

March puts spring in Salt’s steps

4 March 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)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Face saved by late rally

4 March 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

First win of the year for Epsom & Ewell FC

4 March 2024



Camberley Town 1-2 Epsom & Ewell FC. Combined Counties League – Premier Division. Saturday 17th February 2024

After seven successive defeats we finally opened our account for 2024 with an extremely important 2-1 victory at Krooner Park over our old friends Camberley Town. It was our first win over our opponents in ten matches and our first in Camberley since a 2-0 win there back in 2013. Over the ninety minutes we deserved it too, with Ethan Nelson-Roberts claiming the highlights with both goals, although several players produced great performances.

In the absence of Warren Burton, Gwynne Berry took charge in the dugout and we made three changes from our defeat against Farnham Town with the injured Carl Oblitey and the unwell Toby Colwell both being unable to take part with Mekhi Savage dropping to the bench. In their places came Thompson Adeyemi and Sirak Negassi, while in goal we had Faebian Witter who had joined us from Carshalton Athletic. This meant that we were starting our fourth different goal keeper in our last four matches. For those who like their stats, this has only happened five times previously, although it did happen recently, when in January 2023 we had five different keepers in a four game span, due to a harsh sending off that left Nick Wilson between the posts at Hailsham Town!

It wasn't that long ago that we met Camberley Town at the Madgwick, where we started brightly but fell away badly to lose 5-0. While the margin of victory in this match was nowhere near as emphatic, the story was a similar one, except it was our opponents that started better with our boys that finishing the stronger of the teams this time.

Witter found himself having to tip over an early strike from Kingsley Anokye and he also made another good low block at the near post on the quarter hour mark. In response Negassi was causing a bit of trouble on the right wing originally, but switched wings with Nelson-Roberts around the 22 minute mark. He was unfortunate to see the ball bobble on him just as he was shooting, and also put another chance wide from an angle when he probably should have delivered the ball into the box and. It was easy to wonder if this would cost us when the home side took the lead shortly afterwards. With the clock showing the 35th minute we were caught out by an enormous throw from Tom Wensley that was headed past Witter from close range by Regan Hitch. It was a colossal throw in and I'm not sure if I have seen a larger throw, but he had delivered an earlier one on a similar scale, so we probably should have been aware and better prepared for this.

The fightback began almost immediately. Rory Edwards sent a shot just beyond the far post from twenty yards only moments after the goal before we started to build some good pressure. In the 44th minute Tijani Eshilokun was taken out over on the far touchline by Cavan Atkinson and whilst I was surprised that a yellow card was not awarded, we got our revenge in a different way. Adam Green's deep free kick was contested for by two Camberley players who both got a touch to the ball. Reece Tierney and Ethan Nelson-Roberts were on the end of the ball with the ball brushing the latter's right leg as it crossed the line for our 45th minute equaliser. Some people felt there was a foul on the keeper, but having seen the video back, my original view that there wasn't enough contact to cancel it out remained unchanged. More importantly, the referee agreed!

Going up the hill in the second half is often difficult against Camberley, who it should be remembered, had the better of a goalless draw with Knaphill just four days previously and had a fairly decent home record. However, we had wrestled away the momentum and the second half would prove to be a really good one to watch if you were an Epsom supporter.

Edwards was on target from twenty yards in the opening minute and whilst it was a fairly easy save for Owen Crawford, it had come from a good move and was a good start. Next to feature was our full back Jerry Antwi who beat the offside trap on the left after good work from Eshilokun and Negassi before slotting the ball back to Adeyemi who teed it up for Negassi to strike, forcing Crawford into a good low save from twelve yards in the 54th minute. However, we weren't to be denied and a minute later we had our lead. Negassi controlled a crossfield pass with a killer touch on the left, before continuing to run at goal before pulling the ball back for Eshilokun to strike from 15 yards. His shot wasn't the greatest, but it would end up counting as an assist as the ball was scuffed almost sideways and straight into the path of Nelson-Roberts who forced the loose ball in just ahead of a defender from about three yards.

For a few minutes the pattern of the game changed as we had our first lead. We either chose to sit back a little, or were pushed back as the hosts suddenly realised that they needed to "up" things a little. We had to clear the ball away from under the bar before Witter was alert to make a decent save on the hour. We also had a scare when Witter chose to clear a back pass first time and clubbed the ball straight at a home forward, but fortunately the player was unable to control it and we escaped.

We had another great chance in the 74th minute when a Green corner was met by the head of an unmarked Tierney, but the delivery required a solid thumping header and his contact wasn't the greatest and the ball went across goal. Tierney was soon in action at the other end as Macauley Martin ran at him, cutting back onto his right, but he went for power from about 18 yards and was well off target, dragging the shot wide of the near post.

Gradually the home side began to run out of ideas against a defence that was holding up well. Our game management was much better and even the Wensley howitzers were being dealt with by our defenders with Tierney in particular heading a few away during the second half. The game concluded in a fairly comfortable win by the end, albeit with one final funny incident just outside the Camberley penalty area, where Brad Passfield and Cavan Atkinson got involved in a spot of handbags with Eshilokun, only for the referee to bring all three players together and tell them to "grow up"!

Following the match I heard some people refer to the fact that one of our reasons for winning was that we were fitter than we had been. We certainly looked the stronger of the two teams today, particularly in the second period, but must remember it is not that long since we lost three games in a row in the closing moments, so I think there was another reason that was more relevant. I know it is a bit of a cliché, but I felt we simply wanted it more than our opponents, who had won so easily in January and thought this would be a comfortable win, particularly after conceding the opening goal. This time though, we fought back and it was good to see that for the first time in a while. Tougher challenges await us, but for now this is one of those occasions where you just have to focus on enjoying the win, as it's been a while!

Epsom & Ewell: Faebian Witter, Ethan Brazier, Jerry Antwi, Adam Green, Reece Tierney, Nick Wilson (c), Sirak Negassi, Rory Edwards, Thompson Adeyemi, Tijani Eshilokun, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Luke Miller for Negassi (82), Mekhi Savage for Nelson-Roberts

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Salts defeated in presence of legend

4 March 2024



AFC Croydon Athletic 5-2 Epsom & EwellFC. Combined Counties League – Premier Division. Saturday 10th February.

