

## Modern Yard Revitalizes Epsom’s Historic Racing Scene

22 October 2024



**The Daily Telegraph** (Monday 21st October) has highlighted a significant revival for Epsom’s historic role in British horse racing, reporting on the recent developments at **Downs House**, a training yard with a prestigious past. According to the *Telegraph*’s racing correspondent, **Marcus Armytage**, the once derelict site is now undergoing a transformation into a modern facility, spearheading efforts to attract London-based owners back to the area.

The report details how New Zealander **Mark Travers**, who has lived in the UK for two decades, undertook the ambitious seven-year project to restore Downs House. Situated just a quarter of a mile from the start of the Derby, Downs House had long symbolized Epsom’s decline as a training hub, having lost its prominence as a centre for racehorse training decades ago. However, the newly revamped facility, now boasting space for 70 horses and cutting-edge amenities, is positioned to revive the town’s fortunes.

The *Daily Telegraph* also reports that **George Baker**, a Stewards’ Cup-winning trainer, will move his operation to Downs House in January. Baker, along with his wife Candida, was struck by the state-of-the-art facilities and the untapped potential of the nearby gallops. The move signals a bold step forward for Epsom’s equine industry, which has long played second fiddle to more prominent centres like Newmarket and Lambourn.

Baker, who has trained horses from his base in Chiddingfold, shared with the *Telegraph* how unlikely the move to Epsom once seemed. Yet, the combination of modern infrastructure and proximity to London convinced him to seize the opportunity. In an era when racehorse ownership is increasingly attractive to Londoners, Downs House’s accessibility could be a game-changer.

As reported, Baker hopes that his move will contribute to the broader rejuvenation of Epsom as a competitive training centre. With room for 50 horses initially, Baker is aiming to fill the yard within two years, making the facility a top choice for owners seeking convenience and quality.

While Epsom’s journey back to its glory days remains a work in progress, the ambitious restoration of Downs House, as highlighted in *The Daily Telegraph*, marks a pivotal step in the town’s efforts to reclaim its place on the racing map.

Image: Downs House aerial - Google

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## Fofahan makes FA fans as Epsom & Ewell progress in Vase

22 October 2024



Epsom and Ewell FC 3-1 Berks County. Isuzu F.A. Vase - First Round. Sunday 20th October 2024

Just 6 days before the 50 year anniversary of our very first F.A. Vase match against Reigate Priory, we played our 94th match in that competition against a new opponent in Berks County FC; a club formed as recently as 2009 and playing in the North Division of our League, and we were good value for our 3-1 win at a soggy KGF. For those interested, it was our 45th win in that time.

This result improved our recent form to just one loss in our last eleven matches and it is a shame that our club don’t seem to be able to keep up with this off the field. They may claim this was a healthy looking attendance of 145 which, on the face of it, might seem ok for a Vase match, but when you bear in mind that there were only two other games at this or a higher standard anywhere in the Southern half of the country, we really missed an opportunity to pull in a crowd well over the 300 mark and it’s really time that questions were asked about those people who are “running” our club, who appear uncaring or more worryingly oblivious to the opportunities they keep missing, instead believing that bringing in about fifteen of the Colts and a few of their parents each week is somehow sufficient to tick the “family club” box. Throw in a number of unanswered requests on the club Twitter site relating to whether there was going to be an inspection, which was a perfectly valid question following our postponement on Tuesday and you wonder whether our club really do care about your attendance at these matches. And in case anyone is wondering, yes, I have offered my services on many occasions.

There was only one person connected with the club who seemed to show a bit of energy and he was the chap on the tannoy system. Maybe he will even benefit the club, once he can actually get our own players names right!

The club held a minute’s applause for supporter Peter Mitchell before the kick off. Whilst he may have been deserving of a minute’s recognition as he was a fairly loyal supporter over the two and a half seasons he was following us, I see no reason whatsoever for any supporters or club officials to receive this fairly recent fad of a minute’s applause. In my opinion, a minute’s silence should be sufficient, with applause given only to former players and maybe some Managers. Having said that, our club never even bothered to hold a minute’s acknowledgement of any kind for recently passed strikers Gerry O’Rourke and Ben Forey, the latter of whom even sits on our goal scoring Hall of Fame, so it will be interesting to see what happens next time one of these tributes is required at an Epsom match.

We made four changes from our recent 2-2 draw against Fleet Town. Ethan Brazier was fit again and resumed at right back in place of the absent Niall Stillwell, while David Romer came in for Callum Wilson who had suffered a small injury issue at Thursday’s training session. Faebian Witter came in between the posts ahead of Dan O’Donovan, while further forward we had a debut for Kailan North who had recent spells with Colliers Wood United and Banstead Athletic. He came in for the cup-tied Jason Bloor, who had made an appearance for Langley earlier in the competition.

As the pre-match rain eased, it became apparent that the match was not starting on time. For those who were wondering why this was, as the club chose not to advise the reason, it was due to the late arrival of the visiting keeper, Harvey Rackley-Hayes. I’m not entirely sure why this delay was allowed for just one missing player, but either way we kicked off twenty minutes after the original start time in conditions that were far better than originally expected due to the virtual non-arrival in our area of Storm Ashley.

We had an early opportunity when Kionte Gillfillian-Waul sent in a good ball, but it zipped across the wet turf and Carl Oblitey couldn’t quite reach it. Then in the 17th minute we probably should have taken the lead when a free kick was half cleared to Ethan Nelson-Roberts and whilst his shot was deflected for a corner, Adam Green’s delivery into the danger area looked like it would be met by Anthony Nazareth, but he missed his header from close range, only for the ball to fall back to him just six yards out at an angle, from where he sent his shot over the bar.

The visitors volleyed a corner wide at the near post, but we were back on the attack soon after and a deep Fofahan cross resulted in a drop from Rackley-Hayes, but as the loose ball was drilled into the net by Nelson-Roberts, the whistle blew as the referee felt that the County keeper had been fouled. It was a soft one for sure, but in the 26th minute we went ahead anyway after a poor back pass from Will Edwards was intercepted by Fofahan and he drew the keeper before slotting the ball between his legs and into the net from just inside the penalty area.

However, within two minutes of making the breakthrough, the visitors drew level as a deep right wing cross was met at the far post with a header back across Witter from George Gould. Our keeper got a hand to the ball but couldn't keep it out.

Fofahan was giving the Berks County defenders a lot of trouble and he had a speculative effort from 25 yards that went wide, but in the 36th minute he struck the inside of Rackley-Hayes' left hand post from fifteen yards with the ball skewing across the goal and spinning out for a goal kick! Fofahan really should have scored here after he had broken through, but instead we went in at the break with the scores level.

I felt we had shaded the first half, but at 1-1, there was also the potential for a fifth straight 2-2 draw that no one would have wanted, as it would have meant that the tie would be decided on penalties instead! We then had an early scare in the second half as Brazier and Witter got in each other's way while trying to effect a clearance, but we just about got away with it and went back in front for the second time in the 55th minute after Brazier made tracks down the right, before cutting back and delivering a decent cross that Oblitey attacked. His header struck a defender but rebounded into his path and he drilled the ball low into the corner from just seven yards out, giving Rackley-Hayes no chance.

Fofahan forced a good save from a narrow angle by Rackley-Hayes before we had to reshuffle the pack after Gillfillian-Waul was replaced by Luke Miller with Fofahan moving to the left wing instead. This was our first substitution of the day, but by the end of the match all four of our starting defenders would be off the field! Romer would be one of those, but before he departed, he capped a fine performance with a run on the left wing and a low delivery in for Green to strike at goal, but Rackley-Hayes made a superb save with his right boot to keep the close range shot out.

Witter picked up a yellow card for time-wasting but in the 79th minute Gould went in high on Romer and received a straight red card for his challenge, which also caused the obligatory sixteen man scuffle! Toby Young came on in relief of Romer after his own spell out with injury and we made the game safe in the 86th minute with a great move down the right where Oblitey collected the ball and sent it square to the supporting Craig Dundas, but he cleverly dummied the ball which sold the defender completely and left Fofahan through on goal, although he still cut back to beat someone before drilling the ball low past Rackley-Hayes from 12 yards to make it 3-1 to the Salts.

There were more chances as the ten men tried to get back into the game, but we were picking them off and a clever pass put Fofahan through, although he chose to pass instead of shooting from eight yards and it came to nothing. I don't think anyone in the ground would have blamed our winger if he had tried to get his hat trick, but it was a selfless decision and he almost turned provider again in the fourth minute of injury time when his deep delivery from the left wing was headed in by Green from six yards, only for the offside flag to be raised against him.

Still, by the end of the match we were fairly comfortable winners and whilst we will see Berks County again in the League Cup in January, we now look forward to an appearance in the Second Round, or last 128, for the first time since 2017/18 when we were edged out 3-2 after extra time at Whitstable Town. The draw comes out around Monday lunchtime and there are some very good teams left in the draw that would be nice to avoid; Jersey Bulls, AFC Whyteleafe and Fleet Town amongst them, and I haven't even mentioned the top teams in Sussex and Kent yet (including Whitstable again!). But this is a competition in which we have a prominent history, so it's just great to still be involved in it, fifty years after that very first amazing run.

Epsom & Ewell: Faebian Witter, Ethan Brazier, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), David Romer, Anthony Nazareth, Ali Fofahan, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Kailan North, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Luke Miller for Gillfillian-Waul (59), Conrad Essilfie-Conduah for Nazareth (64), Toby Young for Romer (84), Luke Taylor for Brazier (91)

Report Source: [www.eefconline.co.uk](http://www.eefconline.co.uk)

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## Old Tiffinians 41 Sutton & Epsom RFC 19

22 October 2024

The Black & Whites arrived at the Grist Memorial ground having scuppered Sidcup the previous round. That triumph, in a bruising encounter against the erstwhile leaders, came at a cost with the loss of props Gibson and Mount as well as O'Brien and Elliott in the backs. It was not all doom and gloom from the physio's hut as Tom Lennard made his belated first start of the campaign at 10. If there was much to admire last weekend there was plenty to forget this time around. The Old Tiffinians thoroughly deserved their 41-19 success leapfrogging Sutton & Epsom in the league table.

Free from rain, bathed in sunshine and with a gentle breeze upon an immaculate surface the scene was set for a captivating afternoon's entertainment as Freddy Bunting kicked off. The opening Sutton salvoes were quashed by forthright tackling by everyone in an OT shirt as the visitors looked to spread the ball wide to their wings. After ten minutes the Old Boys demonstrated their best phases and enjoyed the bonus of a penalty in the 22. As is the modern vogue they kicked to the corner. Their positive approach was rewarded with a perfectly executed catch and drive from the 5-metre lineout that ushered prop Ross Hobbs over the whitewash for the first try of the afternoon. Though the extras were not added the hosts led 5-0. The OTs were soon on the attack again and assisted by S&E transgressions. Their second entry in the visitors' 22 would result in their second try. Unfortunately, Sutton hooker Peter Gordon had to be replaced by Ben Green after a clash of heads in a try-saving double tackle. On the resumption Tiffinians pressed hard and fine handling saw fullback Max Talman score in the corner and double the lead to 10-0 at the end of the first quarter. S&E responded swiftly to the second score. Like their opponents a kickable penalty was discarded for the greedier option. The Rugby Lane Number 8 Rob Hegarty forced his way over in the corner from the remorseless march of the catch and drive. Freddy Bunting's touchline effort drifted by the uprights as his newly awakened team trailed 5-10. Sutton had shuffled the pack to line up with a front row triumvirate of debutant replacement Dan Johnson, Tom Boaden took over the hooking duties and Callum Hilton. Though this combination is far from the Black & Whites first choice they performed impressively providing a steady platform and did not take a backward step in the set piece. Five minutes later the visitors had a wonderful opportunity to level the scores after a Tom Lennard break but, as would be the case too often during this entertaining encounter, the ball out to the flank was not gathered.

The first period entered its final phase. Any good work by Sutton was thwarted by either the defensive solidity of Tiffinians or critical errors by the visitors. As the half entered its dying embers the hosts went blind exposing defensive frailty. It looked as if Old Tiffinians would run it in from halfway. Though undone by some S&E scrambling defence they had the consolation of having a scrum deep in the Black & White 22. Centre Tim Fawcett ran an excellent line and evaded a double tackle to score under the posts. It was an example of third time lucky as Sharif Dougramaji slotted the conversion to stretch the lead to 17-5 as Mr Kelvin Pryor's shrill blast of the whistle terminated the first half with OT leading S&E by 17-5. Any hope for the travelling supporters looked a rather forlorn one as the second half began with more errors. As the hosts attacked towards the S&E 22 it was their turn to concede an unnecessary penalty. Steve Munford took it quickly, Tom Lennard made a searing break with Austin Bell in support who progressed in the OT half and Alfie Baker sped away to the corner to score. The crowd gazed on admiringly at the pulchritudinous Bunting conversion from the touchline. Was this the start of a classic game of two halves and the Sutton revival? A minute later the answer to that hypothetical query was a resounding "No". Poor play at the restart handed the initiative to the Tiffinians who set out their stall in the S&E 22. Three phases later and winger Seb Sabania was bursting through tacklers to score. Sharif Dougramaji's sweetly struck conversion added to the demoralising impact of the rapid retort to restore the margin to 12 points at 24-12.



The omens continued to point to a home victory. Another Sutton free ball could not rekindle the earlier magic. A kickable penalty was declined and a lineout in the corner was not found. Then the most deflating moment of all was Seb Sabania picking off an interception and running back a fifth try, and his second, from halfway. Sharif Dougramaji accepted the salubrious offering for a 31-12 advantage with a dozen minutes having elapsed in the second period. To epitomise the Sutton decline the restart failed to go ten metres. However, despair was transformed into hope as the pack won a penalty at the set piece. Naturally, the Black & Whites took off lickety-split and were soon in the opposition 22. OT’s scrambling defence not only picked off an interception but countered through an enormous clearance kick. Alfie Baker’s cover was immediately undermined by fellow wing Arun Watkin’s injudicious counter. Sutton were fortunate to escape as Sir reversed a penalty under their posts. The game was now very open and tries at either end were a probability rather than a possibility. Sutton benefited from a magnificent 50 22 from Tom Lennard to set up their next attack. The home defence rebuffed a couple of sorties before Austin Bell’s grubber nestled under the posts. The scuttling full back arrived with the cover and his attempt to nudge the ball forward was viewed as dangerous play as he made contact with the defender who had stoically fallen on the loose ball. This was the first of a string of penalties that throttled potential attacks for both XVs. The next score came from that reliable and fertile source: the penalty kicked to the corner. It was S&E’s turn to demonstrate their catch and drive efficiency with flanker Dan Jones the beneficiary. The Bunting boot made it a two-score game at 19-31. Old Tiffinians set out to restore their supremacy and a bullocking Sabania run hinted at his hat trick before he was eventually forced to pass inside but the ball was knocked on. Sutton cleared their lines but were soon under the cosh. Josh Glanville received a yellow card endeavouring to turn over the ball. Very sensibly Sharif Dougramaji opted for the kick for goal adjacent to the uprights. The successful kick meant that the hosts led 34-19 with three minutes of regular time left. Not so much as a comfortable points’ cushion but more like a massive beanbag occupying most of a living room floor. The contest was over. In time added on Old Tiffinians added an extra layer of gloss to their fine performance. They kicked into the corner for the 5-metre lineout. The unstoppable juggernaut advanced ever onwards and Ross Hobbs collected his second catch and drive try. Sharif Dougramaji celebrated the victory with the conversion and Mr Pryor ended the match with the home team triumphant by 41-19 A week is a long time in politics but it must seem like an eternity for the Rugby Lane faithful as this performance bore no resemblance to their Sidcup success. However, the most significant factor was the quality of the Old Tiffinian performance. Their forwards carried aggressively and effectively with Ross Hobbs and Robert Myddelton in the vanguard. Their defence offered Sutton neither time nor space. When they got to the 22 they were clinical whether with the catch and drive or handling in the backs. The pace and power of Seb Sabania gained the plaudits with a brace of tries in a thoroughly deserved bonus point victory. The Black & Whites created opportunities out wide but poor passing handicapped their progress on numerous occasions. Sutton & Epsom will lick their wounds and look forward to the visit of league leaders Medway to Rugby Lane. Meanwhile the Old Tiffinians departed their Clubhouse to descend upon the 18:24 to Waterloo and serenade the passengers on their way to a night of celebrations.

Sutton & Epsom  
Bell, Watkins, Scott, Bunting ©, Baker, Lennard, Munford, Boaden, Gordon, Hilton, Glanville, Tame, Rea, Jones & Hegarty.  
Replacements: Johnson, Green & Findlay.  
Old Tiffinians  
Talman, Segun, Dougramaji, Fawcett, Sabanaia, Taylor, Fowler, Hobbs, Howard-Clarke, Turner, O’Connell, Noeh, Myddelton, Graham & Marshall.  
Replacements: Corcoran, Dore & Freeman.

# What were the odds of Epsom & Ewell’s 4 x 2 + 2?

22 October 2024

Combined Counties League Premier Division South									
		P	W	D	L	F	A	GD	PTS
14	Horley Town	14	3	4	7	29	34	-5	13
15	Epsom & Ewell	13	3	4	6	19	30	-11	13
16	Camberley Town	11	3	2	6	15	22	-7	11
17	Chipstead	12	3	1	8	17	35	-18	10
18	Sheerwater	13	2	3	8	21	37	-16	9
19	Balham	12	1	3	8	14	31	-17	6
20	Spelthorne Sports	13	0	4	9	8	27	-19	4

Epsom and Ewell 2-2 Fleet Town. Combined Counties League – Premier Division South. Saturday 12th October 2024.

For the fourth time in a row our match resulted in a 2-2 draw, this time against high-flying and unbeaten Fleet Town at the KGF on Saturday. We could and maybe should have handed them their first League loss of the season, having come from behind to lead with twenty minutes remaining, but a late Dan Bone equaliser ensured that we had to share the points once again, and in all fairness, the draw was the correct result.

In front of an attendance counted as 116 (yet officially and farcically advised as 148) that included around twenty of our Colts, we made just one change from the team that had drawn 2-2 at Redhill seven days previously with Niall Stillwell coming in for his first start for the club at right back for the injured Ethan Brazier, as he had done in our draw with the leaders.

We kicked off towards the Chessington end for the first time in a number of matches and Carl Oblitey had the first chance when he tried his luck from long range but was well wide, while the visitors were a lot closer with their first attempt after a deep Tom Smith cross was headed wide at the far post by Danilo Cadete. However, they took the lead in the 11th minute after a good move on the left resulted in a low ball in that was teed up nicely for Matt Surmon to drive it into the net, with a slight deflection off a defender from the edge of the penalty area.

Last season we had to play two home matches against Fleet Town after the original contest had been abandoned for an injury, but in each case an early Fleet goal was answered rapidly with an Epsom equaliser, and this time it was no different, as we only had to wait three minutes to draw level. For the second match in a row we had another own goal in our favour, as Oblitey had tried to put a through ball for Ali Fofahan on the right, but over hit his pass. However, Fofahan retrieved the ball and sent over a dangerous low ball with his left foot. With Oblitey waiting for a tap in, Ross Stepney got there first, but only succeeded in diverting the ball into his own net off the crossbar from five yards out!

Stepney then earned a yellow card for going through Fofahan, but it’s not entirely clear how Fleet didn’t retake the lead in the 28th minute, when a low shot was well saved by Dan O’Donovan, but the follow up from close range from Tane Caubo somehow went back across the goal, missing the target from what appeared to be extremely close range. O’Donovan made another good low save with five minutes of normal time remaining from Luke Kandi before our keeper nearly claimed an assist when his free kick went to Jason Bloor, whose shot was on target and would have crept inside the right hand post of Finley Purcell, but was blocked by a defender and we went in at the break on level terms.

Surmon headed an early chance over the bar for Fleet within a couple of minutes of the restart and the majority of the possession was with them for a while, but on the hour we began to redress the balance and Ethan Nelson-Roberts sent in a dangerous ball that was cleared just ahead of Oblitey by Smith. Caubo headed another half chance wide for the visitors, but then somewhat against the run of play we took the lead in the 70th minute. A clever pass set Fofahan away down the right, and he cut back onto his left foot before delivering a peach of a cross to Oblitey, standing unmarked and five yards out, leaving him with the simplest of

headers into the net.

David Romer came on for the injured Stillwell, which led to a little bit of defensive reshuffling, but we pushed forward again and Nelson-Roberts was denied by a superb last moment tackle, before Kionte Gillfillian-Waul produced a great run and pass across the six yard box, which was just missed by a defender. It appeared that Oblitey, standing beyond him, had expected the defender to reach it and didn't quite react in time; the ball scraping off the underside of his boot from a few yards out.

A third goal then would surely have finished off Fleet Town and their unbeaten record, but good teams find a way back and although their substitute, the prolific Dan Bone, sent a header just wide, he made amends with a low shot from the edge of the area that was just out of reach for O'Donovan in the 84th minute. It's not clear to me whether Bone was on the bench for tactical reasons, or whether he was coming back from injury, but he always gives us problems and it was fortunate for us that he didn't play the full ninety minutes.

We had one last chance in the final minute of normal time when a Fofahan free kick was headed wide by Oblitey who had done well to lose his man, but just couldn't keep the header on target, and after seven minutes of injury time the final whistle confirmed our fourth straight "Desmond".

For those who are unaware, our third 2-2 draw against Redhill last week was the first time in club history that we had even had three of these in a row, so to see a fourth consecutive one is quite bizarre. The simple facts are that we have only one loss in ten matches now, but whilst the Redhill result was a good one, particularly from 2-0 down, I don't believe I'm the only person that thinks the other three of those matches really ought to have been wins.

It's not a major criticism though. Although we are currently in 15th place now with thirteen points from the same number of games, we remain seven points clear of the two relegation positions and are in much better form than the clubs down there, who are presently Balham and Spelthorne Sports. Don't be fooled by the FA Full Time site or even the very useful Football Web Pages site though, it is two clubs and not one that will go down this season. Right now though, it definitely won't be us.

With our League position fairly secure for now, we can turn our attention and focus to a pair of cup matches now, and against the same club as Berks County visit for the League Cup tie on Tuesday and the F.A. Vase tie the following Sunday. On current form, we will be favourites to progress through these ties, but also will need to hold on to a lead when we have it, as a draw in either or both of those matches will send us to the lottery of a penalty shoot out. Additionally, we have fought back from going behind five times in the last four matches, so it would be nice to see us start a little better in the matches to come.

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Niall Stillwell, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Callum Wilson, Anthony Nazareth, Ali Fofahan, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Jason Bloor, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: David Romer for Stillwell (71), Conrad Essilfie-Conduah for Bloor (75)

## Sutton & Epsom Rugby beat the unbeaten

22 October 2024



On Saturday 11 th October 2014 Sutton & Epsom RFC visited Crescent Farm to play Sidcup who were the early season league leaders of London 1 South after five games. On that day the Black & Whites tore up the form book winning 23-16 with a stunning Kyren Ghumra try manufactured by a perfect kick from Frankie Murray. Almost a decade later to the day it was a sense of déjà vu as high-flying Sidcup arrived at Rugby Lane this time topping Regional 2 South East. The visitors were the only unbeaten team in the league, had secured the maximum 20 points from four wins in which they had scored the most points and conceded the least by a considerable margin. It was not a case of lightning striking twice but more like Thor's hammer descending from the heavens in a cataclysmic explosion such was the intensity and physicality of this superb contest won by S&E by a margin of 12-7.

Freddy Bunting got the ball rolling as Sutton played towards the clubhouse with the permanent threat of rain. The early exchanges ceded little territory before a wonderful kick from Josh Twyford angled into the home 22. The hosts responded with two bone-shaking tackles from Ben Tame, that set the tone for an afternoon not for the fainthearted, and a fine kick from Gareth O'Brien cleared their lines. The ferocity of the tackling and a slippery ball hindered the attacking prowess of both XVs. Kiwi Josh Rea demonstrated his talent with a brace of tackles followed by a fine break, Bunting probed with the boot and Sutton attempted to prise open the visitors' well organised and aggressive defence. The first genuine chance came on the quarter hour when Austin Bell kicked ahead and the covering Seb Ellison was caught as he attempted to run from his line. However, in the ensuing frenetic melee the referee awarded Sidcup a scrum for a knock on. The game continued with great pace whilst thunderous tackling from both defences held the upper hand as time after time ball-carriers were unceremoniously dumped onto their posteriors. With the half hour approaching Josh Twyford perfectly placed kicked settled irritatingly just outside the Sutton 22 and a hesitant Bell, now at 15 after an injury to Gareth O'Brien, kicked out on the full. The visitors failed to prosper as their lineout faltered. From a Sutton scrum Rob Hegarty ducked, weaved and evaded tacklers before offloading to the galloping Glanville who burst to halfway where, as ever, Dan Jones was in support. The ubiquitous flanker set off on one of his increasingly familiar runs and was finally halted by the swarming Sidcup defence in their 22. Sadly this exhilarating attack ended as a pass was delivered to a man who was more trying to get out of the way than storm forward.

The Rugby Lane team's confidence was growing and Bell put through a grubber on halfway and recovered it and chipped over to the 22. The second kick was rather over-egging the custard and a grateful opposition regained the ball. To remind everyone who was the top team Sidcup went onto the attack. An excellent kick-chase established them in the Black & White 22. It was now the moment for their backs to demonstrate some wonderful handling in the wet conditions. Sutton were scrambling on their line defending for their lives. Perhaps it was frustration or impatience but with a try looking probable the Crescent Farm men conceded a penalty by going in from the wrong side. Freddy Bunting thumped the ball to halfway and danger was averted. As the enthralled spectators were contemplating a 0-0 score at the break the deadlock was finally broken. Sidcup 15 Seb Ellison collected a Bunting kick on his 22. His return was not his finest strike but the ball descended into space for the rapidly approaching fullback. A favourable bounce was recovered and Seb Ellison ran the ball back from halfway. The covering Freddy Bunting ushered him to the corner no doubt hoping this would be a 5-point score at worst. Up stepped the experienced Josh Twyford who converted magnificently from the touchline to put the



league leaders 7-0 ahead. It was already in time added on but the robust nature of the contest had meant that the medical teams had been on the paddock rather more often than usual rebuilding their troops and there was ten additional minutes. Josh Twyford just failed to increase the visitors’ advantage as a long-range penalty drifted wide. Then it was a case of cattywampus in extremis as a Sutton scrum buckled. Fortunately for the hosts the Twyford kick into the corner erred in their favour and sailed out of the dead ball area. The half finally concluded with the Black & Whites pressing for a score.

The Kent men were determined to reaffirm their status and put the Sutton upstarts in their place at the start of the second period as they kicked an early penalty into the corner. S&E were soon in survival mode as they had a scrum 5 metres from their line. Tremendous Sidcup scrummaging drove the Black & White eight over their line at a rate of knots. Steve Munford managed to touchdown to avert the try. Now it was Sidcup’s turn to have the put in. The home supporters feared the worst based on the most recent evidence. Incredibly Sidcup conceded a penalty at the scrum as it wheeled. The hosts gleefully accepted the salvation. Reinvigorated by their defensive resilience they went onto the offensive. Sutton progress was met by a Sidcup side whose tremendous tackling scythed down all before them. But the Black & Whites were not deterred and started to benefit from a flurry of penalties. The spectators were divided over the perennial question: “Take the three points or kick into the corner?” The team went for the higher tariff option. The excellent S&E lineout secured possession but progress could be measured by inches rather than yards so resilient was the visitors’ defence. Then an infringement gave Freddy Bunting a ‘free ball’ and he kicked to the corner where the ball escaped the clutches of two of his comrades. Another 3 points was declined and this time a huge tackle dislodged a ball giving an escape route for the leaders that they gratefully accepted.

The action switch ends but a lofted kick ahead just drifted into the Sutton 22 and an alert Bunting called for the mark and set off on a counter. Replacement Angus Findlay made a wonderful run into the Sidcup half. The ball came to Lawrence Elliott outside the 22 and to counter the onrushing defence he kicked ahead along the deck. The crowd were distracted as Elliott was poleaxed but Josh Rea kept his eye on the ball and won the race to score. Though Freddy Bunting missed the conversion his side now trailed 5-7.

Mr Willis declared that there were 11 minutes to play as the crowd urged on both teams for another score. Sidcup descended into the Sutton 22. Austin Bell seeking anonymity and respite for an injured shoulder retreated to the flank for a breather. Unaware of his condition he was given the ball close to his line. He kicked for touch but the breeze meant it settled on halfway. Bell was first to the ball and fly-hacked onwards wisely declining to scoop it up on the run. The ball advanced deep into the 22 and S&E regained possession. The ball was sent wide where Jordan Huie collected the pass and ran straight for the corner. A fabulous covering tackle brought him crashing down but he stretched out to score his first try for Sutton. An ecstatic crowd cheers increased when the insouciant Bunting made the touchline conversion look elementary for 12-7. The hosts managed to see out the game without creating unwanted anxiety to record one of their best wins in many seasons.

Any side contemplating beating Sidcup this campaign will need to bring their ‘A+Triple Star Game’. The front row triumvirate of Messrs Gibbons, Fordham and Carmen are formidably supported by a powerful back five. With the ageless Josh Twyford as the puppeteer at 10 they have variety in attack and multiple threats. Traditionally their defence has been superbly organised but there is now an almost savage power to their tackling. Indeed both sides dug so deep in defence they might have enjoyed vistas of Bondi beach. Sutton rose to the challenge and matched the league leaders for defensive desire and were neither intimidated nor subdued. Willing forwards carried, the backs attacked at every opportunity and the kicking game was astute. From 1 to 18 the Black & Whites raised their level to new heights. There have been an avalanche of tries in the league so far at Rugby Lane but this was by far the match of a season that is still in its infancy.

Sutton & Epsom  
O’Brien, Huie, Scott, Elliott, Bell, Bunting ©, Munford, Boaden, Mount, Gibson, Glanville, Tame, Rea, Jones & Hegarty.  
Replacements: Hilton, Green & Findlay.  
Sidcup  
Ellison, Masters, Leek, Smith, Keeley ©, Twyford, Sullivan, Gibbons, Fordham, Carmen, Clarke, Stock, Ruff, Healey & West.  
Replacements: Conlon, Williams & Pooley.

Image courtesy Robin Kennedy

## Epsom & Ewell FC draw with leaders

22 October 2024



Redhill 2-2 Epsom and Ewell. Combined Counties League – Premier Division South. Saturday 5th October 2024.

I wrote last week that matches against Redhill and Fleet Town would give us a better idea of where our likely final position would be, and against the league leading Lobsters we recovered from a slow start and a two goal deficit to send a message to the League that we are perfectly capable of holding our own in this division, as we drew 2-2 at Kiln Brow on Saturday afternoon; only the second time this season that they have dropped points.

The sharp eyed amongst you may have noticed that this was our third consecutive 2-2 draw and wondered whether this has happened before, and the answer is NEVER! This week was the eighth time in our history we had recorded a pair of 2-2 draws; the last time in 2010, but this third consecutive “Desmond” was the first time in club history that this had happened.

We made three changes from the draw against Balham on Wednesday. Callum Wilson returned to the squad after some time out injured, ahead of the absent David Romer, while Ali Fofahan came in on the right wing ahead of Luke Miller who was at a wedding and Jason Bloor made his first start for our club in place of Fabio Nunes who was on the bench, possibly in preparation for his upcoming three match suspension. However, best laid plans don’t always work out and a pair of injury enforced substitutions ensured that both Nunes and Niall Stillwell were both on the field by the end of the first half.

For the opposition, former Salts Adam Grant and Tommy Smith were in the starting line up, with Gavin Quintyne joining the action in the second half, although another in Jaevon Dyer was injured. The connections weren’t restricted to the playing field though, as former Coach and Caretaker Manager Matt Chapman was in the Redhill dugout, along with our former Assistant Manager Jordan Clark, now in charge at Kiln Brow. The hosts were four points clear at the top going into this match, with only Cobham taking points from them to this stage and they kicked off in front of a very decent crowd of 264, which was boosted by a number of children that were invited along, providing an example for our club how to do things like that properly.

The hosts got off to a fast start and a near post corner in the first minute was flicked just over our cross bar, before a raking ball out to the left three minutes later was followed by a great cross, although the Redhill striker wasn’t quite able to get enough purchase on the ball. It would have been a superb goal if it had gone in.

Unfortunately, we didn't have to wait long before the ball was in our net as in the ninth minute Kionte Gillfillian-Waul was robbed (mugged?) around the half way line by former Salt Adam Grant, who then set Nathan Hogan off down the right. Wilson almost got across to cut the ball out, but only got half a boot on it and Hogan continued his run and he cut in and smashed the ball past Dan O'Donovan from an angle. Some say a keeper shouldn't be beaten at his near post, but to be fair, this was a very powerful strike and I'm not sure any keeper could have reacted quickly enough as the ball flew into the roof of the net.

Gillfillian-Waul had taken a blow to the head after Grant's robust challenge and required treatment before walking off, clearly dazed and Nunes was thrown on down the left with Ethan Nelson-Roberts dropping to left back. Soon after this O'Donovan was on the deck after he had come out to head the ball clear, only to be clattered after this. There were to be a number of stoppages in this match for treatment and it was clear that Redhill were going to try and outmuscle us. They even struck a free kick directly against a retreating Carl Oblitey before trying to get him booked, which was a little classless and fortunately the referee wasn't interested in such games.

We hadn't created much to this point and Redhill were certainly worth their lead at this stage, but we had our first real opportunity in the 34th minute when a free kick in was met by a Craig Dundas header and as the hosts failed to clear, Wilson knocked it goalwards and it required the intervention of a defender to hook it clear before it crossed the line. For those wondering, it was about a foot away, but did have the momentum to go in, so it was an important clearance.

Regrettably we were unable to build on that chance as our opponents extended their lead just three minutes later with a right wing cross to the far post that was met with a downward header. It wasn't the greatest or most powerful of contacts, yet it still squirmed past O'Donovan who may not have had much chance with the first goal, but will certainly be annoyed with this one.

At 2-0 down this was an important test of our resilience. We really needed something back before the half time break and that's exactly what happened, and from an unlikely source too. In the 43rd minute we won a free kick out wide on the right. Adam Green usually takes most of our set pieces, but appears to have reduced his workload in that area and Fofahan sent the delivery in, but before it could reach one of our players the Redhill Captain Eoin Fraser jumped higher and diverted the ball superbly past Luke Roberts in the Lobsters net from about eight yards out.

We were to play an extra five and a half minutes of injury time but plenty would still happen before the break. Wilson picked up a booking for a foul before Fraser took one for his team by bringing down Bloor as he threatened to break through. In the third minute of injury time we were forced into another replacement as Stillwell came on at right back in place of Brazier who has struggled at times this season with his hamstring and after feeling it was tight, had to make way. Finally, we had the unusual sight of another former Salt in Tommy Smith, cropping up on the right wing to send a decent cross over, although the header wasn't on target, and after O'Donovan had comfortably gathered Ethan Ford's low shot the players finally went for their half time break.

Our boys came out with a little more belief and we had an early chance in the 50th minute when Oblitey saw his shot blocked with the loose ball being struck only just over the bar by Wilson from the edge of the area. Redhill's lead looked vulnerable and a great ball over the top of the defender from Stillwell set Fofahan through on goal before he was brought down by Joe Dyett. Or so everyone else in the ground thought. The referee was clearly awaiting an indication from the Assistant, but it never came and as Fofahan lay crumpled on the ground there was a lot of protestation, particularly from Bloor who was treading a very fine line on the sin-bin rule. It's possible the referee gave him a little more leniency because he too thought that his colleague had got it wrong!

Bloor then told the Assistant to concentrate just ahead of our next free kick, which was ironic as our man was then pulled up for a foul! However, the pressure continued and as we pressed, Oblitey collected the ball and guided it over the advancing Roberts from ten yards to level the match up at 2-2 in the 58th minute.

The hosts looked rather wobbly at this stage and Nunes then got away on the left wing and his delivery found Fofahan just five yards out, but Roberts spread himself to make a superb block of his strike, and he was up quickly to repel the follow up from Green before Bloor's attempt was blocked by a defender. Somehow Redhill survived this and Roberts continued his one man defiance by heading clear from outside of his area before being well positioned to save another strike from Fofahan. Both Bloor and Nunes picked up yellow cards as our threat began to wane and in the final minutes the hosts finished the stronger of the two sides as they made a belated attempt to claim a winner that they didn't deserve. Stillwell cleared from a dangerous position and then Anthony Nazareth produced a great tackle to dispossess a Redhill forward as they pushed, but without success.

Overall, we were well worth at least a point and it looked to me as though we just gave our opponents a bit too much respect to start with. Maybe we do need to start better, as this was the fourth time in eight days that we had gone behind, all in the first half. We have still only scored two League goals in the opening forty-five minutes all season, and one of those was the own goal in this match! However, we didn't lose any of the recent games where we trailed and now have just one defeat in our last nine matches. Another difficult challenge awaits us when Fleet Town visit on Saturday, but another good result will set us up for the League Cup and F.A. Vase ties at home to Berks County. Yes we are playing them at home in both cups!

The final word today goes to the Redhill programme. As a programme editor for thirteen seasons with nearly a dozen top ten finishes in the National awards, I think I'm qualified enough to comment that this was undoubtedly the best I have seen at this level all season, and it is an example to all that a few random photos and "static" pages moved into different places each week do not make for interesting reading, as you need actual articles to go with them, and at just £2 it is far better value than the others I've seen this season. If Redhill go up this season I'll miss their programme, although on this performance it appears to me as though Redhill still have much work to do, regardless of their current League position.

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Ethan Brazier, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Callum Wilson, Anthony Nazareth, Ali Fofahan, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Jason Bloor, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Fabio Nunes for Gillfillian-Waul (10), Niall Stillwell for Brazier (45+3)

Report Source: [www.eefconline.co.uk](http://www.eefconline.co.uk)

## There's always Buckland Park for winter swimmers

22 October 2024



Guildford Lido, in Stoke Park, used to be open 12 months a year from 2014, but that ended during the pandemic. This year's summer season ended on September 15.

Nestled between Dorking and Reigate within the picturesque Surrey Hills, the Surrey Hills Activity Centre's (SHAC) private lagoon at Buckland Park offers a 400m loop and is the perfect setting for your open water swimming and cold water training needs.

Outdoor swimming enthusiasts have called on Guildford Borough Council (GBC) and operator Freedom Leisure to reinstate all-year-round swimming in the contract when it is renewed in November.

Reaching over 1,600 signatures, a petition has said restoring the lido's 'off-season' (autumn to spring) will promote health, well-being, and athletic achievement throughout the year.

## “Not a financially viable model”

Councillors quizzed the Lead for Commercial Services about the lido at GBC Overview and Scrutiny Committee on September 30. Cllr James Walsh, referencing the petition, asked if a viable compromise could be made where winter swimmers can enjoy the pool without a financial loss.

“I don’t know how many of those 1,600 people would like to swim in the winter,” said Cllr Catherine Houston, Lead for Commercial Services at GBC. She told the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, on September 30, that she went down to the lido a week before it closed and there were only 12 people in the pool. “That is not a financially viable model,” Cllr Houston added.

Run at £140k loss in the summer, the lido is still able to operate because it is paired with the Spectrum centre, according to Cllr Houston. She described it as a ‘loss leader’ model: where the lido is sold at a loss to attract customers to the Spectrum.

Cllr Houston said the lido is “already not a profitable operation in the summer” but the council chooses to run it because “we all love it”. She added: “It’s such a wonderful facility and it provides a really valuable asset to the residents, visitors and beyond.”

Questions were raised about where the money is coming from for the council to invest to keep the pool open. Although there are some super keen winter swimmers, there are not the other leisure swimmers that may spend the whole day in the lido.

Cllr Walsh asked whether letting the pool out to clubs would subsidise the running costs. Officers explained that once the pool is open, the filtration and heating will be on so it is “tough” to see how many clubs and extracurricular sports groups will be needed to offset the costs. GBC would have to pay extra for the staff, heating, energy and catering arrangements.

## The “grand old lady” needs upkeep

Around 91 years old, the 50m lido is a “grand old lady” in need of “tender loving care”, according to Cllr Houston. The off-season closure allows operators to have a safe area to operate the annual works without people in the pool.

Six new boilers will be installed this winter, as part of the lido’s annual maintenance season. Three pool blankets, with an accompanying structure, will also be fitted on the lido to maintain the water’s temperature.

GBC invested £2.1m into refurbishing the lido last year, including new changing rooms, improved drainage systems, environmental technologies to reduce energy and water usage, and updated poolside catering. Freedom Leisure also put in £1m towards the upgrade.

## Contractual obligations

The contract renewal in November creates a new opportunity for the operator and the council to see if a new out of season activity can be put on offer.

Cllr Houston speculated Freedom Leisure might be asked to extend its opening hours by Friends of Guildford Lido. But the operator would have to look at a financial model to see if it is worth it without the extra cash input.

Operators of the lido are contracted to keep it open for 20 weeks, so the council cannot force it to stay open unless there is a big investment. “We’re in financially challenging times so we have to make tough decisions,” the Lead for Commercial Services said.

**NOTE: Friends of Guildford Lido and the petitioners were contacted for comment. Neither have got back in touch.**

Image courtesy SHAC

# Epsom and Ewell’s over 60s win multi-sports

22 October 2024



Wednesday 2 October saw the 16th running of the Better Club Games tournament at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park’s Copper Box Arena.

The annual event put on by charitable social enterprise GLL for the over-60s, saw over 400 older people from 20 local teams descend on the 7,500 seat venue – the 4th largest event space in London.

The ‘Battle of the Boroughs’ pits contestants from London and the south east in a diverse range of activities – all in friendly competition.

Darts, dominoes, short tennis, short-mat bowls, swimming, badminton, table tennis, cycling, walking netball and walking football all featured – with 200 people taking part in the walking sports held the week before in the Lee Valley Hockey and Tennis Centre and 100 in timed swims in local clubs throughout September.

Across all sports and locations, 700 older people took part.

In a tightly fought contest, Team Epsom & Ewell took the ultimate overall title – ahead of Waltham Forest in 2nd and Greenwich in 3rd. Epsom & Ewell were also winners in 2023 in the first gathering of the Better Club Games since Covid.

GLL first decided to put on the Better Club Games back in 2006 when it realised there was no major multi-sports activity in the UK which brought older adults together annually in the spirit of fun competition.

Competitors are drawn from Active Ageing Clubs facilitated by GLL in leisure centres; the activities chime with GLL’s mission to improve health and wellbeing as a key community service through physical activity and sport.

Active ageing has since become a major public health priority with noted benefits to physical health, mental health and helping reduce social isolation in the UK’s older population. In addition, keeping active reduces the burden on the NHS.

The 2024 Better Club Games Ambassador was actor and radio presenter Christopher Biggins, 76. He added some trademark fun to the proceedings, taking part in a candid Q&A and trying his hand at darts and table tennis.

‘Better’ is the brand name of the UK’s leading leisure charitable social enterprise GLL. The company’s ethos is to reinvest in local community health and wellbeing and the Better Club Games is a key part of this commitment.

GLL Deputy CEO Phil Donnay said: “It was inspiring to see over 400 participants at the Copper Box Arena turn out to take part in this year’s running of the Better Club Games, compete and have fun.

“The importance of ageing well and living well is huge – both for individuals and wider society.

“As a charitable social enterprise, GLL are proud to show what older people are capable of through our Better Club Games.

“Congratulations to all those who took part and to our worthy winners – Epsom & Ewell.”

Speaking from winning team Epsom & Ewell, semi-retired accountant Tony Gayle, 68, from Stoneleigh, took part in the table tennis, the Games enabling him to rediscover his interest in the sport. “The competitive element is fun but the most important thing is to enjoy the day. It’s sociable – you see people you met at the Games last year.”

Epsom & Ewell Team mate Phil Humphrey, 64, is a retired construction consultant who was involved with building the Stratford Olympic Park. This was his fourth Club Games and though he previously competed in table tennis, he has now switched to short tennis. “I’d never tried it before but they needed someone for the



team a couple of years ago,” he explains. “Myself and my partner volunteered and we got to like it – so much so that we now play once or twice a week, all year round!”

Better Club Games is organised and funded exclusively by charitable social enterprise GLL – which runs the Olympic legacy competition venues Copper Box Arena and Lee Valley Hockey & Tennis Centre which hosted the sports.

In addition to transport and refreshments, participants enjoy raising awareness for their club, a celebrity ambassador on the day, a team trophy for each individual sport winner and a medal for every competitor.

Teams from Enfield, Mole Valley and Newham competed for the first time.

The event was supported by GLL supplier partners Technogym, Your PT and Brakes.

GLL Communications

Picture caption: 2024 Better Club Games Winners – Epsom & Ewell with GLL Deputy CEO Phil Donnay (4th from right, front row) and Club Games Ambassador Chris Biggins (second row, 4th from left) /Credit: GLL

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## Spirit and chaos in equal measure

22 October 2024



Balham 2-2 Epsom and Ewell FC. Combined Counties League – Premier Division South. Wednesday 2nd October 2024.

We secured a 2-2 draw against lowly placed Balham on Wednesday evening after coming from behind twice with a pair of goals from Captain Adam Green. This result was more notable when you realise that we played with ten men from the 27th minute.

Our club somewhat naively advertised this match as “thrilling” even before it took place, in some rather strange, almost desperate attempt to get supporters to come and watch, but they were coming anyway and 81 were present, many of which had made the journey over to Tooting & Mitcham United’s Imperial Fields, where Balham currently ground share, to watch this contest on a pitch that had dealt comfortably with all the recent rain and a match just twenty four hours previously.

However, this match was definitely not “thrilling”. It was intriguing and even eventful at times with plenty of cards issued to both teams, but it was also bitty, stop-start, niggly and lacking in quality as a clearly low on confidence “home” team were given the one man advantage and took the lead twice, but couldn’t hold on in either case, and over the ninety minutes, I felt that we were the better team and would have won this match, had we retained a full complement of players.

This match was our second consecutive away League match played at the same venue, following our win over Tooting & Mitcham United three weeks previously, which was only the ninth time that this has happened in club history, and the first since 1998. We only made one change with David Romer keeping his place after he had come on for Reece Tierney midway through the second half of Saturday’s match against Horley Town. Tierney was on the bench but would not be involved in this contest.

An early Green free kick was punched away by John Ross in the Balham goal before our opponents sent an early volley over our crossbar that they probably should have scored. However, on the quarter hour mark we did the same after Ethan Nelson-Roberts set up Anthony Nazareth but he blazed over from just ten yards with just the keeper to beat.

The game took a serious turn in the 27th minute when Fabian Nunes won a free kick in the middle of the park, but despite having won this he inexplicably chose to kick out at his opponent in front of the referee, who had no choice but to issue the red card. This will keep him out for the next three matches from next Monday, meaning he will be ineligible for both the League Cup tie and our F.A. Vase tie in addition to the League match again Fleet Town on Saturday week.

Eventually the free kick was taken and although Nelson-Roberts was somewhat harshly pulled up for a foul, it’s still worth reporting as his header produced a world class save from Ross, who somehow guided the downward header back up and over the bar despite being on the ground. A truly incredible save, even if the goal wouldn’t have counted. Ross wouldn’t have known that at the time.

Inevitably, Balham were then spurred on by the present of the extra man and a long range strike from an angle by Idir Kermoud was tipped away from the top corner by Dan O’Donovan. The corner was half cleared, only for Carl Oblitey to concede a foul out wide and from this in the 36th minute, the delivery to the near post was headed powerfully past our keeper by Maxwell Emmery from just ten yards out to give them the lead.

Things looked grim at this point. Balham had only one League win all season and that had come way back on opening day 10th August against the other team in the bottom two in Spelthorne Sports. Fortunately, and maybe crucially, we were back on terms soon after. There was a coming together between Rayjon Moore for Balham and our own Ethan Brazier, both of whom picked up yellow cards, but from the long O’Donovan free kick, Oblitey headed the ball on and a defender missed his clearance, leaving Green through and he slotted the ball with his weaker left foot beyond the exposed Ross into the far corner from just eight yards out in the 39th minute.

Romer held a player back and picked up a yellow card just before the break and we nearly started the second half with a bang as Luke Miller broke through with just thirty seconds on the clock, but from 18 yards out he guided his shot about a foot wide of the Balham keeper’s left hand post. Balham then seized on this to grab the lead once again in the 52nd minute and whilst Moore was the scorer, this goal came about mostly as a result of a superb free kick from the Balham Captain Luke Hedges, who curled the ball towards the top corner from twenty yards, striking the underside of the crossbar and leaving Moore the simplest of jobs to tap the ball across the line from a few feet out with O’Donovan still on the ground. Some marking would have been nice, but it’s the old adage of following the ball in, because you never know if the ball will come back to you!

Again though, the home side weren’t able to hold on for long and just ten minutes after conceding, we were level. Nelson-Roberts did well, while positioned out on the right wing for a change and his pinpoint cross was headed in from close range by Green who outjumped his defender and gave Ross no chance.

The remaining half an hour contained very little to write about, although Hedges picked up a pair of yellow cards in quick succession to reduce Balham to ten men in the final minute of normal time. Ross made another fine save to keep our substitute Jason Bloor out with an outstretched leg in the closing minutes after another substitute Ali Fofahan had set him up, and in the final seconds of the match an O’Donovan free kick from the half way line was met by the head of Green just six yards out but unchallenged, although Ross was down well to prevent our Captain claiming a hat trick.

And maybe we would have deserved the win too. Make no mistake, if Balham continue at this rate, they will go down. An indication of their ambition came after the final whistle when Ross commented to some supporters standing near to us that “at least we didn’t lose”. I’m not sure how they expect to escape the drop if they are unable to take three points from one of the teams in the bottom half, when they are at home, leading twice and with a player advantage!

From our perspective, we showed plenty of work rate and the draw moved us up to twelfth place, which equals the best position we have been in the League since the opening day of last season. We have now lost just one match in our last eight and this was also the first point we had ever gained against Balham who had beaten us in all four previous meetings. However, discipline needs to be improved amid a flurry of cards late in the match, that if I counted correctly, will leave both clubs on a charge of failing to control their players, with the obligatory heavy Surrey FA fine. For sure the referee appeared to lose a some control of the game, but the players weren’t helping him and the game became quite attritional.

Sometimes “attritional” is a good thing. Our players certainly needed to battle across every inch of the field, having lost the man so early and we showed lots of spirit in fighting back to equalise twice. However, in that final half hour the football suffered as a result at a time when I felt Balham were there for the taking. Our next two encounters against the high-flying Redhill and Fleet Town will give us a better idea of where our final position in the table will be, but based on this match, and whilst more points are obviously required still, there are currently no dangers of relegation for our boys, even if it was only a point claimed on the night.

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O’Donovan, Ethan Brazier, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), David Romer, Anthony Nazareth, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Fabio Nunes, Ethan Nelson-Roberts



Subs: Ali Fofahan for Oblitey (82), Jason Bloor for Nelson-Roberts (86)  
Report Source: [www.eefconline.co.uk](http://www.eefconline.co.uk)

# Rare rugby draw for Epsom side

22 October 2024



Battersea Ironsides 19 Sutton & Epsom 19. Saturday 28th September

A year ago the 2023-4 Ironsides vintage were on top of the table having opened their account with 80 points against Gravesend and followed that up with bonus point wins over Sidcup and the Cornish. This current Battersea brew have been battle hardened and forged into steel by a trio of nail-biting finishes. Unbeaten at Garratt Green with a one-point and a three-point victory over Thurrock and Beckenham but bettered by three on the road at Reeds Weybridge. For the high scoring visitors it was a case of wanting to return to winning ways. At the final whistle, after a gripping match, the sides could not be separated as the scoreboard read 19-19. Players and spectators alike palavered peacefully onwards into the unclouded jollity of the afternoon. Sutton with the slope and the wind in their favour were unleashed by Freddy Bunting’s perfectly flighted kick off. The first foray to the Battersea 22 was led by Ewan McTaggart who is fast becoming a most prominent feature in the S&E pack. The lock forward might be lacking in steatopygia, that comforting feature for Number 8s of yesteryear, but he makes up for that deficiency with his athleticism around the park. In reply a penalty and subsequent lineout provided the hosts with their first attacking platform. Outside centre Charles Jacobs’ break was supported by hooker Oliver Lewis before Jacobs carried again. Battersea spun it wide and looked favourites to score in the corner but a wonderful covering tackle by captain Bunting led to a hopeful offload inside which was poached by Gareth O’Brien who was felled by a high tackle. It would not be the only occasion that the Black & White line under severe pressure would be relieved by the impatient hosts conceding a costly penalty.

On the quarter hour Battersea Ironsides were again guilty of failing to convert pressure into points. Awarded a brace of penalties in quick succession from a scrum and then a lineout they were in prime position five metres from the Sutton line. The Rugby Lane forwards refused to yield and the ball was sent to the flank. With defenders dwindling in numbers the hosts were stopped agonisingly close and the ball-carrier executed the most unsubtle of double movements to reach over the line. The observant Mr Howe again awarded Sutton the sweet succour of a penalty. From a certain try conceded, a moment later, Freddy Bunting was pouring a sack load of salt into the gaping wound by calmly notching his first penalty of the afternoon to give Sutton a 3-0 lead. Buoyed by this success Gareth O’Brien made a stunning strike to the Home XV’s 22 . The ball was recycled and sent wide where Ironsides’ 10 Charles Stuart nearly intercepted and both sides were left to rue their chances.

With the half hour fast approaching Gibson replaced Mount in the S&E front row and made an immediate impact with a rampaging carry from a lineout. Soon after Freddy Bunting was admiring his second success of the afternoon as his team extended their advantage to 6-0. The effrontery of the lead despite having less territory and possession spurred the Garratt Park team to greater heights. For the third time an error, with a try looking a distinct possibility, ended an attack but this time the knock on was not fatal as Battersea were brought back for their penalty. The green shirts piled in under the Black & White’s posts before releasing the backs and winger Ewan Magee scored in the corner. Charles Stuart regally converted from the touchline to take a 7-6 lead. To pile pelion on ossa S&E lost Matt Whitaker to injury and Ben Green entered the fray. There was still time left in the first period for Sutton & Epsom to restore their lead when Freddy Bunting opted for a kick at goal from within his own half with the final play. It had perfect direction but just lacked the yardage. The sides turned around with Battersea leading 7-6. For the second period the hosts would enjoy not only the topographical advantage but also any favours from the wind. There was the possibility that the cultured boot of Charles Stuart might be the significant factor for the remainder of the contest and that Sutton’s superb defensive resolve might be tested in extremis during the second half.

The tactical kicking game was initiated from the outset with a bout of kick tennis that ended in Sutton’s favour courtesy of a superior offering by Gareth O’Brien. That the boot might have primacy over the running game was amply demonstrated after a couple of minutes when the dangerous Jacobs shunned the opportunity to run the ball back but rifled a marvellous kick to the

22. As the forwards wrestled for supremacy, the commitment, intensity of carrying and tackling was ratcheted up another notch by both packs. Equally the back divisions marshalled their defences as both XV’s went in search for the vital opening score of the half. After 15 minutes it took an astutely angled grubber from Freddy Bunting that bounced up perfectly for winger Austin Bell to break the deadlock. It was a classic example of sporting vision, that priceless ability to see in a split second what others do not in order to create the sublime moment. A majestic touchline conversion by Bunting bisected the uprights and S&E led 13-7. Sutton held the upper hand for five minutes. The Ironsides forced S&E to their line with a probing kick forcing a lineout ten metres out. Clean ball and a well executed catch and drive saw the hosts trundle irresistibly over the line for their second try. Trailing by a solitary point Charles Stuart’s conversation oversaw the restoration of their lead by 14-13. As is so often the case the opposition were given an early opportunity with a penalty from the restart. The Black & Whites owed their chance for the lead to a thunderous tackle from flanker Ben Tame. There was a moment of confusion when the height of the Bunting kick exceeded the diminutive stature of the Battersea uprights but Sutton & Epsom now inched ahead by 16-14. Perhaps distracted by that uncertainty the restart sailed out on the full and Sutton scrummaged on halfway. Moments later there was another indication of the tension telling. An Ironside queried Mr Howe’s interpretation of the laws in a tone that was not appreciated and the referee ushered the defenders 10 metres back. If loose lips sink ships then loquacious rugby players cost three points. Freddy Bunting added a fourth penalty to his tally for Sutton to lead 19-14 with a dozen minutes to go plus the extras for stoppages.

Battersea now went in search of points. Their first sortie was cut short when they lost possession on the Sutton 22 and Austin Bell cleared magnificently to the opponent’s half. S&E were on the attack but were thwarted by a Charles Stuart interception and kick that rolled into their 22. Austin Bell covered well to secure the ball on the deck and the Black & Whites were gifted a penalty as a chasing Ironside naively fell on the prostrate Bell. As the game entered time added on it was one-way traffic in favour of Battersea. The visitors were magnificent in defence and thought they had earned a turnover but the hosts were awarded the scrum. Closer and closer the Garratt Park pack advanced to the posts. Avoiding the risk of being held up over the line, with admirable patience under the circumstances, they finally forced their way over by the right hand upright. 19 all and the conversion was a mere formality for a kicker of Stuart’s stature. However, Charles Stuart, endured the type of unexpected misfortune that would have been familiar to not only Aeschylus but also his historical namesake as the conversion was missed. Shortly afterwards the referee concluded proceedings and the sides shared the points for a 19-19 draw.

It was a fitting result for two teams that had given their all. For Sutton Ben Green’s performance off the bench was redolent of Ed Burton at Guildford in 2015. Green’s previous contributions had been predominantly inconsequential minutes off the bench but he revelled in the opportunity at a serious stint at Number 8. He carried with aggression, tackled powerfully and symbolised an outstanding effort by the Sutton pack. No doubt this Battersea side will be contenders for promotion again this season as they have quality in all departments.

The league now takes a week off and the action returns to Rugby Lane when league leaders Sidcup visit on 12 th October. What a difference a year makes, on their last trip in November 2023 they arrived bottom of the league and level on points with Sutton & Epsom with both clubs having only a solitary win to their names in seven outings.

Sutton & Epsom  
O’Brien, Watkins, Scott, Elliott, Bell, Bunting ©, Munford, Mount, Gordon, Boaden, Glanville, McTaggart, Tame, Jones & Whitaker.  
Replacements: Gibson, Green & Unused: Symonds.

Battersea Ironsides  
Baker, Magee, Jacobs, Roberts, Craig, Stuart, Barnard, Chetwynd, Lewis, Batstone, MacPherson, Walton, Dollard, Chitan & Martin.  
Replacements: Borup, Humphris & Diamond.