#### Local football feel the blues from Chelsea FC

The **Epsom and Ewell Colts**, a longstanding community-led grassroots football club, are facing a crisis after the abrupt cancellation of their primary training venue at Blenheim High School. The school's decision to make way for the Chelsea FC Foundation has impacted 170 girls from the under-8s team and upwards, leaving them without a place to train or play.

Founded in 1971, the Epsom and Ewell Colts have been a cornerstone of the local community, providing young people with opportunities to develop teamwork skills and forge lifelong friendships. Community football offers far more than the possibility of turning professional or enhancing physical fitness and skills. It strengthens community bonds, offering young people a productive outlet that teaches important life lessons and steers them away from negative influences. Players, coaches, volunteers, and supporters collaborate towards common goals, fostering mutual respect and understanding. This inclusive environment breaks down social barriers and contributes to the community as a more welcoming and integrated place for all.

With the Epsom and Ewell Colts now displaced from their core training ground at Blenheim High School, both players and parents are left feeling disappointed and concerned for the future of their club. Elsie, the vice-captain of the U18 girls' team, voiced her frustration, stating, "So much for encouraging girls football. How disappointing." The disappointment was echoed by the manager of the team, **Steve Luff**, who stated: "It's a grave mistake to prioritise commercial interests or go for the cachet of a professional club over the development of local athletes, who represent the true future of football."

**Pauline Russell**, the Chairwoman of Epsom & Ewell Colts, claims that Blenheim School's decision to displace the team in favour of a professional club "goes against the objectives and aims of the school listed in their last annual report." This refers to Blenheim School's objective 'to promote for the benefit of the inhabitants of Epsom and the surrounding area the provision of facilities and recreation'.

**Rob Williams**, Director of Finance and Operations at Blenheim School responded "Blenheim made the decision to offer their 3G pitch to Chelsea FC on Tuesdays and Thursdays to further develop their existing relationship with Chelsea FC and in support of the work they are doing to develop grassroots youth football opportunities in the local community, particularly with girls. This change was not the fault of Chelsea FC or Chelsea Foundation.

"Blenheim have offered several alternative days and times for Epsom and Ewell Colts to move their Thursday booking to and are delighted that they have made additional bookings on Mondays, Saturdays and Sundays to use the newly installed 3G pitch which has seen unprecedented demand.

In the face of a possible crisis at the club, Pauline Russell is making an attempt to rally the community, stating: "We are calling on the community, local authorities, and Chelsea FC to recognise the importance of grassroots sports and to work with us to find a solution that allows these 170 girls to continue their training on Thursdays without disruption."

While the club searches for alternative venues and potential collaborations with other local organisations, they have put forward an online petition for the public to show their support.

# Epsom replay rise from the ashes hoped for

Epsom & Ewell 0-0 Phoenix Sports. Emirates F.A. Cup Extra-Preliminary Round. Saturday 3rd August 2024.

Our first competitive match at the ninth official "home" ground in club history took place as we took the field at Corinthian-Casuals' King George's Field against Isthmian League Phoenix Sports in the opening round of the F.A. Cup and the contest ended in a largely uneventful goalless draw, with both teams appearing content to hold out for a replay as time ticked down in front of a fairly healthy crowd of 148.

As befits any new match of the season, there were a number of players making their debut, although less than in recent years as Manager Warren Burton chose to retain quite a few from last season. Grabbing all the headlines though was Sutton United Hall of Fame member Craig Dundas, who made his competitive bow in Epsom colours at the age of 43. A few years ago we had 40 year old Jamie Byatt making his debut for the club and I wrote at the time that he would probably be the last player to play for this club who was born before I started watching Epsom and Ewell in 1981. However, since that day we have seen Paul Springett, Reggie Savage and now Dundas who fit into that category with surely the former Sutton man becoming the last. For those who like their stats, our former Manager Ray Purvis holds the record as the oldest player to represent the club at the age of 47 years and 29 days when he took the field at Clapton on 30th April 2005.

Anyway, back to the match! Four players took the field for the first time in defender Toby Young, Dundas, Carlos Polo-Infante and Kenny Antony, with Fabian Nunes joining the action later in the day. Chances were few and far between, although we had an early concern when our keeper Faebian Witter had to come out of his area to clear and conceded a free kick just outside. Fortunately the strike deflected off our wall and away for a fruitless corner. The opening fifteen minutes were slightly more in our opponents favour as they attacked mainly down the left and Young picked up a fairly early yellow card for a foul, although he was then clattered into a few minutes later, earning the Phoenix number 3 a yellow of his own.

The game became more even after this, although not a lot was happening in either penalty area. Our best opportunity of the half came with a cross from Ethan Nelson-Roberts that was a little off target and required a catch on the line from the Phoenix keeper or we might have had a fortuitous opener. Back came the visitors though and a shot from the left was well blocked by a defender before Witter had to get down well to make a good save with his left hand. Nelson-Roberts then picked up a card on the advices of the referee's assistant and we went in at the break as we had started.

The second half continued in a similar pattern and Phoenix nearly scored with a volley in the 55th minute after a free kick was only headed out as far as the waiting player. Fortunately for us, the well-struck effort from just inside the penalty area cleared our bar, but only just. Luke Miller then created something out of nothing as he controlled a deep ball across the field, just keeping it in play, before running at a defender and crossing into the danger area, although his low ball in was a little too close to the keeper who claimed the ball.

Moments later we had our best chance of the match after a wayward keeper clearance left us with an opportunity. Will Kendall closed the keeper down and the loose ball fell to Polo-Infante, but with a fairly vacant net ahead of him from eighteen yards, he couldn't keep his shot down. Nunes replaced him shortly after this. Then Miller went down in the area between two defenders, but there was never enough there to award a penalty and the game continued to meander. Kendall was tripped on an attack and everyone appeared to stop, expecting a free kick which wasn't given and the opposition broke away at goal. However, Young got over well to make the saving challenge.

As the time started to run out Young was just over the bar with a looping header from Adam Green's corner, while Miller was off target with two tries, although not by that much in either case, particularly the latter effort which almost shaved the far post from an angled shot. Both teams seemed happy enough to take a replay by the end of the match and as a result we will make our first ever appearance at Mayplace Lane, near Dartford on Tuesday evening, which means that our League game at Alton will be moved back. It would have been moved anyway though as Alton also drew in their cup tie.

Looking back at this match, there were quite a few similarities with our goalless cup draw twelve months ago against Met Police. Both they and Phoenix finished in sixteenth position in their respective Isthmian divisions last season and of course, we went on to win that away replay by two goals to nil. I wonder if we can repeat that feat on Tuesday evening!

Epsom & Ewell: Faebian Witter, Toby Young, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Adam Green ©, Callum Wilson, Craig Dundas, Luke Miller, Thompson Adeyemi, Will Kendall, Carlos Polo-Infante, Kenny Antony

Subs: Fabian Nunes for Polo-Infante (65), Sirak Negassi for Antony (76)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

James Redfarn adds:

#### **Epsom and Ewell FC new signing Article**

The Epsom and Ewell Football club have pulled off an exciting new signing for the 24/25 season, acquiring the skills and talents of the football veteran Craig Dundas. This player is well known for his immensely impressive tenure at Sutton United, having played over 500 games and scored over 100 goals; Dundas has rightly earned the moniker of Sutton united legend.

At the impressive age of 40, Dundas became one of the oldest players to make a debut in the English Football League. EFL statisticians have proclaimed Dundas to be the oldest debutant since World War Two.

Now at the age of 43, his signature to the Salts is a coup for Epsom and Ewell, adding a wealth of experience and leadership to Warren Burton's squad. Dundas is expected to deliver not only in terms of skill and composure on the field but also by offering his invaluable experience and guidance to younger teammates.

In addition to his role as a player, Dundas will serve as a player-coach, a dual role that promises to have a significant impact both on and off the pitch. His presence is anticipated to bolster the team's performance, offering strategic insights and enhancing team dynamics.

There could be exciting times ahead for Epsom and Ewell FC, and the Dundas effect will hopefully be in full force for the rapidly approaching season.

# Leatherhead Women top their league

**Leatherhead Women's FC** finished the season on a high, winning the league without losing a single game. The team finished with a record of 15 wins, one draw and not a single loss in the league securing promotion into the Premier Division.

Specsavers have championed the team since its introduction into senior women's football, with new kits and banners and continued support from the team of opticians and audiologists.

The team plays every home game in Fetcham Grove where you will be able to see the new kits in action.

Specsavers retail director, **Mihaela Ovadiuc** said: "At Leatherhead, we strive to be a shining light within our local community, whether that be directly or indirectly. Supporting Leatherhead Women's has been such an honour, and we are all over the moon that we are extending the sponsorship. The club aligns with our commitment to promoting healthy and active living and takes pleasure in offering a secure environment for the local community."

# **Inclusive sportsmanship in Worcester Park**

The annual Linden Bridge Football Festival kicked off with a vibrant display of teamwork, camaraderie, and sheer determination. Organized by **Linden Bridge School**, Worcester Park, and led by enthusiastic pupils, this event brought together 15 special educational needs (SEN) schools and over 100 pupils for a day of spirited competition.

The festival, held at **Wandgas Sports Ground**, exemplified the inclusive spirit that Linden Bridge School stands for. Students of all abilities participated in various football matches, showcasing their skills and passion for the beautiful game. From footgolf to mini-tournaments, the atmosphere was electric as players cheered each other on.

One of the festival's highlights was the unwavering support from local businesses. **MetroRod**, a leading drainage and plumbing company, stepped up as the main sponsor. Their generous contribution ensured that every participant received a commemorative medal, a symbol of their hard work and dedication. In addition, MetroRod provided trophies for all participating schools, recognizing outstanding performances and sportsmanship.

Coach Dom, from **KEY Sports Academy**, played a pivotal role in making the festival a success. His expertise in organizing sports events and passion for nurturing young talent shone through. Coach Dom lent equipment and offered valuable coaching tips. His commitment to empowering young athletes was evident as he encouraged fair play and teamwork.

"The Linden Bridge Football Festival is more than just a tournament," Coach Dom shared. "It's about fostering a love for sports, building confidence, and creating lasting memories. These students inspire us all with their determination and resilience."

The **Surrey Special Schools Sports Association** (SSSSA) includes the Linden Bridge Football Festival as a key event in its annual calendar. Linden Bridge School takes immense pride in being an active member of the association. This year alone, Linden Bridge pupils have participated in 25 SSSSA-organized events across various sports disciplines.

"Our students thrive when given the opportunity to compete," said Mr. **Borja Vidal**, PE Lead at Linden Bridge School. "The festival allows them to showcase their abilities, make friends, and celebrate their achievements. We're grateful to everyone who made this day possible."

The Linden Bridge Football Festival reminded us that sports transcend barriers, bringing people together in the spirit of unity and joy.

With the success of this year's festival, Linden Bridge School is already planning for next year. The goal remains the same: to create an inclusive platform where every student can shine, regardless of their abilities. As the festival becomes a cherished tradition, it reinforces the belief that sports have the power to transform lives.

# One flat season in Epsom ends as another begins

Our season concluded in appropriate fashion on Saturday as we laboured to a 1-1 draw against Guildford City at the Spectrum.

Five days prior to this match, Tadley Calleva's win over Colliers Wood United ensured that our two recent wins over Fleet Town and Abbey Rangers had given us enough points to secure our safety, although for some reason our club never made the effort to inform our "Dear supporters" (as they recently called them) of this fact. Either way, Salts players and supporters alike were able to relax a little going into this contest, and I have to say it showed, as we started well but tailed off. Throw in the usual defensive error that confirmed we have to wait until at least August 2024 before we can record our first clean sheet of the calendar year and it meant that the point was enough for our hosts to be certain of confirming their own safety, although as it turned out, results elsewhere meant that they would have survived even had they lost.

We went into this match chasing a third straight win, which would have been the first time all season we had managed this, but it's hard to know how bothered we were about it. Our Manager Warren Burton was absent and we only named thirteen players in our line up; one of whom, Jaevon Dyer, only arrived ten minutes before kick off. There may have been some valid reasons for the absences and delays, but the question has to be asked about how many players we would have been able to name, if we had still required any points from this match.

Our regular supporters were there in decent numbers, including the returning Alex McKay Senior who appears on the mend after being away for much of 2024. The home side were also well supported at the Spectrum, leading to an attendance of 151 and a well-stocked viewing area on what is realistically the only real open side of the ground.

We had the first opportunity of the match in the sixth minute when a square ball from Thompson Adeyemi reached Sirak Negassi on the edge of the penalty area, but the ball bobbled on him and he skied it well over the bar. Our Captain Ethan Nelson-Roberts was flattened by a late challenge that ought to have earned a yellow card, but didn't, before Zach Ingham-Wright saw his strike on goal tipped over the bar by Adam Longman. However, Negassi then received a similar opportunity to his previous one in the 16th minute when an Adam Green corner missed everyone at the near post and found our winger, who curled the ball first time into the far corner of the goal to put us ahead. Negassi has been unfortunate in my opinion to find himself as a substitute so often, and his 21 appearances (from 48 matches) from the bench are the second most in club history, trailing only Dale Marvell's 22 in 2000/01 (from 56 matches) and he turned out to be a very good player!

We may have had a poor season, but it has been our opponents that have been in the worst form of all teams with only eight points collected since the end of September. The only way that they could have gone down was with a four goal defeat here and a Colliers Wood United win against Sheerwater, so it was always an unlikely outcome, but our early goal may well have caused a bit of concern within the home support at that point. However, what we didn't realise was that we had already seen the sum total of our attacking threat for the day. Guildford picked up their level and started to threaten.

The big battle going on was between Reece Tierney and Guildford City's Ben Mitchell and Tierney was lucky to escape without a card of any colour after bringing him down just as he appeared to break through on goal, albeit some 45 yards out. In the course of a normal match I'm sure he would have picked up a yellow card for this, but the referee clearly didn't want to hand any out and he escaped with a warning.

We had a half-chance on the thirty minute mark when Negassi's left wing cross was met by a low header by Carl Oblitey, but Longman kept it out fairly comfortably and in fact things were much more precarious at the other end as a close range header clipped our cross bar, only for a corner to be awarded, much to the dismay of our keeper Dan O'Donovan. The corner then struck the frame of the goal before being fed to the far post where our keeper had to be down quickly to turn a low shot around his post, but from the next corner, another Guildford header smacked against our bar again before being headed up in the air by Ayran Kugathas and into the arms of O'Donovan for a lucky escape.

The second half started with a couple of substitutes for the home team and a third would follow soon after. Negassi struck a corner at goal on the volley, but the contact wasn't quite right and the ball dribbled through to Longman. However, the second half belonged mostly to the team that needed the points more and a far post header by James Glover from a corner was only just

wide.

A Luke Miller strike went harmlessly past the post, but Guildford were looking the more likely to score and in the 72nd minute that's what happened, although in typical Epsom and Ewell style, we were the authors of our own misfortune as Tierney went to head a goal kick back up the field, only for the ball to fly backwards off his head and into the path of Mitchell. Nelson-Roberts tried to close him down, but the damage was done and he clipped the ball over the advancing O'Donovan from eight yards for the equaliser. We had another scare in the closing moments as a long ball nearly bounced straight over O'Donovan. Fortunately, he got a slight hand to the ball and Tierney was just able to get the ball clear of the menacing Mitchell, who certainly looked as though he should be playing for a team higher up the League.

We just had time in the 89th minute to see our substitute keeper Toby Colwell come on as an outfield player. Whilst it was a novelty to see and a reward for Colwell's loyalty; sitting on the bench for most of the year, it highlighted the dysfunctional nature of our season which started so poorly under James Scott, before we recovered under Steve Springett to a position of relative safety, only for Warren Burton and Gwynne Berry to take over in January and record just four wins. We close the chapter on 2023/24 in a rather surprising 16th place, which was higher than we had been at any time since August, although it really just provides an indication of how poor the bottom five clubs have been this season! It is assumed that our Management team will be back for next term, which would be the first time for three years and it will be interesting to see what new faces appear, as I'll be honest, we need quite a few if we are not to endure another difficult season; one where it must be remembered, two clubs will be relegated, not just one.

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Ethan Brazier, Ethan Nelson-Roberts (c), Adam Green, Reece Tierney, Ayran Kugathas, Luke Miller, Thompson Adeyemi, Carl Oblitey, Zach Ingham-Wright, Sirak Negassi

Subs: Jaevon Dyer for Kugathas (67), Toby Colwell for Ingham-Wright (89)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

# **Epsom and Ewell FC escaping relegation zone?**

Epsom & Ewell FC 2-1 Abbey Rangers. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 20th April 2024.

A 2-1 victory over Abbey Rangers marked the end of our brief tenure at the Reg Madgwick Stadium on Saturday and at the same time gained a measure of revenge over our opponents after we lost by the same scoreline over there in November. This win also ended any mathematical hopes they had of reaching the playoffs.

After our superb win over Fleet Town on Tuesday, I felt that this match was a bit of a "freebie" as a Salts win over Guildford City in our final match would have guaranteed safety anyway. However, this result means that we now only require a draw to confirm our survival, and by the time we take the field at the Spectrum next week, it's even possible that other results may have assured our safety. Indeed, had Sheerwater not secured a last minute winner over Cobham this same afternoon, we would be celebrating already!

Maybe unsurprisingly we made only the one change to our line up with Carl Oblitey coming in for the absent Nick Wilson and we stuck with the recent formation of playing three at the back, which was a brave policy playing against a solid and physical Abbey team, but by and large it worked.

Chances were few and far between in the opening exchanges. Jaevon Dyer shot at goal from 20 yards, but it was a fairly easy save for Sam Grey in the Abbey goal. At the other end Dan O'Donovan had one excursion out of his area to clear a break, but we were soon back on the attack and a great pass from Ethan Nelson-Roberts set Will Kendall down the left, although his first time low cross was just out of reach of the incoming Oblitey.

Our opponents probably had more of the ball than we did in the opening half, but we looked solid at the back as they rarely threatened, apart from a decent move on the left that ended with a strike at goal from George Frith that was headed away from goal by Reece Tierney. You could tell from Frith's reaction that he knew the shot was on target, yet within a minute we were the team celebrating after a pass came in from the left towards Oblitey, but before he had a chance to control it, a defender knocked it away, but only into the path of Will Kendall, and although he was at quite an acute angle on our left, his powerful shot from 12 yards went across Grey and into the net off the far post to give us a 36th minute lead.

In response O'Donovan was alert to punch a delivery clear, while at the other end Kendall fell in the penalty area after a coming together between him and Dale Burnham, but nothing was given, which I think was the right call. Then in injury time a break on

the right wing resulted in the ball being swept across goal, but fortunately Ross Murdoch, who had scored a hat trick at Camberley a week previously, skied the chance from a good position. Moments later we had a rather generous free kick on the edge of the area, but Adam Green hit the delivery into the defensive wall. We went in at the break a goal ahead.

It was hard to say that we really deserved to be ahead at the break, but we were certainly as dangerous as our playoff chasing opponents and we fashioned a few chances during the second half too. Oblitey saw his long strike deflected, which took all the power off it, while next to try his luck was Green with a free kick from thirty yards after Luke Taylor was fouled, but the shot went just over the bar. Burnham became the second Abbey player in the book for the foul, joining his team mate, former Salt Daryl Cooper-Smith in the first half, but in the 55th minute Dyer collected the ball out on the left and then sent in a superb strike towards the top corner, only for Grey to produce a stunning save to keep his side in the match.

His reward for this great save was precisely nothing as we extended our lead six minutes later when a delivery in from the left was headed out by a defender under pressure from Kendall only for it to fall to Miller, who cut onto his left foot and thumped the ball into the top corner with his so called weaker left foot from 18 yards. It was a goal deserving of winning any match and at 2-0 it certainly looked as though we would be picking up another three points here. However, we received a reminder of our situation just three minutes later when a ball in over our defence was collected and finished past O'Donovan by Ferrey Danso to reduce the scoreline. The goal means that we haven't kept a clean sheet since our goalless draw on 16th December at Colliers Wood United!

At 2-1 up things were a little nervy for a while. Brazier picked up a yellow card for a late foul out on the touchline as we started to get pushed back a little. A tactical substitution was made with Jerry Antwi coming on at the back for Taylor as we reverted to four at the back and we started to look a bit more comfortable again. In fact we nearly scored a third goal in the final minute of normal time when Miller attempted to replicate his earlier strike, but this time he cleared the bar by about a foot.

As time started to run out the visitors pushed forward in the hope of an equaliser and won a free kick right on the edge of our penalty area, but it was deflected wide from a corner, only for O'Donovan to drop the fairly easy catch from the subsequent set piece which led to a little bit of panic in the six yard box before the ball was cleared. Finally, after around seven minutes injury time, which was about the right amount, the final whistle blew and Salts fans could relax again.

It's been a horrible season, but whilst we are not completely safe just yet, the odds are a lot more in our favour than they were seven days ago! One more match remains. See you at the Spectrum!

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Ethan Brazier, Ethan Nelson-Roberts (c), Adam Green, Reece Tierney, Luke Taylor, Luke Miller, Thompson Adeyemi, Will Kendall, Carl Oblitey, Jaevon Dyer

Subs: Jerry Antwi for Taylor (71)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

# This time a victory counts!

Epsom & Ewell FC 4-1 Fleet Town. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Tuesday 16th April 2024.

After just two wins under his tenure to this point, our Manager Warren Burton was able to celebrate his 48th birthday with a third victory as we won this rearranged League match 4-1 against Fleet Town. In fact it could be argued that this was the most impressive of his three, quite probably better than our 6-2 win over a lacklustre Sandhurst Town side in March, as this win came against a better team and we had to come from behind to do it too!

The win must have been particularly tough on the visiting supporters who had been 3-1 up on Saturday and had probably already added the three points to the League table to close on the playoff pack, only to see one of their players badly injured and the match subsequently abandoned, and then to face a second trip up from Hampshire in four days before being heavily beaten; a win that ends any faint playoff hopes they may have had.

We made three changes to the line up from Saturday's match with Nick Wilson and Jaevon Dyer coming back into the starting line up and they were joined by Thompson Adeyemi who was originally due to be on the bench, but got the call up after Carl Oblitey was late arriving for the match and had to be content with a place on the bench. Tijani Eshilokun and Matt McGillivray were absent for this one.

We got off to an awful start on Saturday when we conceded in the eighth minute, but this time we were behind even earlier as a harmless looking ball came over towards Wilson in the sixth minute, but somehow the ball got tangled up in his feet and then fell for the opposition's leading scorer Dan Bone who scored twice on Saturday and then added another with a low drive past Dan

#### O'Donovan from twelve yards.

The teams seemed to be following Saturday's script as we equalised soon after with a nice passing move that went from left to right where Ethan Brazier went forward before feeding Luke Miller whose low right wing cross was met at the near post by Will Kendall from just six yards out to give Filip Chalupniczak no chance with a left foot strike in the twelfth minute.

Kendall was unlucky to see his low strike deflected into the side netting before another Kendall header from a Miller delivery was only half blocked by Chalupniczak with Dyer knocking in the loose ball from close range, only to see the offside flag raised against Kendall. Kendall looked to be linking with his team mates much better in this game and it was good to see Dyer looking much more like the flying threat we had seen so frequently last season. In short, even with Oblitey by now sitting on the bench, we actually looked like we posed an attacking threat, which you couldn't often say about our team this season.

It was around the half hour mark in the original match that we started to get pushed back, but that didn't really happen here. In fact we looked the more likely to score as the half concluded and had a great chance when Kendall supplied a superb reverse pass into the path of Dyer, but just as he went to round the keeper, he stumbled over the ball and allowed Chalupniczak to claim the ball. This was a massive chance and when O'Donovan tried to see a ball out for a goal kick but got caught out, nearly leading to a goal for the visitors, it made you wonder if we had missed our chance. We went in at the break level at a goal each.

We've not had a vast amount of luck this year and just when I was thinking it would be great to get some here, that's exactly what happened, when in the 51st minute a deep left wing cross forced Bradley Pegg to turn back to defend it, only for him to knock the ball into his own net under pressure from Kendall from eight yards out. The ball could have gone anywhere, but squirmed into the corner of the Fleet net!

We had the lead which was crucial, as I was concerned about the idea of us trying to see the match out for a draw, but could we hold on to it? As you would expect, Fleet came back at us and a far post header by Argjend Ahmetaj was just wide but we were soon back on the attack and Kendall wasn't able to keep his header on target from Adeyemi's superb left wing cross. However, any concerns about the miss were forgotten soon after and we extended our lead on the hour mark. Miller set the ball back to Brazier, whose cross from out wide looked like it was just going to hang in the air for an easy catch, but Adeyemi had other ideas and out jumped Chalupniczak, heading the ball up in the air. It seemed to hang in slow motion before coming down off the bar, but fortunately Kendall was first to reach it and he smashed the ball into the roof of the net from just six yards out to make the score 3-1.

Relief was evident across the ground and we continued to take the game to our opponents who then began to self-destruct when Dan Bone was sent to the sin-bin after believing that he had been fouled. During that time we had further chances with Reece Tierney's header being blocked, while Wilson was just wide from 35 yards and Taylor forced a low save at the near post. For such an important match, it was unusual to feel so relaxed, particularly this season, but we were under relatively little pressure.

Although O'Donovan picked up a yellow card for a bit of time wasting, the visitors were chasing shadows as we passed the ball around like a training session and even when they returned to eleven men we remained the better side. Oblitey came on for Dyer and he was in the action soon after, with a low shot smacking Chalupniczak's right hand post and rebounding to safety, but by this time Matt Sirmon had become the second visiting player to visit the sin-bin and this left them down to ten for the remainder of the match, during which we scored a fourth goal. It was the 96th minute when the ball came in from the left and was then passed to Miller who feigned to shoot on two occasions, completely tricking the defenders before slotting past the keeper from close range to complete the scoring.

It would take a brave person to say that they saw this performance or result coming after Saturday's abandonment and our recent displays, but it obviously gives us a huge lift in our relegation battle and it has to be said that if we had played like this more frequently, we wouldn't be in the position we have been in. It was certainly very good timing to produce our best ninety minutes of the calendar year and maybe our Manager should have birthdays more often!

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Ethan Brazier, Ethan Nelson-Roberts (c), Adam Green, Reece Tierney, Nick Wilson, Luke Miller, Luke Taylor, Will Kendall, Thompson Adeyemi, Jaevon Dyer

Subs: Carl Oblitey for Dyer (79), Sirak Negassi for Brazier (83), Zack Ingham-Wright for Taylor (86)

Related report:

This defeat will not count

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

### This defeat will not count

Epsom & Ewell FC 1-3 Fleet Town. ABANDONED AFTER 55 MINUTES. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 13th April 2024.

An attendance of around 80 people gathered at the Madgwick to watch our penultimate League match at the ground before we move on to Corinthian Casuals for next season. However, it didn't work out quite like that as the contest was abandoned in the 55th minute following a nasty injury to young Fleet defender Ed Scott and the fixture will now have to be rearranged back at the Madgwick, with Thursday 25th April looking to be the most likely date, due to our opponents currently having matches scheduled for both remaining Tuesdays. Please note that this is only speculation on my part and confirmation will follow in the near future.

Those present on a sunny day (but one which had brought swarms of flies out behind the far goal where we were standing) witnessed an hour of football that summed up our season really as we looked quite threatening in patches, only to part like the Red Sea at others and we were 3-1 down at the time of the abandonment.

We had a number of changes to the line up from the loss against Spelthorne Sports as Thompson Adeyemi, Jaevon Dyer and Callum Wilson were all unavailable. Worse still, Wilson confirmed that he is done for the season following a dislocated thumb. However, it wasn't all bad news as Carl Oblitey returned from injury up front while Tijani Eshilokun was also back in the line up alongside Luke Taylor who made his first start for our club. Also back from injury was Ethan Brazier who relegated Ayran Kugathas to the bench and was arguably our best player on the day, making a number of marauding runs.

Now, I'm not a fan of playing three at the back, as regular readers will be aware. We started the season with that formation and we have recently tried it towards the end of recent defeats to Balham and Horley Town. However, this time we started with the three and on this occasion, I could see why. Clearly the plan is now to try and outscore teams in the knowledge that we do not do clean sheets any more!

It is sound logic based on the fact that we are now nineteen matches without a clean sheet, and this formation did enable us to play Oblitey up front alongside Will Kendall, which was a bit of a throwback, although it will only work if enough service is provided to our front two. It nearly paid dividends with just 32 seconds on the clock as Ethan Nelson-Roberts made tracks down the left and sent over a low ball, but it was just too far ahead of Kendall who couldn't wrap his leg around the ball enough at the far post to keep the shot on target.

The opening minutes looked quite promising for Salts fans until a hopeful punt upfield from the visitors left our keeper Dan O'Donovan and our retreating defender Matt McGillivray uncertain of who should claim the ball on the edge of the area and while they dithered, Dan Bone nipped in to poke the ball away from both of them and roll the ball into the empty net in just the eighth minute.

This was horrible, but we were back on level terms just three minutes later after Eshilokun fed the overlapping Brazier on the right wing and his pinpoint cross enabled Oblitey to score with a diving header into the bottom corner of the goal from six yards out. Luke Miller was next to deliver a dangerous right wing cross but it was punched away by Fleet's keeper Filip Chalupniczak. It was a fairly even contest to this point, but then we started to get pushed back by our opponents. McGillivray was forced into conceding a yellow card to stop an attacker breaking through.

We then had an extremely odd and contentious issue in the 24th minute. Chalupniczak made a routine catch and went to drop kick it clear, only for it to hit Oblitey on his back, just outside the penalty area and rebound straight into the net! It was surely a lucky break for us, but no! The referee consulted with his Assistant before then disallowing the goal and awarding a free kick against our man. This appeared extremely harsh, but having seen the video from our excellent Videographer Gary Jarman, you can see Oblitey jumping to block, even though his back was turned. On many occasions, the goal would still have stood, and I believe it should have still counted, but I can at least understand why it might have been disallowed. You'll have to draw your own conclusions as to whether Oblitey really did enough wrong here!

The setback gave us momentum for a while and Miller sent a ball in that was just turned away from Eshilokun at the far post, but on the break Fleet struck a shot just beyond our own post and from this point until the end of the half you could see us being pushed back. Brazier had to head an effort off our own goal line but in the 39th minute they went ahead through the ill-fated Scott with an unmarked near post header from a corner that was a carbon copy of one we conceded recently at home to Horley.

We nearly equalised in the second minute of injury time after Nelson-Roberts did really well to reach the touchline just a few yards out and pulled the ball back for Adam Green to side foot it towards the goal. It took a slight deflection on the way, but even so, it was somehow clutched right on the line by Chalupniczak and we went in at the break a goal behind, but not yet out of the

match. However, the writing was on the wall within two minutes of the second half after a long throw was flicked on and then volleyed in from about ten yards by Bone to make it 3-1 which left us facing a mountain to climb.

However, the game took an unfortunate twist in the 55th minute when Nelson-Roberts threatened to break through on the left, but was then brought down by a high and very clumsy looking tackle from Scott, which left the offender in a heap in the floor. It was immediately clear that he was badly injured and all those in the ground knew there would be the possibility of an abandonment, as happened to us eighteen months previously when Andy "Woody" Hall was injured in a goalless draw at Forest Row. Looking back at the incident itself, it's possible that one of Scott's feet got caught in or on the artificial surface, which was why the original challenge looked so awkward as he looked off balance when he made it. Either way, this became the second Combined Counties League match to be abandoned at the Madgwick since the artificial surface was installed back in August after an injury curtailed the Cobham v Abbey Rangers fixture back in the Autumn of 2023. We obviously wish Ed Scott well for the future and hope he is back playing the game he loves as soon as possible.

From a personal point of view, the Forest Row match I referred to was abandoned with the score level at 0-0 and we went on to win the replayed contest 2-0 which, although we didn't know it at the time eventually gave us the pivotal second place finish and subsequent home advantage in the Southern Combination League playoffs last season. I wonder whether this replayed fixture turns out to be as significant. A new date for Fleet's re-visit will be advised as soon as possible.

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Ethan Brazier, Ethan Nelson-Roberts (c), Adam Green, Reece Tierney, Matt McGillivray, Luke Miller, Tijani Eshilokun, Will Kendall, Carl Oblitey, Luke Taylor

Subs: none

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

# **Epsom & Ewell FC losing at the bottom**

Epsom & Ewell FC 1-2 Spelthorne Sports Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 2nd April 2024.

On a miserable night for football at the Madgwick in front of just 43 spectators, our season took a serious turn for the worse as we led fellow strugglers Spelthorne Sports at the half, only to get pushed back further and further before conceding twice to lose 2-1 with almost everyone in the ground thinking that they could see it coming.

This was a particularly disappointing second half performance and if I'm honest, our opponents had most of the ball in the first half too, but we had some chances and took one of them. However, they fought back, inspired by constant cajoling from the bench and frequent substitutions, while we remained mute and kept the same eleven on the field, despite looking desperate for fresh legs from the hour mark onwards.

Before the kick off our programme notes heralded the arrival of three players, yet one of them, Kevin Turbi wasn't even in the line up! We did hand a start to Will Kendall, late of Redhill, Abbey Rangers and Merstham, while Luke Taylor from Sheerwater also came on late in the day. our opponents had former Salts Ade Batula and Tommy Williams on their registration list, but neither were on the team sheet for this encounter.

We started brightly but without forcing a save from Bob Honey, brother of Shay who had been in goal against us in the return match before joining us briefly; surely the only time in club history that we had faced two goalkeeping brothers in our two matches against the same club! Spelthorne were first to register a shot on target but Dan O'Donovan was alert at the near post to stop the shot from an angle.

There was very little going on in terms of goal threat but we had a real opportunity in the 24th minute when a high and deep cross from Luke Miller was not gathered by Honey, with the ball falling just behind Kendall who was unable to adjust to get any power on it from just a few yards out. Fifteen minutes later we took the lead from our best move of the match as Miller floated in another delivery to the far post where Thompson Adeyemi cushioned the ball back to Kendall who knocked the ball in for his first goal for our club from just five yards out.

Moments later we should have had a second goal after Miller's ball in was sent over the bar by the incoming Adeyemi from just eight yards out. We didn't realise it at the time, but this would prove to be our final real chance of the match. We went in at the half with the lead, although it was a precarious one and there was still a lot of work to do if we were to get the points.

The visitors started the stronger of the teams in the second half and somehow sent a header across goal from four yards when it was easier to score. We were struggling to get the ball out of our half and another good chance was clipped just wide of our far

post from a good position on the hour. Maybe it would be our day after all.

But it was clear for all to see that we were tiring. The supply was not reaching Miller any more and Jaevon Dyer on the left wasn't creating a threat. Yet we made no changes and almost appeared to hope that we would get away with it. That hope ran out in the 74th minute when a deep ball in from the right was knocked back across goal where Andrew Juett was waiting to force the ball in from close range. An inspired Spelthorne team kept pushing and scored again eight minutes later when a ball in from the left found Zach Scott just inside the penalty area and he guided his low shot into the far bottom corner past O'Donovan to give them a lead they would not relinquish.

Dyer was unfortunate not to see his powerful shot clear the bar by inches from twenty yards, but it would prove to be his final input. After going for 86 minutes with no substitutions, we then made four all at once, including Dyer, but it was far too late for them to make an impact and apart from a couple of dangerous looking corners from Adam Green the whistle blew shortly afterwards to confirm our fate.

I should make it clear that our players worked hard all night, but we were lacking in direction, both on and off the field and it looks to our supporters as though we are unable to see matches out on the rare occasions that we get a lead. This needs to change quickly. We are quiet and desperately needed a Zach Powell, or dare I say it, an Alex Penfold, who might have been able to raise the intensity of our game.

I rated our chances of relegation as "slim" going into this match, despite recent form, but that now needs to be updated to "entirely possible" after this contest, as it is looking more and more likely that our survival can only happen because the two teams currently below us fail to win sufficient points to overhaul us. This is a concerning time for our club and we now need to pick up some more points against much tougher opponents in Fleet Town and Abbey Rangers before our season ends at Guildford City. We do at least have eleven more days before those fixtures to try and sort this out, but confidence and belief need to change radically and this needs to come from our Management who might want to take a leaf out of the Spelthorne book for advice.

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Ayran Kugathas, Ethan Nelson-Roberts (c), Adam Green, Reece Tierney, Callum Wilson, Luke Miller, Matt McGillivray, Will Kendall, Thompson Adeyemi, Jaevon Dyer

Subs: Jerry Antwi for Kugathas (86), Sirak Negassi for Dyer (86), Zach Ingham-Wright for Miller (86), Luke Taylor for McGillivray (86)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

# Generous in defeat

Epsom & Ewell FC 1-4 Horley Town. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 23rd March 2024

A strange contest took place at the Madgwick on Saturday as we hosted Horley Town in our latest League match. We created most of the chances over the ninety minutes, yet didn't take them and our opponents took full advantage of our generosity to win the match 4-1.

We fielded our sixth goalkeeper in just ten matches as Faebian Witter had been injured recently and with former keeper Shay Honey already departed for Staines & Lammas, Dan O'Donovan came in between the posts, although he was advertised as David! It never fails to amaze me how our club continues to get our player names wrong so often and wonder what sort of message this sends out to them. In other changes it was good to see the return of Carl Oblitey up front, as he provides us with a greater attacking threat; something we were sorely lacking at Balham in our last match. At the back, we also saw the return of Reece Tierney and Callum Wilson, although the absence of Ayran Kugathas meant that Nick Wilson had to play in the right back position, although he was restored to the Captain's position once again, while Matt McGillivray moved into midfield. Zach Ingham-Wright and Tijani Eshilokun moved to the bench, although the latter would join the action in the second half.

There was a minute's silence before the match for former Banstead Athletic Chairman Terry Molloy, who passed away this week. Our club had an awkward relationship in our time there as tenants from 1993-2010, so it was a little surprising to see us hold a tribute, particularly when our club elected not to do so for recently departed prolific strikers Gerry O'Rourke and Ben Forey. Not that anyone knew at the time exactly who the silence was for, as it wasn't announced by the club and I had to ask an official.

We opened up fairly brightly and an early Luke Miller ball into the danger area was just ahead of Thompson Adeyemi, before a similar cross from Ethan Nelson-Roberts also just missed the incoming strikers. McGillivray was the first to pull a decent save from George Hyde the long-serving Horley keeper, with a low shot from the edge of the area with Adam Green seeing his own

shot deflected for a corner shortly afterwards.

It then came as a bit of a shock when Horley took the lead in the 15th minute with their first real attack. Adeyemi appeared to be brought down in midfield, but play was allowed to continue and a pass forward reached former Salt Lewis Pearch who cut inside Wilson and drilled a low shot beyond O'Donovan from 15 yards.

We almost responded immediately after Oblitey robbed Hyde out wide in the area, although he then chose to go for goal from an extremely narrow angle and was only able to hit the post. We were then denied by an excellent save after Wilson had made progress on the right, sending a shot in from about eight yards that took a wicked deflection off a defender, yet despite Hyde going to his right by this point, he somehow stuck out an arm in the opposite direction to claw the deflected ball away from the goal.

We continued to push forward and Nelson-Roberts sent in a left wing cross that Oblitey headed just wide from around twelve yards out. Moments later Horley midfielder Lewis Taylor found himself in the sin-bin for comments to the referee, but we weren't able to take advantage of the extra man. We had chances during that period though, with Adeyemi somehow getting a Miller delivery stuck under his feet just three yards out and Oblitey striking wide from 15 yards. Jaevon Dyer also struck at goal, but Hyde was equal to it, and to add insult to injury Horley went straight up the other end once they were back to eleven men and scored again with Scott Walker putting the hosts 2-0 up from close range in the 43rd minute.

Hyde tipped an Oblitey piledriver over the bar from twenty yards and the question at the break was how we had managed to go in with a two goal deficit after a decent enough attacking showing in that first half.

However, the second half was a very disappointing one and we appeared to be completely flat, as if we already knew we wouldn't be able to retrieve anything from the position we had found ourselves in. This became apparent to me as early as the 47th minute when Tierney got his foot to the ball before being brought down in the Horley area by Rylan John, yet there wasn't even an appeal for a penalty from an Epsom player. I was questioning my own eyes and even had to check with people around me that I had actually seen the incident correctly and was assured that I had, yet it wasn't until there was a break in play while Tierney received treatment before the question even asked of the referee, who understandably hadn't given anything! If we had appealed for this, maybe the game would have turned in our favour, but of course that is just conjecture on my part!

It was unclear how many matches O'Donovan has played recently, but of course he was a virtual stranger to our defenders, and maybe unimpressed with the standard of defending he had seen to this point, he chose to come out of goal to chase a clearance himself, yet found himself almost 40 yards out from his goal. Fortunately the long range attempt from the visitors went over the bar or it might have proved to be a rather embarrassing afternoon for him! Regrettably he would be picking the ball out of the net shortly anyway as a near post corner was headed past him from close range by Matt Rapson on the hour to make the score 0-3.

Dyer took advantage of John misjudging the bounce of the ball to break through, but drove his shot wide from 18 yards and he was replaced not long afterwards. Our flying winger was superb last season, but looks to be lacking confidence since he has returned to our club and there appeared to be a lack of belief across the playing ranks as this match petered out. Even when Green sent in a lovely flat free kick which was met by an Adeyemi bullet header just inside the far post from twelve yards to pull a goal back in the 83rd minute, there was little by way of celebration of any kind and the remainder of the match was equally disappointing with Green, Callum Wilson and then substitute Jerry Antwi all receiving yellow cards for lunges at Horley players. Fortunately, none of the challenges were severe enough for red cards, but we then conceded a fourth goal in the sixth minute of injury time despite O'Donovan standing up well to make a good save, but no one reacted to the loose ball that was then knocked in from close range. A 4-1 defeat was only marginally better than our 4-0 defeat there, exactly three months previously.

I believe that our players are good enough to get us out of trouble this season, but we really need to pick up a few more points before we can be assured of safety and aren't playing very well right now. On paper our fixtures are favourable, particularly when compared to those around us, but as we know football isn't played on paper and a home match against a team that started the day just three places above us, should have been enough motivation. Instead, we fell away in the second half again, and whilst we did make a lot of chances in this match, which was a notable improvement on the previous Saturday, we are going to need to take some of these if we are not to get caught by the clubs below us. We now have a ten day break before we reconvene at the Madgwick for the visit of Spelthorne Sports; one of the clubs in the bottom five. We absolutely cannot afford to be flat for that one.

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Nick Wilson (c), Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Adam Green, Reece Tierney, Callum Wilson, Luke Miller, Matt McGillivray, Carl Oblitey, Thompson Adeyemi, Jaevon Dyer

Subs: Tijani Eshilokun for Oblitey (63), Jerry Antwi for N.Wilson (77), Sirak Negassi for Dyer (77)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk