, Nick Wilson, Jaevon Dyer, Gavin Quintyne, Jamie Byatt, Jaan Stanley, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Lewis Pearch for Byatt (68), George Owusu for Dyer (86), Owen Higgins for Springett (91) Theo Lukyamuzi for Smith-

Joseph (93)

Epsom draw from the jaws of defeat

Epsom & Ewell 2-2 Godalming Town. Southern Combination League - Division One. Tuesday 7th March 2023.

On Tuesday evening Epsom and Ewell and Godalming Town played out their first ever draw as we fought back from two goals down to force a share of the points on a chilly evening at Fetcham Grove.

We made three changes from the dramatic win at Selsey three days earlier with Toby McKimm getting a second game for us after his first was curtailed wrongly and prematurely at Hailsham Town, whilst Chris Boulter and Mario Quiassaca returned to the starting eleven at the expense of Nick Wilson and George Owusu who were on the bench but would both get involved later.

The first few minutes were in our favour, but in the seventh minute Jaevon Dyer gave away a needless free kick out wide. The original ball in was half cleared but was fed back in and Ollie McAleese was there to head the ball into the net from close range. We nearly equalised in the 15th minute when Athan Smith-Joseph's ball across goal took a deflection and almost bounced along the goal line, inches out of reach of the incoming Dyer.

There weren't many chances in this half really though, and the only other real items to note were a rather strange booking for Smith-Joseph, who appeared to be blocked by a defender, and then in the 35th minute when Ross Cheek was sent to the sin bin. We pushed a little more after that, but a Quiassaca ball across goal was behind Dyer and this summed up the first half really. As the teams went off at the half there was no disguising the fact that this was a fairly flat performance to this point, but a match that could still be won if we could improve. However, in the 58th minute a ball over the top of our defence was collected by Tom White who just got to the ball ahead of McKimm and lifted it over him and just below the bar despite attempts to clear by our defenders.

At 2-0 down we hadn't actually had a shot on target and I couldn't see a way back into the match. However, fairly fresh in the memory was the loss of a two goal lead at Selsey and our players clearly felt that if we could lose one there, we were just as capable of rescuing one too. However, a large amount of credit goes to our Assistant Manager Matt Chapman for making a triple substitution on the hour and changing the shape of the team. From this point we presented a much greater threat.

The next turning point in the match came in the 71st minute when we earned a corner which was met by a great header from Boulter which needed a good punch from Ryan O'Sullivan in the Godalming goal. However, the ball was recycled and fell to Boulter once again, standing on the eighteen yard line and he unleashed a fantastic volley into the top corner of the goal. Trust me, you won't see a better one in the Premier League this weekend, and what a way to score your first goal for the club!

At 1-2 down we had a sniff, particularly with Jamie Byatt now on the pitch and true to form he would have his say. Just before our equaliser though, Quiassaca had a shot blocked at close range after good work from Dyer, but in the 81st minute we saw some silky skills from Gavin Quintyne who took the ball out of defence and then sent the ball over the top of the Godalming back four for Quiassaca to chase. For some reason O'Sullivan had felt the need to come out to try and reach the ball first, but was nowhere near it and Quiassaca simply squared the ball for Byatt to finish into the vacant net from ten yards.

In the final seconds of the match we also saw a yellow card pointed in the direction of the Godalming bench and a final chance created by Wilson who set up Quiassaca, only for the ball to get caught up between his feet before being cleared. Still it was an entertaining final third of the match and a vastly more entertaining spectacle after the break than it had been before. Disappointingly though, only 64 were present to witness this match between two of the league's top five, although our club advertised the attendance as 91!! It is not clear why they feel the need to invent supporters and this constant fictional work embarrasses them as they are tampering with club history. Maybe they should treat the supporters they have a little better and they might actually pass the word! It's also about time they made a decision on the Manager, seeing as it's nearly a week since they announced that news would follow "soon". For what it's worth, Chapman and his team did their cause no harm in this match, should they be looking for the role.

I wrote a couple of weeks ago that if we could take seven points from this difficult three match stretch, we would be in pole position for the second place spot and that's exactly what we got! Whilst this draw does provide leaders Shoreham with some more breathing space at the top, we do look the most likely right now to claim that runners-up position with no clubs left to play in the top five now, assuming we can keep the standard up when we play the lower sides in the table.

Epsom & Ewell: Toby McKimm, Gideon Acheampong, Kevin Moreno-Gomez, Ryan Smith (c), Ollie Thompson, Chris Boulter, Jaevon Dyer, Gavin Quintyne, Mario Quiassaca, Jaan Stanley, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Nick Wilson for Smith (62), Steve Springett for Thompson (62), Jamie Byatt for Stanley (62)

Late winner points Epsom's way.

Selsey 2-3 Epsom & Ewell FC. Southern Combination League - Division One. Saturday 4th March.

Ultimately Saturday's League match at Selsey was decided by, and will be remembered for a 90th minute goal that should not have stood, but over the ninety minutes I felt we had done enough to secure the points and we were in fact cruising to a comfortable victory at one point. However, two goals in quick succession from the home side made reinvigorated the match as a contest and set up an entertaining finish, with the points going back up the A24 to Epsom.

I was told before the match that we had ten players out, although only two changes were made from the eleven who started our victory over Dorking Wanderers on Tuesday evening as Chris Boulter and Mario Quiassaca were missing, and they were replaced by George Owusu and Ryan Smith with Nick Wilson showing further versatility this week and playing alongside Ollie Thompson in the back four. We did look a little weaker on the bench though, with five named, although one was our other keeper Toby McKimm, and another was Jamie Byatt who wouldn't be participating due to injury.

With our Assistant Manager Matt Chapman taking charge of the side following the departure of Anthony Jupp, we made a bright start to proceedings, although the first real chance did fall to the home side when a corner was headed just over Tom Theobald's crossbar on the quarter hour mark. Following this, we went straight up the other end where Jaan Stanley delivered a peach of a cross from the left and Owusu met it with a side footed volley that crashed off the underside of the bar and out again.

Selsey had the ball in the net in the 17th minute, but the flag was up for offside and they had another shot on goal which was blocked by one of our defenders before Ollie Thompson picked up a yellow card that was more clumsy than malicious. From this point though we began to take control and Gideon Acheampong made a good run on the right to earn us a corner. From that Smith corner on the half hour Wilson flicked it on and Thompson met it four yards out with a bullet header that gave Syd Davies in the Selsey goal no chance whatsoever.

Owusu, Jaevon Dyer and Athan Smith-Joseph were asking a lot of questions with their direct running on a playing surface that was very much to their liking while Stanley buzzed around to good effect, just a day after his 21st birthday. Dyer was next to show with a run and strike that Davies parried to safety and we went in at the half with a deserved lead.

We started the second half well. Kevin Moreno-Gomez made tracks down the left before laying the ball back to Smith-Joseph whose curling shot was just tipped over the bar by Davies, although the corner was cleared. However, he wouldn't be denied on his fiftieth appearance for our club and after a spell of good pressure, the ball was fed across to Smith-Joseph again and he beat a man before casually clipping the ball just inside the far post from a step or two inside the penalty area in the 52nd minute. He was at it again a few minutes later with a delicious diagonal pass to Owusu who had beaten the offside trap, but with just Davies to beat, he took a really heavy touch and the ball ran through to their keeper. Next to cause trouble was Stanley who blocked a Davies clearance, but the ball rather luckily rebounded to a defender and was cleared.

In the 66th minute Theo Lukyamuzi joined from the bench for his debut, coming from Peterborough and the 49th player to play for us this season showed some good touches and pace in his spell on the left wing in relief of Owusu.

Moments later though we had our first scare for a while when a slide rule pass set Cian Griffin-Tilley through on goal, although Theobald stood up well and blocked his shot from close range. It was a great save but it clearly provided the home side with a spark as they began to up their work rate and force us back. Shane Brazil on the right wing was starting to give us a few issues with his clever wing play, and in the 77th minute Selsey had a goal back with a deep left wing cross that was met with a strike from James Henton from fairly close range. This was disappointing as we had looked like we'd be good for another clean sheet, but before we'd got our breath back a loose defensive header went straight into the path of Griffin-Tilley and he sent the ball under the advancing Theobald to level the scores up just two minutes later.

At this stage the home side had the momentum and Theobald had to make another save from Brazil's low shot before the controversial ending, which came in the 90th minute.

With the clock ticking down Davies in the Selsey goal had the ball at his feet and for some reason appeared to want to waste time and hang on for the draw which I thought was a bit odd after all they had done to get back in the game. However, Dyer was in to nick the ball away from him, although the ball then went out of play by about a foot before Dyer quickly knocked it back across the goal line. Davies appeared to look over for the Assistant at about the same time I did, only to see him around forty yards up the field, clearly anticipating that Davies had been going to pick the ball up and kick it downfield. He was in no position to see

whether the ball had crossed the line and in that instant Dyer had turned to face goal and sent the ball towards the empty net from twenty yards. It wasn't totally clear if the ball was actually going in, but Thomas Blamire had no idea if there was someone behind him and he tried to block the shot, although he only succeeded in diverting the ball straight into the empty net.

The goal itself was hugely controversial though, as it should not have stood in the first place and with no time left for Selsey to recover the final whistle went soon after. We had taken all three points; a little fortuitously in the end due to the actual circumstances of the winning goal, but I felt we were the better side for much of the match and totally deserved our result against a team that had defeated leaders Shoreham in midweek. We now sit five points behind the leaders as a result of this win and have another difficult match against in-form Godalming Town on Tuesday, although it is worth noting that this will be our last match of the season against a current top five club. Shoreham's run-in is significantly more challenging with trips to Godalming, Dorking Wanderers B and a visit to Selsey. Maybe the title race isn't over just yet.

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong, Kevin Moreno-Gomez, Ryan Smith (c), Ollie Thompson, Nick Wilson, Jaevon Dyer, Gavin Quintyne, George Owusu, Jaan Stanley, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Theo Lukyamuzi for Owusu (67), Kofi Quartey for Smith-Joseph (92)

Epsom and Ewell FC wandering to top table?

Epsom & Ewell FC 1-0 Dorking Wanderers B. Southern Combination League - Division One. Tuesday 28th February.

As a supporter, it is sometimes easy to forget after an awful performance that the players are hurting too and on Tuesday evening they were able to consign that East Preston defeat to history with a fine 1-0 win over a Dorking Wanderers B team that we had failed to defeat since November 2018, courtesy of a Jaevon Dyer penalty that he earned himself midway through the first half.

And without doubt, despite much improved performances across the board, Dyer was the star turn in this contest, threatening on the attack and even putting in a good defensive shift when he was without the ball.

Dorking Wanderers B came into this match on the back of claiming thirteen points out of the fifteen available since the Christmas fixtures; a run that started at our expense at the start of January. However, this result enabled our boys to leapfrog them into second place and we were given an added bonus when unbeaten leaders Shoreham slipped up at home to Selsey the same evening, ensuring that they are not yet completely out of sight in the race for the title.

There were a number of changes from Saturday's defeat. Captain Ryan Smith was absent, while Kevin Moreno-Gomez and Oliver Thompson came back into the defence at the expense of Alex Penfold and Dylan Merchant-Simmonds who were on the bench. Dyer came back into the starting line up alongside Mario Quiassaca and the surprising re-appearance of Jaan Stanley, as the club had announced this week that he had been recalled by Raynes Park Vale! With these two on the field we appeared much more of a threat and started the game brightly.

Stanley's left wing cross was clawed away from danger by Jacob Teddy the visiting keeper as early as the third minute and although chances were limited in this period, the balance of play was well in our favour and it looked like if any team were going to score, it would be us. And so it proved when Athan Smith-Joseph made tracks on the left and his low ball in deflected upwards. As a defender went to clear the ball, Dyer got in front of him and was promptly brought down in the penalty area, picking himself up to score a confident penalty in the 26th minute; his first spot kick for the club and his first goal since finding the net against Billingshurst in October.

Dorking's only real opportunity of the first half came with a low shot that was deflected just wide of our post but the corner was cleared and we went in at the break without any more concerns.

We clearly weren't prepared to settle on that single goal lead as we came out for the second half and took the match to our opponents in search of that second goal. Smith-Joseph sent a low shot in after good work from Dyer but Teddy made an easy save and Dyer turned provider for Quiassaca a few minutes later, although again Teddy wasn't really tested when the shot came in.

We then fashioned a pair of really good chances and Smith-Joseph will be wondering how he didn't take one of them if not both. In the 61st minute Dyer made another great run on the right wing and his low ball across goal found our striker just six yards out, but his shot struck the post and went out for a goal kick. Then four minutes later Dyer again stretched the full back before laying the ball back to Gideon Acheampong to deliver to the far post where Smith-Joseph somehow sent his header wide from six yards!

This was a shame as we certainly deserved a second goal and the absence of one ensured that the final ten minutes would be a little more nervy than they needed to be, although we had one more good chance in that closing period when a clever flick from

Quiassaca set Stanley through and he set up Dyer whose shot was well blocked.

Ultimately, Dorking Wanderers failed to carry a real threat on goal in the absence of their main striker Ben Aubrey and so our first half goal would prove sufficient to claim the points and gain a measure of revenge for our late loss there by the same score in January.

It seems odd to be talking about the Shoreham defeat on the same evening, when they remain eight points ahead of us with a far superior goal difference, even though we do hold a game in hand, as we have some very difficult matches ahead of us, not least Selsey on Saturday who will be flying after handing the leaders their first defeat of the season and where around 200 largely partisan supporters will be present to ensure their good form continues. However, we just need to focus on our own form and we'll see where that takes us. In the meantime, credit is due to our players for finally defeating a team that have given us a lot of trouble in recent seasons.

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong (c), Kevin Moreno-Gomez, Nick Wilson, Chris Boulter, Ollie Thompson, Jaevon Dyer, Gavin Quintyne, Mario Quiassaca, Jaan Stanley, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Rory Edwards for Dyer (86), George Owusu for Quiassaca (92)

Epsom and Ewell pressed on.

Epsom & Ewell 1-2 East Preston. Southern Combination League - Division One. Saturday 25th February.

Whatever happened to Fortress Fetcham Grove? Last season we won eleven in a row and this term we opened up with five straight wins. Yet nowadays, we are lucky if we can win any at all. Our win against ten man Arundel was the only one we have won since late October and our latest loss on Saturday against East Preston regrettably was almost identical to our last Saturday home match against Oakwood where our play was slow, lacking urgency and was completely toothless up front, allowing the opposition to believe they might have a chance, which they then took.

In terms of personnel there were further changes from the midweek win over Arundel and most notable was the absence of our prolific striker Jamie Byatt, who had of course scored the winner on Wednesday. Dylan Merchant-Simmonds came in for his first start and paired up with Chris Boulter at the back with Ollie Thompson moving to the bench, while Nick Wilson returned to the starting eleven after missing the Arundel match in place of the absent Thompson Adeyemi. George Owusu came in for his first start in place of the battered and bruised Jaevon Dyer who was placed on the bench in the hope that he would be able to have ninety minutes off before Tuesday's match against Dorking Wanderers, but he would also be forced into action as we chased the game in the later stages.

Finally, Tyreke Leslie came in, although due to the absence of Byatt he was placed in a more central position to that where we would previously seen him play and it didn't appear to suit him. It is strange that we have tried a number of players in that role from Josh Owen, Jubril Adamson, Josh Alder, Byatt, Dyer and most recently Jaan Stanley who was absent for this match, yet the guy who played there successfully in pre-season still hasn't been given a run at centre-forward in competitive action and so Athan Smith-Joseph instead lined up once again on the wing instead, although he was on the right for this match to accommodate Owusu on the left and this rendered him less effective than usual too.

The encounter settled into a fairly clear pattern as we held the ball most of the time, while the opposition relied on occasional counter attacks. Our first chance fell to Owusu in the tenth minute, but he hooked the ball over the bar from fairly close range and also struggled to stay onside in the first half. Leslie was on the end of a flick on, but his shot was deflected wide, according to the referee at least, as clearly the entire East Preston defence didn't agree, and regrettably the erratic officiating in this match would be another factor in this frustrating encounter.

We had forced a couple of corners and looked generally in control in these early stages, although a miscommunication between Alex Penfold and Merchant-Simmonds allowed Jack Collins to get through on goal. Fortunately, some good recovery defending ensured that their player was unable to get a shot away, however, this appeared to give the visitors some belief and they fizzed another ball across our six yard box before taking the lead in embarrassing circumstances in the 25th minute. I hope Gary Jarman got this one on his video as the players should watch it back again and again. Quite simply, a long throw was flicked on to the far post where Matthew Wilson was standing completely alone and seemed to have ages to guide his header past the helpless Tom Theobald from about six yards. It was the sort of goal you see conceded in the park on a Sunday morning and was horrible to witness from a club at our level.

We responded well and were back on level terms within three minutes as a Ryan Smith corner was blocked almost on the line and

Owusu was there to tuck away the loose ball from a few yards out. In first half injury time both teams had an opportunity, first when Collins fed the ball through to Morgan Day, but his hooked volley went straight at Theobald, then at the other end Smith-Joseph produced one of his trademark mazy runs before unleashing a shot that was well tipped over by Maciek Kason, although Smith's corner then went straight out of play, which sort of summed up the first half.

Unfortunately the second half was an equally disjointed and dispiriting affair if you were an Epsom supporter. We had hardly been playing six minutes when we had a shout for a foul that wasn't given, but Gavin Quintyne felt the need to say something to the referee and ended up in the sin-bin as a result. His absence didn't materially affect the pattern of play and the scores were still level when he re-joined the contest, but it was ten minutes wasted as we created little in that period. Just after the hour Leslie was withdrawn and replaced by the returning Kofi Quartey and the visitors had another opportunity when a half cleared free kick was blazed over from the edge of the penalty area. A couple of bookings followed, firstly for Ryan Harvey and then extremely harshly for Wilson, who didn't even commit a foul as far as I was concerned.

We sent in another corner where a Boulter header was blocked not far short of the goal line before Quartey had the chance of the afternoon after being put through one on one, but he overran the ball a bit and by the time he got the shot away, Kason was out to block. We would regret this ten minutes later when in the 86th minute a hopeful right wing cross appeared to be flicked on by one of our own defenders and fell kindly for the unmarked Harvey to fire a smart volley past Theobald from around ten yards. It was a good finish but the absence of any marking made the job somewhat easier.

Two minutes later and despite having previously seen Quintyne sin-binned, Boulter decided to also say something to the referee and predictably then found himself on the bench meaning that we would play the last two minutes and eight further minutes of injury time with ten men. I have referred to indiscipline in this team frequently this season, but to lose two "experienced" players for ten minutes each, was inexcusable. Yes, the refereeing was poor and yes, he looked out of his depth in this match, particularly in the second half, but our players have to be a bit more accountable for their own actions.

So East Preston won their fourth match in a row and deserve some credit for sticking around in the match that we should have finished off earlier, but let's make no bones about this, both teams were poor in this match and it was a fairly disappointing advert for Step Six football. No wonder there were only 75 there to see it.

With just ten matches remaining, time is running out now and we have three far more difficult looking fixtures coming up against teams that are notably better than a limited East Preston. We face a difficult trip to Selsey at the weekend, and either side of that we host two in-form teams in Godalming Town and of course, our nemesis, Dorking Wanderers B coming up next. In my view (and hey, it's my report!) we are very much at a crossroads here in our season. Which direction will we take? The path to second place in the table that we will surely claim if we are able to secure at least seven points from these next matches, or will we stumble erratically through the rest of the season before losing an away playoff match like we did last season. As a supporter, well aware that the club is spending a lot of money that is running out, I at the very least want to see better than what we witnessed here. Promotion to Step Five is still comfortably achievable, but not with performances like this. It has to stop now.

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong, Alex Penfold, Ryan Smith (c), Chris Boulter, Dylan Merchant-Simmonds, George Owusu, Nick Wilson, Tyreke Leslie, Gavin Quintyne, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Kofi Quartey for Leslie (62), Jaevon Dyer for Owusu (68), Steve Springett for Penfold (77), Ollie Thompson for Smith (89)

Mulletts salted in table top match

Epsom & Ewell 3-2 Arundel. Southern Combination League - Division One. Wednesday 22nd February.

In an important battle at the top end of the table, our boys came through a tense and tight encounter to take all three points from visiting Arundel, courtesy of a late winner from the evergreen Jamie Byatt in front of a disappointing crowd of 70, despite this Wednesday night match being one of very few played in the area.

Byatt, who surely will become the final Salts player to have been born before I started watching Epsom back in October 1981 rolled back the years and in his twenty minute cameo might have resulted in two goals, but an earlier effort was denied by a smart low save.

However, the real story here is that we have now recorded consecutive wins for the first time since October and this result against a team in good form and who drew with leaders Shoreham just four days previously is an indication that maybe our poor form over December and January can now be placed in the rear view mirror. Maybe though we should wait until our next two home matches against East Preston and our recent nemesis the Dorking Wanderers B team before we can be sure.

Sometimes though you just have to get the result, regardless of the performance and going into this match I felt it was important that we take at least a point against Arundel (*nickname the Mulletts*) to keep them at arm's length in the play off race. The visitors probably also felt that a draw would have been a good result, but they will be kicking themselves for the way this match turned out, as they led and missed a few other chances before the match swung in our favour just before half time.

We took the field with two new debutants Tom Theobald in goal and Chris Boulter, the vastly experienced player slotting in at the back. Gideon Acheampong returned to the starting eleven after injury while Alex Penfold made his first start since returning to the club. The players missing out were the suspended Toby McKimm and the absent Steve Springett, Kevin Moreno-Gomez and Nick Wilson.

The opening encounters were fairly even. The visitors had the ball in the net in the fifth minute with a looping header, although the offside flag had already been raised. Then Ollie Thompson made an important clearance for a corner but from the resultant delivery in the fifteenth minute, Harry Russell marked his comeback for Arundel after suspension with a close range header that gave Theobald no chance.

In response Athan Smith-Joseph put in a dangerous low cross but we had no one gambling enough to attack the ball and it fizzed past everyone and out the other side of the six yard box. However, the visitors then had a great chance when the dangerous Carl Brown broke through on the right, but with just our keeper to beat, Theobald stood up well and eventually blocked the shot before the danger was cleared.

Jaevon Dyer was asking a few questions of the Arundel defence, but found himself on the receiving end of some fairly brutal treatment, firstly from Steve Herbert and then from Jordan Dudas who scythed him down with a two footed tackle that angered many of our players, although only resulted in a yellow card.

Penfold picked up a slightly harsh yellow as Brown seemed to throw himself at our man and then to the ground, but the real twist came in the 43rd minute. We started to put a little pressure on and from the edge of the penalty area Gavin Quintyne struck low into the corner; the ball grazing a defender's boot on the way in. This came as a bit of a surprise as the visitors had fashioned most of the chances to this point, but luck then turned our way too in the final minute of the half when a loose ball was picked up by Jaan Stanley and his shot was parried by Andy McCarthy, only to see the ball then strike an incoming defender and dribble over the line! This was the second time this season we have scored in such circumstances after Smith-Joseph's strike at Oakwood and like that goal, this will have to go down as an own goal, regardless of the club's rather hasty announcement that Stanley had scored. He will have to wait a little longer for his first goal in Epsom colours.

Most importantly and despite a fairly average forty-five minutes, we had turned this match around. A big second half was coming up although we'd need to do it without Penfold who was replaced at the break by Dylan Merchant-Simmonds with Gideon Acheampong moving over to left back. However, we seemed to look more solid with Brown providing much less of a threat in this half, and the ball spent much of the time in the middle of the park as the game became a little bit tighter. Harrison Mott then picked up a yellow card for Arundel following a high foot, although the referee appeared to indicate that it was for an accumulation of fouls.

We had a chance on the hour after good work from Smith-Joseph who pulled the ball back for Stanley, but his shot was blocked and cleared. Stanley had another chance when put through in the 66th minute and rode a high tackle which resulted in him being forced out wide and our bench demanding a free kick which may well have been followed by a red card as the player concerned was the last man back. Maybe our player was too honest and should have gone to ground, but the chance had gone.

Byatt joined the fray in the 68th minute for Smith-Joseph with Stanley moving out to the left to accommodate our fit again striker. However, we then had a major scare as an Arundel right wing cross was headed straight at Theobald who couldn't hold on to the ball and Tom Jefkins blazed the loose ball over from close range in the 69th minute. This was a real let off.

Dyer found himself on the deck once again after a blatant body check from Rob Madden which earned him a yellow card, and just three minutes later he was on the ground again after a collision with Mott off the ball. The Assistant clearly had a good view of the incident and flagged vigorously, advising the referee of what had happened, whereupon Mott then received a second yellow card. This incensed the visiting Management team and one of them was then the recipient of a straight red card as a result of his reaction. Dyer was the victim of some fairly unpleasant challenges in this match and it is hoped he is fit enough to go again on Saturday.

However, as we proved at Hailsham Town, you don't necessarily pack up just because you go down to ten men and from a free kick awarded some twenty-five yards out, Herbert curled a peach of a strike into the top corner of our net to level things up at 2-2 in the 80th minute.

With ten minutes to play the visitors appeared to be wanting to settle for a draw, as they slowed the game down a bit, but in the 83rd minute Stanley produced a good delivery for Byatt, whose shot was half blocked and then gathered by McCarthy almost on

his goal line. You felt that a fully match fit Byatt might have given the keeper no chance, but he was there again two minutes later on the end of a great crossfield pass from Quintyne and his downward shot beat McCarthy at the near post and crept into the net to put us ahead for good. Theobald had one more shot to deal with, but he kept it out and after nearly seven minutes of injury time the whistle blew for full time.

A lot of people were very happy after our Hailsham win, particularly in view of the harshness of the early red card, but Hailsham were in a low position in the table and I felt that this match would provide a much better indicator of where we were. If you'd asked me at half time whether we had really turned the corner, I'd have said no, even though we had just taken the lead, as the first half wasn't great from an Epsom point of view. However, by the end of the match I felt we had done just enough to claim the three points, although you can't help but wonder what might have happened if the visitors scored a second goal when they were in the ascendancy. I'm sure they will have been wondering that too as they make the long journey home.

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong, Alex Penfold, Ryan Smith (c), Chris Boulter, Oliver Thompson, Jaevon Dyer, Gavin Quintyne, Jaan Stanley, Thompson Adeyemi, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Dylan Merchant-Simmonds for Penfold (HT), Jamie Byatt for Smith-Joseph (68), George Owusu for Dyer (80), Musa Beegun for Adeyemi (86), Tyreke Leslie for Stanley (86)