# Top Tips for Oaks Day at Epsom Racecourse

One of the biggest Flat race meetings of the British racing calendar is upon us as day one of the Derby meeting gets underway at Epsom Downs today.

The seven-race card has more than £1million in prize money up for grabs as the big gun trainers send their stars to Surrey for one of the most prestigious race days of the season.

The £550,000 Group 1 Betfred Oaks is the highlight on day one but not far behind that is the another Group 1, the Coronation Cup, with a prize pot of £445,000 up for grabs.

The Epsom card on Friday gets underway with the Woodcote Stakes (2.00), a six-furlong contest in class two for the two-yearold's. New Charter looked a handy type for trainer Richard Hannon when chasing home a current Royal Ascot favourite at Newmarket a fortnight ago and is taken to go one better at Epsom, but will face stern competition from Teej A, who won her maiden at Chester in fine fashion and will be bang up there once again.

The second race of the day is off at 2.35 and is a class two handicap over the extended mile trip, with 16 runners set to head to the starting stalls. Preference in this one goes Bopedro ahead of stablemate at David O'Meara's yard Blue For You, who finished third and fourth respectively in a handicap at York's Dante meeting earlier this month and both should improve at Epsom.

The first Group 1 on the card is race three at 3.10 - the Coronation Cup - and a small field of five will battle it out for the £252,360 first prize. Defending champion Emily Upjohn, trained by John and Thady Gosden, is back for more in 2024 and is the one to beat over the 1m4f trip once again. Luxembourg, a four-time Group 1 winner for master trainer Aidan O'Brien, rates as the obvious danger but needs to bounce back from a poor showing in the Dubai Turf at Meydan last time out. Feed The Flame is an intriguing runner in this one as well, heading over from France for trainer Pascal Bary having finished third of nine in the Prix Gany at Longchamps and connections opting to throw him into a Group 1 on British debut.

Fourteen runners look set for the start in race four of the cracking Epsom card on Friday at 3.45 – the Nifty 50 handicap – over the 1m2f distance. Ben Brookhouse's I Still Have Faith shaped well on seasonal reappearance at Nottingham after a fine 2023 campaign and is taken to score a fifth career win ahead of two Karl Burke runners in Bolster in Liberty Lane, who both won last time they were on track and will have plenty to say in proceedings.

The Group 1 Betfred Oaks is the feature race on day one at Epsom (4.30) and this year's renewal looks a belter, with £311,905 heading the way of the winner. That could well be Ylang Ylang for trainer O'Brien, who was a promising fifth in the first classic of the season in the 1000 Guineas at Newmarket and should relish the step up in trip here for a yard looking for a seventh win in the race since 2015.

Cheshire Oaks winner Forest Fairy looks to be a main player in the Oaks for trainer Ralph Beckett, who is no stranger to success in this race having won it with Look Here in 2008 and Talent in 2013, while Irish trainer Dermot Weld also has a live chance with Ezeliya, who has two wins from three starts and recently scored in a Group 3 at Navan.

After the big one, there are two more races on the Epsom card for punters to find a winner. The Listed Surrey Stakes (5.10) can go the way of Balmacara, trained by Eve Johnson-Houghton, who was a ready winner at Doncaster just over a month ago in a novice stakes contest.

Finally, the day one card comes to a close at 5.40 with the 12-runner class two handicap over the seven furlong trip and preference in the finale goes to the Roger Varian-trained Mission To Moon, who returned from a seven-month absence to score in fine style at Goodwood a month ago and is bred from a family who gets better with age.

Epsom selections - Friday (via Royal Ascot odds)

- 2.00 New Charter
- 2.35 Bopedro
- 3.10 Emily Upjohn
- 3.45 I Still Have Faith
- 4.30 Forest Fairy
- 5.10 Balmacara
- 5.40 Mission To Moon

Copy provided by BoyleSports

#### Should the Epsom Derby go back to Wednesday?

The first Wednesday of June used to be for many an unofficial bank holiday. Office, retail and factory staff parties filled **Epsom Downs** enjoying a day off and the annual **Epsom Derby** flat-race. The Epsom High Street shops used to close.

Of course, this year the Epsom Derby will take place on Saturday 1st June and the shops will remain very much open.

In a bold statement aimed at reviving the charm and prominence of the Epsom Derby, retired jockey **Dane O'Neill** has suggested returning the event to its traditional Wednesday slot. This proposal comes in light of apparent declining attendances and the Derby's diminishing distinctiveness against competitors like Royal Ascot.

O'Neill was speaking to Boyle Sports, who offer the latest odds for the Epsom Derby event, said "I think they have messed things up by moving it around a lot, and as a result has lost its identity for the wider public. We have seen it under several different guises. For the aficionado it is always going to be the Epsom Derby, one of the mainstays of English racing, but they have changed it so much that it has lost its spark."

For much of the 20th century, the Epsom Derby was synonymous with the first Wednesday in June. This midweek scheduling created a unique atmosphere, drawing massive crowds not only for the race but also for a festive day out. Historically, even Parliament would adjourn to allow members to attend, highlighting the event's national significance.

However, in 1995, the race was moved to Saturday in a bid to boost attendances and television ratings, a decision that has since been met with mixed reactions.

The switch to Saturday was intended to increase visibility and attendance, capitalizing on the weekend's leisure time. Yet, O'Neill and other critics argue that this move has diluted the Derby's unique character, making it just another event in a crowded sporting calendar. O'Neill believes that returning to a Wednesday would help restore the Derby's distinctiveness and might reignite public interest by creating a midweek spectacle that stands out on its own.

Epsom's course is renowned for its challenging nature, likened by O'Neill to a rollercoaster ride with its steep climbs and sharp turns, particularly at Tattenham Corner. This distinctive track demands exceptional skill from both horse and jockey, adding to the race's allure and prestige.

The Derby remains a cornerstone of English flat racing, celebrated for its history and the high calibre of competition it attracts.

Do you have a view? Write to our letters page.

Images credit: @EpsomRacecourse

### **Epsom Derby week read?**

A tale of triumph and tragedy, dreams and disasters aptly describes the life of **Bernard Dillon**, as detailed in a new book by **Stephen Fernane**. This captivating biography delves into the extraordinary journey of Dillon, who won the prestigious **Epsom Derby** in 1910 on **Lemberg**. The 2024 Epsom Derby takes place on Saturday 1st June.



Dillon on 1910 Derby winner Lemberg Agence Rol - Gallica Digital Library Public Domain

For the first time since Bernard's death in 1941, a book captures his astonishing rise to success and his subsequent fall from grace due to heavy drinking. From a talented apprentice to a shrewd professional, Bernard Dillon won the Epsom Derby and the Grand Prix de Paris, epitomizing a life of sporting triumph and human tragedy.

In 1901, at the tender age of thirteen, Bernard left Kerry with dreams of becoming a jockey in England. Remarkably, within three years, he had become the most popular sporting personality in both Britain and Ireland.

Stephen Fernane reveals that his fascination with Bernard's sporting achievements and the overshadowing sadness of his later years inspired him to write this book. The fact that Bernard's story is not widely known also motivated him.

As reported in the Irish Independent on 25th May the author said:

"Discovering Bernard's career and learning about all he achieved is what inspired me to write it. The inner demons that led to his demise in later life are just as fascinating. To think that very little is known about someone as colourful and complex as Bernard Dillon is astonishing," Stephen said.

The book, titled The Life and Times of Bernard Dillon: The Narie that Won the Derby, nods to Bernard's birthplace at Caherina in Strand Road, Tralee, in 1887.

"I want to bring Bernard home for the book launch. To bring his story back to where it all started, and present it to people who might not know about him. That is the best tribute I can give him. Bernard is a 'Narie' for sure, which is why the Kerins O'Rahilly's GAA Club is the appropriate venue. It's his spiritual home as he was born only a few yards from the clubhouse," Stephen explained.

Bernard Dillon's journey from 1901 to 1911 was anything but smooth as he grappled with celebrity and adversity. Sadly, his downfall included domestic abuse and the mistreatment of his wife, the famous music hall artist Marie Lloyd.

Bernard and Marie met in 1905 and began a turbulent relationship. They were Edwardian England's first celebrity couple, with



ISSN 2753-2771

Marie eighteen years older than Bernard. However, notoriety came at a cost. Bernard's downfall began when he lost his jockey's licence in 1913 over gambling allegations, marking the end of his reputation as a superstar.

Stephen believes it was essential to write Bernard's story due to the fragmented way it exists in the archives. With Marie Lloyd being the more famous personality, information about Bernard's life is usually viewed through the lens of Marie's biographers rather than Bernard's perspective.

"He wrote his memoir in 1922 which has largely been ignored until now. While he does not explain the more violent side to his personality in the memoir, I was able to solve this by reading through many court sittings he appeared before," Stephen said.

"Even though the court charges are upsetting to read, my aim is to show Bernard's opposing sides – not just him as a famous jockey. There are examples of closeness and intimacy between the couple that have never been written about before now," he added.

"There is a chapter about Bernard and Marie being incarcerated at Ellis Island in 1913 because they were unmarried. It's staggering to imagine two of the most famous people in Edwardian England being detained with hundreds of immigrants.

"They were the Posh and Becks of their time, for sure. As for Bernard's active service during WWI, a judge accused him of engaging in more violence in London than on the Western Front! Nothing was ever straightforward in Bernard's life from the time he left Tralee in short pants," Stephen explained.

Stephen sums up Bernard's life as 'totally unorthodox' and emphasizes that the book is about more than just horseracing.

"I wouldn't want anyone to get the impression the book is solely about horses. Significant though they are in Bernard's life, there is an undertone to the book that symbolizes a tragic love story between two people trying to deal with fame and infamy," he said.

"This is a global story that started in a quiet Kerry street and extended to far-off places like America, South Africa, and the Middle East. I just felt it was time for Bernard's story to be told in his own words. I think the book is fair to him and shows that no matter how successful we are in life, we are vulnerable to self-destruction," Stephen said.

The Life and Times of Bernard Dillon: The Narie that Won the Derby will be launched on June 6.

The book is priced at  $\ensuremath{\mathfrak{e}}$ 15 and is available at www.buythebook.ie/bernarddillon.

Top image: By Leslie Ward - Published in Vanity Fair, 12 September 1906, as "Men of the Day" Number 1031. Public Domain and background By Hywel Williams, CC BY-SA 2.0

# Leatherhead Women top their league

**Leatherhead Women's FC** finished the season on a high, winning the league without losing a single game. The team finished with a record of 15 wins, one draw and not a single loss in the league securing promotion into the Premier Division.

Specsavers have championed the team since its introduction into senior women's football, with new kits and banners and continued support from the team of opticians and audiologists.

The team plays every home game in Fetcham Grove where you will be able to see the new kits in action.

Specsavers retail director, **Mihaela Ovadiuc** said: "At Leatherhead, we strive to be a shining light within our local community, whether that be directly or indirectly. Supporting Leatherhead Women's has been such an honour, and we are all over the moon that we are extending the sponsorship. The club aligns with our commitment to promoting healthy and active living and takes pleasure in offering a secure environment for the local community."

# A cloud followed by silver for Old Glynonians

**Old Glynonians** are the new holders of the Papa Johns Community Cup Counties 3 South Shield, having overcome Cranleigh in a thrilling 22-21 victory on Sunday 12th May.

After an emotional minute's silence was held in honour of former Old Glynonians player **Ben Rollinson**, who sadly died aged just 42 last Friday, Glyn started with a fire in their belly and scored two early tries to take a 10-0 lead within the first 20 minutes, but the next 60 minutes would not be as straightforward.



ISSN 2753-2771

Cranleigh responded with two converted scores to lead 10-14 and appeared to be heading towards half-time full of confidence, but OGs captain Tim Laughton-Scott crashed over the whitewash in the last play of the half to restore the Epsom & Ewell-based side's lead.

With temperatures rising to an annual peak of 25c down at Shaftesbury Park in Bristol, home of the Bristol Bears Women, and just a point separating the teams at 15-14, everything was set for an exhausting second 40.

Five minutes into the second half, Man of the Match Michael Hume showed speed, power and calm to break through the Cranleigh defence and juggle a back-and-fourth pass with his fellow centre before dotting down to extend Old Glynonians' lead. The try was converted by fly-half Sam Smith to make the score 22-14.

And that kick that would prove the difference between glory and gut-wrenching defeat, as 35 minutes of gruelling Glyn defence was finally broken by Cranleigh who got over the line to make it 22-21. But as the Crane's conversion sailed through the sticks, the full-time whistle was blown. The match would end 22-21 in favour of the Old Glynonians.

The 2024 Papa Johns Community Cup Counties 3 South Shield now sits alongside three Surrey Bowls (2008, '09, '12) in the Old Glynonians trophy cabinet.

**James McFarlane, Chairman of Old Glynonians RFC, said:** "Firstly, huge credit has to go to Cranleigh. They have given us one of the hardest-fought games I can ever remember. The one-point winning margin is a fair representation of how tight the game was and how well-matched the sides were, so they should also be proud of their performance.

"Winning this competition is hugely satisfying. There are so many people that have been mucking in both on and off the pitch for so many years, and now it all feels worth it."

**Tim Laughton-Scott, Captain of Old Glynonians RFC, said:** "We really had to dig deep out there to win this, so it feels like a very sweet victory. We knew we could do it, but when the score flipped against us in the first half, it tested our belief for sure. We stuck to our game, fought bravely on what was an exhausting day under the sun, and just about came away on top.

"I never expected to be picking up silverware in my first season as captain, but the support from the players and the backroom staff has been great. It's a big win for everyone involved."

**James Kennedy-Myers, Head Coach of Old Glynonians RFC, said:** "I didn't play but I'm still exhausted! To win our first trophy in over decade and to do it less than 48 hours after the devastating loss of a former player stirs up so many emotions. Rollo [Ben Rollinson] was a great friend of mine, and this win will be well and truly dedicated to him.

"I'm thrilled with the squad that we have, probably our strongest ever, and look forward to defending our crown next season."

Image: Old Glynonians lift the Papa Johns Community Cup. credit Lisa Banning/Old Glynonians

## **Inclusive sportsmanship in Worcester Park**

The annual Linden Bridge Football Festival kicked off with a vibrant display of teamwork, camaraderie, and sheer determination. Organized by **Linden Bridge School**, Worcester Park, and led by enthusiastic pupils, this event brought together 15 special educational needs (SEN) schools and over 100 pupils for a day of spirited competition.

The festival, held at **Wandgas Sports Ground**, exemplified the inclusive spirit that Linden Bridge School stands for. Students of all abilities participated in various football matches, showcasing their skills and passion for the beautiful game. From footgolf to mini-tournaments, the atmosphere was electric as players cheered each other on.

One of the festival's highlights was the unwavering support from local businesses. **MetroRod**, a leading drainage and plumbing company, stepped up as the main sponsor. Their generous contribution ensured that every participant received a commemorative medal, a symbol of their hard work and dedication. In addition, MetroRod provided trophies for all participating schools, recognizing outstanding performances and sportsmanship.

Coach Dom, from **KEY Sports Academy**, played a pivotal role in making the festival a success. His expertise in organizing sports events and passion for nurturing young talent shone through. Coach Dom lent equipment and offered valuable coaching tips. His commitment to empowering young athletes was evident as he encouraged fair play and teamwork.

"The Linden Bridge Football Festival is more than just a tournament," Coach Dom shared. "It's about fostering a love for sports, building confidence, and creating lasting memories. These students inspire us all with their determination and resilience."

The **Surrey Special Schools Sports Association** (SSSSA) includes the Linden Bridge Football Festival as a key event in its annual calendar. Linden Bridge School takes immense pride in being an active member of the association. This year alone, Linden Bridge pupils have participated in 25 SSSSA-organized events across various sports disciplines.

"Our students thrive when given the opportunity to compete," said Mr. **Borja Vidal**, PE Lead at Linden Bridge School. "The festival allows them to showcase their abilities, make friends, and celebrate their achievements. We're grateful to everyone who made this day possible."

The Linden Bridge Football Festival reminded us that sports transcend barriers, bringing people together in the spirit of unity and joy.

With the success of this year's festival, Linden Bridge School is already planning for next year. The goal remains the same: to create an inclusive platform where every student can shine, regardless of their abilities. As the festival becomes a cherished tradition, it reinforces the belief that sports have the power to transform lives.

## Making a racket for new padel centre

**Leatherhead** could soon host international competition after Surrey's first indoor padel centre was approved. Padel is a racket sport of Mexican origin, typically played in doubles, and is like a mix between Tennis and Squash.

The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) has said it is committed to investing in the growth of padel and wants to build more courts that can be used throughout the year.

The new facilities, granted planning permission next to Leatherhead Leisure Centre by Mole Valley District Council, are considered critical to sustaining this growth, the LTA said, and would enable more adults and juniors to enjoy, compete and experience the game.

Six new courts will be will be split by cafe area and viewing platform under a large doom next to Leatherhead Leisure Centre. Councillors agreed the benefits sports and recreation would bring to the borough outweighed the harm the 11 metres-tall dome would have on the green belt.

The LTA has also said the courts would be used at both national and international levels. The dome would be shielded to help it blend in to the surrounding area.

Councillor Roger Adams (Liberal Democrat, Bookham West) said: "I'm all for trees being used as screens and the more we can screen buildings the better and certainly this is a very large building, although it is green, it will be nice just to take the the solid lines away by more planting."

Cllr Raj Haque (Liberal Democrat, Fetcham) said: "This proposal is one of the best ones in terms of sporting facilities that will be provided."

Cllr Simon Budd added that he was pleased the dome was going to be green as the white one in Dorking was now discoloured by mould.

The courts include parking for 24 cars and will occupy land used as a boating lake as well as storage for waste containers.

To help spread the game, developers said they would run outreach programs with nearby schools "encourage involvement with the facility" as well as set up a club and hold regular padel lessons.

The land council owned and will be be leased for use as a padel facility and the dome structure will be fully enclosed to prevent significant light spillage.

Image - example of indoor padel centre

### Old Glynonians silver chance in a decade

Epsom & Ewell-based Old Glynonians RFC will take a team bus to Bristol this Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> May to contest the Papa Johns Community Cup Counties 3 South Shield Final.

The side, formed in 2007 by former Glyn School students and still made-up of a number of alumni, will face fellow Surrey side Cranleigh, having dismissed Streatham-Croydon RFC and King's College Hospital in the quarter-final and semi-final respectively.

This will be the 'Ogs' first final since 2012, where they saw off Merton to win the Surrey Bowl, a competition they also won in 2008 and 2009.

**James McFarlane,** Chairman of Old Glynonians RFC, said: "Less than two years ago we were finding our feet again after a COVID-interrupted year or two of on-and-off rugby, so to be heading to a cup final with arguably our strongest ever squad is testament to all the hard work put by so many people at the club.

We'd like to thank The Rising Sun in Epsom, our home pub and clubhouse, for their hospitality this season, our brilliant sponsors, Radford & Sons Butchers in Stoneleigh, without them we wouldn't have any new kit or quality food for out BBQ social events, as well as the brilliant City Skills. Thanks also to Glyn School for continuing to let us use the facilities. Fingers crossed the boys can get the job done on Sunday"

**Tim Laughton-Scott,** Captain of Old Glynonians RFC, said: "Things have really started to click this year. We had a mixed bag of results earlier in the winter, but as the players have gelled, confidence levels have grown and I've got a lot of faith in the team going down to Bristol on Sunday. Funnily enough, we've only recently come off our end-of-season tour to Amsterdam, but we all came home in one piece and everyone should be in good shape for the game."

**James Kennedy-Myers**, Head Coach of Old Glynonians RFC, said: "The boys have already achieved great things this season, including a club-record 10 league wins, and things really have gone from strength-to-strength over the last few months.

"If we turn up with the same energy and commitment we've shown in the previous two rounds of this competition, then there's every chance we can lift the cup."

The match will take place at Shaftesbury Park, the home of Bristol Bears Women and will kick off at 11am.

# Umpire pulls up stumps on cricket plan

A long-standing Surrey cricket club's ambitious plans to construct modern facilities has sparked controversy in the local community, leading to a tense planning decision.

Banstead Cricket Club's plans to modernise its ground have been rejected, by the narrowest of margins. The club, which has been in the village for more than a century and a half, had hoped to update its dilapidated changing rooms and clubhouse to give it a home ground fit for the 21st century.

Residents living near the ground objected over the harm it would do to the character of the green belt. In a nail-biting finish it hinged on whether there were exceptional circumstances to build on the green belt. In the end it came down to the chairman to cast the deciding vote after members were split down the middle.

In an unusual turn of events the planning chair voted against officer recommendations and the cricket club's plans were refused. Councillor Simon Parnall said: "I knew this was going to happen. You have your name on the block sometimes."

He added: "Given the weight of the meeting, and the way that people have their feelings quite openly expressed, I, contrary to my normal position which is to support officers, I think now I ought to stand and vote for the reason for refusal because this is so controversial and it would need another go."

Reasons the club had wanted new facilities included money gained by renting out the space for events. It was also in part due to the massive growth of the game among girls and women, and therefore the need for changing rooms for women.

Martin Long said he was representing the 107 objectors who had written in against the development, where he claims the vast majority live in Banstead Village. He said: "The report does not mention that of the 157 letters of support only 10 per cent are

ISSN 2753-2771

from addresses within the borough.

He said there are three other community venues in the borough, all with better access, and questioned why a fourth was needed. He told the meeting that the Lady Neville park was given to the people of Banstead, not the Banstead Cricket Club.

Opposition focused on the scale of the development and not the club's need to modernise. He added: "A vast two-storey development would be an appalling blot on the green belt, the surrounding treeline and the view from the park itself.

"A single storey cricket club house is all that is needed not a vast function venue with an all round terrace. The impact of noise and traffic that this new facility will have on residents is unimaginable."

The Thursday, April 24, meeting of Reigate and Banstead Borough Council's planning committee heard the primary focus of the club was the provision of cricket but it needed revenue for other activities to survive financially. The club wanted to demolish its current clubhouse and replace it with a new modern facility to conform with "Sport England and the sports governing body standards".

It also wanted to refurbish its pavilion to create a dedicated changing space for women and girls. The plans had been recommended for approval and received more letters of support than opposition during the consultation stage, although it was argued the majority if this came from outside the borough.

Ray Smythe, a resident of De Burgh Park which backs on to the grounds, spoke against the plans. He said they were inappropriate for the green belt and should only be approved if there were very special circumstances.

He said: "The positioning of the new premises will eliminate the only distinct view from the recreation ground that is not currently obscured by buildings in the area." He added that clubhouse's second floor was not needed for cricket and the financial implications were not a planning matter. He said they could also reduce the cost of the project by scaling back the clubhouse.

Arguing for the plans was Ian Thorpe who told the meeting the club had been in Banstead since 1850 and that its facilities were no longer fit for purpose. The new proposals, which had already been scaled back and revised, was needed to fit in with the latest guidelines for sport.

He said the clubhouse was no longer compliant for all players regardless of gender or age and that the site would operate under its current licensing hours with no desire to extend them further. He said: "Its hoped that the facility will be more than just a cricket club to the local community. With this proposal Banstead Cricket Club is seeking to offer its members and the local community a clubhouse to be proud of."

Related reports:

Just not cricket to replace Banstead pavilion?

Image - visualisation of new pavilion and current inset.

# One flat season in Epsom ends as another begins

Our season concluded in appropriate fashion on Saturday as we laboured to a 1-1 draw against Guildford City at the Spectrum.

Five days prior to this match, Tadley Calleva's win over Colliers Wood United ensured that our two recent wins over Fleet Town and Abbey Rangers had given us enough points to secure our safety, although for some reason our club never made the effort to inform our "Dear supporters" (as they recently called them) of this fact. Either way, Salts players and supporters alike were able to relax a little going into this contest, and I have to say it showed, as we started well but tailed off. Throw in the usual defensive error that confirmed we have to wait until at least August 2024 before we can record our first clean sheet of the calendar year and it meant that the point was enough for our hosts to be certain of confirming their own safety, although as it turned out, results elsewhere meant that they would have survived even had they lost.

We went into this match chasing a third straight win, which would have been the first time all season we had managed this, but it's hard to know how bothered we were about it. Our Manager Warren Burton was absent and we only named thirteen players in our line up; one of whom, Jaevon Dyer, only arrived ten minutes before kick off. There may have been some valid reasons for the absences and delays, but the question has to be asked about how many players we would have been able to name, if we had still required any points from this match.

Our regular supporters were there in decent numbers, including the returning Alex McKay Senior who appears on the mend after being away for much of 2024. The home side were also well supported at the Spectrum, leading to an attendance of 151 and a



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well-stocked viewing area on what is realistically the only real open side of the ground.

We had the first opportunity of the match in the sixth minute when a square ball from Thompson Adeyemi reached Sirak Negassi on the edge of the penalty area, but the ball bobbled on him and he skied it well over the bar. Our Captain Ethan Nelson-Roberts was flattened by a late challenge that ought to have earned a yellow card, but didn't, before Zach Ingham-Wright saw his strike on goal tipped over the bar by Adam Longman. However, Negassi then received a similar opportunity to his previous one in the 16th minute when an Adam Green corner missed everyone at the near post and found our winger, who curled the ball first time into the far corner of the goal to put us ahead. Negassi has been unfortunate in my opinion to find himself as a substitute so often, and his 21 appearances (from 48 matches) from the bench are the second most in club history, trailing only Dale Marvell's 22 in 2000/01 (from 56 matches) and he turned out to be a very good player!

We may have had a poor season, but it has been our opponents that have been in the worst form of all teams with only eight points collected since the end of September. The only way that they could have gone down was with a four goal defeat here and a Colliers Wood United win against Sheerwater, so it was always an unlikely outcome, but our early goal may well have caused a bit of concern within the home support at that point. However, what we didn't realise was that we had already seen the sum total of our attacking threat for the day. Guildford picked up their level and started to threaten.

The big battle going on was between Reece Tierney and Guildford City's Ben Mitchell and Tierney was lucky to escape without a card of any colour after bringing him down just as he appeared to break through on goal, albeit some 45 yards out. In the course of a normal match I'm sure he would have picked up a yellow card for this, but the referee clearly didn't want to hand any out and he escaped with a warning.

We had a half-chance on the thirty minute mark when Negassi's left wing cross was met by a low header by Carl Oblitey, but Longman kept it out fairly comfortably and in fact things were much more precarious at the other end as a close range header clipped our cross bar, only for a corner to be awarded, much to the dismay of our keeper Dan O'Donovan. The corner then struck the frame of the goal before being fed to the far post where our keeper had to be down quickly to turn a low shot around his post, but from the next corner, another Guildford header smacked against our bar again before being headed up in the air by Ayran Kugathas and into the arms of O'Donovan for a lucky escape.

The second half started with a couple of substitutes for the home team and a third would follow soon after. Negassi struck a corner at goal on the volley, but the contact wasn't quite right and the ball dribbled through to Longman. However, the second half belonged mostly to the team that needed the points more and a far post header by James Glover from a corner was only just wide.

A Luke Miller strike went harmlessly past the post, but Guildford were looking the more likely to score and in the 72nd minute that's what happened, although in typical Epsom and Ewell style, we were the authors of our own misfortune as Tierney went to head a goal kick back up the field, only for the ball to fly backwards off his head and into the path of Mitchell. Nelson-Roberts tried to close him down, but the damage was done and he clipped the ball over the advancing O'Donovan from eight yards for the equaliser. We had another scare in the closing moments as a long ball nearly bounced straight over O'Donovan. Fortunately, he got a slight hand to the ball and Tierney was just able to get the ball clear of the menacing Mitchell, who certainly looked as though he should be playing for a team higher up the League.

We just had time in the 89th minute to see our substitute keeper Toby Colwell come on as an outfield player. Whilst it was a novelty to see and a reward for Colwell's loyalty; sitting on the bench for most of the year, it highlighted the dysfunctional nature of our season which started so poorly under James Scott, before we recovered under Steve Springett to a position of relative safety, only for Warren Burton and Gwynne Berry to take over in January and record just four wins. We close the chapter on 2023/24 in a rather surprising 16th place, which was higher than we had been at any time since August, although it really just provides an indication of how poor the bottom five clubs have been this season! It is assumed that our Management team will be back for next term, which would be the first time for three years and it will be interesting to see what new faces appear, as I'll be honest, we need quite a few if we are not to endure another difficult season; one where it must be remembered, two clubs will be relegated, not just one.

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Ethan Brazier, Ethan Nelson-Roberts (c), Adam Green, Reece Tierney, Ayran Kugathas, Luke Miller, Thompson Adeyemi, Carl Oblitey, Zach Ingham-Wright, Sirak Negassi

Subs: Jaevon Dyer for Kugathas (67), Toby Colwell for Ingham-Wright (89)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk