

Epsom draw from the jaws of defeat

8 March 2023

Epsom & Ewell 2-2 Godalming Town. Southern Combination League – Division One. Tuesday 7th March 2023.

On Tuesday evening Epsom and Ewell and Godalming Town played out their first ever draw as we fought back from two goals down to force a share of the points on a chilly evening at Fetcham Grove.

We made three changes from the dramatic win at Selsey three days earlier with Toby McKimm getting a second game for us after his first was curtailed wrongly and prematurely at Hailsham Town, whilst Chris Boulter and Mario Quiassaca returned to the starting eleven at the expense of Nick Wilson and George Owusu who were on the bench but would both get involved later.

The first few minutes were in our favour, but in the seventh minute Jaevon Dyer gave away a needless free kick out wide. The original ball in was half cleared but was fed back in and Ollie McAleese was there to head the ball into the net from close range. We nearly equalised in the 15th minute when Athan Smith-Joseph’s ball across goal took a deflection and almost bounced along the goal line, inches out of reach of the incoming Dyer.

There weren’t many chances in this half really though, and the only other real items to note were a rather strange booking for Smith-Joseph, who appeared to be blocked by a defender, and then in the 35th minute when Ross Cheek was sent to the sin bin. We pushed a little more after that, but a Quiassaca ball across goal was behind Dyer and this summed up the first half really. As the teams went off at the half there was no disguising the fact that this was a fairly flat performance to this point, but a match that could still be won if we could improve. However, in the 58th minute a ball over the top of our defence was collected by Tom White who just got to the ball ahead of McKimm and lifted it over him and just below the bar despite attempts to clear by our defenders.

At 2-0 down we hadn’t actually had a shot on target and I couldn’t see a way back into the match. However, fairly fresh in the memory was the loss of a two goal lead at Selsey and our players clearly felt that if we could lose one there, we were just as capable of rescuing one too. However, a large amount of credit goes to our Assistant Manager Matt Chapman for making a triple substitution on the hour and changing the shape of the team. From this point we presented a much greater threat.

The next turning point in the match came in the 71st minute when we earned a corner which was met by a great header from Boulter which needed a good punch from Ryan O’Sullivan in the Godalming goal. However, the ball was recycled and fell to Boulter once again, standing on the eighteen yard line and he unleashed a fantastic volley into the top corner of the goal. Trust me, you won’t see a better one in the Premier League this weekend, and what a way to score your first goal for the club!

At 1-2 down we had a sniff, particularly with Jamie Byatt now on the pitch and true to form he would have his say. Just before our equaliser though, Quiassaca had a shot blocked at close range after good work from Dyer, but in the 81st minute we saw some silky skills from Gavin Quintyne who took the ball out of defence and then sent the ball over the top of the Godalming back four for Quiassaca to chase. For some reason O’Sullivan had felt the need to come out to try and reach the ball first, but was nowhere near it and Quiassaca simply squared the ball for Byatt to finish into the vacant net from ten yards.

In the final seconds of the match we also saw a yellow card pointed in the direction of the Godalming bench and a final chance created by Wilson who set up Quiassaca, only for the ball to get caught up between his feet before being cleared. Still it was an entertaining final third of the match and a vastly more entertaining spectacle after the break than it had been before. Disappointingly though, only 64 were present to witness this match between two of the league’s top five, although our club advertised the attendance as 91!! It is not clear why they feel the need to invent supporters and this constant fictional work embarrasses them as they are tampering with club history. Maybe they should treat the supporters they have a little better and they might actually pass the word! It’s also about time they made a decision on the Manager, seeing as it’s nearly a week since they announced that news would follow “soon”. For what it’s worth, Chapman and his team did their cause no harm in this match, should they be looking for the role.

I wrote a couple of weeks ago that if we could take seven points from this difficult three match stretch, we would be in pole position for the second place spot and that’s exactly what we got! Whilst this draw does provide leaders Shoreham with some more breathing space at the top, we do look the most likely right now to claim that runners-up position with no clubs left to play in the top five now, assuming we can keep the standard up when we play the lower sides in the table.

Epsom & Ewell: Toby McKimm, Gideon Acheampong, Kevin Moreno-Gomez, Ryan Smith (c), Ollie Thompson, Chris Boulter, Jaevon Dyer, Gavin Quintyne, Mario Quiassaca, Jaan Stanley, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Nick Wilson for Smith (62), Steve Springett for Thompson (62), Jamie Byatt for Stanley (62)

The Prince of Maidenhead Reigns Supreme

8 March 2023



Sutton & Epsom RFC 26 – Maidenhead 45. Saturday 4th March.

The Black & Whites returned to Rugby Lane in the knowledge that their race had been run this season. The men in magenta had torn them to shreds at Braywick Park in November and both squads were fully aware of that outcome. Despite the match having no consequence with regard to the league table or which cup competition would be entered both sides produced a thrilling spectacle played at breakneck pace with eleven tries to applaud. Maidenhead won by 45-26 but Sutton restored their pride with a performance that deservedly earned them a bonus point.

It might have been the first Saturday in March but there was no sign of spring in the air as Freddy Bunting started the match with a biting wind behind him. From the outset it was clear that the visitors were going to utilise their excellent back division and run the ball from anywhere. This scenario was no surprise to the hosts whose defensive line on the Berkshire 22 held firm despite several efforts to break free. Reluctantly Maidenhead cleared with the boot. S&E’s first possession proved to be most productive. The covering Caddy charged towards the 22 and after several swift phases Alex Mawdsley’s perfectly timed pass allowed Robbie Martey to score. Freddy Bunting added the conversion for 7-0.

That instant success focussed the Maidenhead minds and within five minutes they had not only drawn level but had taken the lead. Though Sutton safely secured the restart after a few phases near halfway the opted to kick. Their opponent countered at pace searching for space on the right before switching to the opposite flank. An arcing run by centre Harry Wells set up the prolific Alex Turton who ran round under the posts. Moments later Harry Wells turned from provider to scorer. A long clearance into the Surrey men’s 22 was run back but the ball was turned over and the alert Harry Wells swept down the unguarded blindside to score. Greg Smith converted both scores and the boys from Braywick Park led 14-7 after a magnificent seven opening minutes.

There was no respite from the high tempo as both teams threw themselves headlong into attack. Equally both sides were demonstrating resolute defence. At the start of the second quarter the Black & Whites encamped within five minutes of glory. Jordan Huie went close, a 5-metre catch and drive was denied and a golden opportunity to level the scores was missed. Then to heap Pelion upon Ossa the visitors cleared their lines and scored with their next attack. Harry Wells was

a central figure again as he put Greg Smith into space. The fly half burst into enemy territory and was only stopped by an excellent tackle by Alex Mawdsley but the ball was soon in the hands of Scott Prince who ran in the last 30 metres for the first of his three tries of the afternoon. Greg Smith, perfection personified, added the extras for 21-7.

Excellent Sutton defence from the restart regained possession and moments later the hosts had a penalty. A well-rehearsed lineout ploy saw George Drye rampage down the touchline. The ball was spun wide to the opposite flank where Jordan Huie was thwarted by excellent cover. A minute later it was Chris Farrell throwing himself at the line like a torpedo who went agonising close and a shrill blast from Mr Dixon’s whistle gave Maidenhead a relieving penalty. Very soon relief became a form of cruel and unusual punishment. A speculative kick ahead by Scott Prince enjoyed a favourable bounce and the ball was transferred to fullback James Maddern who coasted home to score. Greg Smith celebrated the bonus point try with another conversion for 28-7. With the interval rapidly approaching the hosts desperately needed some reward for their first half endeavours. It was now S&E’s turn to run back a clearance kick and score. Robbie Martey evaded the first man, sped through the gap and drawing the retreating defence onto him he passed to Jamie See who did well to cover the last 10 metres to touch down. Freddy Bunting added the conversion as the referee concluded the first half with the magenta men 28-14 ahead. Despite the score-line the Black & Whites had had the majority of the possession and territory as well as more minutes in their opponent’s 22. However, the visitors were ruthless in exploiting any errors as well as additionally demonstrating scintillating back play.

Sutton enjoyed the perfect start to the second period with a try. Despite failing to secure the 5-metre lineout they regained possession and this time they were not to be denied close to the line. Appropriately George London was the scorer on an afternoon when he carried with relentless aggression and to great effect. Trailing 19-28 S&E were right back in the contest. It was now the turn of the Braywick Park boys to turn the screw in the Sutton 22. Time and again the Rugby Lane men scythed down the opposition but the Maidenhead team patiently retained possession until a long pass found Scott Prince who crossed the whitewash for the second time. Though the conversion drifted wide the visitors had a 14-point cushion leading 33-19 with half an hour to go. Despite dominating the next fifteen minutes with George Drye to the fore with rampaging runs synonymous of classic locks throughout the ages S&E erred at the crucial moment. Whether it was a lineout infringement or pressure from the organised and resolute opposition defence they failed to add to their score. To massage sodium chloride into the laceration Maidenhead needed the merest glimpse of a chance to see them adding to their account. A turnover near their line led to an audacious counter that saw captain Niall Crossley put into space and stride in from 40 metres. With Greg Smith having departed with an earlier injury scrum half Archie Dunnill took over the kicking duties and bisected the uprights for 40-19.

Making light of the latest setback Sutton continued the search for a fourth try and a bonus point. The remarkable pace of the game did not relent and the attacks rained down at either end. A jinking run by Dan Jones hinted at greater deeds. Then five minutes later Alex Mawdsley made a break on halfway but his errant pass was gathered by Scott Prince who needed no second invitation to sprint in unopposed to complete his hat trick. The challenging conversion drifted wide and Maidenhead led 45-19. The game entered time added on and the Black & Whites continued their quest for the Holy Grail of the bonus point. Agonisingly they were held up over the line. Then with the final play of the afternoon there was at last ecstasy after so much agony. Fittingly the score followed another charge from George Drye and an incisive burst from Robbie Martey to set up Freddy Bunting for his first league try for the Black & Whites. He failed to convert his score and the referee ended the contest with Maidenhead 45-26 victors.

In the end it was Maidenhead’s superior quality that told in an enthralling contest. Harry Wells was at the creative heart and wingers Prince and Turton were a constant menace with the former taking the glory with his triple. The Black & Whites more than played a supporting role in this fixture. The back row trio of Messrs Tame, London and Caddy were exceptional as they tackled, harried and carried throughout. George Drye played like a man possessed, as ever Steve Munford tackled everything that moved and parenthood has not blunted Jamie See’s talents. For S&E it was an afternoon when every error was punished with brutal efficiency whilst they failed to make the most of their chances. That being said they took the game to one of the best attacking sides in the league from their early opening score to their bonus point try on the final play of the game and deserve great credit for their performance.

The season concludes for Sutton & Epsom next Saturday with the visit of Bracknell who defeated the Black & Whites on the opening day of the season. The kick off at Rugby Lane will be 3pm. It is hoped that a sizable crowd will be present to bid a fond farewell to the departing quartet of Sam Hurley, James Caddy, Jamie See and George Drye who have given many years of devoted service to the team and have been instrumental in the club’s recent successes.

Sutton & Epsom

Alex Mawdsley, Jordan Huie, Sam Hurley, Jamie See, Robbie Martey, Freddy Bunting, Steve Munford, Tom Boaden, Chris Farrell ©, Will Lloyd, George Drye, Josh Glanville, Ben Tame, George London & James Caddy.
Replacements: (all used) Joe Reid, Dan Jones & Joe Lovatt.

Maidenhead

James Maddern, Scott Prince, Harry Wells, Niall Crossley ©, Alex Turton, Greg Smith, Archie Dunnill, Elio Mandozzi, Jake Leach, Finlay Glass, Brook Harvey-Smith, Mark Grimshaw, Chris Gill, William Macaulay & Ed Atkins.
Replacements: Dan Hostetler, Mykel Parrott & Charlie

Late winner points Epsom’s way.

8 March 2023



Selsey 2-3 Epsom & Ewell FC. Southern Combination League - Division One. Saturday 4th March.

Ultimately Saturday’s League match at Selsey was decided by, and will be remembered for a 90th minute goal that should not have stood, but over the ninety minutes I felt we had done enough to secure the points and we were in fact cruising to a comfortable victory at one point. However, two goals in quick succession from the home side made reinvigorated the match as a contest and set up an entertaining finish, with the points going back up the A24 to Epsom.

I was told before the match that we had ten players out, although only two changes were made from the eleven who started our victory over Dorking Wanderers on

Tuesday evening as Chris Boulter and Mario Quiassaca were missing, and they were replaced by George Owusu and Ryan Smith with Nick Wilson showing further versatility this week and playing alongside Ollie Thompson in the back four. We did look a little weaker on the bench though, with five named, although one was our other keeper Toby McKimm, and another was Jamie Byatt who wouldn't be participating due to injury.

With our Assistant Manager Matt Chapman taking charge of the side following the departure of Anthony Jupp, we made a bright start to proceedings, although the first real chance did fall to the home side when a corner was headed just over Tom Theobald's crossbar on the quarter hour mark. Following this, we went straight up the other end where Jaan Stanley delivered a peach of a cross from the left and Owusu met it with a side footed volley that crashed off the underside of the bar and out again.

Selsey had the ball in the net in the 17th minute, but the flag was up for offside and they had another shot on goal which was blocked by one of our defenders before Ollie Thompson picked up a yellow card that was more clumsy than malicious. From this point though we began to take control and Gideon Acheampong made a good run on the right to earn us a corner. From that Smith corner on the half hour Wilson flicked it on and Thompson met it four yards out with a bullet header that gave Syd Davies in the Selsey goal no chance whatsoever.

Owusu, Jaevon Dyer and Athan Smith-Joseph were asking a lot of questions with their direct running on a playing surface that was very much to their liking while Stanley buzzed around to good effect, just a day after his 21st birthday. Dyer was next to show with a run and strike that Davies parried to safety and we went in at the half with a deserved lead.

We started the second half well. Kevin Moreno-Gomez made tracks down the left before laying the ball back to Smith-Joseph whose curling shot was just tipped over the bar by Davies, although the corner was cleared. However, he wouldn't be denied on his fiftieth appearance for our club and after a spell of good pressure, the ball was fed across to Smith-Joseph again and he beat a man before casually clipping the ball just inside the far post from a step or two inside the penalty area in the 52nd minute. He was at it again a few minutes later with a delicious diagonal pass to Owusu who had beaten the offside trap, but with just Davies to beat, he took a really heavy touch and the ball ran through to their keeper. Next to cause trouble was Stanley who blocked a Davies clearance, but the ball rather luckily rebounded to a defender and was cleared.

In the 66th minute Theo Lukyamuzi joined from the bench for his debut, coming from Peterborough and the 49th player to play for us this season showed some good touches and pace in his spell on the left wing in relief of Owusu.

Moments later though we had our first scare for a while when a slide rule pass set Cian Griffin-Tilley through on goal, although Theobald stood up well and blocked his shot from close range. It was a great save but it clearly provided the home side with a spark as they began to up their work rate and force us back. Shane Brazil on the right wing was starting to give us a few issues with his clever wing play, and in the 77th minute Selsey had a goal back with a deep left wing cross that was met with a strike from James Henton from fairly close range. This was disappointing as we had looked like we'd be good for another clean sheet, but before we'd got our breath back a loose defensive header went straight into the path of Griffin-Tilley and he sent the ball under the advancing Theobald to level the scores up just two minutes later.

At this stage the home side had the momentum and Theobald had to make another save from Brazil's low shot before the controversial ending, which came in the 90th minute.

With the clock ticking down Davies in the Selsey goal had the ball at his feet and for some reason appeared to want to waste time and hang on for the draw which I thought was a bit odd after all they had done to get back in the game. However, Dyer was in to nick the ball away from him, although the ball then went out of play by about a foot before Dyer quickly knocked it back across the goal line. Davies appeared to look over for the Assistant at about the same time I did, only to see him around forty yards up the field, clearly anticipating that Davies had been going to pick the ball up and kick it downfield. He was in no position to see whether the ball had crossed the line and in that instant Dyer had turned to face goal and sent the ball towards the empty net from twenty yards. It wasn't totally clear if the ball was actually going in, but Thomas Blamire had no idea if there was someone behind him and he tried to block the shot, although he only succeeded in diverting the ball straight into the empty net.

The goal itself was hugely controversial though, as it should not have stood in the first place and with no time left for Selsey to recover the final whistle went soon after. We had taken all three points; a little fortuitously in the end due to the actual circumstances of the winning goal, but I felt we were the better side for much of the match and totally deserved our result against a team that had defeated leaders Shoreham in midweek. We now sit five points behind the leaders as a result of this win and have another difficult match against in-form Godalming Town on Tuesday, although it is worth noting that this will be our last match of the season against a current top five club. Shoreham's run-in is significantly more challenging with trips to Godalming, Dorking Wanderers B and a visit to Selsey. Maybe the title race isn't over just yet.

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong, Kevin Moreno-Gomez, Ryan Smith (c), Ollie Thompson, Nick Wilson, Jaevon Dyer, Gavin Quintyne, George Owusu, Jaan Stanley, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Theo Lukyamuzi for Owusu (67), Kofi Quartey for Smith-Joseph (92)

Epsom and Ewell FC wandering to top table?

8 March 2023

Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	Diff	Pts
Shoreham	24	16	7	1	63	21	42	55
Epsom & Ewell	23	15	2	6	51	26	25	47
Dorking Wanderers B	25	14	4	7	44	26	18	46
Wick	24	14	3	7	49	36	13	45

Epsom & Ewell FC 1-0 Dorking Wanderers B. Southern Combination League - Division One. Tuesday 28th February.

As a supporter, it is sometimes easy to forget after an awful performance that the players are hurting too and on Tuesday evening they were able to consign that East Preston defeat to history with a fine 1-0 win over a Dorking Wanderers B team that we had failed to defeat since November 2018, courtesy of a Jaevon Dyer penalty that he earned himself midway through the first half.

And without doubt, despite much improved performances across the board, Dyer was the star turn in this contest, threatening on the attack and even putting in a good defensive shift when he was without the ball.

Dorking Wanderers B came into this match on the back of claiming thirteen points out of the fifteen available since the Christmas fixtures; a run that started at our expense at the start of January. However, this result enabled our boys to leapfrog them into second place and we were given an added bonus when unbeaten leaders Shoreham slipped up at home to Selsey the same evening, ensuring that they are not yet completely out of sight in the race for the title.

There were a number of changes from Saturday's defeat. Captain Ryan Smith was absent, while Kevin Moreno-Gomez and Oliver Thompson came back into the defence at the expense of Alex Penfold and Dylan Merchant-Simmonds who were on the bench. Dyer came back into the starting line up alongside Mario Quiassaca and the surprising re-appearance of Jaan Stanley, as the club had announced this week that he had been recalled by Raynes Park Vale! With these two on the field we appeared much more of a threat and started the game brightly.

Stanley's left wing cross was clawed away from danger by Jacob Teddy the visiting keeper as early as the third minute and although chances were limited in this period, the balance of play was well in our favour and it looked like if any team were going to score, it would be us. And so it proved when Athan Smith-Joseph made tracks on the left and his low ball in deflected upwards. As a defender went to clear the ball, Dyer got in front of him and was promptly brought down in the penalty area, picking himself up to score a confident penalty in the 26th minute; his first spot kick for the club and his first goal since finding the net against Billingshurst in October.

Dorking's only real opportunity of the first half came with a low shot that was deflected just wide of our post but the corner was cleared and we went in at the break without any more concerns.

We clearly weren't prepared to settle on that single goal lead as we came out for the second half and took the match to our opponents in search of that second goal. Smith-Joseph sent a low shot in after good work from Dyer but Teddy made an easy save and Dyer turned provider for Quiassaca a few minutes later, although again Teddy wasn't really tested when the shot came in.

We then fashioned a pair of really good chances and Smith-Joseph will be wondering how he didn't take one of them if not both. In the 61st minute Dyer made another great run on the right wing and his low ball across goal found our striker just six yards out, but his shot struck the post and went out for a goal kick. Then four minutes later Dyer again stretched the full back before laying the ball back to Gideon Acheampong to deliver to the far post where Smith-Joseph somehow sent his header wide from six yards!

This was a shame as we certainly deserved a second goal and the absence of one ensured that the final ten minutes would be a little more nervy than they needed to be, although we had one more good chance in that closing period when a clever flick from Quiassaca set Stanley through and he set up Dyer whose shot was well blocked.

Ultimately, Dorking Wanderers failed to carry a real threat on goal in the absence of their main striker Ben Aubrey and so our first half goal would prove sufficient to claim the points and gain a measure of revenge for our late loss there by the same score in January.

It seems odd to be talking about the Shoreham defeat on the same evening, when they remain eight points ahead of us with a far superior goal difference, even though we do hold a game in hand, as we have some very difficult matches ahead of us, not least Selsey on Saturday who will be flying after handing the leaders their first defeat of the season and where around 200 largely partisan supporters will be present to ensure their good form continues. However, we just need to focus on our own form and we'll see where that takes us. In the meantime, credit is due to our players for finally defeating a team that have given us a lot of trouble in recent seasons.

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong (c), Kevin Moreno-Gomez, Nick Wilson, Chris Boulter, Ollie Thompson, Jaevon Dyer, Gavin Quintyne, Mario Quiassaca, Jaan Stanley, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Rory Edwards for Dyer (86), George Owusu for Quiassaca (92)

Epsom and Ewell pressed on.

8 March 2023



Epsom & Ewell 1-2 East Preston. Southern Combination League – Division One. Saturday 25th February.

Whatever happened to Fortress Fetcham Grove? Last season we won eleven in a row and this term we opened up with five straight wins. Yet nowadays, we are lucky if we can win any at all. Our win against ten man Arundel was the only one we have won since late October and our latest loss on Saturday against East Preston regrettably was almost identical to our last Saturday home match against Oakwood where our play was slow, lacking urgency and was completely toothless up front, allowing the opposition to believe they might have a chance, which they then took.

In terms of personnel there were further changes from the midweek win over Arundel and most notable was the absence of our prolific striker Jamie Byatt, who had of course scored the winner on Wednesday. Dylan Merchant-Simmonds came in for his first start and paired up with Chris Boulter at the back with Ollie Thompson moving to the bench, while Nick Wilson returned to the starting eleven after missing the Arundel match in place of the absent Thompson Adeyemi. George Owusu came in for his first start in place of the battered and bruised Jaevon Dyer who was placed on the bench in the hope that he would be able to have ninety minutes off before Tuesday's match against Dorking Wanderers, but he would also be forced into action as we chased the game in the later stages.

Finally, Tyreke Leslie came in, although due to the absence of Byatt he was placed in a more central position to that where we would previously seen him play and it didn't appear to suit him. It is strange that we have tried a number of players in that role from Josh Owen, Jubril Adamson, Josh Alder, Byatt, Dyer and most recently Jaan Stanley who was absent for this match, yet the guy who played there successfully in pre-season still hasn't been given a run at centre-forward in competitive action and so Athan Smith-Joseph instead lined up once again on the wing instead, although he was on the right for this match to accommodate Owusu on the left and this rendered him less effective than usual too.

The encounter settled into a fairly clear pattern as we held the ball most of the time, while the opposition relied on occasional counter attacks. Our first chance fell to Owusu in the tenth minute, but he hooked the ball over the bar from fairly close range and also struggled to stay onside in the first half. Leslie was on the end of a flick on, but his shot was deflected wide, according to the referee at least, as clearly the entire East Preston defence didn't agree, and regrettably the erratic officiating in this match would be another factor in this frustrating encounter.

We had forced a couple of corners and looked generally in control in these early stages, although a miscommunication between Alex Penfold and Merchant-Simmonds allowed Jack Collins to get through on goal. Fortunately, some good recovery defending ensured that their player was unable to get a shot away, however, this appeared to give the visitors some belief and they fizzed another ball across our six yard box before taking the lead in embarrassing circumstances in the 25th minute. I hope Gary Jarman got this one on his video as the players should watch it back again and again. Quite simply, a long throw was flicked on to the far post where Matthew Wilson was standing completely alone and seemed to have ages to guide his header past the helpless Tom Theobald from about six yards. It was the sort of goal you see conceded in the park on a Sunday morning and was horrible to witness from a club at our level.

We responded well and were back on level terms within three minutes as a Ryan Smith corner was blocked almost on the line and Owusu was there to tuck away the loose ball from a few yards out. In first half injury time both teams had an opportunity, first when Collins fed the ball through to Morgan Day, but his hooked volley went straight at Theobald, then at the other end Smith-Joseph produced one of his trademark mazy runs before unleashing a shot that was well tipped over by Maciek Kason, although Smith's corner then went straight out of play, which sort of summed up the first half.

Unfortunately the second half was an equally disjointed and dispiriting affair if you were an Epsom supporter. We had hardly been playing six minutes when we had a shout for a foul that wasn't given, but Gavin Quintyne felt the need to say something to the referee and ended up in the sin-bin as a result. His absence didn't materially affect the pattern of play and the scores were still level when he re-joined the contest, but it was ten minutes wasted as we created little in that period. Just after the hour Leslie was withdrawn and replaced by the returning Kofi Quartey and the visitors had another opportunity when a half cleared free kick was blazed over from the edge of the penalty area. A couple of bookings followed, firstly for Ryan Harvey and then extremely harshly for Wilson, who didn't even commit a foul as far as I was concerned.

We sent in another corner where a Boulter header was blocked not far short of the goal line before Quartey had the chance of the afternoon after being put through one on one, but he overran the ball a bit and by the time he got the shot away, Kason was out to block. We would regret this ten minutes later when in the 86th minute a hopeful right wing cross appeared to be flicked on by one of our own defenders and fell kindly for the unmarked Harvey to fire a smart volley past Theobald from around ten yards. It was a good finish but the absence of any marking made the job somewhat easier.

Two minutes later and despite having previously seen Quintyne sin-binned, Boulter decided to also say something to the referee and predictably then found himself on the bench meaning that we would play the last two minutes and eight further minutes of injury time with ten men. I have referred to indiscipline in this team frequently this season, but to lose two "experienced" players for ten minutes each, was inexcusable. Yes, the refereeing was poor and yes, he looked out of his depth in this match, particularly in the second half, but our players have to be a bit more accountable for their own actions.

So East Preston won their fourth match in a row and deserve some credit for sticking around in the match that we should have finished off earlier, but let's make no bones about this, both teams were poor in this match and it was a fairly disappointing advert for Step Six football. No wonder there were only 75 there to see it.

With just ten matches remaining, time is running out now and we have three far more difficult looking fixtures coming up against teams that are notably better than a limited East Preston. We face a difficult trip to Selsey at the weekend, and either side of that we host two in-form teams in Godalming Town and of course, our nemesis, Dorking Wanderers B coming up next. In my view (and hey, it's my report!) we are very much at a crossroads here in our season. Which direction will we take? The path to second place in the table that we will surely claim if we are able to secure at least seven points from these next matches, or will we stumble erratically through the rest of the season before losing an away playoff match like we did last season. As a supporter, well aware that the club is spending a lot of money that is running out, I at the very least want to see better than what we witnessed here. Promotion to Step Five is still comfortably achievable, but not with performances like this. It has to stop now.

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong, Alex Penfold, Ryan Smith (c), Chris Boulter, Dylan Merchant-Simmonds, George Owusu, Nick Wilson, Tyreke Leslie, Gavin Quintyne, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Kofi Quartey for Leslie (62), Jaevon Dyer for Owusu (68), Steve Springett for Penfold (77), Ollie Thompson for Smith (89)

Sutton and Epsom RFC Sink Despite All Hands On Deck

8 March 2023



Brighton 39 Sutton & Epsom 22. Saturday 25th February. The last of Epsom and Sutton's rearranged fixtures sadly fell on a weekend that not only featured the Six Nations but also a couple of stag weekends. Creativity was the byword for selection as 2 nd XV players, veterans of yesteryear, coaches and university students gathered at Waterhall for the formal introductions before taking on the Blues. In September at Rugby Lane the Black & Whites enjoyed one of only two successes this campaign when they overcame Brighton 42-24. The south coast men gained a measure of revenge winning 39-22 which eased their fears of the drop but the result relegated S&E because remarkably at Bodicote Park Banbury had defeated second-placed Camberley.

The Sutton and Epsom XV included the veteran trio of Frankie Murray and the brothers Pointing, Chris and Mickey, debutants Jordan Farrar and Alex Gerhard from the Swallows, students Jack Benton and Taylor Gaye and coaches Steve Munford and Mark Lambert. Tom Brooker took the armband and was the only remaining member of the pack from last Saturday's Havant loss. The clouds dispersed and the game started in sunshine but with a strong wind that was illustrated as the Brighton kick off sailed out on the full. The majority of the crowd wisely took advantage of the well-appointed clubhouse rather than braving the elements pitch-side for a match of great significance for both clubs in terms of survival in this league. The hosts looked to spread the ball from the outset and their back division with Onke Nesi to the fore was lively and threatening. S&E tackled ferociously and the pack willingly took on the ball-carrying duties.

After ten minutes winger Aled Edwards thought he had wriggled free but was brought back for a foot in touch. The Waterhall woes were immediately abated when centre Arthur Robinson scythed through the defence after sustained Brighton pressure to score. In the absence of the redoubtable Sean O'Hagan scrum half Harry Alexander took over the kicking duties and made light of the tricky wind to make it 7-0. Five minutes later the Sutton resources were further stretched when Kyren Ghumra was forced off after a knock on the head when falling on the ball. With no spare back on the bench Jordan Farrar went on the flank and Jack Butt stood in on the wing. Despite the adversity the Black & Whites were tenacious in defence and the forwards relished the set scrums with the experienced duo of Reid and Lambert winning penalties.

The Sussex men had to wait until the half hour to extend their lead. A well-worked lineout ploy from 5 metres was thwarted but prop Billy Rolfe twisted and stretched for the line to score. The conversion drifted wide as the hosts led 12-0. Sutton & Epsom brought on Hartpury University prop Taylor Gaye for his debut and he made an immediate impact. The diminutive Dan Jones won a penalty for a high tackle which was kicked into the corner. Though the lineout was lost excellent scavenging by the pack regained possession and Taylor Gaye scored from short-range. The conversion was blown wide but Sutton were on the board trailing 5-12. Confidence now surged through the Black & White ranks and they were soon attacking in the Blues 22. With the interval rapidly approaching the referee issued a yellow card to Billy Rolfe. At once Sutton looked to benefit from their numerical advantage. The forwards got to within a yard under the posts before it was spun wide. It appeared that Angus Findlay had scored in the corner but an excellent defensive covering tackle dislodged the ball as the winger tried to touch down. Brighton cleared their lines from the scrum and the referee concluded the first period with the Blues 12-5 up at the break. If S&E were despondent at their failure to score before the interval you would not have noticed by the way they started the second half. Robbie Martey caught a clearance on halfway and advanced towards the 22. Captain Brooker kept up the attack and ball came to Dan Jones who jinked his way to the line and passed to Frankie Murray who scored a try that rolled back the years. The conversion narrowly missed but Sutton were only 10-12 down with the extra man.

Before the travelling Rugby Lane faithful had time to dream of a remarkable victory they were awoken from their reverie by an instant reply from the Waterhall men. Having secured a scrum on the 22 from the restart the ball went out to Arthur Robinson who ran the perfect line to score his second and Brighton's third try. Harry Alexander added the extras for the 19-10 lead. Conditions deteriorated rapidly as the clouds gathered, the rain fell and the temperature plummeted with half an hour remaining on the clock.

The hosts began to turn the screw with two tries in as many minutes. First to benefit was returning prop Billy Rolfe who collected his second of the afternoon after relentless pressure from the Sussex men. Moments later Aled Edwards was touching down in the corner and the Black & Whites were 29-10 adrift. Entering the final quarter the impartial observer might have thought that the visitors may have run out of steam and the veterans made to suffer. The floodgates did not open and contrary to all expectations S&E began their rearguard action. The next score was an unlikely one when Brighton decided to kick a penalty with ten minutes remaining. Harry Alexander effortlessly bisected the uprights for 32-10 leaving the visitors needing four scores. The task went from uphill to climbing Everest in flip-flops when replacement Conor Scott sped in under the posts finishing with aplomb. Harry Alexander converted for 39-10.

Then Tom Brooker gave a splendid example of leading from the front. Gathering the ball near halfway he took the ball in to contact and drove back three defenders and broke through their clutches and bolted towards the posts. He finished in style brushing aside the last tackler as if he was Alex Dombrandt. Alex Mawdsley drop-kicked the conversion in a blink of an eye for 39-17. Sutton now went in search of a bonus point and took the game to Brighton. Unfortunately scrum half Austin Bell was forced off with an ankle injury and S&E shuffled the deck again. Undaunted by this setback they invaded the opposition 22 again. Quick ball was spun wide and Alex Mawdsley forced his way over. Whether he applied the coup de grace or the significant pressure was supplied by Robbie Martey was immaterial as the referee signalled a try. Alex Mawdsley failed to convert from the flank and the referee blew his whistle to end the game with Brighton victorious by 39-22.

The Blues were worthy winners. Their forwards carried aggressively and effectively and their backs looked to run at every opportunity and had plenty of pace to exploit their somewhat makeshift opponents. The bonus point win was most welcome as the hosts are still not clear of relegation. In contrast this defeat condemned the visitors to the drop. However, the manner of defeat will be cherished by the Rugby Lane supporters. The level of commitment, the tenacity and the bonus point were highlights in a display overflowing with team spirit. Steve Munford gave an outstanding performance in defence tackling all-comers. The many front row permutations were a constant

menace in the scrum. The side benefited greatly from the leadership on the pitch from not only Tom Brooker but also the cadre of experienced players that filled their ranks. On the other end of the scale, the youthful debutants Alex Gerhard, Jordan Farrar and Taylor Gayle put in huge shifts and looked very comfortable at 1 st XV level which bodes well for the future.

Though the season has come to a premature end for Sutton & Epsom, followers of Brighton will hope Wimbledon and Havant will reflect their lofty status and put Banbury to the sword unlike the faltering Camberley so that the Blues stay put in Regional One South Central. Next Saturday S&E entertain Maidenhead at Rugby Lane in the penultimate game of the season.

Sutton & Epsom
Robbie Martey, Kyren Ghumra, Steve Munford, Alex Mawdsley, Angus Findlay, Frankie Murray, Austin Bell, Mark Lambert, Dan Jones, Joe Reid, Alex Gerhard, Jack Benton, Chris Pointing, Jack Butt & Tom Brooker ©
Replacements: (all used) Mickey Pointing, Jordan Farrar & Taylor Gaye.

Brighton
Max Morris ©, George Payne, Arthur Robinson, Onke Nesi, Aled Edwards, David Mcilwaine, Harry Alexander, Billy Rolfe, Will Fitzpatrick, Andrew Rowlandson, Richard Neil, Milo Cawkwell, George Orchard, Alex Havers & Angus North.
Replacements: James Trevis, Will Harvey and Conor Scott.

Mulletts salted in table top match

8 March 2023

Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	Diff	Pts
Shoreham	22	16	6	0	61	18	43	54
Dorking Wanderers B	24	14	4	6	44	25	19	46
Epsom & Ewell	21	14	2	5	49	24	25	44
Godalming Town	22	12	5	5	48	26	20	41
Wick	22	12	3	7	45	36	9	39
Arundel	21	9	7	5	39	32	7	34

Epsom & Ewell 3-2 Arundel. Southern Combination League - Division One. Wednesday 22nd February.

In an important battle at the top end of the table, our boys came through a tense and tight encounter to take all three points from visiting Arundel, courtesy of a late winner from the evergreen Jamie Byatt in front of a disappointing crowd of 70, despite this Wednesday night match being one of very few played in the area.

Byatt, who surely will become the final Salts player to have been born before I started watching Epsom back in October 1981 rolled back the years and in his twenty minute cameo might have resulted in two goals, but an earlier effort was denied by a smart low save.

However, the real story here is that we have now recorded consecutive wins for the first time since October and this result against a team in good form and who drew with leaders Shoreham just four days previously is an indication that maybe our poor form over December and January can now be placed in the rear view mirror. Maybe though we should wait until our next two home matches against East Preston and our recent nemesis the Dorking Wanderers B team before we can be sure.

Sometimes though you just have to get the result, regardless of the performance and going into this match I felt it was important that we take at least a point against Arundel (*nickname the Mulletts*) to keep them at arm’s length in the play off race. The visitors probably also felt that a draw would have been a good result, but they will be kicking themselves for the way this match turned out, as they led and missed a few other chances before the match swung in our favour just before half time.

We took the field with two new debutants Tom Theobald in goal and Chris Boulter, the vastly experienced player slotting in at the back. Gideon Acheampong returned to the starting eleven after injury while Alex Penfold made his first start since returning to the club. The players missing out were the suspended Toby McKimm and the absent Steve Springett, Kevin Moreno-Gomez and Nick Wilson.

The opening encounters were fairly even. The visitors had the ball in the net in the fifth minute with a looping header, although the offside flag had already been raised. Then Ollie Thompson made an important clearance for a corner but from the resultant delivery in the fifteenth minute, Harry Russell marked his comeback for Arundel after suspension with a close range header that gave Theobald no chance.

In response Athan Smith-Joseph put in a dangerous low cross but we had no one gambling enough to attack the ball and it fizzed past everyone and out the other side of the six yard box. However, the visitors then had a great chance when the dangerous Carl Brown broke through on the right, but with just our keeper to beat, Theobald stood up well and eventually blocked the shot before the danger was cleared.

Jaevon Dyer was asking a few questions of the Arundel defence, but found himself on the receiving end of some fairly brutal treatment, firstly from Steve Herbert and then from Jordan Dudas who scythed him down with a two footed tackle that angered many of our players, although only resulted in a yellow card.

Penfold picked up a slightly harsh yellow as Brown seemed to throw himself at our man and then to the ground, but the real twist came in the 43rd minute. We started to put a little pressure on and from the edge of the penalty area Gavin Quintyne struck low into the corner; the ball grazing a defender’s boot on the way in. This came as a bit of a surprise as the visitors had fashioned most of the chances to this point, but luck then turned our way too in the final minute of the half when a loose ball was picked up by Jaan Stanley and his shot was parried by Andy McCarthy, only to see the ball then strike an incoming defender and dribble over the line! This was the second time this season we have scored in such circumstances after Smith-Joseph’s strike at Oakwood and like that goal, this will have to go down as an own goal, regardless of the club’s rather hasty announcement that Stanley had scored. He will have to wait a little longer for his first goal in Epsom colours.

Most importantly and despite a fairly average forty-five minutes, we had turned this match around. A big second half was coming up although we’d need to do it without Penfold who was replaced at the break by Dylan Merchant-Simmonds with Gideon Acheampong moving over to left back. However, we seemed to look more solid with Brown providing much less of a threat in this half, and the ball spent much of the time in the middle of the park as the game became a little bit tighter. Harrison Mott then picked up a yellow card for Arundel following a high foot, although the referee appeared to indicate that it was for an accumulation of fouls.

We had a chance on the hour after good work from Smith-Joseph who pulled the ball back for Stanley, but his shot was blocked and cleared. Stanley had another chance when put through in the 66th minute and rode a high tackle which resulted in him being forced out wide and our bench demanding a free kick which may well have been followed by a red card as the player concerned was the last man back. Maybe our player was too honest and should have gone to ground, but the chance had gone.

Byatt joined the fray in the 68th minute for Smith-Joseph with Stanley moving out to the left to accommodate our fit again striker. However, we then had a major scare as an Arundel right wing cross was headed straight at Theobald who couldn’t hold on to the ball and Tom Jefkins blazed the loose ball over from close range in the 69th minute. This was a real let off.

Dyer found himself on the deck once again after a blatant body check from Rob Madden which earned him a yellow card, and just three minutes later he was on the ground again after a collision with Mott off the ball. The Assistant clearly had a good view of the incident and flagged vigorously, advising the referee of what had happened, whereupon Mott then received a second yellow card. This incensed the visiting Management team and one of them was then the recipient of a straight red card as a result of his reaction. Dyer was the victim of some fairly unpleasant challenges in this match and it is hoped he is fit enough to go again on Saturday.

However, as we proved at Hailsham Town, you don’t necessarily pack up just because you go down to ten men and from a free kick awarded some twenty-five yards out, Herbert curled a peach of a strike into the top corner of our net to level things up at 2-2 in the 80th minute.

With ten minutes to play the visitors appeared to be wanting to settle for a draw, as they slowed the game down a bit, but in the 83rd minute Stanley produced a good delivery for Byatt, whose shot was half blocked and then gathered by McCarthy almost on his goal line. You felt that a fully match fit Byatt might have given the keeper no chance, but he was there again two minutes later on the end of a great crossfield pass from Quintyne and his downward shot beat McCarthy at the

near post and crept into the net to put us ahead for good. Theobald had one more shot to deal with, but he kept it out and after nearly seven minutes of injury time the whistle blew for full time.

A lot of people were very happy after our Hailsham win, particularly in view of the harshness of the early red card, but Hailsham were in a low position in the table and I felt that this match would provide a much better indicator of where we were. If you'd asked me at half time whether we had really turned the corner, I'd have said no, even though we had just taken the lead, as the first half wasn't great from an Epsom point of view. However, by the end of the match I felt we had done just enough to claim the three points, although you can't help but wonder what might have happened if the visitors scored a second goal when they were in the ascendancy. I'm sure they will have been wondering that too as they make the long journey home.

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong, Alex Penfold, Ryan Smith (c), Chris Boulter, Oliver Thompson, Jaevon Dyer, Gavin Quintyne, Jaan Stanley, Thompson Adeyemi, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Dylan Merchant-Simmonds for Penfold (HT), Jamie Byatt for Smith-Joseph (68), George Owusu for Dyer (80), Musa Beegun for Adeyemi (86), Tyreke Leslie for Stanley (86)

Wimbledon on the Up and Up

8 March 2023

Sutton & Epsom Women 20 Wimbledon Women 43. Saturday 18th February. Sutton & Epsom had enjoyed a comfortable 26-0 triumph at Beverley Meads in November. However, they were only too aware that that result bore no resemblance to the recent form of the Dons. In 2023 they have taken the scalps of not only Hammersmith & Fulham last week but also the Guildford Gazelles and most notably Battersea Ironsides. After 80 minutes of thrilling rugby and an eleven-try bonanza Wimbledon returned to SW20 with the points after an exhilarating 43-20 triumph.

Hannah Gutteridge kicked off for the visitors on a mild and sunny afternoon that was ideal for running rugby and both teams capitalised on the conditions. After the initial sparring with both sets of forwards carrying the ball ferociously and being met with thunderous tackles it was the Barham Road team who opened the scoring. The Dons were awarded a penalty when an S&E player failed to roll away. A splendid tackle by Abby Wynne thwarted the first sortie but it was spread wide for Jade Whareate to squeeze in at the corner for a 5-0 lead. The game went from end to end as Sutton tried to get onto level terms whilst Wimbledon sought to extend their lead. With Aegean Leech to the fore the Dons defence stood firm.

Sutton suffered a self-inflicted wound when Abby Wynne's long clearance was brought back due to S&E players failing to retreat. Gifted with free possession and the bonus of a penalty on the host's 22 the visitors exploited the situation to the maximum. Fluent play from the backs set up Maddie Healey who finished with aplomb out wide. Trailing 0-10 the Rugby Lane team were also forced into a change as an injured Hannah Smith was replaced by Natalie McCall. Maddie Healey was soon in the thick of the action once more with another electric burst of pace which should have created a try but the ball hit the deck when the line was begging.

The fates then conspired against the Black & Whites as a raking clearance kick from Hannah Gutteridge took the cruellest of bounces to wrong foot the cover. Maddie Healey got to the ball first and intelligently fly-hacked the ball to the vacant in-goal area. The quicksilver winger won the race to the line to touchdown for her second try of the afternoon. Hannah Gutteridge made light of the challenging conversion to extend Wimbledon's lead to 17-0. Sutton & Epsom pressed hard to get on the scoreboard before the break. The Dons knocked on the restart and provided the prefect platform on the 22 for an S&E attack but once more they could not find a way through the opposition defences. In addition winger Ella Zeqiri was injured in a tackle and had to be replaced by Lucy Hoad. All the hosts' efforts were in vain as the first period ended with Wimbledon leading 17-0.

Sutton & Epsom were pro-active at the break and brought Joanne Evans and Jayne Maddox off the bench as they went in search of an early score in the second half. The latter made an immediate impact with her running and probing boot. However, the next score went to the visitors. A stunning break by fullback Ellie Seagrave put the S&E defence under severe pressure. The hosts conceded a 5-metre penalty. A couple of rumbling carries by the SW20 pack narrowed the defence and then the ball was spun wide. Zoe Johnson was on hand for the clinical finish to earn the bonus point for Try Number 4.

Sutton now mounted a stunning comeback. Aegean Leach stole the ball and her swift counter nearly led to a try. The retreating defence were forced into conceding a penalty and the referee issued a yellow card. The Black & Whites took immediate advantage of their numerical superiority with the tap penalty sent wide where Joanne Evans battled her way over the line to score. Trailing 5-22 the crowd only had a moment to draw breath before they were cheering another Sutton score. S&E secured the restart and Jayne Meadows crossfield kick was gathered but a bone-shaking tackle from Aegean Leach turned over the ball and the talismanic Sutton back set off for the line from halfway. Her powerful run down the touchline culminated in a jolting hand-off to the last defender before scoring. The visitors' lead was now only 22-10 and they were still 14.

It was now Jayne Meadows turn to turnover the ball. Natalie McCall was awarded a penalty after a strong carry which was quickly taken and Jayne Meadows carried it to the 22. The ball was spun wide until Aegean Jones cut back and her angled run saw her collect her second score under the posts. The momentum of the match had swung dramatically in the hosts' favour as they now only trailed 15-22. However, their wings were clipped when not only they temporarily lost the influential Joanne Evans to a yellow card for a high tackle but they also lost Aegean Leech to an injury.

It was now Wimbledon's turn to take advantage of the yellow card scenario. A fabulous run from depth by Ellie Seagrave fielding a Jayne Meadows clearance almost saw the 15 score but support was on hand from replacement Shenay Nurse who crossed the whitewash. Hannah Gutteridge added the extras for 29-15 and clear water between the two teams. Sutton returned to attack mode and a flurry of penalties saw another yellow card being awarded to one of the Dons. S&E failed to convert the pressure from 5 metres out and Hannah Gutteridge relieved the pressure with a huge clearance kick. They say a kick is only as good as the chase and Shenay Nurse raced after the ball and her pressure resulted in a knock on. The visitors were in no mood to ease off and centre Jade Whareate scored a marvellous solo effort to garner her second try of the afternoon. Hannah Gutteridge bisected the uprights as the Beverley Meads team stretched their advantage to 36-15.

Joanne Evans returned as S&E sought out at least a solitary bonus point for the fourth try. But Wimbledon had not finished and as if she had felt left out of the action outside centre Sophie Jackson set off in search of glory. Her powerful run carved through the defence and she had enough in reserve to burst through the last tackle and score under the posts. Hannah Gutteridge added her fourth conversion of the afternoon to make it 43-15. However, the final moment belonged to Lucy Hoad. The winger collected the ball near halfway and began an arcing run across the width of the pitch, having outflanked the defence she only had one opponent left who she promptly sidestepped for a stunning score. That concluded the scoring on a pulsating afternoon of rugby.

Wimbledon deservedly won the contest 43-20 with their excellent back division scoring a magnificent seven tries. On the back of the strong ball-carrying of their forwards the distribution, handling and finishing of their backs showed what can be done with exemplary core skills. The revitalised Sutton after the break seriously threatened to overturn the 22-point deficit and the final margin of defeat probably did not reflect the competitive nature of this wonderful contest. Next Sunday, 26th February, Sutton & Epsom will be looking to return to winning ways when they travel to the Guildford Gazelles who they have yet to play this season.

Sutton & Epsom
 Abby Wynne, Ella Zeqiri, Rachel Kinsella, Olivia Lambe, Charlotte Mahoney, Aegean Leech, Zoe Smith, Tia Jones, Caroline Styan, Hannah Smith, Beth Evans, Robyn Bloomfield, Alice Clarke, Bernadette Rees & Harriet Forsyth.
 Replacements: Georgina Farrington, Isabelle Keith, Lucy Hoad, Natalie McCall, Joanne Evans, & Jayne Meadows.

Wimbledon
 Ellie Seagrave, Zoe Johnston, Sophie Jackson, Jade Whareate, Maddie Healey, Hannah Gutteridge, Sophie Blackett, Nikeisha Hendricks, Willow Ingleton, Maryam Nejand, Zoe Adams, Zoe Leake, Tracey Smith, Heather McNaughtan & Lucy Boiling.
 Replacements: Stacey Malinowski, Karen Williams, Shenay Nurse, Jennifer Croke & Lauren Morton.

Knights give Sutton & Epsom a hard day

8 March 2023



Havant RFC 50 – Sutton & Epsom 5. Saturday 18th February.

The traditional close encounters of the rugby kind between Sutton & Epsom and Havant had a Rugby Lane resurrection in November when the Hampshire men secured a hard fought 30-27 success. The Hooks Lane faithful are enjoying a splendid campaign this season having eight wins out of nine at home with only the table-topping Dons have downed their colours to the tune of 16-11 in a game where the hosts suffered four yellow cards. It was always going to be a mighty challenge for the Black & Whites against the club sitting second in the league and there was to be no underdog story as Havant enjoyed an 8-try triumph by 50-5.

On a cold, overcast afternoon with the sound of the rattlers in the grandstand Freddie Bunting kicked off the match. The opening five minutes was one-way traffic and the blue sign with the white arrow was pointing towards the Sutton try-line. Eschewing thoughts of kicking the ball Havant were keen to stretch the legs of their stylish back division. The initial sparring ended with the ball being brought back for a penalty that the hosts kicked to within 15 metres of the visitors’ line. Ross Parkins caught the lineout and the forwards advanced. The backs were released and a long pass introduced fullback Cam Smith into the line and relishing the gap in the defence he opened the scoring. Though the conversion drifted wide it was 5-0 to Havant and moment later it would be 12-0. Following concerted pressure Reuben Knight was stopped under the posts but a dextrous backhanded pass out of the tackle gifted brother Joel the simplest of scores and he added the extras to boot.

Sutton & Epsom are not unfamiliar with trailing matches in the first quarter this season. Finally, they had some phases but having made little progress they were advanced by a well-placed Freddie Bunting kick. Soon after they won a penalty and chose to decline the 3-point option and they kicked into the corner. The disappointment at losing the 5-metre lineout was replaced instantly by euphoria. Havant tapped the ball into their in-goal area and Tom Brooker reacted the quickest for a Sutton try. Though the conversion from the flank drifted narrowly wide the Black & Whites only trailed 5-12. From the restart problems began to mount for the visitors. They were penalised under pressure at the scrummage. The ball was kicked into the corner and the initial triumph of halting the Havant catch and drive was tempered by James Caddy being shown a yellow card. The hosts took advantage of their numerical superiority with Try Number 3. The next 5-metre lineout was overthrown but recovered by Reuben Knight and from the ruck the ever-alert Ben Holt sniped from close-range. The errant conversion meant that it was now 17-5 to the Bedhampton boys at the end of the first quarter.

In the Rugby Lane fixture Havant were denied the bonus point being tryless in the second period. Invoking that spirit Sutton set forth to reduce the deficit. The pressure from the Surrey men saw Havant receive a yellow card as Will Brock left the fray. Just before that Mr Tompkins was very busy with his notebook when James Caddy returned S&E emptied their bench as Messrs Bell, Boaden & Tame were replaced by Messrs Farrell, Parsons & London, though the latter had temporarily switched with Baptiste-Wilson for an earlier scrummage. This was tactical rather than injury-induced. Though Sutton Mark 2 fared little better against the Hooks Lane XV who were not prepared to rest on their laurels. Robust running from flanker Wes Dugan saw him swat away would-be tacklers and touchdown under the posts. Joel Knight added the easiest of conversions for 24-5 and a bonus point was deposited into the bank. The hosts had not finished and rounded off the first half with their fifth try. The ball found Harry Carr on the flank who used his speed and strength to

score in the corner. The conversion failed but the hosts led 29-5 and soon after the half concluded and the teams retreated to the warmth of their dressing rooms for words of encouragement.

The hosts were in no mood for charity and extended their lead within five minutes of the restart. The Sutton cause was not helped by dropping the kick-off that gifted territory and possession to the Havant XV. After sustained pressure Joel Knight forced his way over from short distance for his second, and Havant's sixth, try. The centre converted his try for a 36-5 lead. The Hooks Lane coaches rang the changes in personnel in a more singular fashion than the visitors. Firstly, the sizeable lineout presence of Ross Parkins was replaced by Matt Whitehead and five minutes later Jonah North was swapped for Rory Penfold on the wing. The Black & Whites started to enjoy more possession but their improving efforts were undone by poor passing. The Hampshire scrum-half, Ben Holt, fell victim to white line fever and ignored Richard Janes to be heldup over line by excellent S&E cover. Moments later the errant Holt made amends and finished clinically from a metre. Joel Knight bisected the uprights for 43-5.

The game entered the final quarter with the result beyond doubt but plenty to play for in terms of pride. Whether it was going to be a case of damage limitation or a spirited finale with consolation scores for Sutton remained to be seen. George London, as he has done so often before, took the game to the opposition, driving his tackler back yards in contact he sought to inspire the Black & Whites. Their followed a bizarre passage of play when the visitors turned over the ball four times in just over a minute. To be fair drizzle and dropping temperatures had made handling increasingly challenging as the game became somewhat scrappy.

Inside the last ten minutes winger Harry Carr produced a moment of brilliance with a blindside break at express pace. Though he was denied the individual glory replacement Matt Whitehead was on hand for the final flourish to score Havant's eighth try. Joel Knight made it five from eight from his boot that added to his brace of tries brought his personal tally to 20 points in the 50-5 scoreline. Soon after Ben Holt added a yellow card to his entertaining afternoon and retired to the sidelines and Wes Dugan stepped in at 9. Sutton, with the extra man, pressed hard for a consolation try. Teams do not sit second in the table if they have a porous defence and the hosts defended their line as if they led by a solitary point rather than 45. Time and again thumping tackles repelled the S&E pack. The ball went wide and the adamant line stood firm as the Rugby Lane men knocked on. Havant cleared and the Black & White army retreated with renewed sympathy for Sisyphus. In the last knockings it was the hosts who looked like ending with a final score. A fine break by Joel Knight saw the inside pass blocked. Then Harry Carr was denied a try as he just failed to reach his chip ahead. The referee blew his whistle and Havant had deservedly won with a bonus point by 50-5.

The combination of robust ball carrying forwards and dynamic backs spearheaded by the trio of Knights was more than enough to defeat the visitors. For the Black & Whites it was the third Saturday on the trot against top three opposition and once more it was a case of spirited resistance in adversity. Their cause was not helped by early scotomata in their

defensive alignment. Though they had to make do with limited territory and possession they were too often undone by errant passing.

Next Saturday S&E head to the coast to fulfil the Brighton fixture that succumbed to the freezing temperatures before Christmas. At Rugby Lane in September the Black & Whites enjoyed their finest hour with a thrilling 42-24 triumph and would dearly love a repeat performance.

Sutton & Epsom

Alex Mawdsley, Kyren Ghumra, Sam Hurley, Lawrence Elliott, Ollie Baptiste-Wilson, Freddy Bunting, Austin Bell, Tom Boaden, Alex Mount, Will Lloyd, George Drye ©, Josh Glanville, Ben Tame, James Caddy & Tom Brooker.

Replacements: (all used) Chris Farrell, George London, & Ross Parsons.

Havant

Cam Smith, Harry Carr, Joel Knight ©, Jacob Knight, Jonah North, Reuben Knight, Ben Holt, Luke Marks, Sean Shepherd, Tam Lindsay, Richard Janes, Ross Parkins, Will Brock, Wes Dugan & Dylan Lawley.

Replacements: Jez Smith, Matt Whitehead & Rory Penfold.

Hackney Impress To Dent Sutton's Title Ambitions

8 March 2023

Hackney Women 32 Sutton & Epsom Women 17. Sutton & Epsom womens rugby had not played a match since their 8 th January victory at Hammersmith & Fulham. They had been frustrated by the weather when hosting Hampstead and then endured the unexpected decision by table-toppers Battersea Ironsides to forfeit their fixture. The result was five weeks of competitive inactivity as they travelled to Hackney who were looking for revenge for the 22-5 defeat they suffered at the hands of S&E at Rugby Lane in November. The host's honour was restored with a hard fought 32-17 victory over the Black & Whites.

Hackney kicked off on a gloomy but still Sunday afternoon thankfully free from rain. The visitors failed to deal with the kick which would be a portent for things to come. Hesitation from Sutton and pressure from Hackney saw the hosts turn over the ball to gain possession in a prime position. S&E were under considerable strain defending scrums, lineouts and penalties in their 22 as the Londoners pressed for the opening score. Courageous defence against the rampant forwards delayed an inevitable score until it was spun wide for fullback Rachel Castola to squeeze in at the corner. The challenging conversion was missed but it was first blood to Hackney who led 5-0.

Sutton & Epsom went in search of a rapid reply forcing their opponents back into their 22. An offside penalty was kicked to the corner for the 5-metre lineout. The disappointment of losing the throw was immediately offset by a magnificent turnover. The backs were released and Aegean Leech finished with aplomb in the corner despite the attention of several defenders. With the scores level at 5-5 the Rugby Lane team prepared for the restart. Once again they invited pressure on themselves by not dealing adequately with the kick. In no time at all Hackney had the ball in their hands and took advantage of an overlap with a clinical finish on the flank by winger Allie Nelkom to restore Hackney's lead at 10-5.

Sutton returned to the offensive with Beth Evans carrying powerfully. The referee's whistle became a regular feature with a particular penchant for offside. As the offences mounted up the official issued a stern warning that the next infringement near the line would be costly. True to his word he flourished a yellow card to give S&E numerical superiority. At once the Black & Whites took advantage and Beth Evans, running an intelligent angle,

took the pass near the ruck and was unstoppable from close-range. Another conversion fell short and it was all-square once more at 10-10.

The pendulum swung back with Hackney on the attack as their powerful pack provided plenty of ball. The pressure was ceaseless from the hosts and the defence heroic by the visitors. Twice players were held up over the line but the drop out clearance just initiated another attack from Hackney. Finally, Louise Edwards scored under the posts and with the conversion successful S&E trailed once more by 17-10. There were no further additions to the score as both sides listened to the sagacious words of their coaches during the interval. For the hosts it was a question of whether they could maintain their effort as they were dominant in the scrum or whether the tremendous workload already put in by their pack would see them fade in the latter stages. For the visitors they needed to reply once again and return to parity on the scoreboard and start to impose themselves on the game.

The second period started with Aegean Leech on a one-woman mission to level the scores. Taking the game by the scruff off the neck she took a quick tap penalty near halfway and was only halted in the 22. The retreating defence was penalised again and another Aegean Leech tap and go penalty saw her cross the whitewash. The conversion was added and for the third time Sutton had levelled the scores. It was the perfect start to the half but whether this was the turning of the tide remained to be seen.

The opening exchanges of the second period saw an outbreak of tactical kicking by both teams eager to establish the territorial advantage to attack. It was Hackney who once more took the lead. A tremendous break by Ella Harte put S&E on the back foot and it needed superlative defensive tackling from fullback Abby Wynne and Beth Evans to prevent the score. But the hosts would not be denied and Allie Nelkon collected her second try of the afternoon to regain the advantage at 22-17. Thunderous tackling and tremendous swarming pressure from Hackney buoyed by their tireless pack forced handling errors by Sutton. This time the visitors could not reply and ten minutes later it was the hosts who replied. Pouncing on a dropped ball the Londoners countered and the increasingly prominent centre Nia Watson-Campbell forced her way over the line. Hackney now had clear water and led 27-17.

The Black & Whites made every effort to get back on terms but the Hackney defence stood firm and did not allow the visitors any further addition to their tally. In fact the only additional score was from the hosts. Following a rather scrappy sequence of knock ons near halfway centre Ella Harte gathered the ball and set off for glory. A wonderful covering tackle in the corner by Zoe Smith denied the outside centre but her centre partner in crime Nia Watson-Campbell was rewarded for her excellent supporting run with her second try. That concluded the scoring and Hackney had deservedly won by 32-17. It was a pulsating contest with nine tries between two evenly matched sides. Hackney had the upper hand in the scrums and had the benefit of being able to play on the front foot whereas S&E ball came on the retreat. Great credit must be given to the Hackney pack who were relentless from the first minute to the last carrying the ball powerfully and aggressively gaining those hard yards with flanker Camilla Turchetti quite outstanding. The backs finished clinically with Allie Nelkon collecting a brace of tries but it was the centre combination of Nia Watson-Campbell, who also scored twice, and Ella Harte that ensured that their possession was put to good use.

For Sutton & Epsom there was much to be commended. Emily Grainger's thunderous tackling set the tone for the determined pack with Beth Evans was very prominent in the loose. The talented back division did their utmost with limited possession with Aegean Leech to the fore. The defence was exceptional near their own line with fullback Abby Wynne making several try-saving tackles. Ultimately Hackney enjoyed the majority of the territory and possession and made good that statistical advantage. Though this was a disappointing result in terms of their title aspirations their chances for glory still lie in their own hands and were aided by Wimbledon defeating Hammersmith & Fulham 31-14. Sutton & Epsom return to Rugby Lane next Sunday 19 th February for the visit of local rivals Wimbledon. The kick off will be at 2:30pm as the Black & Whites look to return to winning ways and press on towards the Promised Land of Promotion in what is turning out to be a most fascinating and competitive league.

Sutton & Epsom

Abby Wynne, Lucy Hoad, Aegean Leech, Olivia Lambe, Rachel Kinsella, Joe Evans, Zoe Smith, Tia Jones, Harriet Forsyth, Beth Evans, Robyn Bloomfield, Isabelle Keith, Alice Clarke, Bernadette Rees & Emily Grainger.

Replacements: Georgina Farrington, Natalie McCall, Charlotte Mahoney, Holly St George. Hackney

Rachel Castola, Alex Nelkon, Ella Harte, Nia Watson-Campbell, Caroline Mitchell, Katie McAndrew, Flora Gibbons, Jessica Evans, Vanessa Riscado, Louise Edwards, Beth Patterson, Zara-Louise O'Toole, Camilla Turchetti, Carol Anderson, & Zoe Durbin.

Replacements: Kate Davidson, Ka Ling, Diane Anstis, Victoria Bibby, Justine Despins & Megan Hollyman.