

Top dog toppled in windy contest

11 December 2023



Beckenham RFC 22 - Sutton & Epsom RFC 26. Saturday 9th December.

Saturday marked the start of the home stretch with the first of the reverse fixtures. In Week 2 both teams endured testing temperatures in the crucible of Rugby Lane to produce an extraordinary game of extremely fluctuating fortunes. The denouement included the ecstasy of a penalty try to Beckenham and the agony of a last second penalty drift wide for Sutton as the visitors won 42-41. At least the teams were spared Arctic weather for the rematch at Balmoral Avenue. Many players had crossed the whitewash since that September Saturday and the Kent Club sat atop of Regional 2 South East whilst the men from Surrey arrived with four consecutive wins under their belt. After an enthralling contest Sutton gained their most impressive scalp of the season as they won 26-22.

Sutton & Epsom offered a warm welcome back to Tom Lennard after his highly successful jaunt in the Antipodes. The playmaker not only starred for Melbourne University gaining representative honours but also encouraged Josh Pulvirenti to join him at S&E. If Tom was the Australian addition New Zealand was represented by the returning Willem Ratu. So the domestic unions did not feel overlooked Sutton even selected a Welshman in Ross Parsons. The weather once again played a significant role in the fixture with a tremendous wind billowing down the pitch. Freddy Bunting kicked off with the gale behind him and Sutton went on the offensive from the very start but their swift attacks were matched by the swarming defence of the hosts. Though the leaders gave up an early penalty in front of the uprights. With a prostrate player holding the ball in place and the posts swaying in the wind Captain Bunting made it 3-0.

Beckenham gave an early warning to the visitors of the quality of their back play as Tom Bateman linked with Matt Lovell to bring the leaders deep into the Sutton 22 but their efforts were thwarted by conceding a penalty. After ten minutes S&E had doubled their lead to 6-0 with another Bunting penalty but they were frustrated that a fine attack had not resulted in a try. At the end of the first quarter Matt Whitaker's desperate bid to force his way over by the posts was held up by resilient defenders. The elements made it extremely difficult for the hosts to exit from their 22 but their well organised defence frustrated the Black & White backs. On the half hour Tom Lennard hacked through a loose ball and gathered it up and a couple of strides short of glory he was tackled. The referee ruled it a high tackle and with no other defender in view he awarded a penalty try and Sutton led 13-0.

The leaders then enjoyed their best passage of play as their forwards and backs combined with multiple phases to get into the Sutton 22. Impressive offloads in the tackle maintained the momentum and then they opted to kick ahead. On any other afternoon it would have been a worthwhile gamble but the ball was gathered by Freddy Bunting and despatched on the wind 60 metres back down the paddock. The visitors pressed hard to extend their lead and thought they were about to score again from a 5-metre scrum when Gareth O'Brien was penalised. With time running out in the first half Willem Ratu countered towards the 22. His run earned another penalty which Freddy Bunting readily converted to conclude the half with a 16-0 lead.

As both sides retired to the warmth of the dressing rooms for directions from their coaches everyone pondered just how many points the wind was worth. In addition to the elements Beckenham had survived 10 minutes with 14 men after a yellow card to stand off Gary Dipple. The leaders had done extremely well to frustrate the Black & Whites who, for all their territory and possession, only scored a solitary try. Sutton knew that they would need to be at their very best in the second half to withstand the inevitable siege to come.

The Blamoral Avenue crowd did not have long to wait to cheer the success of their local heroes. A Sutton fumble on their 22 from the restart put the hosts in prime position to chip away at the lead. S&E conceded a penalty at the scrum and Geordie Boyce stepped up to chip over the conversion for 3-16. Beckenham pressed hard for further additions. A Gareth O'Brien tackle thwarted one attack and the pack stole a scrum ball on their 22. However, the clearance kick was run back with a vengeance. The Kent side were within 5 metres and flung out a long pass. Lock Ciall Kirwan was hugging the touchline and did superbly to take the pass on his laces to score in the corner. Unsurprisingly the touchline conversion was blown off course but the Sutton lead was now 16-8 with 30 minutes remaining.

With errors mounting in the Sutton play and confidence surging through the veins of the league leaders the momentum had definitely shifted. It was now that Sutton & Epsom demonstrated not only great character but also their best play. The howitzer boot of Bunting thumped a penalty into the 22 to give his team a promising lineout. The catch and drive advanced the ball into threatening territory. Following multiple phases and admirable control by the pack finally Matt Whitaker was ushered over the line for the try. The kick adjacent to the uprights was converted and S&E led by 23-8. The men from Rugby Lane continued to attack in search of another try. As per the first period the Beckenham defence held firm but once again the referee brought play back for a penalty. Once more the irrepressible Bunting extended the lead to 26-8 as the game entered the final quarter.

Considering the playing conditions this was a most impressive phase of play from the visitors who continued on the offensive not only carrying well but when required kicking penalties into the 22. At this stage centre Tane Feldhaus-Davies gave voice to his frustration with the number of offside penalties that his team were accumulating as he let fly with colourful language as he enquired to the heavens as to the precise number of offences. With ten minutes remaining Beckenham scored a quite outstanding try as fullback Francesco Pennacchia made a stunning break from his own half and linked with his support. A wave of Beckenham shirts burst into the Sutton 22 and captain Hans Laud-Anderson, like every quality 7, was on hand to add the finishing touch. Geordie Boyce added the extras for 26-15.

Roared on by a sizeable and passionate crowd the game was now turned on its head and it was the Surrey team who had to show their defensive mettle. It was the turn of the visitors to concede penalties. Beckenham opted for a 5-metre scrum and the result was another penalty and a yellow card not to a prop but to flanker Rob Hegarty and the leaders opted for the tap penalty. The ball was given to replacement prop James Cleverly with his mane like Samson, the beard of a lumberjack and a physique that shuns the modern figure-hugging apparel he bounced off the first tackler, sidestepped through a gap and strode over for a most accomplished solo effort. With Geordie Boyce chipping over the conversion the Sutton lead was only 26-22.

The crowd were in full voice and expectations running high as Sutton had five minutes to survive. In recent times the expression game management has not been linked with flattering adjectives

for the Black & Whites but they now relentlessly held onto possession through multiple phases near halfway with a prodigious effort by the forwards. Then a shrill blast of the whistle and the hosts were given a lifeline of a penalty. The Gods smiled down benevolently on S&E as the kick went through the in-goal area. A grateful Sutton accepted a scrum on halfway and moments later ran down the clock to gain a fabulous 26-22 victory.

That made it five wins in a row for Sutton and to inflict the first defeat on the table-toppers at Balmoral Avenue this season was a notable achievement. The Beckenham backs are formidable not only in attack but also in defence. The leaders ability to pass out of the tackle is a most potent weapon but S&E matched their lofty opponents and it was their ability to play so well against the wind that was the deciding factor. Freddie Bunting's accumulation of points is well known but in this game it was the power of his kicking from hand that caught the eye. However, in truth it was a great team performance, as is often the way in harsh weather, that was the backbone for this latest win. It would be remiss not to mention the magnificent hospitality offered at Balmoral Avenue with the clubhouse bar one of the finest locations around to enjoy the traditional pleasures for which rugby is renowned.

Probably with a sense of relief to players, coaches and administrators next Saturday sees the last league match of 2023 and the competition adjourns for the festive break. For those readers who still prefer the High Street to online purchasing but are looking for an excuse to escape the horrors of Christmas shopping I can heartily recommend Sutton's game against Old Reigatian at Rugby Lane that kicks off at 2pm.

Sutton & Epsom:

Gareth O'Brien, Kyren Ghumra, Willem Ratu, Tom Lennard, Ciaran Mohr, Freddy Bunting ©, Ross Parsons, Tom Boaden, Chris Farrell, Alex Mount, Ewan McTaggart, Josh Glanville, Rob Hegarty, Josh Pulvirenti & Matt Whitaker. Replacements: Callum Gibson, Jack Howes & Matt Symonds.

Beckenham:

Francesco Pennacchia, Tom Bateman, Matt Lovell, Tane Feldhaus-Davies, Geordie Boyce, Gary Dipple, Ben Murphy, Lamar Sinclair, Liam Markey, Graham Murray, Ciall Kirwan, Josh Hiscott, Conor Palmer, Hans Laud-Anderson © & Oliver Stapelton.

Replacements: James Cleverly, Thomas Ward & Jed Hamilton

Salts beat County Town, or City?

11 December 2023



Epsom & Ewell 4-3 Guildford City. Combined Counties League – Premier Division. Saturday 9th December 2023.

On Saturday we welcomed Guildford City to our temporary home at Cobham for a first League meeting since 2018 and a bizarre match ensued with our boys just about coming through to secure the points by a score of 4-3.

On a fairly wet and often gusty afternoon that attracted just 72 spectators, despite many local matches falling foul of the weather, I firstly noticed that there were some changes in the dugout. Joint Manager Sam Groombridge was still absent due to personal issues and in view of this, Steve Springett brought in Gwynne Berry and Warren Burton to help him as Coaches. Burton is in fact a former Salt, making a couple of first team appearances in 1993/94 before moving on to greater things, while Berry was formerly with Sutton United amongst other clubs.

This “reshuffle” allowed Springett to take his place back on the field in his newly favoured central defensive midfield position after missing the previous two contests and in addition Luke Miller and Ade Batula came back into the starting line up with Tijani Eshilokun, Tino Carpena and George Owusu making way, although the latter two would play a part from the bench. For Guildford, our former Captain Callum Wilson was in the starting line up for a team that had taken just five points from their last twelve League matches, although they had picked up three of those with a win over Colliers Wood United just three days previously.

We had an early scare in just the fourth minute when our Captain and keeper Harvey Keogh came out to clear a ball, only to hammer it against a visiting player who was trying to close him down, with the rebound luckily heading out for a goal kick. It was a warning that we wouldn't heed later in the match.

We responded well and took charge of proceedings for a while. Ethan Nelson-Roberts and Jaan Stanley were linking well on the left and we took the lead in the twelfth minute with one of the best deliveries of a ball I have seen at this level as Nelson-Roberts pinged the ball diagonally from around 35 yards right onto the head of Thompson Adeyemi who then nodded the ball past Adam Longman from eight yards to open the scoring.

The visitors nearly levelled up soon after this as a ball in from the left was met by a Guildford striker, but he was unable to get his close range effort on target and it almost appeared as if he hadn't expected the ball to reach him. We were soon back on the attack though and a Springett free kick found Adeyemi's head again, although the effort went straight at Longman. Two minutes later though his next set piece caused panic in the defence and the ball was guided into the corner of the net by Niall Stillwell for an own goal. Stillwell was Keogh's PE teacher a few years back and he currently teaches my boy Nathan, so I'm sure words will be had at school next week!

At 2-0 up we were good value for our lead and we nearly made it three on the half hour when Stanley pressured a defender to head the ball beyond his own keeper and although he was then able to clear before our man could get there, the ball didn't go far and was fed back in where Miller's powerful drive was just deflected over the bar at the last minute by our former Captain Wilson.

Unfortunately in the 38th minute the game swung in Guildford's favour when Keogh tried to see the ball out of play for a goal kick and was robbed. Our man then collided head first with the fencing as the ball was fed across goal for Darnell MacDonald to fire into the empty net. We were a long way from the action but there was certainly an argument from people closer than me that he had been fouled. Either way, the ball should really have been sent into Row Z. Keogh appeared to have recovered after five minutes of treatment, but then in the seventh minute of injury time, ironically only being played as a result of his earlier collision, he let a corner slip through his hands and Will May fired in an equaliser.

Clearly our keeper was struggling and he never came out for the second half, leading to a second appearance in goal this season for our midfielder Nick Wilson. In fact the early part of the second half was a bit of a trial for our supporters as Guildford came at us with the momentum they had gained at the end of the opening forty-five minutes and Wilson had to punch away one corner before producing a world class save in the 57th minute as a low right wing ball was met at the far post with a tap in. The away supporters behind the goal were already cheering, only to see Wilson recover to claw the ball away from the line and stop a certain goal. If a striker can score a worldy, then this was the goal keeping equivalent and it turned the game back in our favour.

It was easy to forget at this point that whilst we had lost our keeper, we were not down to ten men and as the half wore on we began to get more of a foothold. Then in the space of two minutes we took charge again, firstly in the 67th minute with a typical powerful low drive across the keeper into the far corner from Miller from just inside the penalty area. Both Wilson and Longman got slight touches to the ball on its way, but couldn't keep it out. Then two minutes later a ball from the right was finished off at the far post by substitute Sirak Negassi who had come on at the break for Keogh.

As we were celebrating behind the goal we realised that Longman was requiring more treatment and he was replaced soon after, leaving us with the very rare occurrence of both starting keepers failing to finish the match! After a small break we continued and Stanley did ever so well on the right wing to chase a lost cause and rob a defender, only to then try an ambitious strike from a narrow angle with two of our players waiting for a pass who were not best pleased! Then Springett was inches wide with a free kick from 25 yards that the keeper wasn't going to reach.

Then in the 83rd minute we conceded again as Wilson shouted to claim a corner, only for the ball to sail over his head where it was nodded in from close range. This led to quite a nervy ending, especially when the referee advised the replacement visiting keeper that we were going to see an extra seven minutes, but we

saw them out with minimal worry, although Wilson made another superb save with a low block from close range in the final minute of normal time. We nearly scored a fifth goal when Negassi sent the ball over for Tino Carpena, only for his shot to be deflected inches wide.

The final action came in the 98th minute when Nick Inwugwu was fouled as the visitors were chasing an equaliser, only for Owen Sims to vent his frustration about the decision to the referee who sent him straight to the sin-bin for his comments. He must have been sat down on the bench for ten seconds at most when the final whistle blew anyway.

This was a strange encounter that had a few turning points. We looked well in control for a large part of the match, only to be pegged back, and effectively we had to go and win the match a second time. This was an important victory to take us further away from the bottom two clubs, and more relevantly, it was a well-deserved one too. Hopefully we can extend our winning run to two matches when we visit Colliers Wood United next Saturday.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh (c), Nick Inwugwu, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Steve Springett, Reece Tierney, Nick Wilson, Luke Miller, Thompson Adeyemi, Ade Batula, Rory Edwards, Jaan Stanley

Subs: Sirak Negassi for Keogh (HT), George Owusu for Miller (75), Tino Carpena for Batula (75)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Unflagging Bunting clinches victory at the end

11 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

11 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 Carpena, Rory Edwards, Jaan Stanley

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

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Penalty shoot out in normal time....

11 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

11 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

11 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 programmess 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

11 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 clattered 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

11 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

11 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.eefonline.co.uk