Despite scoring seven times in matches against AFC Croydon Athletic this season, we only have three defeats to show for our efforts and without sounding like a broken record, I felt we have been unlucky in all three of them! In this match, and despite the introduction of four new debutants, we gave as good as we got, only to be punished by some clinical finishing that gave the scoreline of 5-2 a hugely flattering look.

Fortunately, from a personal point of view, the disappointment on the field was eased by the presence behind the goal of our Club legend and record goal scorer **Tommy Tuite**, who scored the huge total of 391 goals for our club between 1973 and 1987. How we could do with that sort of loyalty and production right now. His attendance enabled us to talk about the good old days when we were one of the better teams in Surrey and had a ground with a welcoming atmosphere. Those days are sadly gone for now at least.

Our four new starters were Conor Beattie, Alex Green and Mekhi Savage, whose father Reggie would also make his debut later on. However, any chance of us having a father and son combination on the pitch for what would be only the second time in club history would have to wait until next week, as one replaced the other! Some of you may not be aware that a large number of players have departed in the last week, hence the replacements, although it was interesting to note that the opposition Manager stated in the match programme that we had let some players go, which couldn't be further from the truth!

Either way though, the new Management Team were going to have to add some players and Savage and Green look like being useful additions to the squad, while we may have to wait a little longer to analyse Beattie's performance as he injured himself very early in the second half and was unable to continue.

Despite the bare facts that showed AFC Croydon Athletic had won their last four League matches while we had lost our last four, we started confidently and had the early share of possession. Until the fifth minute that is, when Oalekan Osideko broke away on the right and drilled a shot low at goal. Beattie was down to make the save but could only parry it back into the danger area where the Croydon goal machine Louis Theophanous was waiting to drill the shot past our by now horizontal keeper from a few yards out. It didn't seem to dent confidence too much though and Savage Junior struck low from twenty yards, requiring Toby Fisher to turn the shot wide. From the corner Thompson Adeyemi was there first, but was unable to keep the header down.

The home side headed another good chance over, although the offside flag would have cancelled any goal out, and we were back on the attack soon after. Carl Oblitey, playing against one of his former clubs, nearly scored when he was denied by a good block, with the loose ball being sent back in with interest by Green who saw the ball deflected wide. Oblitey then headed just over from the resultant corner. However, fortune was not going to be on our side today and on the half hour mark Osideko's shot was well saved by Beattie, only for the rebound to strike the incoming Nick Wilson, who was only able to clear the ball once it had gone over our goal line. A really unlucky way to concede, although we scored twice last season in similar circumstances. Swings and roundabouts!

Again though we responded well to the set back and within a minute we had a goal back. Ethan Nelson-Roberts fired the ball towards goal, only for his somewhat wayward strike to reach Oblitey, who controlled the ball on the edge of the area and drilled the ball low into Fisher's right hand corner. Savage then produced a good run, only for the final product to be straight at Fisher. As we went in at the half, we were very unfortunate to be 2-1 down.

The half had been in progress for a few seconds when Beattie came out to clear a long ball, but missed his kick and injured his leg in the process, requiring his replacement. Toby Colwell came on and the game continued in a similar style with Green next to have a try after some good pressure, only for his shot to go just beyond the far post from an angle. In response, the hosts struck the bar with a powerful shot from an angle, but we were asking as many of the questions, if not more than our opponents and Sirak Negassi made a good run, only to be fouled just outside the area. Regrettably though, the free kick was cleared and on the break it took two simple passes to cut our whole team out and leave Andre Coker the easiest of tap ins at the far post in the 68th minute.

With that two goal lead the home team began to grow in confidence and seven minutes later they extended their lead with a fantastic strike from Theophanous who volleyed the ball in from thirty yards with Colwell completely unable to do anything about it. Things got worse as it became 5-1 in the final minute of normal time as Theophanous drilled the ball low past Colwell from the edge of the area.

We had time to pull a goal back when substitute Rory Edwards made a good run on the right and his early low cross was guided past Fisher from six yards by Nelson-Roberts in the 94th minute, but it was barely a consolation and the final whistle blew a few minutes later with the home side victorious by five goals to two.

It wasn't all bad though; there were glimmers of hope as we performed fairly well against one of the form teams in the League who will surely make the playoffs if they continue to stay fit and healthy, in particular their striker Theophanous who was almost unstoppable. We have brought in some new players, but no defenders yet, and it is fair to say that we are going to need to strengthen in that area if we are to avoid further defeats, even if we manage to score more. Up front Oblitey looks a handful and if only we could have had a young Tuite playing alongside him, we could go into the next matches with more confidence, but up next is the Farnham juggernaut, chasing a world record, and that match looks rather daunting right now.

Epsom & Ewell: Conor Beattie, Ethan Brazier, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Adam Green, Reece Tierney, Nick Wilson (c), Mekhi Savage, Thompson Adeyemi, Carl Oblitey, Tijani Eshilokun, Sirak Negassi

Subs: Toby Colwell for Beattie (50), Reggie Savage for M.Savage (75), Rory Edwards for Adeyemi (75), Ayran Kugathas for Negassi (83)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Twice led, thrice beaten....

4 March 2024



Sheerwater 4-3 Epsom & Ewell FC. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 3rd February.

One of the most concerning afternoons in recent club history took place on Saturday as we made our very first visit to Sheerwater's Eastwood Leisure Centre for a massive League match between the two clubs. Yet, despite the importance of the fixture, we led twice and threw the game away in the final minutes, marking the third match in a row where we have now done this as the home side claimed a 4-3 victory to record their fifth straight win against us.

For the three previous match reports between 16th and 30 January 2024 [CLICK](#) here for reports brought to us by Nathan Lambert.

We went into the match with news breaking over the previous 24 hours that we had lost regular players Jaan Stanley and Ollie Thompson who had decided to move on and I found out during the afternoon that over the last week we had also lost George Owusu, Ade Batula and Tommy Williams too. The club hasn't bothered to advise its supporters of any of these departures, or even acknowledge their contributions, leaving long suffering fans to figure things out for themselves; not for the first time as secrecy and paranoia continue to reign at our club. One glance at the FA Full Time site was enough to tell me that we have had no new registered players joining the club since Steve Springett resigned and we took the field with just four substitutes named for this hugely important contest.

In terms of personnel Harvey Keogh came back in for Toby Colwell who was one of the four subs, but this was the only change to the line up from our narrow loss to Jersey Bulls four days earlier.

Despite the backdrop to this match, we actually started very well. There were only 91 seconds on the clock when a good move down the left was laid back for Ethan Nelson-Roberts to deliver the ball into the danger area where Carl Oblitey stretched to guide the ball past Joe Hill from close range in the Sheerwater goal. This was a terrific way to start and whilst Louis McGrave headed over unmarked from a corner soon after our goal, the home threat would prove to be fairly limited in the final third in this opening period.

Oblitey was causing problems and it looks like Springett's final signing will be pivotal to our plight if we are to stay up. He had another chance in the seventh minute after Tijani Eshilokun intercepted a poor defensive pass and set him up, only for our striker to snatch at the ball, puling it wide from just inside the area when he had more time than he realised.

The home side had as much possession in the first half as we did and around the twenty minute mark they sent two balls fizzing straight across our six yard area in opposite directions with no one there to get the vital touch, but we looked likely to increase our lead whenever we went forward and a Nick Wilson free kick was

parried by Hill with Nick Inwugwu just millimetres away from getting a touch to the ball first. Oblitey then struck wide from another Eshilokun pass before we extended our lead in the 40th minute. Luke Miller did well down the right and sent in a deep cross that had Hill scrambling. He just managed to reach the ball to claw it away, but only as far as Oblitey and although his chance was blocked, the loose ball reached Lewis Pearch who scooped the ball over the line, off a defender’s leg and up into the roof of the net from inside the six yard box. There were shouts for handball from the home side, but I didn’t see one, although handballs would go on to play an enormous part in the second half story.

But at the half we went in, fully deserving of the two goal lead and unaware of the disastrous second half that would follow. The hosts clearly changed things and Michael Milne and George Sellick began to cause us real difficulty. An early strike from distance wasn’t an issue for Keogh, but a low shot from the right wing caused him to make a good block at the near post, only for the loose ball to be struck against the arm of Reece Tierney with a penalty being awarded. Milne tucked away the penalty in the 51st minute and the home side were on the board.

Tierney was the man penalised for the penalty against Jersey Bulls four days previously, but this one, although it did hit him on the arm, looked a bit harsh and it’s not clear exactly how we could have been expected to get out of the way. Having now seen a video of the incident, I don’t believe that the arm was in an unnatural position either. Either way though it was now 2-1, but not for long as a low shot in came back off our far post and as it rebounded back into play Frazier Osunkoya reacted first to knock the ball into the net from around six yards. This happened in the 53rd minute and our two goal lead had suddenly evaporated into thin air.

We responded to the setback fairly well though and Oblitey set Pearch up for a low shot that was kept out by the feet of Hill before we went ahead again on the hour mark after Miller’s cross was blocked by an arm and Wilson stepped up to send the keeper the wrong way from the spot. It was another one of those decisions where in the old days the appeal would have been rejected as it was clearly ball to hand, but with these new interpretations, I don’t believe anyone is completely sure of what actually constitutes a handball any more. All you could say I suppose is that the referee was consistent in his approach to both penalties and we were 3-2 up again.

Despite being given this lifeline though, we started to be pushed back with Sellick in particular giving our defenders a very difficult examination and asking the question about why he was causing so much trouble after being fairly anonymous in the opening forty-five. However, Keogh was alert to block his low shot before Sellick got through again, winning a corner after a defender got across to block his shot. A free kick was then headed over from one of his crosses while we picked up three yellow cards, one of which for Wilson, saw the home player flying up in the air as a result. Maybe it looked worse than it was, but this is the fourth match in a row with a yellow card for our Captain and he is better than that.

Sellick drilled a shot across goal before delivering another ball deep to the far post which was headed back into the danger area, only for another handball to be given against Tierney. Again, this looked harsh, but Milne put the spot kick to Keogh’s right for the second time in the match and it was 3-3.

In response, Ethan Nelson-Roberts benefitted from a good “no-look” pass from Pearch but chose to shoot from an angle with Miller waiting in the middle and Hill parried the ball to safety, but for the third match in a row we conceded in the closing seconds after Milne wasn’t closed down and his shot from around the edge of the area crept into the corner in the 91st minute to complete his hat trick and give Sheerwater a 4-3 lead that they wouldn’t have time to relinquish.

There was still time for Milne to fall to the ground in the middle of the field, whereupon he picked up a second yellow card for apparent simulation. It was a bizarre decision from a referee who had become a little too trigger happy and incensed the home side to the extent that one of their Management was shown a red card in the “discussions” that followed the final whistle. We were no angels either as the referee was also pursued at the final whistle by our Vice-Chairman Barry Gartell, claiming vociferously that the referee didn’t understand the handball law. He may well have had a point, although I’m aware that the guidelines are often changing in this respect, but it wasn’t a very good look for our club.

Our new Management team now have some significant work to do in bringing in some new players ahead of a brutal run of fixtures coming up throughout the month of February, but the manner of this defeat will also need to be questioned, along with our game Management ability as this is now three points dropped in the last three matches that may well prove costly in a relegation battle that Sheerwater showed more likelihood of escaping than we do right now.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Ethan Brazier, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Nick Inwugwu, Reece Tierney, Nick Wilson (c), Luke Miller, Thompson Adeyemi, Carl Oblitey, Tijani Eshilokun, Lewis Pearch

Subs: Sirak Negassi for Pearch (88)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Three January match reports for Epsom and Ewell FC

4 March 2024

Between 16th and 30th January **Nathan Lambert** took up the Epsom and Ewell FC match reporting responsibilities of his father Richard. Here are his three reports for your pleasure and the archives. Well done Nathan. Good job.

Epsom & Ewell 2-4 Virginia Water. Southern Combination Cup – Second Round. Tuesday 16th January 2024. Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk. Reporter: Nathan Lambert

Salts frozen out by Water

On a cold evening at the Reg Madgwick stadium in Cobham, Virginia Water visited us for a Southern Combination Cup tie. The match started off well with a few good chances for both teams as in the sixth minute, Lewis Pearch was set free down the left wing and his ball into the box was headed narrowly wide by Jaan Stanley. From the resulting goal kick, Water went down the other end and put a shot from 15 yards high and wide to the right.

A few minutes later, Thompson Adeyemi ran through the opposition defence and squared a ball across for the shot to be lashed narrowly over the bar from just outside the box. Once again Virginia Water went up the other end and put a ball across the face of the goal from the left-hand side that no one could capitalize on.

After 20 minutes, both sides had decent chances and both could have scored, but it was us that took the lead in the 25th minute when a deep ball from defence found Luke Miller who got in behind the defence through the use of a nice one-two with Tijani Eshilokun. Miller finished this chance off with a great finish at the near post.

It was all downhill from here unfortunately with not much happening between this point and half time, apart from us conceding in the 44th minute with Brandon Jackson who scored for the visitors with a clinical finish into the bottom right corner.

At half time we seemed to be worth the draw but that would not stay the same into the second half as in the 52nd minute, a ball across from the left was poked into the net by Casey Boccaro from about 12 yards out. A few minutes later we made a double substitution to try and switch things up. We brought Carl Oblitey and Sirak Negassi on for Jaan Stanley and Lewis Pearch.

Debutant Oblitey, with an almost instant impact, was put through on goal by Rory Edwards after he ran through a couple of defenders and put his shot just over the bar. However soon after this we went out of the match entirely, conceding soon after from a free kick which was originally saved, but the rebound was tapped in from close range in the 72nd minute.

Ten minutes later a great back-post ball from the right wing was finished back across the goal into the far bottom corner and the visitors did not let off the pressure having two more goals ruled out for offside where balls in behind were slightly mistimed. This was not the end of the action however as substitute Sirak Negassi found himself in possession of the ball after a sliced defensive clearance to curl the ball over the keeper into the top right corner in the 90th minute.

In conclusion this was a fairly poor performance all round, as we were too open at the back, not holding the ball in midfield and we weren’t creative enough in the final third but, at the end of the day it was a cup match and our main focus has to be staying up in the league this year.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh (c), Ethan Brazier, Tommy Williams, Rory Edwards, Reece Tierney, Nick Wilson, Luke Miller, Thompson Adeyemi, Tijani Eshilokun, Jaan Stanley, Lewis Pearch

Subs: Carl Oblitey for Pearch (63), Sirak Negassi for Stanley (63), Jerry Antwi for Williams (80)

Epsom & Ewell 1-2 Cobham. Combined Counties League – Premier Division. Friday 26th January 2024

Landlords leave it late on Friday night

Subsequent to this disappointing injury-time loss to Cobham, the threat of relegation looms large as we are six points beneath Guildford and only three ahead of Sheerwater and four ahead of Colliers Wood United. I certainly think that we need to have an improvement in form soon or we may well be headed back into step Six and possibly back to Sussex, which would be unfortunate after the work we put in to get promoted last season.

Toby Colwell came in for a rare match between the posts as Harvey Keogh was away for a few days and we started off strongly in the 4th minute where a ball in found its way to the back post where it was poked over the line following a goal-mouth scramble. Unfortunately, it was disallowed for a foul against the Cobham goalkeeper which was probably fair. Two minutes later we had another good chance after Nick Wilson found himself in some space on the edge of the box, but he drilled his shot wide.

The next piece of action at either end came in the 14th minute as Luke Miller received the ball just outside the box and put us ahead with a low, curling shot that was reached by the keeper, but not kept out. At this point I was thinking back to the last match we had played against Virginia Water, where we had gone 1-0 up fairly early with a Miller goal but had let it slip by conceding four from that point. However, this looked different as there was limited action for much of the remainder of the first half with a few saves at each end, most notably in the 34th, with a great low save by Toby Colwell that went out for a corner that led to nothing.

Three minutes later our new signing (as of last week) Carl Oblitey had a shot from roughly 20 yards that went slightly over the bar. It seemed like we were playing the better football as we were approaching half time with one Cobham chance in the 44th minute that flew over the bar from 15 yards.

At the half we probably deserved the lead. In the 51st minute, Cobham got a player through onto a one on one with our keeper that was well saved by Colwell with the follow up being blocked as well. Soon after we had a free kick that was crossed to the back post and headed narrowly wide.

Nothing much else happened for 15 minutes except for Cobham seeming to be more in control of possession. This however, would count for nothing if they couldn't create chances whilst they had most of the momentum. Unfortunately for us, they did take advantage of this period of good play with a goal in the 75th minute where a shot from Reis Stanislaus found its way across goal to Ryan Marklew who bundled it in.

At this point I could tell that it would be a matter of "when" rather than "if" as we were losing focus, losing control and we couldn't string many passes together. We tried to make a couple of substitutions to change our fortune, but Cobham piled on the pressure after a few quick restarts and got chance after chance.

A brilliant opportunity opened up for Ryan Holt in the 92nd minute as our defence didn't close him down and he was able to get his shot off to swerve which led to a corner. The corner was only half cleared and this would cost us as the ball was returned to the back post where Marklew got himself his and Cobham's second when they needed it most - three minutes over the normal time

Although there were another eight minutes after the goal for us to score in, it seemed that we were trying to punt the ball long and win the header to score but it didn't work and the game finished 2-1. I felt we were unlucky to lose but it still leaves us in a bad position, particularly if results elsewhere go badly.

Epsom & Ewell: Toby Colwell, Tommy Williams, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Nick Inwugwu, Reece Tierney, Nick Wilson (c), Luke Miller, Thompson Adeyemi, Carl Oblitey, Tijani Eshilokun, Lewis Pearch

Subs: Jaan Stanley for Oblitey (65), Sirak Negassi for Eshilokun (80), Ethan Brazier for Williams (87)

Epsom & Ewell 1-2 Jersey Bulls. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Tuesday 30th January 2024

A late loss, again

Our fifth home match in a row provided us with a fourth consecutive loss on Tuesday as we lost in the final minutes against Jersey Bulls. Although it was a narrow loss and late in the match it still leaves us without a point for 2024 so far; form that can't continue if we want to stay up this season.

Our opponents came straight out of the gates at kick-off, putting us under some early pressure which we couldn't escape from. It took them just nine minutes to score with a fantastic ball into the box from near the touchline that was poked in from close range by Lorne Bickley. This was not the end of their pressure however as for the next 15 minutes we didn't get many chances at all whereas they kept on putting good balls into the box which were either missed, saved or blocked.

At this point in the half we were lucky not to be further behind, but the price of weathering the storm was just the one goal. We were starting to get a couple of chances at goal and in the 30th minute, Carl Oblitey headed a long ball down to Tijani Eshilokun who returned it to him for a shot towards goal. This shot looped up in the air, over the keeper and back into the box off the frame of the goal where Oblitey finished it back across goal at the second attempt, low to the keeper's left to make it 1-1.

It was only a few minutes later when Jersey had another chance. Their forward got through on goal but the ball bobbed away from him and he landed on the ground apparently due to a shirt pull from a defender, but the referee didn't give a pen for it.

The first half finished with two chances from Jersey, one was put over into the stand at that end and the second chance was a cross that went across the face of goal that no one could get to. At the half, we were lucky not to be behind after Jersey's early pressure, but the score was one apiece at the half.

Early into the second half, we showed a bit of bright attacking play where Luke Miller got down the right wing and put a ball across but no one was far enough upfield to capitalise and give us the lead. There was very little attacking threat from Jersey for the next 15 and even less from us as the game quietened down. However Jersey then found a second wind and was pushing forward from about the 70th minute onwards.

I was surprised that we hadn't made any substitutions by this point as we weren't looking great up top, but we waited until the 86th minute to make replacements as Jaan Stanley and Sirak Negassi came on for Lewis Pearch and Eshilokun to try and create new ideas in attack. However, three minutes later, a penalty was awarded to Jersey for an apparent handball that our defenders were certain did not hit an arm. Nevertheless, the penalty was clinically converted by Bickley into Colwell's top left corner to make it 2-1 to the visitors.

Three minutes into added time we had the final chance of the match with a free kick from about 20 yards out. Nick Wilson lined up to take it but it was parried by the keeper and the rebound was gathered. It is probably worth noting that the wall did not look like it was six yards back, let alone ten but it is not the reason we ultimately lost this match. We should have created a few more chances ourselves. At the end of the day, we could have lost the match far before that point and it still leaves us with four losses out of four for January.

Epsom & Ewell: Toby Colwell, Ethan Brazier, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Nick Inwugwu, Reece Tierney, Nick Wilson (c), Luke Miller, Thompson Adeyemi, Carl Oblitey, Tijani Eshilokun, Lewis Pearch

Subs: Jaan Stanley for Pearch (86), Sirak Negassi for Eshilokun (86)

A goal conceded for every year not played

4 March 2024



Epsom & Ewell FC 0-5 Camberley Town. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 6th January.

Our first meeting with Camberley Town for five years ended in a dispiriting home defeat by five clear goals, which marked our worst defeat of the season so far. Historians won't be particularly surprised as we hadn't won on this day in history since 1934, but this was surprisingly poor, bearing in mind our stellar second half showing just seven days previously.

Despite many other matches being called off and the knowledge that our game would definitely be on, a hugely disappointing crowd counted as 62, even though the official figure was advised as a rather ambitious 92, witnessed a very disappointing performance against a Camberley Town team that belied their League position and looked likely to score whenever they went forward, while we registered just two shots on target, with the visiting keeper Stuart Norman only having one serious save to make, and that came in second half injury time!

We made three changes from last week's win over Tooting & Mitcham United. Steve Springett was on dad duty and was unable to take the field, while Nick Wilson and Reece Tierney returned to the line up after being unavailable and injured respectively. They came in for the injured Ollie Thompson and also Nick Inwugwu

who had to make do with a place on the bench, while Lewis Pearch came in up front.

On a day when there were some very erratic officiating calls that left players confused and sometimes frustrated at times, it is important to point out that this match wasn't close enough to be affected by them, even though we looked quite good for the opening ten minutes!

Unfortunately, the first time the visitors went into our half, their striker was brought down clumsily on the edge of the penalty area and Regan Hitch delivered a free kick casually into the bottom far corner with our keeper Harvey Keogh either slow to get down to it, or unsighted. This goal came in the tenth minute and the lead was extended just two minutes later as a right wing cross was met with an unmarked looping header from Mason Taylor that gave Keogh no chance from twelve yards.

Things nearly got worse in the 14th minute when another break on the right from Stan Jones ended with a shot past Keogh that crossed the line, but hit the diagonal stanchion supporting the post and came back out. We had a spell of incidents like this a few years back at Chipstead, but fortunately, in each case the officials had awarded the goal to us. This time there was to be no such decision in Camberley's favour, much to the amazement of a number of their players and the score remained at 2-0.

Maybe it was to be our day after all. That bit of fortune should really have motivated us to fight back, but Epsom just weren't at the races and a third goal followed in the 26th minute. Maybe appropriately it was Jones who was the scorer after being "denied" twelve minutes earlier, although his shot appeared to be scuffed and Keogh, expecting a more powerful shot, went down before the ball got there and it crept into the net.

We desperately needed a way back into this match in quick time and Luke Miller produced a pinpoint cross for Pearch, but he headed the ball over the bar from just six yards. What we didn't realise at the time was that this would prove to be our best chance of the match and the visitors were soon back on the attack with Keogh being well placed to make a good save from a close range header. As we went into the third minute of injury time Tommy Williams played a decent one-two with a teammate, but the shot with his weaker left foot was easily fielded by Norman.

Could we turn this around in the second half, as we had done just seven days previously? Well, frankly, no! We had only been playing for a few minutes when an injury to Ayran Kugathas necessitated his replacement. We did put together a decent move, starting with Jaan Stanley who found Miller who then set up Rory Edwards, whose shot went across goal, but was just out of reach of the incoming Ethan Nelson-Roberts. Keogh was forced into another good save but in the 70th minute a good run from Jones ended with a shot across goal where Brandon Vangrove was there to touch the ball in from close range for the fourth Camberley goal. Things were looking really serious now and we made a triple substitution, but Keogh still had to make another close range save to prevent the score going higher.

We had a half chance with quarter of an hour remaining when substitute Thompson Adeyemi had a try from just outside the penalty area, only to see the ball hit the full face of the cross bar and rebound to safety, but in the 79th minute a corner was headed in by the unmarked Tom Wensley at close range and we were 5-0 down. Keogh had to make another couple of saves, with the latter of these coming out of the top drawer with a full stretch save of a shot that was heading for the top corner before Norman actually had some work to do in the 92nd minute when he tipped over a Williams shot from twenty yards with the subsequent corner being headed over by Tierney, but to be honest, a goal wouldn't have even counted as a consolation, such was the standard of this performance.

You rarely get results this one-sided unless two things happen. Firstly, we didn't play well, but secondly, Camberley did. With the hugely impressive Jones on the field, we appeared to have no real answer and remain winless against the Krooners in nine attempts dating back to 2014. To his credit our Manager Springett was brutally honest about the performance on social media after the match and it is hoped that we can fight back, although we now do not have another League match for three weeks, so there should be plenty of opportunity to try things out at training during that time. Either way, we need to improve or this relegation battle will remain a concern for far longer than it really should do.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh (c), Tommy Williams, Ayran Kugathas, Rory Edwards, Reece Tierney, Nick Wilson, Luke Miller, Tijani Eshilokun, Lewis Pearch, Jaan Stanley, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Nick Inwugwu for Kugathas (50), Thompson Adeyemi for Stanley (65), Ade Batula for Pearch (77), Tino Carpena for Miller (77), Jerry Antwi for Nelson-Roberts (77)

Horley make mincemeat of Epsom and Ewell

4 March 2024



Horley Town 4-0 Epsom & Ewell FC. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 23rd December 2023.

Exactly six years to the day since we last visited Horley Town, we made a visit that will not live long in the memory unless you are a Horley fan as we crashed 4-0 in our latest League fixture.

Horley produced a nice touch for this contest by sending some of the children around the ground to offer everyone mince pies, but regrettably that was all we would get from them in this match, as they finished much the stronger of the two teams after a fairly even first half hour. In comparison, we were extremely generous and many gifts were presented by our team!

Our line up contained our Captain Harvey Keogh, who had returned from a trip away, while Tommy Williams came back into the starting eleven, pushing Ethan Nelson-Roberts further forward. Tijani Eshilokun, Luke Miller and Tino Carpena also started, while Thomson Adeyemi surprisingly dropped to the bench and Sirak Negassi and George Owusu were not available. Finally, Ollie Thompson was back on the bench after what looked like being a longer term injury last weekend, although he advised that he wasn't going to be risked. For Horley there were two former Salts as Josh Alder and their Captain Louis Chin lined up against us.

Although possession was fairly even in the opening exchanges, we never really managed to get a shot of any power or accuracy at goal, while for Horley, Sam Harper broke through, but Keogh spread himself well to block the ball with his feet. An Alder right wing cross just eluded the incoming strikers, while Keogh then required treatment after he and a home player both went up with high feet and our man came off worse. Fortunately he was able to continue after receiving treatment.

The game changed in the 33rd minute when Miller picked up a yellow card, somewhat harshly, I thought. However, his response to this in applauding the decision earned him an unnecessary visit to the sin bin. Our club are well aware when a referee has an assessor present, but I wonder whether our Management are advised of this fact, as you always know that these sort of things are more likely to be actioned on by an official who is being assessed.

Within a minute we were forced into a substitution after Reece Tierney picked up an injury and Thompson came on for an appearance he wasn't expecting to make. Horley stepped up the pressure and Nick Inwugwu made a good clearance from a dangerous ball in. Then Alder's shot on goal was blocked for a corner, from which Jake Roberts then fired the ball into the roof of the net for the opening goal in the 37th minute.

We were back to ten men soon after, but Horley were up and running now and a right wing cross was headed just wide of our goal before our defence parted in the 48th minute and Joshua Rapson delicately chipped the ball over the exposed Keogh to put the home side two nil up at the break.

We had a couple of half chances early in the second half, but Nelson-Roberts was flagged offside when Miller appeared to be fouled in the area, and then a Steve Springett free kick required George Hyde in the Horley goal to make his first real intervention of the day by punching the ball clear, but these were small crumbs unfortunately and in the 57th minute we conceded a third goal in awful circumstances when Harper eased past Inwugwu and squared the ball for Cameron Gyeabour to finish off from close range.

Bad became worse just seven minutes later when Hyde's long goal kick put Alder through and with no defenders nearby, Keogh had to come out, leaving the former Salt to chip the ball over him into the net from twenty yards, despite a covering defender being on the line by this time.

In response Springett sent a free kick high and wide from 25 yards and substitute Adeyemi also sent a shot wide, but I didn't recognise a single shot on target from our boys in this match and there was even time for Hyde to venture behind the goal to share a drink with some of the home fans! The final chances fell to the home team and they had a fair shout for a penalty turned down, before Hyde nearly secured a second assist when his long ball found Rapson on the left and his shot was well blocked by Keogh, although the ball went up in the air and should have really been finished off by an incoming player, but fortunately he missed his kick! We

were then reduced to ten men in the 93rd minute after Nelson-Roberts picked up a visit to the sin-bin himself. He has been one of our best players this season, but obviously you can't influence the match when you are on the sidelines and we need to start learning this lesson. Mercifully the whistle saved us from further punishment and we retired, defeated by four clear goals.

There were many concerning aspects about this particular afternoon, but I shall concentrate on the three most important ones. Firstly, the way we defended, particularly in the second half. Secondly, we have now gone 301 minutes of normal time since we scored a goal. Finally, for the first time in a while results around us did not go well, particularly with Colliers Wood United winning at Tooting & Mitcham United. We face the latter in our next contest and it's fair to say that this now becomes a very important League match for our club.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh (c), Tommy Williams, Nick Inwugwu, Steve Springett, Reece Tierney, Nick Wilson, Luke Miller, Tijani Eshilokun, Tino Carpena, Rory Edwards, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Ollie Thompson for Tierney (34), Thompson Adeyemi for Carpena (56), Jaan Stanley for Miller (76), Ade Batula for Springett (76)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Wish their paths had not crossed?

4 March 2024



Epsom & Ewell FC 0-2 Tadley Calleva*. Combined Counties League - Premier Division Tuesday 19th December 2023.

On a rather chilly Tuesday evening at the Madgwick in front of less than 70 hardy souls, Tadley Calleva made the long journey over to Surrey and returned with the points after defeating us fairly comfortably by two goals to nil.

Anyone who just looks at the results would have seen Tadley's heavy defeat at the weekend, but anyone who actually studies them in detail would have seen that it came against Farnham Town and written it off as an anomaly. Far more relevantly, their three matches prior to that had been won and there was little doubt that they would collect the points here as they controlled the first half, scored twice and then kept us at arm's length for the majority of the second period, despite an improvement from our boys.

Toby Colwell kept his place in goal, but Ollie Thompson was unable to go following his injury at Colliers Wood United that will keep him out over the Christmas period at least. In his place came Steve Springett while Ethan Nelson-Roberts also returned which enabled Nick Inwugwu to switch over to right back, releasing Rory Edwards to play back in midfield again. Further forward Jaan Stanley and Tijani Eshilokun were unavailable, so Sirak Negassi and George Owusu came in for starts with Luke Miller dropping to the bench and Nick Wilson retaining the Captain's armband he had been holding since Thompson's injury.

We nearly had a shocking start as the visitors swept downfield and Alex Miller struck our post with a curling shot inside the first ten seconds. A regular supporter near me advised the time as six seconds, which, if it had gone in would have represented the earliest goal ever scored in an Epsom match as far as records could prove. We escaped this time, but apart from a Negassi shot that was well blocked by a defender, we created little in the first half and were often confronted with the sight of watching the match at distance as much of the opening "forty-five" was played in our half. Colwell made a couple of good saves midway through it, with the second of these right out of the top drawer to deny Sheldon Wright.

We made a little progress in the 33rd minute when Thompson Adeyemi fed Negassi who beat two men, but shot weakly at Craig Atkinson in the Tadley goal from a good position. However, we were back on the defensive soon after and the visitors opened their account in the 35th minute with a deep corner that was met at the far post with a downward header by Brad Neal. Although one of our defenders cleared the ball away, it had already crossed the line. Bad became worse when a second followed just four minutes later with a low drive from Ousman Darboe which nestled in the far corner from the edge of the penalty area.

We could have no complaints about the score to this point, although it was disappointing that we had created so little, particularly after drawing a blank at Colliers Wood in the previous match. The second half looked like it might follow a similar pattern as Colwell was forced into another good low save just after the restart, but things got better and we nearly pulled a goal back in the 57th minute when a deep corner found Ade Batula who controlled the ball and shot at goal, only for the ball to be blocked on the line by a defender with the grateful Atkinson falling onto the ball before we could get that vital touch.

On the hour we saw the return of Tommy Williams after he had completed his four match suspension, although it was originally meant to be in relief of Reece Tierney whose number came up, only for a quick change of mind by our Management team after they had spotted that Nelson-Roberts had just picked up an injury and he was the man who came off instead.

Batula was asking a few questions with his pace and he was brought down in the corner for a free kick just a couple of yards in from the touchline, but the Springett delivery was headed over the bar by Adeyemi. Then Batula broke through the offside trap and bore down on goal, although his shot was a good height for Atkinson who parried the strike on goal. The visitors had a couple of strikes from distance, both of which only just missed our top corner, but this was a much better half and Adeyemi climbed to win a good header which he sent back across goal. It wasn't clear whether it would have crept inside the post, but it didn't matter as a defender was there to hook the ball away in any case.

As we entered the final few minutes of normal time Darboe picked up a yellow card for a clumsy challenge and two minutes later collected a second card, leaving the visitors with ten men for the remaining two minutes, plus five more of injury time. In between the two bookings we had our best chance of the match after Adeyemi made a good run and pass to Miller who then put another substitute through in Tino Carpena, who clipped the ball over Atkinson, only to see the ball miss the far post and also the incoming Springett by inches.

Our final chance came in the first minute of injury time, but as we sent a long throw in from Williams to the head of the towering Adeyemi it was apparent that there was no one actually beyond him to finish off a chance should one arrive! The flick on was duly won, with the ball dribbling past the far post for what would have been a certain tap in, had we gambled. It set the seal on a disappointing evening, although it must be remembered that our opponents are looking good for the playoff spots and were very solid last night.

The League table shows us third from bottom with 14 points from 19 available which currently provides a healthy gap between us and the two clubs below us. For some reason our club has chosen not to put a League table in its match programmes, which is a shame because it looks a lot better than it did at the end of September! Hopefully, we can continue to increase the number of points between us and the single relegation place when we visit Horley on Saturday for another important League fixture.

Epsom & Ewell: Toby Colwell, Nick Inwugwu, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Steve Springett, Reece Tierney, Nick Wilson ©, Ade Batula, Thompson Adeyemi, George Owusu, Rory Edwards, Sirak Negassi

Subs: Tommy Williams for Nelson-Roberts (59), Luke Miller for Owusu (74), Tino Carpena for Batula (80), Kiyo Brown for Negassi (80)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

The word Calleva means "**where the paths cross**".

Goalless draw with bottom side

4 March 2024



Colliers Wood United 0-0 Epsom & Ewell FC. Combined Counties League – Premier Division. Saturday 16th December 2023.

On Saturday, two clubs; each placed in precarious positions in the League, met each other and showed everyone present exactly why they were down there! An extremely poor goalless draw was the result of this match, although the real memory of this one for me will be the scrappiness of this contest with the inability of either team to string more than three passes together, despite having perfect conditions for football.

Premier Division South

#	Team	PI	HW	HD	HL	AW	AD	AL	W	D	L	F	A	Diff	Pts
18.	Epsom & Ewell	18	2	0	5	2	2	7	4	2	12	26	42	-16	14
19.	Sheerwater	20	1	1	9	1	1	7	2	2	16	22	67	-45	8
20.	Colliers Wood United	20	0	3	7	1	1	8	1	4	15	16	49	-33	7

This was obviously a pivotal match and was bound to be a tense occasion, particularly for the home side who really needed to close the gap on those teams above them, while we were obviously keen to produce a similar performance to the one that had resulted in a 5-1 Salts win back in Steve Springett’s first match in charge on 7th October, but the only players who will take anything positive from this contest will be the two keepers, not that either had a vast amount to deal with though, as both defences dealt with the limited threats on their goal fairly comfortably.

In goal for the opposition was Toby McKimm, and any supporters who went to Hailsham Town last year will have remembered him making an appearance for us, although it was a debut he would want to forget as he was unfairly dismissed after just twenty-five minutes, making him the possessor of one of the shortest playing spells in our club history. We also had a change between the posts as Harvey Keogh was away for this match on a pre-arranged trip, although for those of you who recall his collision with the fencing the previous week, a Club Official advised that he is now fine, which is good news for all. In his place, and making his second appearance for our club was Toby Colwell, who has been most reliable this season, despite having to spend a vast amount of his time on the bench, as is the lot of a substitute keeper. Taking the Captain’s armband in place of Keogh was Ollie Thompson who returned to the starting eleven, along with the suspended Tijani Eshilokun, with Steve Springett and Ethan Nelson-Roberts unavailable to play.

The hosts had an early opportunity when they dragged a shot wide from fairly close range in the second minute, although five minutes later we had what would prove to be our best opportunity of the half when Ade Batula sent a perfect ball through to Eshilokun just twelve yards out, but he delayed matters instead of shooting and McKimm was out quickly to clear the danger.

Soon after this Luke Miller put another great ball through to Jaan Stanley who tucked the ball low into the corner of the net, only to see the Assistant’s flag raised against him. Batula then blazed high and wide after cutting onto his left foot, before Colliers Wood sent a deep ball to the far post where a shot was blocked by a defender.

In the 26th minute Thompson picked up a facial injury, believed to be a broken nose and required quite a few minutes of treatment. He was able to continue but would not reappear for the second half. It is hoped the injury will not result in him missing much time. From this point the match became more attritional with few real chances and we went in at the break goalless.

Sirak Negassi came on for Thompson which led to a reshuffle of our back line with Nick Wilson dropping back there and taking on the armband. We already had Rory Edwards playing in an unfamiliar right back role, so it was becoming a bit of a makeshift back line by this stage. Within a few moments of Wilson moving back, a long ball went just beyond him, although fortunately Colwell had smartly anticipated the danger and was out just in time to gather it ahead of an incoming attacker.

We had another decent opportunity just after the hour when a decent move down the left was centred to Miller who struck powerfully with his left foot, only to see the ball deflected away for a corner by a defender. McKimm then dropped the corner but the danger was cleared. Then at the other end a Wood attack finished with a low shot, and I must remind people that I was a hundred yards away from this, so apologies if I have this wrong, but the ball appeared to go out for a goal kick off the foot of our post.

In the 73rd minute we got another chance after McKimm’s poor clearance went to Stanley thirty yards out, but he was unable to return the ball to what would have been a vacant goal at that point; instead he went down the left and squared the ball where Batula went in for the ball with McKimm, only for the keeper to lie almost motionless for a few minutes as a result of the collision which our man then picked up a yellow card for. From our angle it was hard to see what Batula had done wrong and protests were made to this effect while McKimm remained on the ground receiving treatment. Fortunately he was able to continue after another long break and the match continued to meander.

Finally, in what would become nine minutes of injury time there was a little more to write about, and the first chance involved one of our substitutes, Yannick Monga-Ebwa, who made tracks down the left and his ball was collected by Batula whose shot on the turn went just beyond the Wood far post. Then Eshilokun’s twenty yard drive wasn’t gathered by McKimm, although he was just able to recover the ball as Batula ran in. In the 98th minute another sub George Owusu was unfortunate to see his shot from eight yards ricochet off a defender and go wide for another corner.

From that corner we had a bit of controversy as a Nick Inwugwu header was fumbled by McKimm and looked like it was going to go over the line, but he reacted quickly to claw the ball away. There were appeals that the ball had crossed the line, but as with the earlier Wood chance where I was a hundred yards away, this time I was less than two yards from this one and I wasn’t convinced it had crossed, although admittedly it was close. Far more relevantly than mine or anyone else’s opinion, the Assistant was bang in line with the play and also felt it had stayed out. The final whistle blew shortly after this and Colliers Wood’s first clean sheet in the League this season, along with Colwell’s first for our club were confirmed.

It was a bit embarrassing to see our Club Secretary berating the Assistant over the goal line incident, purely on the basis of a phone clip he had taken (even though it was from a far worse angle) that he “claimed” had proven the ball had gone over the line. Further ridicule followed when he doubled down on this after the match by placing a picture on the club Twitter site that failed to show any clear view of the line or the ball! It was similar to the kind of grainy and inconclusive image that we’ve all seen in the papers whenever anyone thinks they’ve seen the Loch Ness Monster, and deserved the derision it received from a number of commentators!

Regrettably this ninety minutes proved about as fruitful as that peculiar Scottish hobby, but the draw ensures that we remain in a much stronger position than the two clubs below us. It must be said that one of the things we have failed to do this season is grind out a point from time to time, without falling to a late sucker punch as we have at Fleet Town, Eastbourne United and Abbey Rangers, so credit is deserved in that area, particularly with the personnel changes that were required at the back. Indeed, over the course of the match, we also had the slightly better chances close to goal, but by no means did either team do enough to say they genuinely deserved to win this match and hard work remains for both if they are to avoid being the one club that will make the drop to Step Six this season.

Epsom & Ewell: Toby Colwell, Rory Edwards, Nick Inwugwu, Nick Wilson, Reece Tierney, Ollie Thompson ©, Luke Miller, Thompson Adeyemi, Ade Batula, Tijani Eshilokun, Jaan Stanley

Subs: Sirak Negassi for Thompson (HT), George Owusu for Miller (89), Yannick Monga-Ebwa for Stanley (89), Tino Carpena for Batula (95)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk