

Drawing conclusions in Epsom and Ewell v Horley tie

30 September 2024



Epsom and Ewell FC 2-2 Horley Town. Combined Counties League – Premier Division South. Saturday 28th September 2024.

An entertaining contest took place at King George’s Field on Saturday and although the visitors took a share of the points from this 2-2 draw with a late equaliser, it would have been harsh on them if they had lost, as both teams played their part in a fully committed and competitive encounter.

An official attendance of 94 was advised for this match, even though only 77 were counted half way through the first half, but maybe an inflation of the crowd was inevitable this week, following the poor number of attendees for the midweek win over Hilltop. Either way, our team went into this match in good form, having won five of our last six matches and bearing this in mind, the figure remains a disappointing one.

We made three changes to our line up after the win over Hilltop with Anthony Nazareth coming in for his first start in place of the injured Toby Young, while further forward Fabio Nunes came back in ahead of Luke Taylor. The final change was with Dan O’Donovan back in goal ahead of Faebian Witter, who was destined to be on the bench until he injured himself in the warm up. He was then replaced in the line up just before the kick off by young defender David Romer. He was joined there by fit again Ali Fofahan, following his injury at Tooting & Mitcham United and also Jason Bloor who had scored on his debut before missing the last couple of matches due to a holiday.

The visitors were first to fashion an opportunity when a right wing cross was met with a far post volley, but the ball struck a defender and was cleared. Horley dragged a free kick wide from a good position, but in the ninth minute we created a good chance of our own as Carl Oblitey, showing no effects of the hamstringing twinge he suffered four days previously, beat two men and as he drew other defenders towards him, he sent the pass to the right where Luke Miller was in a large amount of space. Our tricky winger would usually bury this chance, but on this occasion he lashed it straight at George Hyde in the Horley goal from just inside the penalty area and he parried the ball to safety.

Then just a minute later a visiting defender sliced the ball straight into Oblitey’s path, but he also sent his shot too close to Hyde, who blocked the ball up in the air and was alert to get up quickly and claw the ball away as it threatened to cross the goal line.

We were now well and truly in this match, yet surprisingly we then went behind in the 18th minute and it might well have been avoidable. Nazareth cut his head in a collision and had to leave the field to await the arrival of a clean shirt, which for some reason was still back in the changing room and he was still off the field when a right wing delivery was met by a close range header from former Salt Lewis Pearch that gave O’Donovan no chance.

Another cross was just headed wide by Mason Seagroatt as the visitors threatened to get a second goal and they then sent a low volley just wide of O’Donovan’s right hand post. The frustrating thing about this last chance was that we had chosen to attack before losing the ball, yet by kicking the ball out of play, we would have been up to eleven men again. Instead, Nazareth was left standing there on the sideline and waiting to come back on, so to have conceded at this stage would have been a really serious error. Finally after nearly seven minutes off the field, our bandaged up defender finally returned to the field of play. It was all a bit Sunday League!

But with eleven men again we threatened to level things up when Oblitey sent Miller through in the left hand channel, from where his powerful shot just clipped a defender, sending the ball onto the crossbar and out for a corner. Then from the Adam Green corner, the ball skipped straight through everyone before hitting Ethan Nelson-Roberts at the far post only a couple of yards out, and as the ball rebounded back off him and into the danger area, Nazareth skied the ball from just eight yards out.

Horley were also making chances and a good ball down the right sat up nicely for Pearch to strike a volley towards goal, which O’Donovan just plucked out of the air. Then we had a bit of an issue after Nazareth was accused of stepping on a player. Obviously, we were a long way from the action, and he may well have caught him, but the referee either decided that it was accidental, or maybe he didn’t get a great view of it, so no further action was taken. From the subsequent free kick O’Donovan got his hands to the ball but couldn’t hold on and required a defensive clearance before we could relax. We nearly equalised right on the half when a deep Nelson-Roberts cross was met by a volley from Miller, but it was from a narrow angle and the ball zipped across the six yard area and out for a goal kick.

A goal down at the break, and with the knowledge that we had missed some really good chances and still hadn’t managed to score in the opening half of any of our ten League matches this season, it was important that we didn’t concede again, but it nearly happened in the 50th minute when Pearch set up another former Salt in Warren Colman, but the shot at goal had the sting taken out of it by the covering Ethan Brazier and the ball dribbled tamely through to O’Donovan.

The visitors continued to seek a second and a loose header from Reece Tierney forced Nazareth to try and reach the second ball, which he failed to do; colliding with a Horley striker and picking up a yellow card for his troubles. Fortunately, Aaron Moody’s free kick from twenty yards was straightforward for O’Donovan.

After this wobbly start to the second half we began to get a foothold in the contest and Oblitey set up Miller for a low shot, although Hyde made a decent save. Then Romer came on for his debut in place of Tierney. It was odd to see the new boy taking the field as the first substitute, seeing as he hadn’t even been in the sixteen man squad originally, so I have to assume that Tierney had suffered an injury.

He didn’t have much defending to do for a while as we continued to press. Nunes saw his shot take a slight deflection before Hyde was able to palm it beyond the far post on the hour and from the corner Nunes then saw his low shot blocked, but not held by Hyde, although he was up quickly to block the close range effort from Nelson-Roberts just wide. Finally, from the second corner, the ball reached Miller at the far post and his pinpoint cross back into the danger area was met by Oblitey eight yards out with a thumping header that flew into the net in the 61st minute for our equaliser.

We were well on top at this stage and Nelson-Roberts did really well on the left to turn his man and run in, sending an early delivery for the incoming Oblitey, but he had more time than he realised and snatched at the ball, slicing it wide from eighteen yards. Then Nunes saw his shot blocked by Hyde’s legs and although it sat up kindly for Green, his header didn’t have enough power on it to beat Hyde.

We continued to attack and Miller received a great pass from midfield, only for his cross to be just ahead of Oblitey. Miller was then caught by a defender after his delivery but the referee decided that it wasn’t worth a penalty, even though our man was adamant that he had been fouled. Fortunately, it wouldn’t make much difference as Bloor had come on in the 71st minute and within 120 seconds he made the breakthrough for his second goal in his second match. It was a nice move, coming from a throw on that Green flicked on, and Oblitey cleverly dummied, which gave Bloor a bit of space and he drilled the ball in at the near post from the edge of the area with Hyde unsighted to give us the lead.

Craig Dundas was next to test Hyde, and although the shot was well saved, Miller then blazed the loose ball high and wide from fairly close in. As time began to tick down though, Horley started to make some chances. Brazier picked up a yellow card for a foul that led to a bit of handbags between the players. One delivery whizzed across our six yard box, before an 85th minute Matt Rapson cross to the far post was met by a looping header from Seagroatt that O’Donovan couldn’t reach and Horley were level at 2-2.

Both teams had one good chance in the closing minutes. Horley sent a ball in from the left that was just ahead of their incoming striker, while substitute Fofahan was put through on goal, but Hyde was out quickly to block the shot. Overall though, a draw was a fair result, and whilst the visiting keeper Hyde was the busier of the two keepers, our lack of clinicality meant that we hadn’t done enough to deserve the win and we now face a trip to Tooting & Mitcham United on Wednesday where we will face Balham in our next attempt to get three points.

The final word goes to the referee Mr Sotimirin. I have not always been a fan of some of his performances, going all the way back to 2008, but he let the game flow nicely and although the players occasionally threatened to take advantage of his leniency at times, his handling ensured that this was one of the most entertaining matches of the season so far and credit is due for this.

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

Subs: David Romer for Tierney (59), Jason Bloor for Nunes (71), Ali Fofahan for Oblitey (88)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Season finale tips for Epsom racecourse

30 September 2024



The finale meeting of the Summer Flat season at Epsom Downs arrives on Sunday with a seven-race card to bring the campaign to a close. Racing gets underway at 1.45pm with a class four nursery contest before the action – and the season – rounds off at 5.15pm with a class four handicap. *Read below to discover the latest tips and a full meeting preview for Epsom’s final card of the year on Sunday courtesy of **Racing TV**.*

The opening contest on Sunday’s card sees a small field of five head to the start for the class four jersey contest (1.45). The Paul and Oliver Cole-trained White Chapel Road could be the play in the opener, getting off the mark in a Brighton maiden 27 days ago in fine style and he should be right up there again if showing the same form. Previous course and distance winner Pietro can fill the second spot and rates the chief threat.

Race two on the card (2.20) is another five runner contest, this time in a class two conditions stakes over the extended mile around Epsom. Anniversary holds an entry in the Group 1 Futurity Stakes at Doncaster next month and this could be an ideal prep run for the Ralph Beckett runner, off the mark on debut at Newmarket six weeks ago so is the clear horse to beat here.

Sene runners aged between three and four years old will tackle race three on the card (2.55) over the one mile and two furlong trip. Rickshaw made a promising start for trainer Harry Charlton when landed a third in a Pontefract maiden ten days ago and should be in with a big shout here stepping up in trip. Of his rivals, Sir Lowry’s Pass rates the main danger, a winner of a Goodwood novice earlier this month despite missing the break that day.

Mark Of Gold looks to be the one to beat in the fourth race on the card (3.30), returning to the Flat having been pulled up in a handicap hurdle at Sandown in April for trainer Gary Moore and back on a handy looking mark as well, will take all the beating. Stablemate Miller Spirit can run him closer, a three-time winner in 2024 and produced a career-best when winning at this track just 17 days ago.

Nine runners will tackle the one mile and two furlong class three handicap at 4.05 with preference heading the way of Andrew Balding’s handicapping newcomer Winston’s Tipple, who got off the mark in a six runner novice at Lingfield last time out and has the eye-catching jockey booking of Oisin Murphy to boot. Qitaal looked better than ever when scoring under the now retired Franny Norton at Chester on his last run and can take the second spot here as he has to defy a 9lb rise in the weights.

The penultimate on the card is up next at 4.40 and Arkhalia Flynn is taken to get back to winning ways having only been narrowly denied in his hat trick bid last time out at Haydock for trainer Jack Channon.

Finally, the card and the season at Epsom comes to a close with an 11-runner handicap in class four over the seven furlong trip (5.15). Preference in the finale goes to Hodler, who has a good record at this track including a win over course and distance 17 days ago for which he is penalised 6lb in the weights but given how impressive his last run was, looks the type to be able to shoulder the rise with ease.

Epsom selections - Sunday

- 1.45 - White Chapel Road
- 2.20 - Anniversary
- 2.55 - Rickshaw
- 3.30 - Mark Of Gold
- 4.05 - Winston’s Tipple
- 4.40 - Arkhalia Flynn
- 5.15 - Hodler

Horses racing Image: Credit Paul. CC BY 2.0

Epsom top the hill 4 - 1

30 September 2024

Epsom and Ewell 4-1 Hilltop. Combined Counties League Cup – First Round. Tuesday 24th September 2024.

Two goals, two assists and a position on the Hall of Fame for being one of our fifty top goal scorers in club history! Not a bad day’s work for Luke Miller, who scored his thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth goals for the Salts, whilst also providing the deliveries for our first two goals, scored by Ethan Nelson-Roberts as we swept aside the challenge from Hilltop FC by four goals to one in the First Round of the Combined Counties League Cup at the KGF on Tuesday night. Hilltop are a club of mostly Somalian origin and currently play in the North Division of our League where they, like us had registered exactly a point per game, so a close contest was expected.

The scoreline might indicate that this was a comfortable win, but it was a slightly flattering one as possession was fairly even over the ninety minutes, although we were far more dangerous in front of goal where the visitors looked a little wobbly, and we appeared far more solid at the back. In fact, we are starting to look like quite a good team right now and even the early loss of Carl Oblitey to a hamstring injury didn’t derail our attacking threat in this match.

We made three changes to our starting line-up following our mostly comfortable victory over Seaford Town on Saturday with Reece Tierney replacing the injured Stefan Aiwone and getting his first start since suffering a head injury against Jersey Bulls, whilst Luke Taylor also came in further forward for Fabian Nunes who is still working his way back from injury and was on the bench. Also watching from the sidelines was Dan O’Donovan as Faebian Witter was given a rare outing between the posts.

The visitors started brightly and passed the ball around nicely. Early indications were that this might be a long night, especially when Oblitey limped off, although he was replaced mostly as a precaution, with a more important League fixture coming up on Saturday. We conceded one of many free kicks around the edge of the area, but Witter was alert to reach the strike from Abukar Mohammed on the 15 minute mark.

And a minute later we were ahead. A pass out to Miller resulted in a dangerous low delivery that just eluded two of our players coming in, but was met just beyond the far post by Nelson-Roberts, who was too strong for his full back and slotted the ball past Hansel Coelho at his near post from about four yards out. Witter made another low save but we extended our lead in the 31st minute when Miller provided another deep delivery and Nelson-Roberts got ahead of his man to head the ball downwards and up into the net, just inside the post from around five yards out.

Tierney was alert to block a shot from the visitors but in the 35th minute we conceded in rather odd circumstances. It was hard to see exactly what happened, but it looked as though Witter came out wide to clear a ball and struck it against a team mate, leaving the easiest of finishes for Tahir Showkat to roll the loose ball into the empty net.

We responded well to the goal though. Substitute Sean Anderson made a good run, forcing Coelho into a save from a narrow angle, and although the ball fell nicely for Adam Green, his shot from eighteen yards went across the goal and out for a goal kick. However, in the 45th minute Green was largely responsible for our third goal as he put Coelho under severe pressure and his clearance went straight to Miller on the edge of the penalty area, and he guided the ball straight

back past the keeper into the far corner of the goal to give us a 3-1 lead at the interval.

This goal placed Miller into the club Hall of Fame. For those who are unaware of this at: www.eefconline.co.uk it shows the top fifty players in club history in terms of appearances, goals and clean sheets. Miller thus joined a pair of players on 35 goals in our former Player/Coach Sid Faggetter who scored his goals in just forty matches in the 1950/51 season and former Captain and appearance record holder Graham Morris who scored them over 658 appearances from 1990-2004!

Seven minutes into the second half he had surpassed both of these players with his second of the night and again Green was the provider as he robbed a defender and set Miller up in stride, from where he ran in and clipped the ball across Coelho into the bottom corner.

With almost half of the match remaining, it might come as a surprise that this goal was the last of the match, although there were more chances for both sides. Nunes had been on the field for seconds when he had a shot blocked by a defender, while Witter was able to pick a shot out that was heading for the top corner. Another free kick from Mohammed forced Witter into his best save of the night, getting down low to push the ball away and then being ready to make a second save from an angle as the ball came back in. Our keeper needed a little help from a defender after failing to hold the next free kick from Benet Hashani, before a left wing cross from the visitors bounced off the top of our crossbar and away.

We then wasted a corner, which led to a rapid counter from Hilltop, but Witter was able to make another good low save to keep the score at 4-1. At the other end Coelho nearly dropped a shot from Nunes over the goal line after parrying it up in the air, but was able to recover without serious alarm and the only other concern came when substitute Niall Stillwell sent a header forward on the left where Coelho got to the ball to clear just ahead of Nelson-Roberts, who felt the full force of his challenge and limped off in the 88th minute. Electing not to put O'Donovan into the outfield, we had used our other four substitutes and so finished the remainder of the match with ten men.

The visitors, as you might expect with the player advantage, held the balance of the possession in those final minutes and another substitute Anthony Nazareth had to head the ball off the goal line after Witter had punched the ball against an opponent which had then looped up, while Ethan Brazier picked up a late yellow card for two fouls in quick succession. Nunes had the final word with a swerving strike from thirty yards, but Coelho kept the ball out and the final whistle confirmed our progress to the last 32 of the competition, which is scheduled to take place around the middle of October.

This was our fifth win in six matches and it was just a shame that only 40 spectators were in attendance; our smallest home crowd since February 2020 when we were playing our home matches at the remote High Road ground in Chipstead. I was provided with various excuses for the small number, ranging from Sky TV (when isn't there a match on Sky?) and that they had been refused permission by the League to reduce the entry cost, but I don't buy this at all. The League has a minimum entry rule, but we already charge well over that amount and could easily have reduced it at any time without requiring permission.

Quite simply, there is always an excuse or something being "spun" at our club, and there remains no sincere attempt by anyone in an official position to get more of our own supporters in. There are a number of things they could do, and engaging with the ones they currently have would be a start; something they have failed to do over the last three years. A few random pictures of player huddles on Instagram might get a few "likes", while a few Colts coming along on a few Saturdays might boost the numbers artificially, but neither help our short term plight. Three long-serving supporters were present at this match, who have in recent years all been on the Club Committee and were keen to help, yet were forced off because they held some different opinions to those who do not want to hear them. This remains a huge mistake by those currently running the club, who seem to think that they are not answerable to supporters. Whilst a new ground, if it ever occurred, would undoubtedly bring in new support for a while, you have to ask how the club would retain them for more than a few months once the novelty has worn off.

We host Horley Town on Saturday in an important League match; a club that have engaged with their local community in recent months and had two attendances well over 500 at the end of last season because they visited and invited all their local school children in with their parents. Whilst it is slightly more difficult for our club to do this as we can't recoup anything for the bar and catering, a crowd of this number would make a huge difference. Horley's attendances have been similar to ours in recent seasons, so there is no reason why we couldn't adopt a similar idea, and right now they would see a good team in decent form, which always helps!

Epsom & Ewell: Faebian Witter, Ethan Brazier, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Reece Tierney, Toby Young, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Luke Taylor, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Sean Anderson for Oblitey (13), Fabian Nunes for Taylor (54), Anthony Nazareth for Young (69), Niall Stillwell for Dundas (81)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Late Seaford rally too late to knock Epsom out

30 September 2024



Epsom and Ewell FC 3-2 Seaford Town FC. Combined Counties League - Premier Division South. Saturday 21st September 2024.

Although ultimately irrelevant, two Seaford Town goals in the 86th and 88th minutes would be the memory of this match that most supporters will have taken as they headed home, which was a pity as this was the most dominant performance I had seen from an Epsom and Ewell team since we returned to Step Five in 2023. We won this F.A. Vase contest by three goals to two in the end, although 5-0 wouldn't have been a score line that the visitors could complain about. When considering that they brought a supporters coach to this match, and that we had around a dozen children in the ground as mascots, together with a number of parents, the attendance of 78 on a hot sunny afternoon was an extremely disappointing one for such a prestigious match.

Two changes were made to our starting eleven after Tuesday's defeat to high-flying Knaphill, with Ethan Nelson-Roberts and fit again Fabio Nunes coming in for Luke Taylor and the absent Sean Anderson. Jason Bloor put in a fine appearance from the bench in that match and may have started here, had he not been on holiday! Taylor dropped to the bench where he was alongside a pair of debutants in Niall Stillwell and Anthony Nazareth. Stillwell spent much of last season at Guildford City, where he stood out despite their disappointing season. He is also my boy's P.E. teacher! Nazareth played for us briefly in pre-season but has now joined after spending time at Cobham. Both would make their debuts later in the match.

We went into this match in fairly good form with three wins from our last four matches, but Seaford Town were top of the Southern Combination Division One and were expected to put up a decent fight, even if their main priority is probably a run at promotion. We also carried a strange statistic into this encounter, as we had not scored in the first half of the twelve competitive matches we had played so far, which equalled a record set way back in 1982, starting with our famous F.A. Trophy match at home to Altrincham and concluding with a 2-1 win at St Albans City in our thirteenth match. What we would give to be playing those sort of teams again!

We nearly consigned that stat to the history books as early as the fourth minute as Nunes set up Carl Oblitey for a good strike from close range, but he sent the ball flying into the car park at the Tolworth end. Adam Green then struck a tapped free kick from Nunes wide from twenty yards. The next chance came when Oblitey did well on the right and his delivery was met by a brave low dive from Nelson-Roberts whose header went just wide.

We were completely dominant at this stage and a Green corner was met by a header from Stefan Aiwoone that keeper Wester Young did well to keep out before Nunes sent the loose ball wide from only a few yards out. Young is advancing in years now but was part of the strong Molesey line up that used to play us around fifteen years ago before moving to East Sussex and playing for Hailsham Town against us in recent seasons. Young punched away another good delivery from Green before Oblitey finally got the ball past him from Nelson-Roberts' low left wing delivery, only to see the Assistant's flag raised against him.

Nelson-Roberts then hit the crossbar from twenty yards out with a curling strike from out wide and Oblitey then cushioned a header back for Green to strike at goal, but Young parried the ball away to safety. We were half an hour into the match before the visitors even had a half chance when a deep cross had Dan O'Donovan scrambling and he just clawed the ball away just when it looked like it might drop over him, although was relieved to see the incoming striker send the loose ball way over the bar from not that far out.

Aiwoone couldn't get his header on target from a Green corner and Luke Miller was sending in some dangerous deliveries, but it was becoming apparent that we were approaching the half time mark with another blank. Just as I was preparing my half time tweet to the masses, I had to re-write it as Miller's ball in was sliced into the far top corner of his own net by the Seaford Captain Ryan Knight from about eight yards in the 47th minute and there was no time to restart the first half. Technically, we did still set a new club record in terms of 619 minutes without scoring in the first half, even if we didn't quite register that thirteenth consecutive half time duck!

But 1-0 was the least we deserved, and it arguably could have been much more. We had to change things around almost immediately after the restart when Aiwone hurt his knee and had to be replaced by Nazareth in the 48th minute. It didn't stop the flow of traffic though and we extended our lead in the 52nd minute with a superb defence splitting pass from Green that Miller ran onto in the right wing channel. He drew the keeper and struck at goal, only to find a defender had just extended a foot to block the shot, but it fell kindly for him and with Young committed to blocking the previous effort, our tricky winger had the simple job of sliding the ball at an angle into the empty net from eight yards. Miller has now scored thirty-four goals for our club and is one away from joining the club Hall of Fame which shows the top fifty goal scorers in our history and contains some names that regular supporters will know well, like Jamie Byatt, Kyle Hough, Robbie Burns, Daryl Cooper-Smith and Dale Marvell, not to mention the top man himself Tommy Tuite. It is quite an elite group!

Toby Young had a chance from a corner, but the ball hit his back as he jumped and the ball just looped over the bar, before Green saw his strong shot cleared for a corner. Craig Dundas then sent his header wide from that Miller corner as we continued to boss the game completely.

We had a scare in the 62nd minute when O'Donovan, who was probably a bit bored by his lack of action to this point, started to make a number of incursions outside his penalty area and from one of these, his headed clearance just went up in the air behind him and Young had to react quickly to head the ball clear of our goal under pressure from a visiting striker.

But this was an isolated foray into our half and we scored a third goal in the 65th minute when a deep Green corner was reached at full stretch by Nelson-Roberts at the far post. His shot struck the foot of Young's left hand post, but rebounded kindly across goal, where Nazareth reacted first to poke the ball over the line from a couple of yards out.

Frustration boiled over for the visitors and Lewis Hallett picked up a yellow card for going straight through the back of Oblitey, although our centre-forward then picked up a card of his own just a few minutes later, although it wasn't clear what for, and even Oblitey seemed perplexed by the decision. Nazareth then sent a header wide as we continued to do most of the work.

However, in the 86th minute the visitors received a lifeline when a long ball out of defence was reached by Josh Wright ahead of O'Donovan who had come a long way out of his goal, leaving their man with the simple job of putting the ball into the empty net. Although it might look as though O'Donovan was at fault here, it is important to question why he felt the need to come so far out of his goal so often in this match. It's worth noting that Dundas had by this time left the field and we just didn't seem to be so organised after that point. Two minutes later, a right wing cross was turned in unmarked at the far post by Matt Holland to make the score 3-2.

We still had chances as a couple of substitutes got involved. Taylor sent a header back across Young, only to see the ball drop inches beyond the Seaford crossbar, while Felipe De Lima was booked for an unconvincing fall just outside the penalty area that the referee correctly saw as simulation. In fact, De Lima was probably a little lucky to stay on the field as he clattered into a visiting player in the 96th minute and could easily have picked up a second yellow card. Although the whistle blew as the Seaford player landed, fortunately it was to signify full time!

So it's now four wins in five matches for our boys and we remain in good form ahead of our League Cup First Round tie at home to Hilltop on Tuesday. It's also good to report that discipline was much better, following the issues from last Tuesday and now we have to focus a little better on concentration for the full ninety minutes, or it may cost us next time. Overall though, this was a strong performance against a team that I thought would push us far more than they did and obviously credit goes to our boys for restricting them as well as we did.

Monday's F.A. Vase First Round draw will be released around lunchtime and, as always, we'll have full details available within minutes of the draw being released on Twitter / X at @EEFCOnline and soon after that at the Epsom and Ewell FC Archive website at: www.eefconline.co.uk That match will take place on Saturday 19th October, unless we are drawn at home, in which case it will probably be the Friday evening as our landlords are at home that day in a League match. That means our next Vase match will take place just one week before the fifty year anniversary of our first ever F.A. Vase match in 1974/75, which ended with an appearance at Wembley Stadium in the first ever Final. Wouldn't it be nice to have a Vase run to match that!

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Ethan Brazier, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Toby Young, Stefan Aiwone, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Fabio Nunes, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Anthony Nazareth for Aiwone (48), Felipe De Lima for Nunes (63), Niall Stillwell for Young (76), Luke Taylor for Dundas (83)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Sutton & Epsom Denied at the Death in Epic Encounter

30 September 2024



Sutton and Epsom RFC 43 v Old Reigations 48. Saturday 21st September 2024.

It has been a Jekyll & Hyde start to the campaign for Sutton & Epsom. However, the reality dates back to Epictetus and his motto that has been adopted by coaches from around the globe: "Control the Controllables". The one aspect out of your control is the standard of the opposition and Beckenham last Saturday provided a far sterner test than the opening day Old Colfeians. Last season Old Reigatian did the double over S&E in a couple of high scoring contests. They started by winning a fluctuating game at home 35-29 before a first half blitz was the basis of their second success at Rugby Lane by 38-21. New heights were reached on Saturday with a dizzying 12-try spectacular with the tries equally distributed as Old Reigatian hung on in a fabulous finale to win by 48-43 and continue their unbeaten start to the season.

It was a superbly sunny Saturday, firm under foot with a refreshing breeze and all was set fair for entertaining running rugby and these two sides did not disappoint. The visitors dominated the early exchanges including their front row winning a penalty at the first scrum. In customary fashion the front row offender demonstrated his prelapsarian innocence with a look of amazement at having been penalised. With tenacious defence OR were denied. It was frustrating for Sutton that their first possession in the backs culminated in an interception near halfway and Harrison Mitchell running in the opening try that was unconverted for a 5-0 Reigatian lead. After the restart Adam Bibby's reward for his excellent chase and tackle was a twisted ankle and being replaced by Lawrence Elliott for the remaining 70 minutes.

After a dozen minutes S&E were on the scoreboard. Gareth O'Brien initiated the counter before a powerful carry by Jordan Huie and a probing run by Pete Gordon. Then the backs were released and the crowd enjoyed the delicate tracery of O'Brien's weaving run to score under the posts. Freddy Bunting's conversion gave the hosts a slender 7-5 lead. In the next 20 minutes Sutton's hopes were hampered by discipline. Tom Baldwin willingly accepted a trio of penalties and the Black & Whites were reduced to 14 when Jordan Huie connected with an opponent in midair. The yellow card was perhaps not a condign punishment but this law is harsh if not essentially fair. With the visitors leading 14-7 Glanville and Whitaker rallied the hosts who were awarded a penalty of their own and Freddy Bunting reduced the lead to 14-10 to OR. Moments later a further 3-point opportunity was declined and Captain Bunting kicked to touch for a 5-metre lineout. Mount, no

doubt, wearied by the moil of his scrummaging duties delighted at receiving the ball close to the line and dutifully scored. Despite the balmy temperatures Freddy Bunting was as cool as the underside of a cucumber and being as hard to rattle as two grapes in a wine glass he converted from the flank to take a 17-14 lead as the first half entered time added on.

As is frequently witnessed at every level of the game the restart is a vulnerable time for the team that has just scored. The Black & Whites secured the ball and seemed to have avoided the fatal error only to concede a penalty on their second sortie. Tom Baldwin made it four from four to level the score at 17-17. Neither side were content to just play out the first period with parity and audaciously tried to wrest the advantage from the other. Despite the endeavours of all concerned there was no addition to the score and the sides turned around level, 17-17. It had been a commendable effort by Sutton to shackle the Old Reigatian team and restrict them to one try and they now had the elements in their favour for the second period.

S&E were immediately under the cosh in the second half and were indebted to vital interventions by Jordan Huie, Alex Mount and Pete Gordon. But the Old Boys would not be denied and as it was Harrison Mitchell, who again opened the scoring, this time applying the coup de grâce from closer range. Ten minutes elapsed before the next score which was to be the first of a Tom Baldwin hat trick. Showing great determination he forced his way over in the corner despite considerable attention from the defenders and a dubious crowd dropped their remarks into the understanding air. Though unable to add the extras to his try Tom Baldwin had stretched the lead to 27-17. Sutton needed a swift reply and that was supplied by the livewire flanker Dan Jones with the Bunting boot bisecting the uprights the game was once more in the balance with OR leading S&E 27-24.

The game appeared to have taken on an entirely different complexion, and ended as a contest, with a sensational 5-minute burst from the men from Geoffrey Knight Fields. When 18-year-old William Henry Perkin invented by accident the synthetic purple dye, mauveine, in 1856 he became a multi-millionaire. It appeared that this purple patch of three tries in five minutes would be equally priceless to Old Reigatian. The hosts muffed the restart and Tom Baldwin dummied with numbers queuing up to score for his second. The inside centre completed his trio courtesy of some indecisive defence. Then replacement back William Parker joined the party with the pick of the tries courtesy of some delightful legerdemain. It was suddenly 48-24 with Tom Baldwin’s personal tally 33 points. Whilst their opponent’s back play was passing and running in excelsis Sutton had embraced the arms of Morpheus. The third rapid score would have encouraged the Rugby Lane faithful to get to the bar before the rush or view the remainder through the leper’s squint. However, it was the catalyst for the transmogrification of the home XV’s performance. With ten minutes on the clock the game that was threatening to become a rout became a spectacular comeback. Sutton to their credit did not panic with reckless play but valued their possession and waited for the openings. Jordan Huie brought the ball out of his 22 and it was recycled wide to Lawrence Elliott who stepped inside and broke to halfway before launching a speculative kick. The ball nestled under the posts and Arun Watkins won the race to touch it down. The simplest of conversions made it 48-31. Playing with pride and passion the Rugby Lane men laid siege on their opponents’ line. Finally, the pressure told and Matt Whitaker scored and though the touchline conversion drifted wide it was 48-36 as the game entered time added on. Ewan McTaggart demonstrated how to secure the restart and put Sutton on the attack again. Freddy Bunting saw a gap and accelerated into the Reigatian half. The retreating defence of the Old Boys conceded a penalty. Without hesitation it was quickly taken and Matt Whitaker was dotting down under the posts. The rapidly taken conversion was successful and the scoreboard read 43-48. It was breathless and unbelievable rugby and the passionate crowd had witnessed the most extraordinary reversal of fortunes. The Black & Whites secured possession and Bunting and Watkins led the charge to halfway. This time the penalty led to a yellow card and the 14-man Old Reigatian team were forced into their 22 by Freddy Bunting’s arrowing kick. Then another penalty and Mr Whinney issued another yellow card with a mortician’s lofty detachment for the irksome job in hand as OR were set to complete the game with 13 on the pitch. The visitors faced a 5-metre lineout with no doubt a mixture of emotions from total disbelief to grim determination. To their eternal credit the visitors defended with heroic valour tackling with ferocity and denying space until they forced a turnover. The final whistle was greeted with jubilation and relief by Old Reigatian whilst the Sutton faces were marked deeply with the hieroglyphics of pain.

First and foremost, this was a fabulous game of rugby that did great credit to all who were involved. The Old Reigatian backs attract a lot of praise, which is thoroughly deserved, but do not underestimate the front row triumvirate of Messrs Monk, Nestor and Collister who provided an excellent platform. No doubt the club archivist will be asked if Tom Baldwin broke the record for most points in a league game. For Sutton the remarkable revival should convince them that they have the capability to beat anyone in the league when they play their best rugby. Next week the 1 st XV travel to Battersea Ironsides who themselves have enjoyed three close encounters of the rugby kind so far this campaign with two victories. The kick off will be 3pm at Burntwood Lane and it will be the first time Sutton have played a league fixture at this venue as last season the weather meant it was relocated to the Grasshoppers RFC’s synthetic surface.

Sutton & Epsom
O’Brien, Watkins, Scott, Bibby, Huie, Bunting ©, Munford, Mount, Gordon, Boaden, Glanville, McTaggart, Rea, Jones & Whitaker.
Replacements: Hilton, Green & Elliott.

Old Reigatian
Woodford, Mitchell, Allen, Baldwin, Coyle, Holder, Skinner, Monk, Nestor, Collister, Jones, Franklin-Talbot, Brooks, Goldsmith & Travers.
Replacements: Lee, Courteney-Walker & Parker.

Photo: Robin Kennedy

Blue sky sees Black and Whites in the red

30 September 2024



Beckenham 29 Sutton & Epsom RFC 14. Saturday 14th September.

Sutton & Epsom arrived at Balmoral Lane as league leaders after a comprehensive Colfeians victory by 50-7. Beckenham had impressed with a 27-13 triumph of their own over Reeds Weybridge in their opener. As are the vagaries of availability there were six switches in the Sutton set up but no new arrivals. Messrs Elliott and Rea were elevated from the bench with Joe Lovatt starting at 9 to be joined by the experienced quintet of Munford, Whitaker, Mount, Mohr and Tame. Apologies for absence ranged from concussion to watching the T20 cricket finals at Edgbaston. Meanwhile, Beckenham's hat trick hero of Round One, Geordie Boyce, had endured an Australian Friday night to forget in Cardiff and was absent. After a keenly contested encounter Beckenham deserved the honours with a bonus point victory by 29-14.

Freddy Bunting kicked off on a beautifully sunny afternoon with a stiff breeze over his shoulder. After the initial sparring from both attacking units it was S&E that produced the first chance of the afternoon. A flowing break after a dozen minutes saw Sutton thwarted by foul play 5 metres from glory. The tapped penalty found its way to Matt Whitaker who stretched for the line but Mr Burchell adjudicated that the ball had not been touched down. Beckenham put themselves under further pressure by knocking on on their 22. This time it was Lawrence Elliott for Sutton who came agonisingly close to opening the scoring but marvellous defence prevented the ball being placed over the line. Moments later it was not to be third time lucky as a rampaging run by prop Alex Mount set up the perfect platform for a try but the opportunity was squandered. At the start of the second quarter Beckenham winger Gabriel Jordan dashed into the enemy half and threatened a stunning score but he was scythed down by a tremendous tackle by Lawrence Elliott. Having that taste of moderate success the hosts looked probable scorers on the half hour when Number 8 Andrew Knowles was hauled down with the line at his mercy. It was a very temporary stay of execution for Sutton. From the ensuing scrum the ball was transferred to the left where winger Gabriel Jordan had time and space to score. Despite the Lewis Bunton conversion failing on the wind Beckenham led 5-0.

Excellent pressure from the Black & Whites at the restart gave them an advantageous lineout on the host's 22. The scenario improved when Beckenham conceded a penalty that was kicked into the corner. Initially the Kent forwards splendidly drove back the Surrey pack. However, a secondary Sutton surge saw the visiting forwards advance towards the line. Then play was halted by the shrill blast of the whistle and the referee not only awarded Sutton & Epsom a penalty try but also he flourished a yellow card to captain Richard O'Keefe to reduce the host's, who now trailed 7-5, to 14 men. The Balmoral Avenue men made light of the numerical deficiency and soon regained the lead. S&E failed to deal with a bobbling ball near their 22. From the scrum the home team struck down the flank with an arcing run followed by an inside pass to scrum half Craig Thomson who went through untouched to score. Lewis Bunton's successful strike concluded the first half with Beckenham leading 12-7 despite the wind and being a player down on the naughty step.

With the Beckenham coaching contingent imploring greater dynamism from their charges one contemplated that the collective noun for a group of coaches should be a 'Frustration' of coaches. Meanwhile in the visiting camp the message would have highlighted that the numerous visits to the opposition 22 had garnered only a solitary try whereas their opponents had been far more clinical with a couple of scores. The Balmoral Avenue faithful must have viewed their team as slight favourites as they had both the lead and the wind but they knew success would only come with an improved performance in the second half.

From the restart the hosts went in search of their next score. They upped the pace and ferocity and forced an error from the visitors when their scrum, on their line, came under considerable pressure. Beckenham looked to be mimicking S&E when they dropped the ball but rather than being fly-hacked to safety it fell into attacking hands. With commendable vision a long bouncing pass reached Matt Lovell in splendid isolation for him to score with ease. Lewis Bunton added to the growing lead with the conversion for 19-7. Moments later the Kent men looked likely to score a marvellous try as they swept down the pitch exhibiting superb support play but scrambling Sutton denied them a spectacular score.

S&E brought on their bench, Messrs Boaden, Hilton and Munford as they sought to hold out under their posts. The hosts conceded a free kick that was taken quickly by Matt Whitaker and in a flash he had relieved the siege and was crossing the halfway line. With the hour rapidly approaching Sutton were indebted to a wonderful solo effort from flanker Dan Jones who showed great pace and nimble footwork to score. Freddy Bunting nonchalantly added the extras to put his team back into the contest as they entered the final quarter trailing by 19-14. Elation became deflation from the restart. Failure to catch the kick led to the ball being deflected forward and giving away a hideous offside penalty as the approaching ball was as irresistible as an ice-cold lager on a sweltering summer afternoon. Lewis Bunton punished the error as he chipped over the penalty for a 22-14 lead that meant the visitors needed two scores to avoid defeat.

Lewis Bunton now sensibly used the wind to keep Sutton at arm's length by pinning them in their 22 with well-placed kicks. S&E were chasing the game and conceded a kickable penalty but Beckenham went in search of the bonus point try. Though their bravery went unrewarded as they lost the attacking lineout they had their reward in time added on. Gabriel Jordan scored his second try by demonstrating great strength in contact to break the tackle and then notable determination to run 30 metres straining every muscle to score with tacklers hanging onto his frame. Lewis Bunton bisected the uprights from the touchline for 29-14. There was time for one more frustrating visit to the host's line for the persevering visitors but the lammergeyers had been hovering over the Sutton carcass for a while and the final whistle put the visitors out of their misery on a frustrating afternoon for them.

Beckenham deservedly won this encounter outscoring S&E by 4-2 in the try count. From the outset their pack had the upper hand in the set scrum despite an early departure of the influential Rimarni Richards. The brothers Caddy impressed in the midfield whilst the educated boot of Lewis Bunton kept Sutton in their half in the second period once an 8-point lead had been established. Credit must also be given to the host's dogged defence in the first half that frustrated the visitors' attack that could not get into top gear. The clinical finishing by the home team was the ultimate difference between two evenly-matched outfits.

For Sutton & Epsom Dan Jones put in his best performance for the 1st XV and his stunning solo score was a just reward for a tireless effort in the best traditions of openside flankers. It is easy to take Matt Whitaker for granted as he approaches his 200th appearance but his uncanny habit of gathering the ball at eight from a retreating pack and still getting over the gain line is an invaluable commodity. Though the tempo and ferocity of the contest went up a notch or two in the second half it was the rather flat performance, in contrast to Week 1, in the first period that scuppered the Black & Whites in this match. In terms of possession and territory they should have led at the interval but instead turned around with a 5-point deficit which proved to be a significant obstacle to success.

The Black and Whites return to Rugby Lane to take up the challenge of Old Reigatians who were most impressive 38-21 winners in the corresponding fixture last season. They will hope, no doubt, to recapture the sparkling form from the opening fixture and return to winning ways. Sutton & Epsom

Elliott, Watkins, Scott, Bibby, Mohr, Bunting ©, Lovatt, Mount, Gordon, Gibson, Tame, McTaggart,

Rea, Jones & Whitaker.
Replacements: Boaden, Hilton, & Munford.
Beckenham
Kennedy, Lovell, J. Caddy, L. Caddy, Jordan, Bunton, Thomson, Baker, Willden, Richards,
Latouche, Moran, Keefe ©, Stapleton & Knowles.
Replacements: Hatfield, Bernard-Moore & Feldhaus-Davies.

A hat-trick of wins for Epsom and Ewell FC

30 September 2024



Tooting & Mitcham United 0-2 Epsom and Ewell FC. Combined Counties League – Premier Division South. Saturday 14th September 2024.

After a horrible start to the season with five straight League defeats, it appears that we have now turned the tide as we recorded our third win in a row, all of which have come without conceding a single goal. This 2-0 win at Tooting & Mitcham United's Imperial Fields was arguably the best all round performance under Warren Burton's reign, as we nullified any home threat in the opening half an hour before going on to take control of the remaining sixty minutes and leaving the mostly home crowd of 177 severely subdued by the final whistle.

As always, there are some good stats we can pull out of this fine victory. This was the first win for our club on this day since a 6-0 home London League win over Carshalton Athletic in 1938, and it was also our first ever away win on 14th September in our history. Additionally, this was our fourth visit to play Tooting & Mitcham United since they left Sandy Lane and they have yet to beat us there. Finally, the last time we recorded three straight League wins without conceding was in January 2020.

We made two changes to the line up from Saturday's late win at Camberley Town with Callum Wilson being replaced by Stefan Aiwone and Luke Taylor replacing the injured Axel Kodjo. For the home side, under the Management of former Salt Jamie Byatt and Club Captain Alex Penfold, we came up against two other former Salts in the starting line-up in Mario Quiassaca and Toby McKimm.

The opening exchanges were slightly in favour of the home side, but consisted mainly of long range efforts clearing our crossbar. Toby Young blocked an early strike that looked like it was on target, but by and large our keeper Dan O'Donovan had very little to do between the posts. We may have been nullifying the home attacks, but weren't creating too much of our own to start with, but that all changed just after the half hour mark when Ali Fofahan did well down the left before pulling the ball back to Carl Oblitey whose powerful shot from twelve yards was kept out well by McKimm. This heralded the start of a good spell for us and Adam Green cleverly set up Luke Miller down the left, where his pull back to Oblitey was also struck on target, although he was denied by McKimm again.

A Green corner bounced off the top of the Tooting & Mitcham crossbar and away, and whilst the home side forced some corners too, ours looked more dangerous. McKimm dropped a deep delivery at the feet of Aiwone, but was able to collect the loose ball before our man had realised what was happening just behind him. Then Ethan Brazier got away on the overlap and his right wing cross was met by the head of Oblitey who saw the ball tipped over the bar by McKimm. I don't think the header was going in, but it could have gone anywhere if it had struck the bar, which it looked like it might, so it was an important intervention by the home keeper. Our opponents fashioned a couple of dangerous moves just before the break, but Kionte Gillfillian-Waul was there in time to clear a ball in from the left before it would have been tapped in at the far post. Then a short corner and delivery to the near post was headed just wide of O'Donovan's right hand post, but it would have been harsh had we gone in trailing at half time, which ended goalless.

We had completed the opening forty-five minutes in the ascendancy, even though our failure to score in the first half has now been extended to eleven matches; one short of our club record set in 1981/82. Still, the players had only been back on the field for just ninety seconds when we broke through. Fofahan sent an aimless looking throw towards Oblitey, who was well marked, but he out-jumped two defenders to head the ball back to Green. He then gave the ball back to Fofahan out on the touchline, from where he ran at goal, beating a man on the way and then drilling a low shot just inside McKimm's right hand post from the edge of the area in the 47th minute.

O'Donovan had to make a fairly comfortable save from distance, but we were soon back on the attack and in the 57th minute we extended our lead after one of our corners wasn't properly cleared and the ball pinged around in the penalty area before striking Fofahan and looping up kindly for Oblitey to nod the loose ball past McKimm from just four yards to claim the goal his performance deserved and to give us a decisive two goal cushion.

Although the scoring was finished for the day, we continued to press. On the hour Miller put Green through on the left, but McKimm was out quickly to block his shot on goal with Taylor firing the rebound wide from just inside the area. Then Green picked up what looked like a harsh yellow card, although it might have been for persistent fouls. From their subsequent free kick, a deep delivery was headed back into the path of a striker, but from twelve yards he scuffed his shot and the grateful O'Donovan was able to make the straightforward save.

We should have scored a third goal after Gillfillian-Waul and Fofahan combined well on the left, with the delivery being side-footed wide by Green from only eight yards before Fofahan intercepted a pass moments later and set up Oblitey who laid the ball into the path of Miller whose powerful shot was directed straight at McKimm, who blocked it up and away.

The game started to get a little niggly and a couple of yellow cards were waved in the direction of frustrated home players for lunges and their day was summed up around ten minutes from time with a shot on goal that was so high it cleared the stand roof. If you've been to Imperial Fields, you'll realise how high that is!

I've referred before to there being very few substitutions in recent matches, and again we went for over 80 minutes with the starting eleven, but we made a couple in the closing minutes with both scorers being taken off in order and being replaced by Ethan Nelson-Roberts and Sean Anderson respectively. Nelson-Roberts then sent over a left wing cross, but his delivery was just ahead of Miller and he couldn't keep the shot on target. In the final minute of injury time Anderson sent over a good deep cross and Miller's header was inches away, nestling in the side netting.

It didn't matter though and after five minutes of injury time the whistle blew to confirm a very strong performance from our team. There was more good news today as our former Manager Adrian Hill was present at the game and was able to confirm at the age of 79 that his health is a lot better than it was a couple of years ago. He looked much stronger after going through some difficult days, as indeed did our team!

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Ethan Brazier, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Toby Young, Stefan Aiwone, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Luke Taylor, Ali Fofahan

Subs: Ethan Nelson-Roberts for Fofahan (84), Sean Anderson for Oblitey (87)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Seven-race card tips for Epsom Thursday

30 September 2024



Epsom Racecourse hosts its penultimate meeting of the Summer on Thursday with a seven-race card for punters heading to the track.

Racing gets underway at 2.00pm with a novice stakes in class four before the action comes to a close at 5.22pm with a nine-runner handicap in class five.

*Read below to discover the latest tips and meeting preview for Epsom's card on Thursday courtesy of BoyleSports, who offer the latest **horse racing odds** throughout the season.*

The opening contest on the Epsom card (2.00) sees a field of seven head to the start for the seven furlong handicap in class four, with the two-year-old's taking centre stage in the opener. Luna Girl was a €95,000 purchase as a yearling for trainer Richard Hannon and ticks plenty of boxes on paper making her debut here. Bold Impact for the Ralph Beckett teams also makes plenty of appeal, a thrice-race maiden who has been beaten as an odds-on favourite twice but could go one place better at Epsom this time around.

Race two on the card (2.35) is a seven furlong handicap in class four and a good field of 15 will be taking it on. Red Mirage was a winner at Catterick in April and followed up with a third in a Chester handicap so is a big player here 1lb lower in the weights. He should see off the inform Roscioli, a winner at Salisbury last month and a very good second of 11 in a Lingfield handicap three weeks ago.

Nine runners will head to the start for the class five handicap over the one mile and two furlong trip to mark race three on Epsom's card (3.10). Imperial Cult gets the nod here for trainers Rachel Cook and John Bridger, only narrowly denied in his handicap bid over this course and distance last month having landed back-to-back all weather wins at Lingfield. Mrembo rates the main danger if she can handle the expected softer conditions at Epsom as she has shown preference for better ground than this previously.

A competitive class four handicap is race four of the afternoon (3.45) with ten runners set to tackle the one mile and four furlong distance. Enochdhu gets the very slight edge here, the slow ground expected to be very much in his favour after a disappointing outing on a faster surface at Kempton last week when he was a disappointing fifth of seven. Of his rivals, Haliphon rates the main danger, the Ian Williams runner arriving off the back of a win at Haydock last time out just a week ago.

Dubawi Time looks very much the one to beat in race five of the meeting (4.20) having been bang in-form prior to flopping at Chelmsford last time around where he didn't appreciate the step up in trip so is back down at a more comfortable distance heading to Epsom, while race six (4.50) can go the way of Chips And Rice, who is in good order for trainer James Fanshawe despite being hampered in-running last time out at this track.

Finally, the card comes to a close with the class five handicap for three-year-old's at 5.22 over the extended mile trip. Preference in the finale heads the way of Tribal Chief for trainer David Menuisier, landing a career-best when winning a ten-runner Kempton handicap last month and has a very progressive profile to boost his chances. Crimson Spirit is a previous course winner and was second at Epsom on his last spin so clearly has a liking for the track and rates the chief threat so can fill out the second spot.

Epsom selections - Thursday

2.00 - Luna Girl

2.35 - Red Mirage

3.10 - Imperial Cult

3.45 - Enochdhu

4.20 - Dubawi Time

4.50 - Chips And Rice

5.22 - Tribal Chief

Image: Credit Paul. CC BY 2.0

Sutton and Epsom Rugby off to a flying-start

30 September 2024



Sutton & Epsom RFC opened their 2024-25 league account against Old Colfeians, on Saturday 7th September, over whom they had completed an impressive double last season. There were nine changes in personnel from the last time the Black & Whites ran out at Rugby Lane in the concluding fixture against Reeds Weybridge. Among the multiple changes were six debutants: Arun Watkins on the wing; Finlay Scott and Adam Bibby in the centres; Pete Gordon at hooker; and Callum Hilton and Josh Rea ready to come off the bench. It very much had the feel of a new beginning for the Surrey outfit, with not a single player in the same position as in the curtain-raiser from last season. When the final whistle blew, the new-look XV had surpassed all expectations with a thrilling 50-7 victory.

Captain Bunting kicked off the campaign, and after ten minutes it was the hosts who opened the scoring. Pouncing on a clearance that failed to make touch, Sutton advanced into the opposition 22. Debutant hooker Pete Gordon exploited the blindside to race home untouched. Freddy Bunting added the extras for a 7-0 lead. As S&E dominated the early exchanges, the visitors' task became harder when winger Estefan Ellis was awarded a yellow card for a high tackle. The visitors, now a man down, were swiftly punished. Bunting kicked into the corner, and from the platform of the attacking lineout, Rob Hegarty forced his way over from short yardage. The conversion failed, but Sutton & Epsom held a useful 12-0 lead at the end of the first quarter.

The Rugby Lane team pressed hard to maximise their numerical advantage, gathering the restart and running the ball back with interest. Soon, winger Jordan Huie was threatening to add another score. The pack rumbled remorselessly forward before the ball was spun out to Gareth O'Brien, who jinked, stepped, and stretched out to touch down for a try. Freddy Bunting slotted over the kick for 19-0. The visitors were restored to their full complement, but the card had cost them 12 points. Old Colfeians struggled to gain a foothold in the contest, as errors and penalties frustrated their rhythm and gifted territory to the eager hosts. As the interval approached, S&E had another 5-metre lineout. Once again, the forwards controlled the ball and pressured the line before a timely release to the backs offered Gareth O'Brien the opportunity to cross the whitewash again. Freddy Bunting celebrated the bonus point score with another conversion, making it 26-0.

Sutton made personnel changes as debutants Rea and Hilton replaced Jones and Hilton. In the generous time allowed for stoppages, Colfeians started to find their feet and pressed for a morale-boosting score before the break. However, the Black & Whites’ resolute defence neutralised the attacks, and the sides turned around with the hosts enjoying an impressive 26-0 lead. It was clear that the men from Horn Park would need an early score in the second period to initiate a comeback and try to sow the seeds of doubt in the confident Sutton squad.

Any hope for the visiting supporters of an early score was denied by a combination of Sutton’s intensity in defence and Colfeians’ mounting error count. S&E replaced Pete Gordon with Dan Jones as Lawrence Elliott came off the bench to swap with Adam Bibby. As the final quarter approached, it was Sutton & Epsom who recorded try number five. Arun Watkins reacted fastest to a loose ball and burst through a gap to score his first try for the home team. Freddy Bunting made it four from five as the lead stretched to 33-0.

With the score and the clock against them, the Colfeians’ mountainous task was approaching Everest-like proportions. However, five minutes later, a flicker of light emerged from the abyss as Captain Andy O’Malley, carrying a couple of Sutton tacklers on his back, scored. Ryan Napper provided the conversion, making it 33-7. Sutton’s fatalists were soon relieved when, minutes later, a familiar electrifying break by Dan Jones gifted Freddy Bunting a try. However, to the surprise of many, the usually reliable kicker saw his effort drift wide, leaving the score at 38-7.

Unfortunately, scrum-half Laurence Wise was forced to depart with a shoulder injury after a sterling performance as the game entered the period that Mr Ben Stewart’s watch deemed necessary. There was still plenty of time for the Rugby Lane crowd to enjoy a brace of tries from debutant centre Finlay Scott. The first, an unconverted effort, followed two breaks, and Scott was on hand as the beneficiary. The second came after Colfeians’ scrambling defence conceded a penalty try and collected a yellow card. A precise cross-field kick opened up the defence for the final try. Normal service was resumed as Freddy Bunting bisected the uprights for a 50-7 win.

There was an air of almost uncomfortable optimism before the kick-off at Rugby Lane, as pre-season had gone well, and there was evident intensity in defence and improved continuity between the forwards and backs. Lest one forget, S&E had conceded an uncomfortable 598 points last league campaign, and as the legendary coach of the University of Alabama football team, Bear Bryant, wisely stated: “Offence wins games... defence wins championships.” However, few would have expected Sutton to break two all-time league records. Not only did they eclipse their previous points total of 49 against Bedford Athletic in 2018 by scoring 50, but they also surpassed the 31-point winning margin of their 2005 45-14 thrashing of Gosport & Fareham. What was most impressive was that the Black & Whites had integrated numerous new combinations at half-back and in the centres, with a debutant hooker in Pete Gordon. For a delighted coaching staff, this performance must bode well for the rest of the season. For the unfortunate Old Colfeians, it was one of those days where things simply did not go right. The first game of the season should never be a barometer for the whole fixture list, as numerous hurdles, from weddings to injuries, can distort the true picture.

The campaign will continue next weekend, Saturday 14th September, with a trip to Balmoral Avenue, where Sutton enjoyed one of their finest games of the last campaign, defeating the then-league-leaders Beckenham 26-22 on an afternoon notable for extraordinary winds.

Sutton & Epsom: O’Brien, Watkins, Scott, Bibby, Huie, Bunting ©, Wise, Boaden, Gordon, Gibson, Glanville, McTaggart, Pulvirenti, Jones & Hegarty.
Replacements: Hilton, Rea & Elliott.

Old Colfeians: Edwards, Chapman, Sleep, Griffiths, Ellis, Napper, Spaczil, Rameaux, Holland-Oliver, Whicello, O’Malley ©, T. Walker, M. Walker, Carter & Gray.
Replacements: Seva, Cunningham & Ramdhan.

Photo credit: Robin Kennedy

91st minute strike wins for Epsom and Ewell FC

30 September 2024



Camberley Town 0-1 Epsom and Ewell FC. Combined Counties League – Premier Division South. Saturday 7th September 2024

In my preview for this match, I wrote that on this day in history we had played a club record of 21 matches without a draw, but that sequence came under serious threat at Krooner Park where we required a 91st minute winner from Ali Fofahan to break the stalemate and clinch all three points with the only goal against Camberley Town.

On a personal note, this was my thirty-fourth visit to Camberley Town’s ground, and the 66th time I had watched these two teams do battle. These clubs have now met each other on 95 occasions, which by some distance makes the Krooners our most regular opponent. However, it has been a long time since we had been this superior against them, as the last dozen or so results hadn’t been great, with exception of a 2-1 win here last February. More relevantly, this win was our second in a row and also our second clean sheet in a row, which we had not achieved in the League since October of 2022.

Warren Burton made just one change from the eleven that defeated Chipstead on Saturday with Fofahan returning to the starting line up on the left hand side of midfield after being absent on Tuesday. Stefan Aiwone made way, although he was unavailable for this match, so it isn’t clear whether he was injured, or indeed, whether he’d have made way for Fofahan had he actually been here! Kionte Gillfillian-Waul moved from the left wing to left back with Toby Young moving into the centre of defence as we unsurprisingly retained the same formation that had looked so solid against Chipstead.

The opening exchanges were fairly even as we kicked off heading up the Krooner Park slope. The hosts had a first chance as early as the eighth minute when Stan Jones ran onto a ball over the top of our defence, only for Gillfillian-Waul to get across and block his shot. Then Camberley’s Captain Regan Hitch got on the end of a Luis Hamblin free kick at the far post, but his header was easy enough for Dan O’Donovan to field without undue alarm. O’Donovan was looking confident after recording his first clean sheet for the club four days previously and was often out to claim the ball with minimal fuss.

Our first real opportunity came just after the twenty minute mark when Adam Green’s free kick was headed out by the first man to Axel Kodjo whose strike was not far wide of Ben Grummitt’s left hand post from twenty yards. This heralded the start of some good Epsom pressure and Gillfillian-Waul and Fofahan produced some good interplay, ending in a shot from the latter that was blocked by a defender, with Green’s follow-up being deflected wide. From the corner Green received the ball back and his shot from an angle was on target, only for another defender to get in the way.

Green appeared to be pulled back in the area, but the referee wasn’t interested, although Luke Miller was then fouled in a similar way just outside the area, which was given in our favour. However, Green’s free kick cleared the crossbar by about a yard. During this time though Kodjo picked up an injury and had to limp off, being replaced by Luke Taylor.

Grummitt punched clear a Salts corner which then led to a Camberley break, but Gillfillian-Waul did well to recover the situation before it got too serious. Our new signing has looked most impressive in recent weeks, particularly in the first half of matches, and it is almost easy to forget that Ethan Nelson-Roberts has been missing for these last three games. We also looked dangerous on the right wing with fit again Ethan Brazier linking well with Miller who sent a ball right into the danger area, where Taylor and Carl Oblitey were inches away from turning it into the empty net, although the Assistant’s flag was up for offside anyway.

Craig Dundas picked up a yellow card for kicking the ball away and we had one final scare in injury time when O’Donovan came out of his area to clear and instead of putting it in row Z, he struck it against Hamblin and was most fortunate to see the ball rebound off him and out for a goal kick. Moments later, he showed he had learned his lesson as he sent the ball flying way over the Krooner Park clubhouse as the referee blew the half time whistle!

This was our tenth match of the season and it is important to note that we haven’t scored in the first half of any of these matches! For those who love a stat, this is now our joint second longest run in club history, matched in 1972/73 and 1992/93 and only exceeded in 1981/82 when we went for twelve matches without scoring in the opening forty-five minutes. Strange really, as we had arguably the strongest team in modern times at that point, and matches against reigning non-League Champions Altrincham and Quadruple winners that season, Leytonstone and Ilford were both part of this twelve match run.

Going down the hill in the second half Louis Lindsay picked up a yellow card for a similar offence to that of Dundas in the first half, although Dundas then did it again moments later and despite the protests from the home team, he was fortunate indeed not to pick up what would have been one of the softest dismissals of his career. However, the game gradually began to tilt in our favour and although Fofahan and Hitch picked up yellow cards for the dictionary definition of “handbags” we were creating most of the pressure, but with one issue; we weren’t actually causing Grummit any trouble in his goal. In fact the hosts probably

should have taken the lead in the 68th minute when a left wing cross was flicked on to Hamblin at the far post, but he got it all wrong, spooning the ball over our bar from close range. Maybe emboldened by our escape, we were back on the attack soon after and Taylor made a good overlap on the right, although Oblitey was unable to get his header on target from Taylor's delivery.

The temperature of the game went up a few degrees in the 74th minute as a long ball down the right found Miller and his ball across goal was turned into the net from twelve yards by Fofahan, but celebrations were then muted by the raising of the offside flag. There were a few Epsom supporters in different places who thought the decision was a wrong one, but none were level with the incident, which the Assistant quite clearly was. However, a cringe worthy episode then followed as both our Vice-Chairman and Chairman, who were also out of line, both literally and metaphorically, were both clearly heard giving a lot of grief to the Assistant about his decision, followed by that feeble plaintive shout we've heard before of "we've got the video", almost as if they thought the referee would turn around and say, "you know what, thanks for this, you're right, I'll just allow the goal!" Memo to our people who really should know better, it won't happen, stop embarrassing yourselves and set a better example!

Fortunately, the incident didn't stop our momentum as we were in full flow by now although another contentious incident followed when Grummitt punched clear after a collision with his own player, only for the free kick to be awarded against us! Still we attacked and Oblitey sent his header from a Miller cross wide. O'Donovan had to be alert to come out of his area to head a break off, literally, with his head before Camberley sent a header wide at our far post. It would be their last opportunity and in the first minute of injury time Miller's low ball in struck Oblitey and fell kindly for Fofahan to stick the ball away at Grummitt's near post from eight yards out to register his first goal for our club and clinch the points.

Maybe the goal had a touch of fortune about it, but it was a deserved winner and we now sit in sixteenth position, level with the recently vanquished Chipstead, who only sit above us on goals scored. I'm still a bit puzzled about our lack of substitutions at present, with just three made in three matches, but the early season form that left us at the foot of the table has now been netted off with these two wins and to use a football analogy, we are back in the game. Saturday's trip to Tooting & Mitcham United; a team that haven't beaten us at home since they were playing at Sandy Lane, are on paper, a better team than Camberley Town and will provide a better idea of how good we are currently, but for now we are outside the relegation positions for the first time this season, which is pleasing to report!

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Ethan Brazier, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Toby Young, Callum Wilson, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Axel Kodjo, Ali Fofahan

Subs: Luke Taylor for Kodjo (29)

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