

Leatherhead Women top their league

15 May 2024



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

15 May 2024



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

15 May 2024



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 bobbed 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?

15 May 2024



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!

15 May 2024

Premier Division South							
Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS
16	Spelthorne Sports	36	10	8	18	-25	30*
17	Guildford City	36	8	4	24	-54	28
18	Epsom & Ewell	36	8	3	25	-37	27
19	Colliers Wood United	34	6	7	21	-36	25
20	Sheerwater	36	7	4	25	-56	25

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 continued on the front foot in the second half and Dyer sent a curling shot just beyond the far post after Adeyemi's set up. 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

15 May 2024

Premier Division South						
Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	PTS
16	Spelthorne Sports	36	10	8	18	30
17	Guildford City	36	8	4	24	28
18	Sheerswater	36	7	4	25	25
19	Epsom & Ewell	35	7	3	25	24
20	Colliers Wood United	33	5	7	21	22

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

15 May 2024



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

15 May 2024



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

Balham, gateway to the ... defeat

15 May 2024



Balham 2-0 Epsom & Ewell FC. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 16th March 2024.

On Saturday we made our second visit of the season to the Mayfields Stadium and received our second defeat. Five weeks ago we were unfortunate to lose there 5-2 to AFC Croydon Athletic, but this 2-0 loss to their tenants Balham, was far more disappointing, In fact the few supporters who were there will not remember this match for very long, not even the home ones, as this was a very uninteresting encounter, full of errors and scrappy play from both sides, and even when Balham finally did break through, there was an element of a defensive contribution towards both of the goals. I felt we were deserving of a point from a goalless draw, but could have no real complaints at the end of the match.

We made three changes from our encouraging draw at Redhill seven days previously. Carl Oblitey was injured, while Reece Tierney and Callum Wilson were unavailable, so Matt McGillivray came in for his first start at the back, while Club Captain Nick Wilson returned after his two match suspension, although it was interesting to note that Ethan Nelson-Roberts retained the armband for this match, maybe because we had done well in the previous two matches, or maybe due to Wilson's excessive number of cards in recent matches. Further forward, Zach Ingham-Wright also had his first start for the club.

We kicked off slightly late after the referee took exception to Luke Miller's blue long sleeved undershirt, even though our away colours are yellow and blue. Yes, you've guessed it, he was being assessed! Officially though, I was advised that the term is now "observed" as the previous term is now seen too much as a critique of the referee. Well, my observations were that it was fortunate that no major decisions were required on this occasion, although we had a confusing early incident after our keeper Faebian Witter was blocked as he tried to drop kick the ball, yet moments later Adam Green picked up a yellow card for us, for pulling his man back. Whilst you couldn't complain about the card for our player, it was hard to see why one wasn't given for the Balham offence.

The first half contained little to write home about. Witter rushed out to claim the ball and did well to keep it inside the penalty area, despite 95% of him being outside it, while at the other end Haydn Read was alert to leave his area to head clear after Ingham-Wright had threatened to reach a Thompson Adeyemi pass. However, these were not even half-chances really, and indeed the only event of note during the first forty-five minutes came when our Secretary Spencer Mitchell was stung by a bee on the sideline. No physio was required!

We went in at the half unsurprisingly goalless and the second half started off in a worryingly similar pattern. A Jaevon Dyer header was accidentally dropped over the goal line by Read for a corner after a few minutes, but our winger was having a quiet day and was replaced by Sirak Negassi in the 52nd minute. Balham's defence had clearly done their homework and cancelled out the threat from our wings almost entirely. We were also missing the physical presence of

Oblitey who had been really impressive in the last couple of matches and although Ingham-Wright was well involved in the match, he never looked likely to add to his goal from the previous week.

In fact, neither team looked like breaking through at any point, so when the home team actually opened the scoring in the 65th minute it came as a bit of a shock. A deep free kick was headed back out by Adeyemi, but he wasn't able to get a decent purchase on the next delivery back in, and inadvertently flicked it to the back post where it was volleyed back into the danger area for Jack Banks to strike the ball into the net from close range.

We then had our best chance of the match in the 70th minute when Adeyemi was brought down right on the edge of the area in a central position. The ball was placed literally one foot from the penalty area, yet the referee seemed totally happy to allow the defensive wall to congregate along the penalty spot, no more than six and a half yards away. Even when the referee had this pointed out to him he paced eight small steps back and moved the wall back about a yard! Ironically, had the wall stayed where it was originally, Adam Green's free kick might have taken a slightly larger deflection to put it out of Read's reach, but instead he was able to dive to his left to parry the ball out for what became a fruitless Epsom corner.

At this point we changed our shape. Reggie Savage and Jerry Antwi came on and we switched to three at the back, but to be brutally honest, it didn't work. From this point the home side seemed to find more space and although an overhead kick was sent well over our bar, former Salt Ash Snadden was set up for a strike from just twelve yards that was headed off the line by Wilson with Witter beaten. Moments later Witter made a good save down to his right, but the ball was recycled and a long shot from James Anderson from a central position around twenty yards out took a heavy deflection off Nelson-Roberts and bounced into the other side of the net to where Witter had been standing in the 84th minute.

Anderson picked up a late booking for clattering into Wilson in injury time, but it made no difference and Balham gave their slim hopes of a playoff place a huge boost with this win, while many others around them floundered this week.

It is difficult right now to compose a report without reference to the two teams below us, as we still need to keep looking over our shoulder to see how they got on. This will clearly continue for a while yet as Colliers Wood United and Sheerwater both won, making things a lot tighter at the foot of the table. I still believe 30 points will be enough to see us to safety, but while we remain on just 24, concerns remain.

Epsom & Ewell: Faebian Witter, Ayran Kugathas, Ethan Nelson-Roberts (c), Adam Green, Nick Wilson, Matt McGillivray, Luke Miller, Thompson Adeyemi, Zach Ingham-Wright, Tijani Eshilokun, Jaevon Dyer

Subs: Sirak Negassi for Dyer (52), Jerry Antwi for Eshilokun (73), Reggie Savage for Kugathas (73)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Salts rescue a point from the Kiln

15 May 2024



Redhill 1-1 Epsom & Ewell FC. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 9th March 2024

An 85th minute equaliser from Zach Ingham-Wright earned us a well-deserved point from a 1-1 draw at Kiln Brow after the hosts had taken the lead early in the second half. Although they put us under pressure after an even first half, I felt we were worth a draw for our display in the final fifteen minutes, during which time we equalised and very nearly pinched all three points!

Following the confirmation that Warren Burton was now permanent Manager, we made just one change from our important 6-2 win over Sandhurst Town as Shay Honey was replaced between the posts by Faebian Witter. Our Captain Nick Wilson completed his two match ban here and so Ethan Nelson-Roberts kept the Captain's armband for this contest. We knew our opponents fairly well with a pair of our former Assistant Managers, Jordan Clark and Matt Chapman in charge and there were four former Salts in their line up in Adam Grant, Gavin Quintyne, Ben Dyson and Tommy Smith. Redhill were of course looking for a League "double" following their 3-1 win in August at the Madgwick.

We opened up in confident mood against a team who were also in decent form, if you excluded their surprise 2-0 defeat at Camberley Town in midweek. Tijani Eshilokun had a go from around twenty yards with his curling shot missing the far post by a couple of feet, before Carl Oblitey headed an Adam Green corner just over the crossbar inside the opening ten minutes.

Oblitey then set up Luke Miller for a shot, only to find it blocked by Smith, before a long throw was knocked on by Thompson Adeyemi for Oblitey to try his luck with an overhead kick, but it went straight at Isaac Ogunseri in the Redhill goal and he made the easy catch. This would prove to be the only save made by either keeper in the first half, although the home side sent a header wide at full stretch, before a string of injuries to our players led to an extended appearance on the field by Physio Alfie Wyld and an additional five minutes at the end of the period, during which time Redhill headed towards goal, only to see the effort headed away by Reece Tierney from near the goal line just before the half time whistle.

We were obviously familiar with many of their players, but of course, the reverse applied too, and the two teams were

cancelling each other out a bit, with our tricky wingers, Miller and Jaevon Dyer being kept very quiet. With Redhill's lofty League position, I expected them to try and change things up in the second half and they came out with more intent, pushing us back quite a lot. However, we weren't totally out of it either and in the 50th minute Eshilokun sent the ball across to Dyer, only to see it deflected for a corner. From the Green delivery Oblitey rose highest and was really unfortunate to see his header hit the full face of the bar and rebound directly to the keeper, even though he was by that time standing about eight yards away from his goal. It could have gone anywhere!

This scare clearly woke Redhill up and they forced four successive corners. From the last of these, a deep delivery was met at the far post by the unmarked Smith, who met the dropping ball with a textbook low side footed volley that gave Witter no chance from about eight yards in the 57th minute. One nearly became two just four minutes later as a header was blocked on the line by Green with Quintyne sending the loose ball over the closing defenders, but also over the bar from close range.

The hosts had another chance soon after with Witter forced into a good low save, with the ball parried out wide. It was then sent back in for a header that just missed our far post. We made a couple of substitutions with Matt McGillivray on for Ayrán Kugathas and Sirak Negassi on for Dyer and the newly introduced Negassi had a chance to score with his first touch as the ball crept under a defender's foot, but his shot from twenty yards went beyond the far post.

Ingham-Wright came on for the injured Eshilokun who had taken a bit of a battering in this match and had been on the field for about a minute before he scored our equaliser in the 85th minute. An unnecessary foul out wide gave us a free kick and Green's delivery was flicked on by Tierney to Adeyemi at the far post, who headed the ball across goal for our substitute to nod in from close range. If I'm honest, a few of us behind the goal all looked across at the Assistant, just in case there was an offside, but he was happy and we were then able to celebrate.

But could we hold on? Late goals had given us trouble all season, so we needed to be careful, but in reality, it became more a matter of whether we would score again as we took the match to a suddenly wobbly Redhill team and started to attack them on the flanks. We should have had a second goal when we cut them apart with a good move involving Oblitey and Ingham-Wright who fed Negassi on the right, but his perfect cross was somehow headed back across the vacant goal by Miller from just two yards out! The ball was retrieved by Oblitey, but he was at a very narrow angle by then and he clipped the post before the home side were able to scramble the ball to safety!

I'm still not too sure how we didn't take the lead at this point, but an away win would have been harsh on Redhill and they were probably frustrated enough with the draw. We saw out a rather inflated seven minutes of injury time with only a couple of nervy moments before we were able to celebrate a point that in all honesty, I didn't expect us to get before the match, but that's football! With both teams below us picking up points, it's a little tighter at the foot of the table than anyone involved with our team would like it to be, but with six matches remaining, survival is still most definitely in our own hands!

Epsom & Ewell: Faebian Witter, Ayrán Kugathas, Ethan Nelson-Roberts (c), Adam Green, Reece Tierney, Callum Wilson, Luke Miller, Thompson Adeyemi, Carl Oblitey, Tijani Eshilokun, Jaevon Dyer

Subs: Matt McGillivray for Kugathas (74), Sirak Negassi for Dyer (78), Zach Ingham-Wright for Eshilokun (84), Jerry Antwi for Oblitey (92).

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

March puts spring in Salt's steps

15 May 2024



Epsom & Ewell FC 6-2 Sandhurst Town. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 2nd March 2024.

Cast your mind back just four days to our heaviest defeat of the season, when we fell away badly to lose 6-1 at Knaphill. This weekend Sandhurst Town were the visitors and we registered our heaviest win of the season with a 6-2 score line. This was also our first home win of 2024 and for those who like their stats, it was our first home win on this date since 1957 when Uxbridge were defeated 2-0 in a Corinthian League fixture!

In case you were wondering, this sort of thing has happened before. In October 2018 we lost a Vase match 6-1 at Lingfield, only to bounce back in our next match with a 6-0 win at AC London, but it could be argued this was a far more important win.

Having played some very difficult matches recently, I had written previously about how the fixture list was a little kinder to us in March and April, but that doesn't guarantee us anything; we still had to go and get the points, and although we had a very friendly helping hand (or foot!) to see us on our way in this contest, we were good value for the win against a Sandhurst team that never really recovered from their awful start.

With Nick Wilson suspended after an accumulation of yellow cards, Ethan Nelson-Roberts was handed the Captain's armband and Wilson was replaced by Carl Oblitey. The return of the big man up front certainly gave us some added

balance, particularly up front, but the star of the show this time was the little man, Luke Miller who had a fine game, although a few others also deserve mentions. We also appeared to learn a lesson from the Knaphill defeat as we pressed more and made it much more difficult for our opponents to play throughout the ninety minutes.

This match was a pivotal one for us and arguably for our Management team, who went into this game with one win and nine defeats from their ten matches in charge, well aware that our Committee have been extremely trigger-happy in the last three seasons. We all needed a change of fortune and in the fourth minute we got some. A harmless looking back pass went straight under the visiting keeper Harry White's foot and he was unable to reach the ball before it crossed the line and nestled in the back of the net to give us a rather fortuitous lead!

Sandhurst were clearly rattled by this and White then had to make a good save to his right to deny Miller before our tricky winger got the ball back after we intercepted it in midfield. He drew White out, only to put his shot wide from the edge of the area. A second goal would really have been a great start, but as it turned out, it was just around the corner anyway. In the tenth minute Thompson Adeyemi set up Miller on the right with a nice pass and he simply squared the ball over for Jaevon Dyer to tap it into the net from three yards. However, it didn't quite work out like that as despite the artificial surface, Dyer somehow got under the ball and spooned it up onto the crossbar! The ball bounced down and then up onto the bar a second time before he was finally able to nod the ball over the line from about an inch, getting bundled into the net with the ball by a defender for his troubles!

From this point the match became more even, with the visitors holding the balance of possession for a while, but not really being allowed to do much with it. A long shot gave Shay Honey some trouble and he parried the ball wide, where he then had to make a second save from an angle from a low shot. Next to feature was Tijani Eshilokun who appeared to be knocked over in an off the ball challenge. The referee had a few words with Callum Wright for Sandhurst, but felt that no card was required, or maybe he felt sorry for Wright who was already being given a proper run around by Miller!

Unfortunately in the 34th minute Sandhurst found a way back into the match with a long shot that appeared to bounce just in front of Honey and although he kept the shot out, he couldn't hold onto the ball and it was knocked back past him from close range to make the score 2-1.

Ayran Kugathas picked up a yellow for us as the visitors threatened to level the scores, but we were still dangerous on the attack and Oblitey set up Miller on the right to strike powerfully at goal, where White made a good block for a corner. Moments later we thought we had a third goal after Eshilokun sent the ball across into the danger area where Oblitey clipped the ball into the net. However, on its way into the net, the ball went close to Dyer who was standing in an offside position according to the Assistant and although he didn't touch the ball, I could understand why the official would think he might have been in the keeper's line of sight, even if I could see from my position that he wasn't! Either way, the referee took his time, consulted with his Assistant and then explained the matter fully to Nelson-Roberts as he disallowed the goal.

Regrettably this wasn't good enough for Eshilokun who remarked about having been cheated before and maybe understandably the referee took this comment to heart, ensuring that our man then had to make his fourth visit of the season to the sin-bin as a result. This was our team's eleventh dissent offence of the season and remains a concern. I should also point out at this stage that I felt the referee had a really good game and even if this was probably the wrong decision, he communicated with our Captain and explained his reasoning. Quick word to our Committee. The referee will not change his mind, just because one of you shouts out from the sidelines that "we've got it on video". He really won't, so why do we keep using this line that I've heard three or four times over the last two seasons now. It's an embarrassing look for our club!

The half time whistle blew shortly afterwards, but the second half started with a bang! There were just 19 ticks on the clock when a great pass out to Miller was taken in stride and as he left Wright for dead he then sent the ball across the face of goal where Oblitey was waiting to tap the ball in from close range to make it 3-1 to the ten men. Clearly this was unacceptable to the visiting Manager who then made a triple substitution and followed it up with a fourth moments later. This sparked a response and a long shot was cleared off the line by an Epsom defender, but once our "sin-binner" was back on the field we started to get back on top and it was Eshilokun that then applied the tap in finish on the hour after a corner had been half cleared to Oblitey who delivered the ball in from the right.

At 4-1 up you could be forgiven for thinking it might be comfortable from this point, but it had to be remembered that we had been 4-1 up in the return fixture after an hour, only to draw 4-4. This time there would be no such concerns as Oblitey got away on the left and pulled the ball back for Dyer to strike into the far top corner from the edge of the area to make it 5-1 in the 67th minute, grazing White's glove on the way.

The visitors showed a bit of life for a while after this and a long ball was chested down by a striker only for the ball to get away from him and run through to Honey. Then our keeper did well to parry away a free kick that was aiming for the far post. However, they reduced the arrears in the 83rd minute after a long range effort came back off our post and was knocked in by Amari Fushanu from a few yards out, but we produced another excellent goal in the second minute of injury time when both substitute Nick Inwugwu and Eshilokun produced some skilful interplay, including a clever back heel from the former to the latter who then drilled the ball in to the net from six yards, via a defender.

It was a fantastic way to finish the match and whilst these three points were important, the four goal boost to our goal difference could also prove relevant at the end of the season. For what it's worth though, a couple more performances and results like this in our remaining seven matches and we'll be fine anyway!

Epsom & Ewell: Shay Honey, Ayran Kugathas, Ethan Nelson-Roberts (c), Adam Green, Reece Tierney, Callum Wilson, Luke Miller, Thompson Adeyemi, Carl Oblitey, Tijani Eshilokun, Jaevon Dyer

Subs: Zach Wright for Oblitey (74), Nick Inwugwu for Kugathas (75), Matt McGillivray for Wilson (80), Sirak Negassi for Miller (83)

Face saved by late rally

15 May 2024



Epsom & Ewell FC 3-4 Alton. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 24th February.

A competitive and entertaining, if niggly encounter at the Madgwick on Saturday ended with visitors Alton scraping a win by four goals to three after a couple of late strikes from our boys gave us a hope of pinching a point right at the end. It wasn't to be though and to be honest, if we had, it would have been harsh on our opponents, who were well in control in the first half and should probably have been out of sight by the break anyway, even if the second period was more even. The fightback did at least help us with our goal difference and who knows how important that might prove to be for both teams at the end of the season.

Alton remain solid bets for one of the four playoff spots after this victory and were well on top for large periods, with one of the biggest differences between the two teams being the quality of service into the danger areas. Alton were able to get down our flanks on a regular basis and sent the ball in for the big men in the box which caused us trouble all day long, while our opportunities and in particular our set pieces were really poor in this match. However, it is impossible not to ask if things would have been different had a key flashpoint not been better dealt with, and yes, regrettably I do have to question the performance of our match officials a little after this encounter.

With many other matches called off and even with a number of travelling supporters, our attendance was advised as an extremely disappointing 68. Yes, results haven't been great, but using the club's figures we averaged 92 in the League last season (110 if you include the playoffs) while this season we average 81, despite larger away support and more local matches. Our club doesn't currently engage with the few really loyal supporters it has and our match programme doesn't even welcome them to the ground any more. The player stats within it were also wildly inaccurate and it even carried a full page advert for our "home" match this coming Tuesday, when in fact we are away! Our club recently advised on Twitter that much hard work is being done by our Committee, yet all of this "work" is apparently deemed too important to tell mere supporters what it is, while the attention to detail in the limited club output is really poor. The club actually has one fairly big story which I'm told will be announced very shortly, but even this has been an open secret on the circuit for the last three weeks!

We only made two changes from our fine win at Camberley as Rory Edwards was unavailable and was replaced by Reggie Savage, making his first start, while our goalkeeping turnstile rotated for the fifth straight week with the addition of new keeper Shay Honey who played against us for Spelthorne Sports back in October. Whilst we had five keepers in four matches almost exactly a year ago, this is the first time in club history that we have started five different ones in consecutive matches. Honey performed well on his debut and it is hoped that our Management have now found someone they are happy with between the posts, although alarmingly once again we only named four substitutes.

After a fairly even opening ten minutes we had the first strike at goal, although Savage's strike was well kept out by Lewis Mees in the Alton goal before anyone noticed that the offside flag had been raised anyway. The visitors started to gain the ascendancy and opened their account in the 22nd minute with a deep corner that was met with an unmarked downwards header from close range by Ryan Stepney that Honey had no chance of keeping out. A combination of keeper and defenders blocked another chance on goal minutes later. We had an opportunity in the 27th minute after the tricky Sirak Negassi was brought down some twenty yards out, but the subsequent free kick was probably one of the worst in our history as Nick Wilson stuttered over taking it, before being replaced by regular taker Adam Green who then ballooned the strike way over the bar!

However, the next issue in this match came when Jerry Antwi picked up a facial injury on the half hour. Having seen the video of the incident it was really clear that Pat Cox raised an elbow above his head and it clattered into our player's head. The bright orange sleeved arm was really clear to see, even though the video was taken from sixty yards away, yet the referee who was much closer, didn't even award a free kick for the assault that absolutely warranted a red card. Insult was added to injury when a clearly incensed Antwi also had to be replaced by Ayran Kugathas and Wilson made his views clear, only to find himself in the sin-bin as a result! The number one priority for a match official has to be the protection of the players and it wouldn't surprise me if during the injury break, the referee realised he had got this one wrong as his performance was very shaky from this point with both teams taking the opportunity to appeal for almost everything from that point onwards.

With one of our defenders off the field for ten minutes we looked very vulnerable and the only Epsom person winning a header during this period was long-serving supporter John Bonner who headed the ball back into play from the sidelines! Green was alert to clear the ball off the line from another free header that had beaten Honey, before a right wing cross was met by a superb half volley from Cox that Honey tipped over. Whilst that corner was cleared, the visitors kept up the bombardment and a left wing cross from right out on the touchline was as good as any you will ever see in the Premier League, leaving Cox the simple task of nodding the ball in at the far post from a couple of yards out in the 45th minute. Whether Cox should still have been on the field was of course extremely debateable, but in the five minutes of injury time that followed, we were grateful to Honey for making two further good stops in that time. We were very fortunate to be only two goals down at the interval.



The second half had to be better if we were going to get back into this match, but that's exactly what happened. An early chance for Ethan Nelson-Roberts was blocked before Savage drove the rebound just wide from the edge of the area and whilst Alton had an appeal for a penalty after a header on goal struck Green's arm, it would have been extremely harsh had it been given. As we entered the 53rd minute Savage chased down a ball in midfield, winning the tackle and setting up Negassi to streak down the right wing. We were a bit short of options in the middle, so he tried to cut back onto his left foot and was brought down in the area as he did so, earning a rare and uncontested spot kick that Wilson tucked away a minute later to give us hope.

We had to make an adjustment just before the hour as Ethan Brazier limped off, and with Luke Miller coming on we had to move a few players around to accommodate. This took a little bit of time to bed in and we found ourselves being pushed back, although there was time for an Alton player to volley the ball away after it had already crossed the touchline, which as regular supporters will recall, earned our Captain Wilson a yellow card just seven days previously! However, we were grateful to Honey again as another ball in from the right was struck at goal and turned away by our debutant keeper. Unfortunately our defence had little chance in the 66th minute as we were pushing forward, but lost the ball in midfield and the counter attack was brutal, sending the ball inside the advanced Kugathas, by now playing at right back, with the square ball in being knocked in from close range by former Camberley favourite Jamie Hoppitt to make it 3-1.

Alton missed a good chance with a close range header before Wilson picked up a yellow card for a foul. Moments later someone took revenge on him, leaving him to require treatment, but the referee didn't want to know how it occurred, even ignoring an Assistant who was flagging on the far side. Then in the 80th minute Tijani Eshilokun unwisely chose to speak out to the referee after Nelson-Roberts was pulled up for a foul out on the Alton right wing and found himself having a ten minute breather as a result. As with our first half sin-bin we then conceded while short handed as the free kick was met by another close range finish, this time giving Staples his second goal of the match and giving the visitors an probably unsurmountable 4-1 lead in the 82nd minute.

Oddly enough we then produced our best ten minutes of the match and Negassi was pulled down right on the edge of the area by Archie Larkum who picked up a yellow card. Whilst the free kick from Green from wide out wasn't a very good one, it squirmed through the wall and was diverted goalwards from six yards by Wilson, completely deceiving Mees at his near post and giving us a second goal in the 87th minute. We continued to press and Negassi sent in a powerful shot from 20 yards which had a lot of swerve on it. Mees did well to parry the strike but Miller was on the loose ball in a flash and as Mees spread himself expecting Miller to strike at goal, our man held the ball up skilfully before strolling round the prostrate keeper to tap in from a couple of yards to make the score a scarcely believable 3-4!

With that goal coming in the 90th minute there were probably about seven additional minutes to play, but even with the reappearance of Eshilokun we were unable to engineer any further real chances. Instead the game continued in its niggly way and wasn't helped by some strange decisions, firstly when Kugathas was pulled back yet no card was issued, and then bizarrely when an Alton player fell to the ground in the 96th minute. Was he wasting time or genuinely injured? Well, if you are a physio, you can't take that chance and our physio Alfie Wyld came on to look after what he felt was a potential head injury, only to then receive a yellow card from the referee for entering the field of play without permission! I am certain the referee thought he was carding an opposition physio and had no idea it was our man. Either way though, our man may now think twice before rushing to help someone on the field, which is a concerning development, although pretty much summed up the day for the man in the middle and he faced a fair bit of criticism from both sides as he departed the scene moments later.

For our boys it was a much improved second half, but Alton are a very solid side who play good football and get the ball into the danger areas well and consistently. We simply couldn't afford to give them a two goal head start and hope to get away with it. We face another tricky match at Knaphill on Tuesday evening but once this match is complete, the fixture list eases significantly after a brutal February where we have played many of the top teams. Although Colliers Wood United closed the gap between us and them to four points at the foot of the table after their pivotal 2-1 win at Sheerwater, I'm seeing enough from our boys in patches to remain confident that we can stay up, although it would be nice to see a full bench again and some better club advertising and information to try and welcome more people as we enter this critical phase of the season!

Epsom & Ewell: Shay Honey, Ethan Brazier, Jerry Antwi, Adam Green, Reece Tierney, Nick Wilson (c), Sirak Negassi, Thompson Adeyemi, Reggie Savage, Tijani Eshilokun, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Ayran Kugathas for Antwi (35), Luke Miller for Brazier (56), Mekhi Savage for R.Savage (68)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk