



Unflagging Bunting clinches victory at the end

4 December 2023



Sutton & Epsom RFC 21 Old Colfeians 17 Saturday 2nd December.

Old Colfeians arrived at Rugby Lane as the form team in the league with five victories on the spin. Meanwhile a resurgent Sutton & Epsom had won all their three November fixtures and were equally confident. Both squads were hit by injuries and illness with S&E giving a debut to Matt Symonds on the wing. The last time the Black & Whites played OCs in 2007 the Kent side managed to record the only blemish on James Clark's perfect season. Fixtures between the two clubs go back 50 years and in the league era the matches have always been keenly contested and Saturday was no exception with Sutton winning 21-17.

There was a serious risk that the freezing weather might sabotage the game but a moderately milder morning, temperatures being above zero, meant that the crowd would not be disappointed. Freddy Bunting set the game in motion and the visitors immediately demonstrated their superlative form with the opening score after five minutes. Having spun the ball wide to both flanks the forwards took over in the 22. Phase after phase they remorselessly advanced under the posts until prop Tom Rameaux powered over. Chris Harris added the simple conversion for a 7-0 lead. In the early exchanges the powerful pack of the visitors initially held the upper hand in the set scrum but the host's lineout was more efficient and also disrupted the Colfeians ball. Both sets of backs looked threatening when they had possession and expectations of a closely fought encounter, that had been anticipated before the kick off, were being fully justified.

In the closing moments of the first quarter Sutton had an attacking lineout. Josh Pulvirenti took the ball and the pack advanced. The referee noted an indiscretion by the visitors but he played the advantage and was soon raising his arm to signal Rob Hegarty's try. Freddy Bunting's conversion cleared the uprights but just drifted wide as S&E trailed 5-7. The game was being played at a furious pace with both sides tenaciously contesting the breakdown forcing turnovers and errors. On the half hour S&E had another opportunity with a 5-metre lineout. The ball was safely secured and Matt Whitaker exploded from the pack powering over the line with would be tacklers hanging off him. Normal service resumed as Freddy Bunting added the extras to put his team into a 12-7 lead.

Old Colfeians reply was immediate and the Sutton lead short lived. With commendable adventure they ran a penalty from halfway and advanced to the S&E 22. The jinking Chris Harris took over to score a stylish solo effort. He was unable to add the conversion to his try but the Kent team were level at 12-12. Before the interval the Sutton back division that had already endured three changes before the start had another set back as Steve Munford was forced off through injury to be replaced by the versatile Jack Howes. The momentum had shifted to the visitors and Chris Harris came off his wing to create the overlap and the OCs surged from their 22 but the Sutton cover forced a knock on. The half concluded with the Black & Whites pressing hard but undone by an error in the opposition 22 and there was no further addition to the score and the sides turned around at 12 apiece.

Sutton & Epsom were fast out of the blocks in the second half from a lineout it was a vintage run from Matt Whitaker carrying the ball 40 metres. Sadly, the talismanic eight had outrun his support but soon had the consolation of a penalty. From a central position near halfway Freddy Bunting thumped the ball between the posts for a 15-12 lead. Once again the visitors responded with an assault on the Sutton 22 with the sidestepping Chris Harris to the fore. Alex Mount conceded a penalty but immediately made amends by winning a turnover from the quickly taken play. S&E replaced Tom Boaden with Callum Gibson, who is a man of considerable 'avoirdu pois' whose 140kg frame might turn a deck-chair to match-wood, to add ballast to the front row. In addition their lineout with the catch and drive was becoming a potent weapon.

The weather began to deteriorate as not only did the temperature plummet but also a fog began to descend and gradually envelop proceedings. As Colfeians sought parity they probed the 22 and were awarded a penalty for a Ghumra knock on. Chris Harris went for the three-point option but hooked his kick. In stark contrast a couple of minutes later Sutton were awarded a penalty on the halfway line on the angle with a distance in excess of 50 metres. With a truly magnificent strike Freddy Bunting bisected the posts. The strike was greeted with rapturous applause from the crowd as much for the 18-12 lead as for the opportunity to warm their hands.

As had been the case throughout the match the men from Horn Park responded at once in the grand manner. Winning a kickable penalty they opted to kick for the corner. They won the lineout and after sustained pressure the ball was transferred to hooker Daniel Orubo who dismissively broke through the tacklers to score. With the conversion going awry there was now only a solitary point in the game with Sutton & Epsom holding the advantage at 18-17. With the game entering the final quarter and so finely poised the hosts now played their best rugby of the match. With a slender lead the key is to play in the opposition's half and they proceeded to dominate the territorial battle.

The game opened up and Sutton scrum half Chris Ballard became more influential making sniping breaks and playing at a high tempo. From one counter the 9 won a penalty and took the quick tap which instigated multiple attacks from the Rugby Lane XV. Colfeians defensive resolve was impressive as they managed to halt Kyren Ghumra in the corner and the hosts were held up over the line. S&E were then gifted a great chance by a careless knock in the 22. From the scrum Matt Whitaker headed for glory. Once more the Horn Park men stood firm and Sutton were held up over the line. The visibility deteriorated and the distant Clubhouse was shrouded in fog. A shrill blast of Tobias Whitney's whistle indicated another penalty for Sutton. Freddy Bunting stepped up and hammered it home for a 21-17 lead with a couple of minutes of normal time remaining.

Up to this point Sutton had been exemplary on receipt of the restarts but at this vital stage they gave away a penalty. The visitors, conscious of the clock, turned down a shot at goal. Now the anxiety of the crowd as much as the fog descended on Rugby Lane as they knew another Colfeians try would see them take the lead. As they tried to work an overlap on the 22 Kyren Ghumra made a priceless interception. From the subsequent Sutton scrum the hosts failed to find touch and invited more pressure on themselves but forced a knock on with thunderous tackle. S&E conceded a penalty from the scrum and OCs turned the screw by opting for another scrum. Their followed a commendable moment of tactical acumen as the home team replaced their hooker with a prop. The beefed up Black & White pack drove their opponents off the ball and were awarded a penalty which was greeted by the loudest cheer of the day. Bunting kicked to touch, the lineout was secured and the clock was run down before the ball was kicked to the grandstand. Sutton had won this epic encounter 21-17.

The excellence of Freddy Bunting's placekicking had made the vital the difference. The Colfeians powerful forwards with the outstanding Number 8 Conor Gray had an influential afternoon with Chris Harris their creative hub in the backs. However, Sutton & Epsom played with steely determination that bodes well for the rest of the season. Once again they raised their game in the second half with their collective desire epitomised by debutant Matt Symonds' nerveless display. This is the midpoint of the season and the reverse fixtures begin next Saturday with a trip to Balmoral Avenue to take on leaders Beckenham. Back in September on that remarkably hot day the Kent side won 42-41. It will be another stern test for the Black & Whites especially as their hosts will no doubt be smarting from having just lost to bottom of the table Sidcup.

Sutton & Epsom:

Gareth O'Brien, Kyren Ghumra, Steve Munford, Ciaran Mohr, Matt Symonds, Freddy Bunting ©, Chris Ballard, Tom Boaden, Chris Farrell, Alex Mount, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, George London, Josh Pulvirenti & Rob Hegarty.

Replacements: Callum Gibson, Ben Tame & Jack Howes.

Old Colfeians:

Ryan Napper, Louis Baker, Miles Jones, Victor Spaczil, Chris Harris, Will Smith, Jed Wylie, Tom Rameaux, Daniel Orubo, Lloyd Evans, Andy O'Mailey, Leo Cunningham, Ethan Collins, Jake Carter & Conor Gray.

Replacements: Bamidele Agorioge, Frank Blythe & Ollie Burkett.

Image courtesy Robin Kennedy

Salts fail to clear foggy condition

4 December 2023



Alton 2-0 Epsom & Ewell FC. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 2nd December 2023.

"Sorry you had to see that" said our young Captain Harvey Keogh as a dejected Epsom team came off the pitch after competing against an Alton side who were in all honesty, no better than we were, but found a way to score twice midway through the second half to claim the points on offer.

The irony of his comment was that most of the spectators really didn't see that much of the match, as the foggy conditions made the contest look like a throwback from the old pre-war days when fog was the only reason you would ever get a match postponed for. The conditions were no one's fault of course, but as a result of them, the contest was lacking something in the way of atmosphere and this seemed to project onto the players too, as it must have felt like they were playing a match in an empty ground, even though the attendance was a very respectable 142, despite the bitterly cold winter's afternoon. Ultimately though, our first visit to the redeveloped Anstey Park since May 1977 ended exactly the same way as our last did with a 2-0 defeat.

With Ollie Thompson joining Tommy Williams on the suspended list for this one match, Nick Wilson found himself playing in the back four, just a week after he had taken positions both in midfield and in goal! Ethan Nelson-Roberts moved into the back four in place of Ethan Brazier for whom George Owusu came in further forward. Finally, Jaan Stanley started ahead of Luke Miller who would join the action later.

I have to be honest here and apologise to our opponents. My report, as our regulars will be aware, is compiled from behind our goal so it was really hard to see, let alone describe many of Alton's attacks, although it's fair to say that in the first half there weren't many by either side. Nick Inwugwu was first to try his luck for us as he advanced towards the edge of the area, but after having made good progress with his right foot, he struck well wide with his weaker left foot. In response the home side sent a shot straight at Keogh in the 16th minute and another effort wide from a good position five minutes later. A further strike from a decent position also failed to trouble our keeper and the teams went off at the break with just one shot on target between them to show for their work.

Clearly our Manager Steve Springett had seen enough by the break as just seven minutes into the second half he replaced our entire front three, so Miller came on alongside Sirak Negassi and debut boy Yannick Modeste Monga Ebwa. To be fair though, these three had a similar lack of success against an Alton team that were very well drilled at the back. Negassi sent a shot wide from a half cleared Rory Edwards free kick, but as we reached the hour mark it looked like this match was going to end with the goalless draw it deserved.

But the home team had other ideas and took charge. In the 61st minute they had an attempt headed off the line by an Epsom defender, but we didn't heed the warning and two minutes later, a ball in from the right was converted at close range by Perry Coles. Three minutes later it was game over as a right wing cross was headed low past Keogh from a few yards by Pat Cox.

Very little happened in the final twenty minutes with exception of a Tijani Eshilokun header from a Nelson-Roberts cross and a speculative Wilson attempt from twenty-five yards that went high and wide. We had a glimmer of light six minutes from time when an injury to an Alton player left them down to ten men, as they had used all five of their substitutes, but the player returned after a few minutes on the sidelines and the chance was gone. In fact, the home side were denied from extending their lead by a low injury time save from Keogh.

It is fair to say that whilst conditions were awkward and our opponents difficult to break down, this was one of our weaker performances in recent weeks and I would imagine our boys would probably agree with that assessment. Certainly our Manager felt that way as evidenced by the triple substitution just after the halfway mark. Additionally, we are now on a run of just one win and one draw in seven matches. However, we have an intriguing and winnable set of fixtures coming up against teams in the lower half apart as we approach Christmas, including the pivotal trip to Colliers Wood United, and we need to start getting a few more points in the near future. Performances, particularly from an attacking standpoint will need to improve, but no one watching this match will be surprised to read that.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh (c), Nick Inwugwu, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Thompson Adeyemi, Reece Tierney, Nick Wilson, George Owusu, Tijani Eshilokun, Tino Carpene, Rory Edwards, Jaan Stanley

Subs: Luke Miller for Owusu (52), Yannick Modeste Monga Ebwa for Carpene (52), Sirak Negassi for Stanley (52)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Penalty shoot out in normal time....

4 December 2023



Abbey Rangers 2-1 Epsom & Ewell. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 25th November 2023.

In a match decided by three penalties and some rather odd officiating, we were extremely unfortunate to fall to a 91st minute defeat in a match where we were the equal of our top four opponents on their own patch at Addlestone Moor.

We made three changes to the starting eleven following our narrow defeat against AFC Croydon Athletic. Manager Steve Springett didn't select himself for this match and Tommy Williams was suspended, so Nick Inwugwu and Ethan Charles-Brazier came in at the back while Nick Wilson came in for his first start since returning to our club and Jaan Stanley moved to the bench.

The opening exchanges were very even. An early bout of head tennis in our penalty area resulted in a header going just wide of the post, while in reply Rory Edwards produced a good run and low finish that was only a yard wide of the post from just outside the penalty area. Reece Tierney put an Edwards free kick over the bar, but in reality the first half hour contained little in the way of goal threat.

That changed in the 32nd minute when a clever little flick through from an Abbey Rangers player reached their number 15 whose close range volley was excellently kept out by Harvey Keogh and he then made another superb close range block a few minutes later from former Salt Daryl Cooper-Smith to keep us on level terms. We would take full advantage of this by earning a couple of corners and from the second of these, the ball fell back towards Ethan Nelson-Roberts who showed quick feet to elude his defender who brought him down in the area. The referee delayed his decision for a while and for a moment I thought it wasn't going to be given, but finally the whistle blew and Wilson tucked away the penalty high to the keeper's left in the 41st minute.

The half time lead was probably a little harsh on our opponents who had given as much as we had in that first half, but for a top four team, they had threatened us only rarely. They are in the top four for a reason though, and in the 50th minute Abbey pressed for an equaliser and got it when Ollie Thompson brought down Cooper-Smith from behind, picking up a yellow card. King put the penalty down the middle, but Keogh had already moved to his left and we were level at 1-1.

Just before the hour we had a fantastic opportunity as Nelson-Roberts, playing further forward this week, delivered a dangerous low ball into the six yard box, but from only a yard out Tijani Eshilokun was unable to get the ball over the line as the Abbey Rangers keeper made a fantastic stop from close range and then gathered the ball.

We then had one of the most bizarre incidents I have seen in a year or two and guess what, yes, the referee was being assessed! Our keeper was actually penalised in the 62nd minute for the crime of holding the ball for too long!! Leaving aside the fact that he hadn't been holding it for that long, insult was then added to injury after he threw the ball away and received a yellow card and after further discussion he was then sent to the sin bin! With no substitute keeper on the bench Wilson went between the posts, not for the first time in Epsom colours as he had been in goal last February at Hailsham Town when Toby McKimm had been harshly dismissed. Fortunately, the ten minutes passed uneventfully enough and Keogh was soon back on the field. Wilson joins a rare group of people who have scored a goal and played in goal in the same match, the last of which was Nathan Ayling at Frimley Green back in April 2014.

As we approached the closing stages of the match Thompson Adeyemi tried his luck from twenty yards with his left foot, requiring the Abbey keeper to make a good save low to his right. However, Abbey then broke away and in the 89th minute one of their players rounded Keogh and struck at goal. It was blocked on the line by Thompson, but what by? Obviously I was a long way from the incident, but the Assistant, standing some forty yards away and on the far side of the pitch was certain that he had seen something and following consultation with him, the referee issued a straight red card in our man's direction. Murdoch tucked away the penalty low to Keogh's right for what proved to be the winner in the 91st minute, but was it the right decision? According to Thompson as he walked past us just after being sent off, the ball hit him squarely on the forehead. Assuming this to be the case, it is really hard to accept the Assistant's view, particularly as it was from so far away. Thompson will also serve a one match suspension for this alleged offence.

There was time for the Abbey Rangers 7 to be sent to the sin bin after complaining about receiving a yellow card for a foul as we pushed for an equaliser, but we only had a minute left for play and were unable to take advantage of the ten v ten situation before the final whistle blew.

So Abbey Rangers extended their unbeaten run to twelve games and it has to be said that they certainly didn't deserve to see that run end here. However, compared to some of the other teams we have played recently like Farnham Town, Knaphill and AFC Croydon Athletic, Abbey didn't hurt us nearly as much and I felt we were well worth a draw from this match. To lose it in such disappointing circumstances is cruel, but I see some more points being picked up soon if we keep playing this way.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh (c), Ethan Charles-Brazier, Nick Inwugwu, Nick Wilson, Reece Tierney, Ollie Thompson, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Thompson Adeyemi, Tijani Eshilokun, Rory Edwards, Luke Miller

Subs: George Owusu for Miller (79), Jaan Stanley for Nelson-Roberts (81), Tino Carpena for Edwards (84)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Genuine victory on synthetic surface

4 December 2023



Cobham 16 **Sutton & Epsom** RFC 44. Saturday 18th November. Being the last league fixture in November the S&E squad had a rather Edwardian appearance as if they were members of the Epsom Amateur Dramatic Club cast preparing for a performance of 'Journey's End'. However, their Movember charitable generosity did not extend to the rugby pitch as they impressively defeated a more than capable Cobham XV by 44-16. On a gloomy afternoon blissfully free from precipitation Cobham kicked off the match on their pristine synthetic surface.

The hosts had amassed 140 points so far this campaign from their three home victories and were one of a trio of clubs on 27 points looking to close the gap on the top two of Beckenham and Battersea Ironsides. The Memorial Ground men made a confident start as their large, athletic and mobile forwards provided plenty of possession for their quicksilver backs. The home team's high tempo game was matched by excellent defence as Sutton and Epsom's best play was thwarted by an impenetrable wall on the opposition 22. The Fairmile Lane side pressed hard for an opening score as a vital mark five metres from the S&E line denied them a try. Moments later Cobham had the consolation of a scrummage penalty in front of the posts and Jonny Holmes opened their account for a 3-0 lead.

After fifteen minutes the hosts were finally rewarded for their early dominance with a try. Despite valiant defence on their line the Cobham pack would not be denied and hooker Andrew Murphy forced his way over from close-range. Though the conversion drifted wide the home team held an 8-0 advantage. For supporters of the Black & Whites there had been precious little attacking play to cheer but the restart provided them with their first try. The alert Chris Farrell gathered the loose ball and burst into the 22 and a few phases later Josh Pulvirenti exploded from the ruck to run in under the posts. Freddy Bunting chipped over the simplest of conversions to make it 7-8. A couple of minutes later Willem Ratu swooped on the ball and ran it in from 60 metres to score by the uprights. Captain Bunting did the necessary and S&E now led 14-8 at the end of the first quarter.

Cobham might have felt a tad aggrieved that the scoreboard did not reflect the balance of the game. To their credit they responded in the classical manner with a try of their own. A perfectly flighted kick descended from the leaden sky just outside the Sutton and Epsom 22 and Jordan Huie was greeted by the ball and an opponent. It was the hosts turn to scoop up the loose ball and punish the back-peddalling visitors as prop Luke Bliss burrowed his way over the line for the try. The extras were not added but the home team now trailed by a solitary point, 13-14. Sutton made early changes as Ben Tame and Tom Boaden replaced George London and Callum Gibson. The momentum of the match had shifted back in favour of the hosts as their swarming defence harried Garerth O'Brien and won another penalty in front of the posts. Jonny Holmes gratefully accepted the three points and Cobham held a 16-14 lead.

With 10 minutes remaining in the first half Sutton & Epsom enjoyed their best period of play. An impressive catch and drive from the lineout saw them advance to the line and force a penalty. The ball was kicked to the corner for the 5-metre lineout but there was to be no repeat of the forward efficiency and a knock on gave the hosts an opportunity to clear their lines. A lengthy clearance was skilfully trapped by Jordan Huie who ran the ball back and won a penalty. The irrepressible Bunting made it 17-16 for S&E. In the dying embers of the first period Cobham had a lineout on the Sutton 22 and the platform to edge ahead once more. However, Ewan McTaggart stole the ball to initiate a counterattack. The ball went wide and was twice kicked ahead and Lawrence Elliott was on hand to score in the corner. Freddy Bunting made the touchline conversion look anything but challenging and the referee blew his whistle and the teams turned around with Sutton & Epsom leading 24-16.

After a half of high quality rugby that had been most competitive from the first minute none of the assembled crowd would have risked a wager on the outcome as the game was very much in the balance. From the restart Cobham gathered the ball and launched a speculative Garry Owen that resulted in a mid-air collision on halfway and chaos. The ball was hacked forward as S&E struggled to control it until Willem Ratu touched down over his line. After that escape it was Sutton who were the first to open their account in the second period when they were awarded a scrummage penalty. Freddy Bunting knocked it over from 45 metres to extend the lead to 27-16.

The hosts then dominated territory and possession for the next ten minutes. Earlier in the season S&E's defensive frailties would have seen them conceding tries but the defence now on show was unrecognisable from those autumnal days. The tackling was ferocious and forced handling errors in an impressive collective show of cussed defiance. The next visit to the hosts' half resulted in another penalty and another long-range success for the boot of Bunting as the Rugby Lane men led 30-16 with the game in the final quarter.

As determined as the Cobham attacks were they were trumped by the excellence of the Sutton defence. The visitors not only halted the hosts in their tracks but were making turnovers and counterattacking with relish. With pace on both flanks and confidence in abundance the Black and Whites turned defence into attack. The Memorial Ground XV were equally resolute and threw everything at Sutton in an effort to get back into the game. A glimmer of hope was extinguished with another obliterating tackle by Jordan Huie in the corner. The winger then showed his attacking qualities by carrying the ball into the opposition half and won a penalty. Captain Bunting opted for the kick to the corner and he was rewarded

with a try. The 5-metre lineout was taken and the forwards muscled their way over the line and Ben Tame emerged as the scorer. Freddy Bunting caressed over the conversion for 37-16 and the Black & Whites had secured the bonus point for their fourth try.

Once again Chris Farrell regained the restart and initiated a thrilling Sutton attack. A crossfield kick was secured by Jordan Huie who strode towards the 22 and linked with Chris Ballard. The momentum was maintained by a superb piece of support running by lock Ewan McTaggart and the ball was spun wide to Willem Ratu who finished with aplomb in the corner. Freddy Bunting maintained his perfect kicking afternoon taking his personal tally to 19 points as his team lead by 44-16. In time added on there was still time for more thrills and spills. Once more a Cobham attack floundered on the Black & White wall in the S&E 22 and a devastating counter ensued. Freddy Bunting ran from his own half down the wing with deceptive pace that left the would be pursuer clutching a pulled hamstring. The Sutton 10 opted to run over the last defender rather than go round him and as he tumbled to the ground and juggled the ball the referee ruled a knock on as he popped the ball up to a supporting player. The game concluded in the Cobham half with no further addition to the score. Sutton had won 44-16 to record their second bonus point success on the road in consecutive weeks and make it three wins on the bounce.

This was by a margin the finest match of the Sutton season so far. The Cobham side from the first minute to the last carried a serious attacking threat. The front row triumvirate of Messrs Murphy, Bliss and Lippiatt were mightily impressive at the set piece. The home forwards carried with pace and aggression and the backs spread the ball well. However, the deciding factor in the contest was the excellence of the Sutton defence which not only stopped numerous attacks but forced errors and countered with great effect. It was truly a marvellous team performance with the side relishing their defensive duties as much as they enjoyed running with the ball. The second half effort to shut out the quality Cobham XV and to win it 20-0 was most impressive.

Next Saturday is another rest weekend and the campaign continues on 2 nd December when Old Colfeians visit rugby Lane for the 2pm kick off. It promises to be a splendid match as the visitors are enjoying a purple patch having won their last five fixtures. It will also be the 50 th anniversary of the first time the clubs met and their first league meeting since 2007.

Stella servant to local football passes

4 December 2023



Stella Lamont, Club President of **Epsom and Ewell FC**, passed away on Armistice Day 2023 at the age of 95. Born on September 1, 1928, Stella's association with the club spanned over fifty years. A devoted supporter since 1973, Stella initially joined the Committee in 1979, contributing significantly to the improvement of the Match Programme.

Throughout the '80s, she served as Press Secretary, and in 1993, under her guidance, the club won the prestigious "Special Category" programme award. Stella's dedication was further acknowledged in 1998 when she received a voluntary service award for 25 years of involvement with the Epsom and Ewell Boys League.

In 2003, Stella became the President of Epsom and Ewell FC, a position she held with pride. Despite facing health challenges, she remained actively engaged, taking on roles such as Membership Secretary and contributing to the match programme. Her lasting legacy includes her impact on local Boys football and the informative programmes she crafted with meticulous detail.

Stella's commitment endured, even as she faced declining health. In 2016, she received a long service award from the Surrey Football Association, a testament to her enduring influence. Stella's final years saw her contributing articles to the club's programme, showcasing her unwavering dedication.

Beyond her football involvement, a peculiar note in her history involved an appearance in a pop video, "We Stand Around" by I Ludicrous, filmed at the club's old ground. This charming anecdote reflects Stella's unexpected and lighthearted presence in the club's rich history.

As we bid farewell to Stella Lamont, her name will forever be remembered among those who shaped Epsom and Ewell FC into a close-knit family club. Rest in peace, Stella.

Salts succumb to athleticism

4 December 2023



Epsom & Ewell 2-4 AFC Croydon Athletic. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 18th November 2023.

A rather harsh 4-2 home defeat to AFC Croydon Athletic in our latest League match should have been the big story of the day, but regrettably we had another to report as a couple of hours before the match it was announced that our long-serving Club President Stella Lamont had passed away seven days previously at the grand age of 95 having completed twenty years in the role, having been appointed at the Annual General Meeting in 2003. As you would expect, the minute's silence (far more appropriate for a Committee member or supporter than applause) was impeccably observed and the focus returned to the football.

Our opponents had of course already won once at our ground this season when turning around a 3-1 deficit into a 4-3 League Cup victory and had strengthened since then with the addition of striker Louie Theophanous, who scored five goals a couple of weeks ago against Sheerwater. We made just the one change with Ethan Nelson-Roberts coming back into the line up at the expense of Nick Inwugwu. Despite no Premier League action taking place and many other matches being postponed it was disappointing to see an attendance of just 79 counted at the ground, particularly as we have been playing better in recent weeks.

Maybe we were affected by the sombre occasion at first, but either way we were a little slow out of the blocks in this match, although there was little of real danger for Harvey Keogh to deal with either. A couple of dangerous crosses into each box whizzed out the other side after failing to reach their intended targets before we lost the ball coming out of defence in the 12th minute. Fortunately the left wing cross into the danger area was then sent well over the bar by Olalekan Osideko from a good position.

It was a bitty start from both teams, with the visitors in particular struggling to keep the ball on the pitch, but we grew into it and Luke Miller was only just beyond the far post with a fifteen yard header as he met Jaan Stanley's cross, before Nelson-Roberts struck at goal, only for his powerful looking strike to hit team mate and Manager Steve Springett and rebound away to safety! Rory Edwards was next to try his luck from around fifteen yards and the ball took a slight deflection before David Boateng stuck out a leg and diverted the ball only just over his own crossbar from six yards. We were pressing for an opener at this stage with debutant AFC Croydon Athletic keeper Toby Fisher being kept busy, although Keogh had to make a low save on the half hour to keep out a shot from Osideko.

Regrettably, just as we were going into first half injury time a pass through our defence found Theophanous in space and he ran in and slotted the goal past Keogh from close range to open the scoring.

If that half time scoreline looked harsh, things then got worse in a hurry as we conceded two more goals in the 48th and 51st minutes to leave us facing a mountain to climb. The goals came in a similar manner with dangerous balls in from the right wing and close range finishes, although it transpired that the first of these goals was actually knocked in by one of our defenders with Brandon Pierrick registering their third goal. Keogh then made a low save from an angle with his feet as the visitors threatened to run away with things.

We made some substitutions, only for one of them, Nick Wilson to spend just five minutes on the pitch before he was sent to the sin bin for disputing an extremely harsh yellow card that had been brandished in the direction of Eshilokun. This appeared to be poor officiating and I was waiting to hear the comment from someone that "he's being assessed" which of course he was!

The ten men made a fight of it though and Eshilokun made a good run, only to drag the shot wide with teammate George Owusu in a better position, but I don't blame any of our strikers when they want to have a shot if they are in a good position. We then had another scare when Keogh was robbed and nearly conceded a fourth goal, but it came anyway in the 73rd minute after Pierrick received the ball on the left and his pull back was struck home by Newbay Haile with the aid of a slight deflection.

At 4-0 things were getting desperate. We pushed for a goal and Edwards appeared to be cluttered in the penalty area before Owusu then threw himself to the ground, picking up a yellow card for simulation as a result. However, he redeemed himself two minutes later after a Springett corner was flicked on by Eshilokun and the loose ball found its way through to Owusu who scooped the ball into the net from four yards out to reduce the deficit in the 78th minute.

The visitors sent a left wing cross over that clipped our bar on its way out, but we were getting on top now and Wilson was fouled as he broke away, earning a yellow card for his assailant before Owusu received a pass from Miller, but instead of returning the pass he chose to shoot and Fisher was untroubled by it. We did get a second goal in the 87th minute after a deep Edwards free kick resulted in a couple of collisions. Reece Tierney went up with Fisher and although there was contact, the referee felt there was no foul and with the visiting defence almost frozen, expecting a whistle for a foul, Nelson-Roberts nodded the loose ball over the line from a yard to make the score 4-2.

It was a grandstand finish as Owusu saw his next shot deflected just wide by Fisher's leg, before their new keeper made a fantastic save with his left foot to deny Edwards his first goal for the club and Thompson Adeyemi then sent his header over from a corner before Owusu then celebrated a "third" goal only to see the flag raised for offside.

We had finished quite strongly and in many ways it was a completely opposite ending to our previous meeting, but AFC Croydon Athletic had enough in the bank to see them over the line with that 4-2 score line and probably did deserve the points over the course of the ninety minutes, mostly for that blistering start to the second half when we had no answers, but football was of secondary importance to our club on this sad day.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh (c), Tommy Williams, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Steve Springett, Reece Tierney, Ollie Thompson, Luke Miller, Rory Edwards, Tijani Eshilokun, Thompson Adeyemi, Jaan Stanley

Subs: George Owusu for Stanley (54), Nick Wilson for Thompson (54), Nick Inwugwu for Williams (58)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Undiluted squash champions of Epsom

4 December 2023



Ebbisham Sports Club in Epsom is proud of its junior squash members, in particular several of its girls who regularly play in the Ladies Team competing against other clubs in the Surrey Leagues. **Maja Leese**, who turned 15 in May this year plays at Number 1 for the club's Ladies Team. Recently, Maja and two other Ebbisham girls - **Lara Krnic** and **Imogen Wood** - were all selected to represent Surrey as Numbers 1, 2 and 3 respectively for the 2023/24 Girls Under 17 team.

On the 12th November at Broxbourne Sports Club, Hertfordshire they competed against other counties in Stage 1 of the Junior Inter-County Championships where they emerged as runners-up in their group. All the juniors at Ebbisham have training at the junior club sessions, and are coached by our resident coach **Paul Steward**.

The Club was awarded both Epsom and Ewell and Surrey's "Sports Club of the Year" in 2009 and 2016. Its mission is to provide a sporting pathway for life, for all ages and abilities, from grassroots to elite level. Members can play racket sports at an affordable price and enjoy a sociable, healthy lifestyle, whether at a casual or competitive level - Ebbisham is a Club for life.

It is a friendly purpose-built club, open 362 days a year, with three dedicated courts each for badminton, squash & racketball and tennis. There is also a small warm-up gym area with a treadmill, indoor rower and a stationary bike. The Club has over 400 adult members and over 200 junior members drawn from all over the borough and beyond.

For more details see <https://ebbisham.mycourts.co.uk/index.asp>

Image: left to right Lara, Maja and Imogen

Madness at the Meadow

4 December 2023

Sandhurst Town 4-4 Epsom & Ewell. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Tuesday 14th November 2023.

A superb advert for the Combined Counties League took place on the excellent artificial surface at Bottom Meadow; the home of both Sandhurst Town and their larger neighbours Bracknell Town, as two fully committed teams shared eight goals in an all out attacking encounter that unfortunately spilled over at times and led to a pair of red cards as a result.

We made just the one change to the starting eleven from our win at Tooting & Mitcham United and this was enforced as Ethan Nelson-Roberts had issues reaching the venue. Luke Miller stepped up from the bench, while amongst the substitutes was the returning Nick Wilson, who was a part of our successful promotion side last season.

The home side opened proceedings with an early shot into the side netting but we were soon attacking at the other end with Tijani Eshilokun going close with a shot from the edge of the area after good work from Miller on the right. Miller then sent over a teasing cross that the extremely tall keeper Henry Pidgeon was just able to reach at the second attempt before Harvey Keogh then made the first save of the night as he was down well to make a stop that was then cleared. His next save in the 15th minute was an even better one as the referee played an excellent advantage and allowed Jose Sani to break through on goal but Keogh stood up well and blocked the shot from fairly close range.

However, Sani would only have to wait two minutes before opening his account as a left wing break was followed by a cross to the far post that was knocked in by the unmarked player from close range. We then had another worry when a dangerous ball was played in and Nick Inwugwu turned the ball out at the far post for a corner, although his clearance



was about a foot wide of the post which was a little too close for comfort!

At the other end, Miller was fouled on the edge of the area, although Steve Springett's free kick was just inches over the bar from a central position. We were building pressure though and a wayward back pass caused Pidgeon to concede a corner. From Springett's touch back Eshilokun delivered a near post delivery and Thompson Adeyemi's deft header from eight yards out went across Pidgeon and into the far corner to level things up in the 34th minute. We then took the lead just three minutes later when a ball towards the edge of the area was reached by Jaan Stanley, just ahead of the advancing Pidgeon. He nodded the ball past the keeper and was just able to get to the ball ahead of covering defenders to clip the ball over them into the net from a couple of yards out to register his fourth goal for the club, but his first in open play.

As we approached the break Keogh made two fantastic saves. Firstly, he got down well to save a powerful thirty yard free kick that threatened to zip past him on the wet surface and then in injury time he reacted well to tip a dipping shot over the bar at full stretch. We went in at the break with a narrow 2-1 lead but the knowledge that we would surely need more goals if we were to win this match.

We opened up the second half well and Eshilokun's free kick deflected over the bar for a corner. From the Edwards delivery Pidgeon jumped to claim the ball, but Adeyemi jumped in front of him and nodded the ball just inside the post from three yards out to give us a 3-1 lead in the 48th minute. Things got better still six minutes after that as Stanley made a run on the left and sent over a delightful far post cross that Miller controlled before smashing the ball low and back across Pidgeon from six yards; the ball going in off the Sandhurst far post to make it 4-1!

However, there has hardly time to advise the description of the goals on Twitter (@EEFCOnline) before the hosts pulled a goal back as Keogh's clearance went straight to Dylan Ive who lobbed our keeper with a speculative effort from twenty-five yards that dropped over everyone into the far corner of the net in the 57th minute.

Despite being 4-2 up you could never say we were comfortably ahead, although the eleven men would probably have held on and maybe scored more. However, the match turned against us in the 63rd minute when Tommy Williams brought down Logan Coles just outside our penalty area and near the touchline. It was hard to see exactly what went on from a hundred yards away, but it looked as though there was a reaction from Coles and Williams retaliated to it, leading to our man receiving a red card and Coles getting a yellow. Unfortunately as it is the second dismissal of the season for Williams, he will face a four game suspension for this action.

Most concerningly the whole incident was unnecessary as we were leading at the time and this gave the home side added impetus. Despite a couple of substitutions with Ethan Charles-Brazier making his debut and Wilson coming on for his first Epsom action of the season, the deficit was halved in the 70th minute when substitute Harvey Seeman volleyed in an equaliser from a low right wing cross. Keogh then made another close range save but the home side were rampant at this point and Seeman broke the offside trap to slot past Keogh to level the scores at 4-4 just five minutes later.

However, there was no denying that the match had become a little bit niggly and a Sandhurst substitute was fortunate not to see a red card for a horrible foul on Adeyemi; the referee determining that the yellow card was sufficient. Then in the 88th minute Wilson sent in a powerful long range free kick that Pidgeon did well to parry away and as Miller battled for the ball with Coles out wide, the Sandhurst man brought ours down and then attacked him. This was surely the easiest decision of the night for the referee, and to be fair the red card was raised very quickly in the direction of Coles. The match would finish as a ten v ten contest.

The final chances of the match took place in our penalty area as Keogh made a couple of important blocks before their final chance of the night was headed wide and after five minutes of injury time had been played, the final whistle blew and everyone was able to take a breath again. Well, except for those who had to leave immediately to get their cars out of the nearby car park that was due to close in a matter of minutes!

This was a breathless and pulsating end to end contest; one of the best Epsom matches I have watched in many years, and whilst you could look at this from a perspective of never wanting to lose a three goal lead, it has to be said that Sandhurst were well worthy of a draw over the ninety minutes and a point isn't such a bad position to be in as it takes us five points clear of the bottom club Colliers Wood United and with two matches in hand. Remember, regardless of tables you may see showing two clubs going down, only one club will be relegated this season, due to size increases to the Step Four Leagues for 2024/25. The two Management teams may not have enjoyed the openness of the play when a bit of control was needed to slow the game down, but it was a fantastic match for the neutrals!

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Tommy Williams, Nick Inwugwu, Steve Springett, Reece Tierney, Ollie Thompson, Luke Miller, Rory Edwards, Tijani Eshilokun, Thompson Adeyemi, Jaan Stanley

Subs: Ethan Charles-Brazier for Stanley (63), Nick Wilson for Springett (69), Sirak Negassi for Edwards (78), Ade Batula for Eshilokun (78)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Willem The Conqueror brings victory to local rugby side

4 December 2023

London Cornish 24 Sutton & Epsom RFC 53, Saturday 11th November. It had been a decade since these two clubs had met in a league fixture and only a point separated them this season in the nether regions of the table. Having defeated

bottom club Sidcup the previous Saturday Sutton travelled with optimism and were buoyed by the arrival of centre Willem Ratu from New Zealand who was making his debut. The hosts after weeks of hampered availability were also content that they were fielding their best combination so far this campaign.

At the final whistle it was Sutton & Epsom who took the spoils with a 53-24 bonus point victory. This ended a winless streak of 16 away league fixtures for the Black & Whites stretching back to the thrilling Tring 21-20 triumph of March 2022.

On a chill but still afternoon Freddy Bunting initiated proceedings in sunshine under a bright blue sky following a minute's silence for Remembrance Day. London Cornish have endured a hideous run of injuries and their misfortune continued after the first ruck that forced them to bring on Mathew Hand for Tony Pellow and reshuffle their front row. London Cornish's attempt to clear from their 22 was spoiled by Ewan McTaggart using all of his Brobdingnagian stature to charge down the kick then he adroitly transferred the ball to Robbie Martey who offloaded to Josh Pulvirenti to score his first 1st XV try. Freddy Bunting added the extras for a 7-0 lead. S&E barely had time to reflect on their perfect opening before the hosts drew level. Having forced their way into the 22 they were awarded a penalty that was quickly taken and scrum half Findlay Tweedie scored by the uprights. Michael Edworthy added the simple conversion for 7-7.

Sutton pressed hard to regain the advantage and seemed to have wasted an opportunity but the referee brought play back for a penalty in front of the sticks and Freddy Bunting made it 10-7. Moments later they extended their lead with their second goal of the afternoon. Another kick clipped Black & White hands foreshortening the clearance enabling Gareth O'Brien to gather the ball in centre field. The ball was transferred to Willem Ratu who ran it in from 40 metres with clinical efficiency and devastating pace. Captain Bunting bisected the uprights for a 17-7 lead.

Moments later he was caressing another penalty over the bar for 20-7 to end the first quarter. In the next ten minutes the men in Black & Gold had a chance to get back within a score. Fly half Michael Edworthy was successful with his first penalty but his second attempt drifted wide so London Cornish trailed 10-20 with ten minutes remaining of the first period as they enjoyed their best spell in the game. Sutton broke the shackles courtesy of another erroneous kick. A penalty failed to find touch and Robbie Martey returned it with interest. Soon Willem Ratu was offloading to Chris Farrell and the hooker set off for the line only to be denied by a wonderful covering tackle and the observant visiting touch judge who spotted he put a foot in touch when diving for the corner. It was then the Surrey men who suffered a charge down in their 22 but they escaped unpunished. In the dying embers of the first half Sutton secured their third try. Willem Ratu released Jordan Huie who showed great strength in the 22 before Ewan McTaggart advanced it to the line. The recycled ball came to Gareth O'Brien five metres out who stepped inside and was tackled but managed to reach for the line and score. Freddy Bunting concluded the half with the conversion and Sutton & Epsom led 27-10.

This was familiar territory for London Cornish, in the previous round they trailed at the break by 22-0 at Cobham before a storming 4-try second half brought them to the verge of a classic win. However, it was not long before the Rugby Lane team were extending their lead as they secured a bonus point with their fourth try two minutes into the second period. Willem Ratu in a flurry of surging limbs swatted away touchline tacklers and ran the ball in from his own 22 and the Bunting boot made it 34-10. As with the first half the hosts swiftly replied. This time it was a forward effort rounded off by captain Alex Davey from short-range. Ciaran Johnston took over the kicking duties from the injured Mike Edworthy and reduced the lead to 34-17.

For the Rugby Lane followers of a pessimistic disposition their fears were immediately allayed. Sutton claimed the restart and carried the ball to the Cornish 22 where Alex Mount made the telling break before passing to Rob Hegarty to do the honours. The simple conversion was completed and the scoreboard indicated S&E were 41-17 up within ten minutes of the second half.

The Black & Whites replaced Steve Munford at 9 with Chris Ballard and Tom Boaden swapped with Alex Mount at prop. London Cornish were far from subdued and threw everything at their opponents with winger Rob Mackay a constant threat coming off his wing numerous times zigzagging his way through would be tacklers. The Sutton & Epsom defence held firm with Matt Whitaker's magnificent tackle holding up his opponent over the line.

The next score went to Sutton and Willem Ratu completed his hat trick. He ran into the 22 and appeared to be halted as he stumbled but he rolled over regained his feet and ran in to score.

There followed a collector's item... a missed kick by Bunting as the visitors held a 46-17 advantage. The visitors were now at full throttle. They were held up over the line, a kick ahead was cleared by the scrambling defence and Matt Whitaker was halted from a five-metre scrum. But with ten minutes remaining it looked as if Rob Mackay was going to get his reward for his afternoon's endeavours. He strode towards the corner but was brought down with glory within his grasp by Jordan Huie. In years gone by it would have been acclaimed as a great cover tackle but in this season of the experimental new law it was a high tackle, yellow card and a penalty try.

S&E's penchant for the penalty try has seen five in eight outings and has now reached epidemic proportions as the Cornish trailed 24-46. With the numerical advantage they eyed the opportunity for a bonus point for a fourth try before the match concluded.

Once more the Rugby Lane XV regained the restart and advance to the 22. A tremendous scrummage provided the perfect platform to exploit a generous blindside. Matt Whitaker picked up at 8 drew the defender and Chris Ballard waltzed in for his first Sutton try. Normal service resumed as Freddy Bunting converted to bring his personal tally to 18 points and the score to 53-24. For the remainder of the game the hosts went in search of the valuable bonus point but the visitors showed the same determination in defence as they had in attack. Despite the extra man London Cornish were not able to create a clear cut opportunity and the game ended with no further addition to the score. Sutton & Epsom had finally ended their away day woes and won handsomely 53-24.

Willem Ratu was outstanding on debut not only scoring a hat trick but also his passing and tackling were of the highest quality. As is often the case when an exceptional player is added into the mix it elevates the players around him. Ewan

McTaggart had his finest game, Chris Farrell revelled in his role out wide and Robbie Martey racked up impressive stats for players passed and metres made. The travelling supporters were delighted to see the Black & Whites playing once more with pace, power and confidence and are now relishing the remainder of the season. London Cornish never took a backward step but were hindered by losing two of their front five within the first 10 minutes. Notable in a losing cause were Number 8 Adam Wheeler who carried relentlessly and Rob Mackay who was dangerous whenever he got the ball.

Next Saturday Sutton are on the road again when they visit the Memorial Ground to play high-flying Cobham who are fourth in the league only trailing Reeds Weybridge on points difference.

Sutton & Epsom:

Gareth O'Brien, Robbie Martey, Willem Ratu, Lawrence Elliott, Jordan Huie, Freddy Bunting, Steve Munford, Callum Gibson, Chris Farrell, Alex Mount, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, ****George London, Josh Pulvirenti & Matt Whitaker.

Replacements: Tom Boaden, Rob Hegarty & Chris Ballard.

London Cornish

Ben Boorman, Robert Mackay, Kyle Hughes, Peter Brogden, George Bromage, Michael Edworthy, Findlay Tweedie, Tony Pellow, Oscar Cruz, Rory Ling, David Chalkey, Tom Carr, Alex Davey ©, ****Jack Waving & Adam Wheeler.

Replacements: Mathew Hand, Mark Osei-Tutu & Ciaran Johnston.

Epsom & Ewell FC imperious victory in Imperial Fields

4 December 2023



Tooting & Mitcham 0-3 Epsom & Ewell. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 11th November 2023.

Cast your mind back to the 4th March 2003. Some young lad by the name of Justin Timberlake was at number 1 with Cry Me A River, Tony Blair was Prime Minister and our Manager was Adrian Hill, who was approaching the end of a club record thirteen year tenure in his second spell in charge. Oh yes, and we defeated Tooting & Mitcham United by four goals to three in an Isthmian League victory on our first ever visit to Imperial Fields.

Just over twenty years on, it was great to see our former Manager, now aged 78, amongst the crowd as we achieved our first victory over the Terrors since that date and it has to be said that this 3-0 win; our best since 1934, probably flattered us a little, as the match was very even for a large part of the contest. However, a second half sending off for the home side followed by a crazy own goal enabled us to cruise home comfortably by the time the final whistle blew.

There were five players in our starting eleven who had taken the field in Epsom colours last season, yet there were also three in the Tooting & Mitcham team! We renewed acquaintances with Tom Theobald, Johnny "Sonic" Akoto, and Warren Colman, not to mention another former Salt Kieron Campbell who was with us in three earlier spells and this wasn't even including Captain Alex Penfold who was an unused substitute and their Manager Jamie Byatt who was not in the playing line up on this occasion.

For our part, we made just the two changes from our defeat against Sutton United with Tijani Eshilokun coming in for George Owusu, while Jaan Stanley played ahead of Luke Miller, although both of the replaced players were on the bench and would come on later in the contest.

The home side were in decent form and the match programme referred to their aim of reaching for the playoffs. Arguably they were, and remain under more pressure to achieve this season than our club does, and much of that pressure is centred on their Centre-forward Shay Brennan who had a number of goals already this season. However, one feature of this match was that he was kept very quiet throughout and it could be argued that this was our best defensive performance of the season as a result, as Harvey Keogh didn't have a massive amount to do in this match, certainly compared to the recent games we have played.

The first half probably should have finished 0-0 as neither team created a vast amount. Both keepers made the occasional save; Theobald, the hero in our penalty shoot out win over Selsey last season was down well to save from Rory Edwards, while Keogh made a couple of decent blocks too, but nothing too taxing. Despite the lack of real chances for either side, we took the lead in the 34th minute from a well directed Edwards corner that was challenged for by a number of players from both sides, but the ball looped up off them and was heading towards goal. Fortunately Eshilokun got a toe to the ball on its way down to get it over the line from close range and save me from trying to work out who the scorer would have been otherwise!

In reality, neither team probably deserved to be ahead to that point, but this is sometimes where expectation and pressure

tells. A 0-0 draw would have been fine for us, but totally unacceptable to the home side who would have been well aware of our recent defeats to Knaphill and Farnham Town and aiming to replicate them. However, they were severely hampered in that target just two minutes into the second half when Edwards played a nice pass towards Stanley, only to then be taken out by a challenge from behind. It looked a naughty challenge, but was still a surprise to me when a straight red card was shown in the direction of Jayden Hutchings, although other people who saw the challenge from another angle said it was deserving of a straight red.

Ironically, the home side then had their best spell of the match, but they were struggling to find Brennan and Keogh kept out a good volley from the edge of the penalty area with his feet. He was then down well to make a low save that came from a decent move down the right and a near post strike, but the threat from the home side completely evaporated in the 81st minute when we scored our second goal. It's hard to say exactly how much credit we deserve for this one as it was mostly down to the home side as Sam Orisatoki sent the ball twenty yards back to Theobald who then missed the ball with his kick completely and despite rushing back to try and repair the damage, the ball had crossed the goal line by the time he was able to clear it and the Assistant flagged accordingly.

The goal knocked the stuffing out of the home side and the match was all over as a contest. Five minutes later we had a third as Edwards, arguably playing his best game for our club, got down the left wing and pulled the ball back to substitute Luke Miller in the vicinity of the penalty spot and he drilled the ball first time into Theobald's bottom right hand corner to seal the points. We had further chances in the closing minutes as Tommy Williams played a one-two with Ade Batula but dragged his shot beyond the far post, while Batula's shot was deflected over the bar, although no corner was awarded. In the end it didn't really matter and whilst the scoreline may have been slightly generous, I have bemoaned the fact that we were unlucky to lose by so many in recent weeks, so it's swings and roundabouts really!

I wrote last week that good, hard-working performances like those at Farnham and Knaphill were great, as long as we could take that on and get something from our next games, and I'm happy to report that we did exactly that at Imperial Fields with a performance that was very similar to the one at Spelthorne Sports three weeks previously, but was also our first three goal haul away from home in any competition since winning 3-1 at Billingshurst back in April and our largest away win since we scored five at Oakwood back in August 2022. We go to Sandhurst on Tuesday in good form and are now up to third from bottom of the table with games in hand. A good weekend!

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Tommy Williams, Nick Inwugwu, Steve Springett, Reece Tierney, Ollie Thompson, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Rory Edwards, Tijani Eshilokun, Thompson Adeyemi, Jaan Stanley

Subs: Luke Miller for Stanley (59), Ade Batula for Eshilokun (77), George Owusu for Nelson-Roberts (87), Tino Carpena for Springett (93)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Epsom Derby football cup defeat

4 December 2023



Epsom & Ewell 1-2 Sutton United. Surrey Senior Cup - Second Round. Tuesday 7th November 2023.

Our first match back in the Surrey Senior Cup for five years, coupled with the fact it was our first meeting for twelve years against our old rivals Sutton United, ensured that a healthy crowd, counted at 135, were present at Cobham for this encounter, maybe like me with memories of past encounters and rivalries long consigned to history.

It is obviously difficult to assess the quality of this performance. This was often the case back when we were at Step Six and played Development and Reserve teams and you never really knew quite what standard of opponent you were going to face. Indeed we defeated a Sutton United Development eleven by seven clear goals in the Surrey Premier Cup not long ago, but it was clear from the start that this wasn't going to happen in this match. It was also good to see two former Salts in the Sutton dugout as Jimmy Dack and Ross White took charge for the visitors. Dack played for us as a 16 year old under Ricky Kidd from March 1989 before moving up the footballing pyramid, while White made his debut in March 2011, although it was his younger brother Sean that made the lion's share of their appearances for our first team.

Our club chose to insult people's intelligence on its social media by making out that we had narrowly lost to a team five divisions above us, when quite obviously we weren't playing their first eleven. Their Academy side provided more than enough of a challenge though and deservedly won this match 2-1, despite our boys taking the lead just after the hour. In fact, the margin of victory would probably have been greater, had Harvey Keogh not made half a dozen superb saves in what was arguably his best performance for the club.

Keogh made his first start with the Captain's armband on in the absence of injured Zach Powell, and it was also good to see Tommy Williams back on the field after his own injuries, while Caretaker Manager Steve Springett made his first start of the season too. Further forward Thompson Adeyemi came back into the starting eleven along with George Owusu as Sirak Negassi and Ade Batula dropped out, although the latter would join the action from the bench later. Finally, Ollie Thompson was good to go again after being withdrawn just before kick off against Knaphill and he came in for Ash

Snadden.

We had an early scare in just the seventh minute when Jack Phillips sent an early strike just beyond out far post, but in response Luke Miller put Owusu through on goal and his shot was tipped onto the bar by Bradley House, although the offside flag would have ruled the strike out anyway. Adeyemi was next to strike the Sutton bar with a header, but he too was offside.

Just after the half hour mark Keogh made the first of his fine saves with a point blank range save from a far post header and he had to make another low one to keep the scores level at the break. However, the second half was just ten minutes old before he had to make a further good block from a header that was definitely going in.

Despite threatening rarely to that point, we then won a penalty in the 60th minute. A good move down our left flank ended with a trip on Edwards right in the corner of the penalty area. With Jaan Stanley on the bench and Marlon Pinder absent, Miller stepped up to take the spot kick, only to see it well reached by House, diving to his left to parry the ball for a corner. With the visitors maybe thinking they had got away with it, a Steve Springett corner eluded everyone and was nodded in from close range at the back post by Ethan Nelson-Roberts in the 62nd minute.

We made a couple more substitutions with Lewis Elsom, joining from Aldershot Town, made his debut when he came on for Williams, while Stanley replaced Miller, probably wishing he had come on ten minutes earlier to take the spot kick! Stanley was soon attacking and his deflected strike from twenty yards had House scrambling to keep the ball out, although the ball was going just wide anyway.

Unfortunately for us, as the match reached the closing stages the visitors drew level. With the clock showing the 76th minute a deep ball in from the right was knocked back across goal where a powerful low shot was again well blocked by Keogh, but the loose ball was then knocked in from ten yards out by George Vorster.

It was the least they deserved though, and Keogh had to be alert once again to tip a Sutton header over the bar, but was powerless to stop their winner in the 86th minute as a dangerous run from the left resulted in the ball being laid back into the path of Vorster who drilled a low shot into the far corner from around 15 yards out which proved to be the winner.

The game turned around quite rapidly here and it is becoming noticeable that we are conceding a lot of late goals. If you look at those which have come after the 80th minute of our matches, we have scored twice, yet conceded thirteen! I'm not sure if our people were aware of this, but hopefully something can and will be done that will increase either our fitness or our game management, or both. Luckily this match was largely irrelevant in the grand scheme of things, but with important League matches coming up against Tooting & Mitcham United, Sandhurst Town and AFC Croydon Athletic, we need to tighten up in those final stages.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Tommy Williams, Nick Inwugwu, Steve Springett, Reece Tierney, Ollie Thompson, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Rory Edwards, George Owusu, Thompson Adeyemi, Luke Miller

Subs: Ben Amisah for Owusu (55), Lewis Elsom for Williams (64), Jaan Stanley for Miller (67), Tino Carpena for Springett (75), Ade Batula for Nelson-Roberts (81)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Sutton and Epsom sink Sidcup

4 December 2023



Sutton & Epsom RFC 30 - Sidcup 20. Saturday 4th November. Regional 2 South East is a most competitive league where any side can overturn its opponent so giving hope to supporters every Saturday afternoon. However, for the followers of Sutton and Sidcup they knew only too well that on occasion you have to win games. This campaign had witnessed only a solitary success for both camps and this fixture was therefore a meeting of the damned duo in terms of relegation spots. To the unaffiliated observer the game may have had the appearance of two bald men fighting over a comb but to these two proud clubs meeting under strained circumstances it was a match of the utmost importance. The result would lead to the bells ringing out for both clubs whether they were the alarm variety of relegation or angelic church ones heralding success was still to be determined. By the final whistle it was the hosts who were in the mood for the seasonal fireworks as they triumphed by 30-20.

After the season stalled in deference to the World Cup Final hostilities renewed at Rugby Lane as Sutton welcomed one of her oldest opponents in Sidcup. Despite the tempestuous weather the match was played on a fine surface and mercilessly minus rain as Freddy Bunting kicked off. The opening exchanges saw both teams attempting to run the ball. The Kent side's first entry to the Sutton 22 was undermined when they conceded a penalty. In contrast for S&E a Callum Gibson charge down saw Chris Farrell surge towards glory before the referee brought it back for a penalty to S&E. Captain



Bunting kicked to the corner for the attacking line out. Having secured the ball the forwards escorted George London over the line to score the first try. Freddy Bunting added the extras for a morale-boosting 7-0 lead after 10 minutes.

Following some excellent defence the Black & Whites looked like giving Sidcup a second dose of medicine as they kicked a penalty into the corner. However, the throw in went askew and the visitors were awarded a relieving scrummage. Ten minutes later the men from Kent showed S&E how to score from an attacking line out but not in the classical mode. Having secured the ball Mr Tobias Whinney halted proceedings with a shrill blast of his whistle. He had taken objection to winger Max Russell's involvement and issued a yellow card and then jogged under the posts to give the Crescent Farm side a penalty try. This was the fourth time this season that the hosts had suffered this draconian sanction as the visitors levelled the score at 7-7.

Reduced to 14 Sutton & Epsom introduced Messrs Boaden & Hegarty for Gibson & London in the hope of holding out. Sidcup were then inconvenienced by the loss of scrum half Sam Leamon to injury. Then his half-back partner, Josh Twyford, made a telling contribution with a steeping kick. The ball descending from the heavens and S&E winger Robbie Martey jumped to contest for the ball on halfway but the ricochet was re-gathered by Sidcup. A second try was only prevented by scrambling defence and an excellent Martey tackle. Sadly for Sutton it was the most temporary stays of execution as the visitors swiftly recycled the ball and forced their way over the whitewash. Josh Twyford added the conversion for a 14-7 lead.

The first period had been an even affair but was ending with Sidcup in the ascendancy. The visitors next sortie into the host's 22 saw Sutton fullback Ciaran Mohr injure his shoulder to be replaced by the experienced Steve Munford who went to 9 as the incumbent Chris Ballard retreated to the open pastures of 15. The Black & Whites appeared to be navigating the half into a safe haven when they conceded a penalty whilst in possession. Josh Twyford stepped up to conclude the first half with a sweetly struck penalty to extend the visitor's advantage to 17-7.

Despite the lowly league status of the two teams it had been an entertaining first period with both sides carrying the ball with intent but being thwarted by efficient defences who tackled with a relish that reflected the significance of the fixture.

The match re-started and soon Josh Twyford was initiating an aerial bombardment that had proved beneficial in the billowing wind of the first half. This time Sidcup did not gain points from the sensible tactic. Both teams were aware of the significance of the first score in the half. Sutton's efforts were undermined as their line out temporarily malfunctioned and offered the visitors an easy escape. After ten minutes S&E scored through their most familiar method. The half-moon countenance of the Sidcup offender gave no hint of what he had been doing or, indeed, thinking but it was enough for Mr Tobias Whinney to award a penalty. Freddy Bunting collected three points for the Sutton cause as the scoreboard recorded 10-17. Within five minutes an excellent interception by the Black & Whites' lock Ewan McTaggart saw the hosts on the attack and awarded another penalty. Freddy Bunting reduced the deficit to 13-17.

The penalty pendulum swung back in the favour of the Kent men when a few minutes later the referee awarded them an opportunity to go for goal. Josh Twyford stepped up to the mark to make it 20-13 in Sidcup's favour as the game entered the final quarter. With a sense of symmetry the visitors were reduced to 14 men for a high tackle on Max Russell who had earlier enjoyed an unexpected ten minute rest. Soon after the Black & Whites had another penalty well within Freddy Bunting's range but the captain opted to kick to the corner. The gamble resulted in an unexpected bonus. The catch and drive was halted illegally and Sidcup were reduced to 13 men as Sir took his yellow card from his pocket once more. S&E opted for the 5-metre scrum but heroic defence on the line by the visitors saw them hold up the pack to be awarded the drop out from their line.

Before the crowd had time to digest if that might have been the turning point of the match the Surrey men were back on the attack. Chris Farrell found space out wide and burst into the 22 and his perfectly timed pass was taken by flanker Rob Hegarty who squeezed in at the corner. A fabulous touchline conversion brought the scores level at 20-20 and the crowd to their feet. With Sidcup still not returned to their full compliment Sutton ran back the restart.

In such circumstances retaining possession is vital. S&E swung the ball from side to side and eventually Sidcup ran out of numbers. Once more it was the ubiquitous Farrell, on the left wing rather than the right this time, who was the provider as he passed to Robbie Martey on halfway. The winger showed all of his vast experience and class as he weaved his way to the line leaving would be tacklers rooted to the spot like potted plants. Freddy Bunting added the conversion as the two goals within five minutes had the Black & Whites leading 27-20.

The reinvigorated hosts went searching for a fourth try and a bonus point. Max Russell broke into the 22 but conceded a penalty on the deck. As the game entered time added on Sutton were awarded a penalty near halfway. Captain Bunting wisely took aim for goal with the reward of extending the advantage to beyond one score. He made it six successful strikes out of six and S&E led 30-20. Spirited Sidcup gathered themselves for a final assault and took advantage of the host's indiscipline to kick a penalty into the 22. Any anxiety for the Rugby Lane supporters was alleviated as their side turned over the ball and won a penalty. Shortly afterwards the referee concluded proceedings and the Black & Whites had a vital 30-20 win.

The hard fought contest was eventually decided by Sutton exploiting their numerical advantage when they played probably their best rugby of the season. In a fine effort by all concerned the hosts defence was much improved. The visitors contributed much to the match and gave no indication of being any worse than previous visitors this season despite their position in the league. Sutton & Epsom travel to the Richard Evans Memorial Playing Fields next Saturday 11th November to take on London Cornish. Please note that the game will kick off at 2:15 pm and for those spectators who enjoy indulging in the post-match reflections these will take place at Roehampton Cricket Club.

Sutton & Epsom:

Ciaran Mohr, Robbie Martey, Lawrence Elliott, Freddy Bunting ©, Max Russell, Gareth O'Brien, Chris Ballard, Callum Gibson, Chris Farrell, Alex Mount, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, George London, Josh Pulvirenti & Matt Whitaker.

Replacements: Tom Boaden, Rob Hegarty & Steve Munford.

Sidcup:

Charlie Pooley, Luke Sheridan, Dan Masters, Zak Jones, Louis Keeley, Josh Twyford, Sam Leamon, Joe Brady, Harry Large, Teddy Gibbons, Jack Dutton ©, Steve Ecans, Tom Epps, Liam Healey & Jon West.

Replacements: Jon Fordham, Harry Gibbons & George Bird.

Epsom and Ewell FC caught Knapping?

4 December 2023



Epsom & Ewell 0-4 Knaphill. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 4th November 2023. We have been unfortunate to come up against arguably the best two teams in the League in consecutive weeks and we appear to have been soundly beaten by both if you look solely at the score lines. However, as with last week's defeat at Farnham, we gave as good as we got for large periods of this game, only to fall apart in a ten minute spell at the end of the match, when the visitors scored three times to complete a 4-0 victory over our boys.

Now, all who read these reports will know that I'm honest with my summaries, even when we are poor, and it might sound like a broken record here, but we have actually played quite well in our last two matches. However, the two teams we have faced just had more quality than we do currently and whilst we are now a lot more competitive and will fancy our chances of survival this year, these two results will not define our season.

In a match that was in my opinion excellently officiated, with exception of a penalty shout towards the end that was never likely to be given, due to the referee allowing the game to flow instead of blowing the whistle every few seconds, we made a few changes to our starting eleven. In came Nick Inwugwu and Ash Snadden at the back, while further forward Luke Miller came in for his first start since returning to our club in a more central role than where we used to see him play a couple of seasons back while Sirak Negassi earned another start on the left wing after playing well from the bench last week. We then had to make a final change after Ollie Thompson tweaked his knee in the warm up and it was decided not to risk things; Reece Tierney coming in for him, although Thompson remained as a named player on the bench.

The opening ten minutes of the match were very much in favour of the confident visitors who had been unfortunate to pick up just the one point in Jersey the Saturday before and an early chance was headed over the bar before they took the lead in the 11th minute when a ball into the right hand channel was then set up into the stride of Calvin Camara running across the edge of the penalty area and he guided a low left footed shot beyond Harvey Keogh into the far corner to open the scoring.

The crowd of 98, boosted largely by the postponements of other local matches is definitely a positive advertisement for having an artificial surface. However, one of the negatives appears to be that we just cannot go ninety minutes on this surface without picking up at least one injury and this time, following a corner, Zach Powell went down after twisting his lower leg as he landed and he required treatment, although was unable to continue, so Thompson Adeyemi joined the action and it appeared as though Keogh took the Captain's armband on. If our keeper was Captain, it would represent one of our youngest ever players to hold the position.

The remaining twenty minutes of the half was very even, although it was apparent that the visitors were very solid at the back and we rarely threatened to break through. Inwugwu made a good run on the right and reached the touchline, but his cross was parried away by Jos Barker and we went in at the break, just the one goal down, but very much in the match still.

The first item of note in the second half came when the referee had to stop play to take issue with one of our substitutes, George Owusu, who was warming up perfectly normally on the touchline. However, his fluorescent yellow top was clashing with that of the Knaphill team and he was asked to remove it!

The game continued in a similar pattern to that of the first half with both teams cancelling each other out in midfield. Rory Edwards and Adeyemi were both heavily involved, but we were unable to find that pass through to our front men. In the 69th minute a deep Knaphill corner was met with a towering downward header at the far post but Keogh did really well to keep the ball out. However, the visitors were getting closer and they had a goal disallowed for offside just four minutes later before putting another header over the bar from a good position. Then Keogh was down low to make another good save from close range as Camara threatened a second goal.

However, it wasn't until the 80th minute when the man of the match got involved. Joining the action as a substitute Spencer Whitfield received a clever slide rule pass inside Inwugwu, which he ran onto and cut back before clipping the ball past Keogh into the far corner from 12 yards to give Knaphill that two goal cushion.

And with the result no longer in doubt, the visitors really turned it on. Keogh had to make another low save to turn the shot around the post. Owusu had by now been introduced although Ethan Nelson-Roberts' good work on the left was wasted a little when Owusu sent the shot high and wide. Then in the 88th minute we gave the ball away in midfield and

Knaphill broke on the left, sending a sweeping delivery across goal to Stacey Thrupp at the far post and his delivery was bundled in by Whitfield from close range. Moments later Edwards tumbled in the area, and whilst we have seen penalties given before, you knew it wouldn't be given today and we allowed the visitors to break where Whitfield then completed his hat trick at which point the substitute was then promptly subbed off again!

In summary, we competed well for all but the first ten and the last ten minutes of this match, but against the top teams in this division we need to accept we are still a fair way short and the upcoming match at Imperial Fields against Tooting & Mitcham United will provide a much better guide of where we are likely to finish this season.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Nick Inwugwu, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Ash Snadden, Zach Powell (c), Reece Tierney, Luke Miller, Rory Edwards, Ade Batula, Jaan Stanley, Sirak Negassi

Subs: Thompson Adeyemi for Powell (25), George Owusu for Negassi (55), Tino Carpene for Batula (70), Marlon Pinder for Miller (84)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Scoreline does not reflect performance

4 December 2023



Farnham Town 5-1 Epsom & Ewell. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 28th October 2023.

Our trip to the Memorial Ground, home to Farnham Town, was always going to be a challenging one. They have a large budget, a great team and will almost certainly go up as Champions. In four home League matches coming into this match they had scored seventeen goals and conceded none, so under the circumstances, a 5-1 defeat not only represented the first time any club had breached their home defences in this competition, but I will go further and say that the scoreline was harsh on our boys who battled hard for the entire ninety minutes and deserved more than the one goal we registered.

In fact we more than held our own for large parts of this game and although our hosts held the balance of possession over the match, it was only the clinical finishing of our opponents, and Darryl Sanders in particular with a first half hat trick, that proved to be the main difference between the teams.

Our Manager Steve Springett was back in the dugout and as you might expect after our win at Spelthorne Sports he made only one change with Marlon Pinder returning to the starting eleven in place of Sirak Negassi who was on the bench. We made a bright start with a good run on the left from Jaan Stanley after just 50 seconds, although his low cross was just cut out by a defender ahead of the oncoming Ade Batula.

The opening ten minutes were fairly even and it almost came as a surprise when Farnham took the lead in the twelfth minute from a free kick unnecessarily conceded, although still some way out. However, Harry Cooksley's free kick was delivered to the near post where Sanders met the ball with a deft, glancing header that gave Harvey Keogh no chance at all as the ball nestled in the far corner of the goal. Worse was to come just ninety seconds later as Sanders collected the ball from a throw in and sent a superb curling effort right into the top corner from nearly twenty-five yards to put the hosts two goals up.

Moments later we had a good chance after a poor clearance from Pat Nash which went straight to Stanley, but with a decent sight of goal he rushed his chance and scuffed the ball gently through to Nash who was able to recover his position by this time. We then had a moment of controversy when Keogh came out to punch the ball clear, only to be completely taken out by a Farnham player. Luckily our keeper was able to continue after treatment, yet not even a card was issued to the assailant. The cynic in me would call this a home town decision and this belief was enhanced when ten minutes later Tijani Eshilokun picked up a yellow card for a slightly late challenge that wasn't in the same category as the previous assault.

We were having some success with deliveries into the box as we picked up on the second ball once the initial deliveries were half cleared, and Eshilokun had the next chance as the ball fell to him just outside the penalty areas, but his volley wasn't hard enough to trouble Nash. We were actually having a real go at our hosts and Batula broke down the right, before cutting inside onto his left foot, but his attempt went wide of the near post. Keogh was down to make a good save from a powerful Farnham strike but we were soon up the other end again and Batula's shot was deflected for a corner that came to nothing.

The home side were on the attack soon after and sent a header just wide of Keogh's post, but just before half time a good passing move ended with Sanders almost walking the ball into the net to complete his hat trick and we went in at the break three goals down, which was incredibly harsh on our boys.

Just before the break we had replaced the injured Jabari Ofosu-Hernandez with Nick Inwugwu and for the first time in club history we then made a quadruple substitution as early as the 51st minute, leaving our bench hoping we didn't suffer any injuries in the remainder of the match. We have never made five changes to a line up this early in a competitive match

before, but at 3-0 down, it was worth a gamble!

Farnham nearly extended their lead two minutes after this, but Adam Liddle was closed down well by Keogh and put his shot wide. In response a Rory Edwards corner was met by a Thompson Adeyemi header, but the flick on went beyond the far post and out for a goal kick. The next corner wasn't such a good one, but it was cleared to the edge of the area where substitute Negassi let fly with a powerful strike that was arrowing straight for the top corner, only for it to be diverted by the slightest deflection from the head of Sanders, who was now saving goals at one end instead of scoring them at the other!

The next corner again didn't get past the first man and as the home team broke away, Ethan Nelson-Roberts had to take one for the team as he cleared out the attacking player. Fortunately there were defenders covering and he received only a yellow card.

We attacked again and a great pass from Edwards to Negassi on the left resulted in him cutting inside his man and sending him the wrong way but his shot was well blocked by Nash from twelve yards. However, we conceded a fourth goal in the 62nd minute when a deep Farnham corner was headed back across goal, where it was then headed into the danger area and Liddle was able to nod the ball in from close range.

The clouds had been gathering during the second half and as was the case at Spelthorne Sports seven days previously, the heavens opened just after the hour mark, but in the 68th minute we had some reward for our hard work as some great interplay in midfield enabled the ball to be fed through to another substitute George Owusu who rounded the keeper before slotting the ball into the net with his left foot.

The game continued to swing from end to end and Keogh had to make another good save from Owen Dean before Nelson-Roberts produced a mazy run, beating three men before teeing up substitute Luke Miller, whose shot from twelve yards maybe should have been a little higher and Nash was able to get across to palm the ball away for a corner, which again didn't get past the first man. If there was a criticism today, it was that we didn't use our set pieces well enough.

There was still time for another opportunity at both ends. A nice Eshilokun pass to Negassi gave him the chance to embarrass Michael Kinsella again, although the end product was straight at Nash, and then in the second minute of injury time Dean broke through on the right hand channel and finished clinically past the exposed Keogh.

This was one of our better performances of the season. A few weeks ago we went to Jersey Bulls and subsided meekly without a shot on target, but this performance, against a team that will surely wrap up the League title before March is out and may even be walking out at Wembley Stadium in the FA Vase Final come May, proved that we are now competitive enough at this level to survive the season. We have a hard set of fixtures this month, but the most difficult of them all on paper has now passed, and whilst no one can ever be happy to be on the wrong end of a 5-1 defeat, I thought there were many positives that our team could take from this match.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Jabari Ofosu-Hernandez, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Thompson Adeyemi, Zach Powell (c), Ollie Thompson, Ade Batula, Rory Edwards, Marlon Pinder, Tijani Eshilokun, Jaan Stanley

Subs: Nick Inwugwu for Ofosu-Hernandez (45+1), Sirak Negassi for Batula (51), Luke Miller for Stanley (51), Reece Tierney for Powell (51), George Owusu for Pinder (51)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Sutton & Epsom go under at Gravesend

4 December 2023



Gravesend v Sutton and Epsom RFC. Saturday 21st October. The last occasion that Sutton & Epsom ventured to the Rectory Field was during Gravesend's triumphant title-winning season of 2013-4 as the host's mighty pack and Italian international half-backs secured a 41-3 victory. Much has changed in the last 10 years and George London was the sole Sutton survivor from that torrid afternoon. Gravesend have recovered from their harrowing opening day of this campaign against the Ironsides and came into the contest with a couple of wins including an impressive success at Medway who had defeated S&E the previous round. After a match of fluctuating fortunes the home team secured a bonus point win by 36-29.

To the relief of all concerned Saturday's torrential rain coincided with S&E's coach journeys to and from Kent. On a mild afternoon, the sun shone but there was a stiff breeze that favoured Sutton when captain Freddy Bunting kicked off the fixture. Keen followers of the Surrey men often feel that a strong drink is a prerequisite to watching the first quarter but on Saturday they made a wonderful start. Australian debutant Josh Pulvirenti soared into the air to secure the first lineout on the opposition 22 and the ball was spun wide for Luca Shaw to be denied in the corner by the touch judge's flag. Consolation for the visitors was immediate as the referee bought the game back for a penalty. It was kicked to the corner, the lineout was secured and a few carries later the Sutton pack was over the line and Matt Whitaker had the try. Freddy Bunting chipped over the simple conversion for a 7-0 lead after 5 minutes. A couple of minutes later the first of many penalties for high tackles provided Freddy Bunting with the opportunity to increase the lead. Making light of the distance



and angle he extended the lead to 10-0.

The home XV soon were pressing for points with a lineout in the visitor's 22 but a technical infringement gave Sutton a scrum near their line. Perhaps expecting a long clearing kick on the wind the Kent men were taken by surprise as Number 8 Whitaker took off down the blindside swatting away tacklers with disdain on a 60 metre rampage. Sadly for players and spectators alike the potential entertainment was disrupted by the frequency of the whistle with Gravesend incurring the early wrath of Sir before he transferred his attentions to S&E's infringements.

Freddy Bunting added impressive penalties from distance in the 17th and 22nd minutes and Sutton led by 16-0. The Rectory Field supporters finally had something to cheer when fullback Ben Kite, grandson of club legend John Moxham, burst into the 22 to create a try for centre Chris Brady. The touchline conversion failed but Gravesend were on the board trailing by 5-16. The penalty pendulum now swung violently against the visitors. Soon the referee was beckoning over the Sutton skipper for a word and some cautionary advice. Everyone knew that the next offence would result in a yellow card. True to his word he brandished a yellow card to Josh Glanville on Gravesend's next sortie into the Sutton 22. The ball was kicked into the corner and the hosts had the 5-metre lineout and the opportunity to exploit their strong suit against the numerically reduced opponents. The catch and drive was illegally impeded and a penalty try was awarded. To rub salt into the visitor's wounds a second yellow was flourished and another Josh departed, this time the Antipodean version, Mr Pulvirenti.

The lead was reduced to four points and S&E to 13 men as Gravesend were 12-16 down but with everything in their favour. Sutton & Epsom dug deep and defended with great determination to make it to the interval with no further points conceded and no more men sent to the dug out. The hosts were in the ascendancy despite trailing 16-12 at the break. However, Sutton would only have a couple of minutes of the second half to survive before being returned to their full compliment.

The game resumed with the Rectory Field men eager to take advantage of their numbers and not only reduce the deficit but also take the lead for the first time in the match. Remarkably not a single point was gained against the 13 men. Perhaps Gravesend thought it unsporting to score against a Sutton side in reduced circumstances because no sooner were Sutton back to 15 the Kent side took the lead. Kicking a penalty into the corner their efficient catch and drive produced the points as flanker Samraj Chahal was ushered over the line. The conversion faltered but the home team had clawed back a 16-point gap and now led 17-16. The crowd barely had time to savour this success as Sutton's riposte was immediate. Excellent play got S&E into the 22 and Gravesend on the defensive. A long pass found winger Lawrence Elliott in splendid isolation and on the 503rd anniversary of Ferdinand Magellan's discovery of his eponymous Straits he had a considerably simpler journey to the try-line to score. Freddy Bunting converted with aplomb as Sutton regained the advantage to lead 23-17.

To mimic the visitors the hosts instantly replied with a try of their own in the corner. The ball was spun wide and a powerful burst by winger Andrew Cooke saw him touch down in the corner. Rhys Betts could not replicate Sutton's touchline conversion and Gravesend trailed by a solitary point, 22-23. The second period had seen three tries in seven minutes and the expectant crowd were hungry for more. S&E were next to score and it was from that most familiar source...the boot of Bunting. The captain's fourth penalty of the afternoon increased the Rugby Lane team's advantage to 26-22. The Kent men surged into the 22 after an excellent probing kick had Sutton scrambling near their line. From the Gravesend 5-metre scrum replacement Junior Rocket went close to scoring but a few phases later and Samraj Chahal picked up his second try of the afternoon. Rhys Betts ended his kicking drought bisecting the uprights to regain the lead by 29-26.

Entering the final 10 minutes the game was very much in the balance. Junior Rocket's explosive entry into the game now turned into a damp squib as he was not only penalised for his covering tackle but also given a yellow card due to its height. Numerical disadvantage once again proved to be no obstacle for the team suffering the man in the bin. As Sutton pressed hard for the next score and to keep the ball alive they rather naively got bundled into touch. A grateful Gravesend had a lineout near halfway and fell back on their tried and tested routine of the catch and drive. They advanced down the paddock and won a penalty. They knocked the ball into the corner with the prospect of another try. For the second time the referee ruled that foul play had prevented a certain try from the lineout and awarded the penalty try, Chris Farrell departed with a yellow card, the teams were 14 each as the Rectory Field XV could reflect on the 36-26 advantage in time added on. For the visitors it looked as if they would be returning to Surrey with nothing to show for their efforts. However, a penalty at the restart enabled Freddy Bunting to increase his personal tally to 19 points and reduce the deficit to a single score thus earning a valuable bonus point. A minute later the match concluded with Gravesend victorious by the score of 36-29.

Any side that outscores the opposition by 6-2 in tries deserves to win any game and Gravesend's clinical efficiency in the attacking lineouts made all the difference. Sutton & Epsom were much improved from last week. The tackling, the lineout and the fluid passing in the backs were better than at any time in the season. Josh Pulvirenti had a fine debut as looks to be a valuable acquisition. Even by his remarkably high standards, Freddy Bunting's kicking was quite exceptional as he landed 5 penalties and 2 conversions from his magnificent seven kicks at goal. Both XVs suffered with discipline and endured a hefty penalty count in an evenly matched and entertaining contest. Ultimately it was the hosts with their formidable catch & drive that held the trump card in this match and they exploited it to the full.

Next Saturday there are no league fixtures in deference to the Rugby World Cup final. The campaign continues on 4th November at Rugby Lane when Sidcup are the visitors. The Kent side recorded their first win of the season on Saturday by defeating London Cornish by 28-21 at Crescent Farm. It will be a basement battle as these two clubs with proud histories sit at the bottom of the league table. The kick off is at the earlier time of 2:30pm.

Sutton & Epsom:

Ciaran Mohr, Luca Shaw, Ross Parsons, Freddy Bunting ©, Lawrence Elliott, Gareth O'Brien, Chris Ballard, Callum Gibson, Chris Farrell, Alex Mount, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, George London,

Josh Pulvirenti & Matt Whitaker.

Replacements: Tom Boaden, Rob Hegarty & Steve Munford.

Gravesend:

Ben Kite, Harry Tasker, Chris Brady, Jamie Fautley, Andrew Cooke, Rhys Betts, Matt Brady, Brendan Kelly, Terry Papworth, Harry Brooker, Tom Bird, Andrew Hampshire, Matt Hewitt, Samrat Chahal & Connor Murphy.

Replacements: Jamie Forsyth, Stan Dadson & Junior Rocket.

A hard-earned three points for Salts

4 December 2023



Spelthorne Sports 0-1 Epsom & Ewell FC. Combined Counties League - Premier Division.

On Saturday we visited the Spelthorne Sports Club for another important League match. This was a venue we had visited on four previous occasions without suffering defeat and we extended that sequence to five with a hard working 1-0 win, providing us with our second League win in a row. The win also gave us our third clean sheet, but unlike the first two against Met Police, our keeper Harvey Keogh had to work hard for this one, making some superb saves during the match.

In the absence of our Caretaker Manager Steve Springett; on a holiday that was booked before he took on the role, the bench duties fell to Assistant Manager Ash Snadden and Coach Sam Groombridge and three changes were made from our friendly match against Merstham last week. Zach Powell returned from injury ahead of Nick Inwugwu, while Sirak Negassi came in for Marlon Pinder and Tijani Eshilokun came in for Snadden and we kicked off in front of a rather pitiful crowd of 37, although admittedly, any "floating supporters" would have always chosen to go to an FA Vase match on this day instead.

We made a bright start with some early interplay on the left between Rory Edwards and Jaan Stanley with the latter's cross just cut out by the home keeper Shay Honey. In response the home side sent a deep cross to the far post, but the header went over the bar and a few minutes later another right wing cross was acrobatically volleyed over the bar by Kelvin Karanja; a player that had given us a lot of trouble a few years back when at Bedfont & Feltham.

We then had a real scare in the 14th minute after Keogh scuffed a goal kick straight to Leon Iloube and although our defenders closed him down quickly, he still sent a stinging shot towards goal that our keeper somehow clawed away from the top corner to record a fabulous save. This became doubly important a minute later when Ade Batula sent a really good crossfield pass over to Jaan Stanley. Stanley cut back and it looked like the chance might be gone, but then he got round his man and was brought down in the penalty area. I was expecting a yellow card for the defender, but ultimately the award of a penalty was the more important issue and Stanley sent the keeper the wrong way to give us the lead in the 15th minute.

Although we didn't know it at the time, this goal would be the only one of the match and the rest of the match could arguably be described as attritional! We battled to cover every inch and our job was made a little easier when the Spelthorne Captain, Jamie Fuller chose to argue his case with the referee and found himself in the sinbin. You can always tell when a referee is being assessed as it more often than not leads to a very fussy and over officious display from the man in the middle and this was definitely the case in this match! Admittedly, he had a tricky job in trying to deal with the home bench who yelled and appealed for everything. On one of these occasions Ollie Thompson picked up a yellow card after a coming together between him and another player which looked completely accidental but it's possible that the official was swayed into awarding the free kick and once it was, I felt that a card would follow.

Then we had another great opportunity on the half hour as Batula got through on goal, but his touch let him down and the ball rolled tamely through to Honey. If we had taken advantage here against the extra man, maybe this would have resulted in a more comfortable position but Fuller was back on the field soon enough and the chance was gone.

The half ended with a couple of Epsom half chances. Eshilokun sent a dangerous looking free kick just wide after Edwards had been fouled nearly thirty yards out, and then Sirak Negassi sent a decent effort just wide from twenty yards with his weaker left foot. We had just about shaded the first half as the players went off for the break.

The second half got going under leaden skies which would eventually become a fairly solid downpour and we nearly had a second goal to celebrate only two minutes in when Thompson Adeyemi clipped a ball goalwards from twenty yards and it ended up only three inches past the post and into the side netting. However, the home side were on the attack soon after and Keogh did well to spread himself to block a shot over the bar.

We had another worry in the 53rd minute when Zach Powell, now Captain following the departure of Callum Wilson to Guildford City, fouled a Spelthorne player. It was hard to tell if it was inside the area or not, but either way we were spared by the sight of the Assistant's flag going up for offside and the danger was over.

Bearing in mind that the referee had already made it clear he wouldn't stand for any dissent, it was incredibly hard to

believe that anyone would take the risk again, yet in the 54th minute Daniel Watts for the home side and then Eshilokun for us in the 59th both found themselves in the sinbin too after taking issue with decisions that hadn't gone their way. Both had a very strong case for a free kick, but we need to learn not to say anything to an official, particularly when they have already sent someone for a ten minute rest previously!

It nearly cost us when a left wing cross from the home side was headed goalwards, but Keogh was there to tip the ball over for a corner. From the corner a delivery clearly hit the hand of one of our players, but the referee wasn't interested in the subsequent penalty shout, despite the rather desperate pleas of the bench some forty yards away from the incident!

As the game reached the closing stages, it certainly was to our advantage to break the game up and Adeyemi picked up a yellow card for delaying a free kick, but when a card was really deserved, after a late lunge on Ethan Nelson-Roberts, there was just a lecture given instead. We welcomed Luke Miller back into the side and he made his 50th appearance for our club, nearly two seasons after his 49th when he joined the action in the 77th minute, but by now we were more interested in hanging on to what we had, instead of attacking too much and Keogh was next to get a yellow card for delaying his goal kick. However, Keogh had already kicked the ball by the time the card was waved, and more time was actually wasted because the referee pulled the game back for a re-kick!

The home side continued to press for an equaliser, but they wouldn't threaten again and in fact the final opportunity of the match went to Eshilokun who nearly caught Honey out from twenty yards with a chip, but although the keeper's clearance wasn't the best contact, it was good enough to keep the ball out.

The final whistle led to celebrations from the players and few supporters that had made the journey and there was an additional bonus as results elsewhere ensured that the win actually moved us off the bottom of the table for the first time in weeks. It may be optimistic to expect to get anything out of our next two matches against Farnham Town and Knaphill, but we were looking like being cut adrift two weeks ago and yet now we are back amongst the other teams with games in hand. We're not done yet!

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Jabari Ofofu-Hernandez, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Thompson Adeyemi, Zach Powell (c), Ollie Thompson, Sirak Negassi, Rory Edwards, Ade Batula, Tijani Eshilokun, Jaan Stanley

Subs: Tino Carpena for Negassi (61), Luke Miller for Batula (77), Nick Inwugwu for Edwards (92)

Report Source: www.eefonline.co.uk