



Anyone for free Summer tennis in Epsom and Ewell?

25 March 2025



Epsom & Ewell Borough Council will provide free morning tennis sessions in all council-owned tennis courts across the borough this summer, between 22 July and 29 August 2025. The decision, made by the Environment Committee last week, follows a similar initiative which took place last year. In addition to the summer program, starting April 1 residents can enjoy free Sunday morning sessions at Gibraltar and Poole Road Recreation Grounds. The council already offers two hours of free, bookable tennis sessions at courts every weekend throughout the year.

Epsom & Ewell moved to a pay-to-play model for tennis last year. The scheme aims to ensure that council tennis courts are well-maintained as well as providing funding for future improvements. Maintenance carried out so far includes clearing and treating all courts for moss; improved signage; new court-side benches at Poole Road and Auriol Park; and installing windbreakers at Court Recreation Ground, Gibraltar Recreation Ground and Poole Road. New laser line marking at Alexandra Park will take place later this year.

Councillor Liz Frost, Chair of the Environment Committee, commented: "We were really pleased with how well received the free tennis sessions were last summer and we're very happy to be able to offer them again. They provide a great opportunity to give a tennis a try for free – whether you are a complete beginner, haven't played for a few years, or just want to get some extra practise in."

"I hope residents will take advantage of the various free sessions on offer now and this summer. Booking details are available on the council's website."

Court sessions are available to book online 24 hours a day on the ClubSpark website, and paid coaching sessions are also available to book at Court Recreation Ground, Alexandra Park and Auriol Park: [Find & book a tennis court near you | LTA](#).

Free summer tennis sessions are available up to midday (12 noon) from 22 July 2025 to 29 August 2025.

To take advantage of the free tennis offer, individuals must first register with ClubSpark and then use the platform to book their free sessions.

In addition to the free morning sessions available in the summer, free sessions are available year-round at the following times:

- Alexandra Park
 - Saturday: 9am-10am
 - Saturday: 10am-11am, this session is run by a coach or volunteer
- Auriol Park
 - Saturday: 9am-10am
 - Saturday: 10am-11am, this session is run by a coach or volunteer
- Court Recreation Ground
 - Saturday: 10am - 11am
 - Sunday: 10am-11am, this session is run by a coach or volunteer
- Gibraltar Recreation Ground
 - Saturday: 9am - 11am
 - Sunday: 9am - 11am
- Poole Road
 - Saturday: 9am - 11am
 - Sunday: 9am - 11am

Epsom break Weybridge Reeds

25 March 2025



Reeds Weybridge 28 Sutton & Epsom RFC 33. Saturday 22nd March.

The denouement of the campaign is rather lacking in a crescendo this season. This was the penultimate Saturday and it will be followed by yet another tedious blank Saturday. No doubt the boffins would argue that clubs need a rest before the frantic finale.

When these two teams met in December the nation was mopping up after Storm Darragh and everyone was grateful to avoid a postponement. A trio of Sutton tries edged out the visitors in a keenly contested match that ended 17-11. With Sutton lying fifth in the table and Reeds only a place below, expectations were for another even encounter. The crowd was not disappointed as Sutton & Epsom edged a game of fluctuating fortunes by 33-28.

Despite an ominous roll of thunder whilst the teams warmed up, the match was played on a dry afternoon on a very firm surface. The Whiteley Village location has arguably the most significantly advantageous slope in the league. Sutton kicked off with the advantage not only of topography but also the breeze.

The visitors started well, dominating possession in the opposition 22, running through their patterns. After a couple of penalties the pressure told as prop Callum Gibson forced his way over in the third minute for the opening try. Freddy Bunting converted for a 7-0 lead.



Reeds immediately illustrated the attacking potential of their illustrious back division as they ran back a kick and won a penalty. The chance to get on the scoreboard after winning the line out was squandered by a poor pass as the low ball was kicked through and a grateful S&E touched down for a drop out.

Five minutes later that attacking threat bore fruit with a sumptuous score from 40 metres out. Matt Stevenson was put into space by an initial break and finished with élan as he left defenders floundering in his wake. Joshua Clark converted to level the scores at 7-7.

The Black & Whites returned to attack mode aided by a penalty kicked into the corner. Yet again the hosts demonstrated not only superb defensive organisation but also cussed tenacity as Sutton launched wave after wave of attacks. Dan Jones was halted by a high tackle near the line. The result was a penalty and hooker Rhys Day getting ten minutes off for bad behaviour. From the penalty Sutton forced their way over and their leading try-scorer Dan Jones got his rewards. Freddy Bunting added the easy extras to restore the lead with a 14-7 advantage near the end of the first quarter.

Everything was in Sutton's favour — the slope, the breeze, and now the numerical advantage. However, they failed to convert pressure and a spirited Reeds continued to look to unleash their backs at every opportunity. The quality of the visitors' play also deteriorated. They were held up over the line, they opted to kick to the corner and kicked it dead and were frustrated.

After the half-hour mark Matt Whitaker replaced Ben Tame as the back row reorganised to accommodate the talismanic Number 8. The malaise spread to the decision-making. A fatal failure of risk assessment saw a clearance from the 22 declined in favour of running the ball. Optimist tackled, penalty gifted and try conceded. The ruthless Reeds attack took the opportunity as prop Kerran Beavis muscled his way over. Despite the conversion failing the hosts only trailed 12-14.

A two-point advantage with less than ten minutes remaining in the first half was not only insignificant but also well below par for this particular location. Sutton urgency began to look like desperation as another attempt to counter from their 22 ended with poor passing. The situation deteriorated as Captain Bunting was given a yellow for a collision in the centres. Joshua Clark stepped up and knocked over the subsequent penalty for a 15-14 lead.

As the travelling support from Rugby Lane pondered how it had gone so heinously awry they were served up one final unamusing amuse bouche before the break. They were awarded a penalty in front of the posts on the 22. Declining a simple three points to retake the lead when playing with 14 they opted to kick to the corner. Their bearings were faulty as the ball was kicked dead.

The situation could have swiftly turned from trying to terminal as a Reeds counter threatened to score. Small mercies for the visitors as Mr Lipetz-Robic blew his whistle to end the half with Reeds Weybridge 15-14 up.

At the break the hosts held the advantage not only on the scoreboard but also on the pitch with favourable conditions, a man advantage and a back division that was on song. It was going to be an uphill struggle for Sutton & Epsom in every sense of the phrase. Their defence would have to be at its best and they would have to find a tactical approach to maximise their strengths whilst mitigating the slope.

Thomas Boaden replaced Dan Johnson in the visitors' front row but the hosts turned the screw at the start of the second half. A flurry of penalties was followed by a warning to the Black & Whites as they were forced back in their 22. With a sense of inevitability a penalty was kicked to the corner and the Whiteley Village pack exploited the lineout to usher over lock Cameron Goodwin for their third try of the afternoon. Clark's conversion failed but Reeds led 20-14.

Sutton regained possession at the restart and won a penalty that they advanced deep into the enemy 22. This signalled the moment that veteran Matt Whitaker began to impose his considerable talent on the afternoon's proceedings. Playing his 201st game with all the hunger of his first he scored his 118th try — a typically abrasive carry leaving tacklers hanging off his powerful frame. Freddy Bunting inched Sutton ahead by 21-20.

The Black & Whites had appreciated that the road to glory on this afternoon would be on a path trod by their pack. The trio of Whitaker, Lennie and Gibson were at the forefront of a mighty effort to negate the slope as they carried relentlessly, compiling impressive statistics for yardage gained.

However, the quality back play of the hosts would remain a constant threat. Ten minutes later the partisan crowd were raising their glasses to salute their bonus point score as Reeds regained the lead. Once more it was superb back play with the excellent Will Jones at 15 creating the opening for replacement Nick Brown to score. It was advantage Reeds as they led 25-21.

In this fluctuating fixture the crowd did not have to wait long for another twist. Within five minutes S&E had their bonus point for a fourth try and had taken back the lead. Playing with renewed vigour and belief they demonstrated impressive efficiency as the pack turned pressure into points in the 22 with Rob Hegarty being the beneficiary on this occasion. The conversion drifted wide as the Rugby Lane team led by a solitary point 26-25 as the referee informed the protagonists that they had 15 left to play.

The visitors' chances were dealt a blow at the restart as Thomas Boaden was issued a yellow and Sutton again had to play with 14. The hosts tried desperately to make the advantage count. The Black & White line held, repelling a 5-metre lineout as they kept the ball with their tireless pack.

With five minutes remaining Reeds Weybridge were awarded a penalty. Joshua Clark stepped up and calmly bisected the uprights from 45 metres for a 28-26 lead. As the match entered time added on the referee intervened once more to flourish a yellow card. A high tackle on Dan Jones meant that the hosts would finish the match a man down.

A minute later S&E had scored. Demonstrating superb control from a lineout, first Matt Whitaker and then Sam Lennie carried towards the line. The ball was spun wide to prop Callum Gibson who was in splendid isolation. He ran home his second try of the afternoon, concluding with a celebratory dive that was less Tom Daley and more of a belly flop. Freddy Bunting added the vital extras for 33-28, meaning Reeds required a try to draw or a goal to win.

Almost inevitably Sutton conceded a penalty at the restart to ensure high anxiety for the conclusion. Penalties followed as the ball advanced to the 22. The hosts declined the kick to the corner and tapped from a central position, no doubt searching for a try that would have a more advantageous position for the conversion.

The S&E defence stood strong until the hosts knocked on and from the scrum they dispatched the ball into the neighbouring pitch for a hard fought win.

The season concludes on Saturday April 5th as the Black & Whites head to Horn Park where Old Colfeians will no doubt be a much improved outfit to the one that lost 50-7 on the opening day of the season. Whilst Sutton were winning in Whiteley Village the Old Boys had a significant 31-17 win at Gravesend that secured their Level status.

Sutton & Epsom:

Findlay, Nelson, Bibby, Bunting ©, Scott, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Lennie, Gibson, McTaggart, Glanville, Tame, Jones & Hegarty.
Replacements: Boaden, Whitaker & Rea.

Reeds Weybridge:

Jones, Maitland, Stevenson, Forbes, Bennett, J. Clark, Beavis, R. Day, Agyapong-Ntrah, Goodwin, Finn, Ewington, Wastie & Corner.
Replacements: Howe, McKinley & Brown.

Epsom & Ewell FC mid-week loss

25 March 2025



Horley Town 2-0 Epsom and Ewell FC. Combined Counties League - Premier Division South. Tuesday 18th March.

We made some changes from our defeat at Tadley Calleva on Saturday as Kevin Kardel returned between the posts, with Toby Young in front of him in place of Stefan Aiwone, while Kionte Gillfillian-Waul came back in on the left, enabling Ethan Brazier to switch back to his natural right hand side and releasing Niall Stillwell to play further forward. Up front there was another surprise as Craig Dundas took on the centre-forward role ahead of the late arriving Carl Oblitey and Ali Fofahan came in ahead of Jason Bloor. However, for the second match in a row we went behind in the opening minutes.

It's one thing conceding early, but quite another to let a goal in that is easily preventable and in the fourth minute the ball was just pinged into the danger area from the left wing, where former Salt Will Kendall was waiting unmarked to guide a header past the helpless Kardel from fairly close range.

We then had a chance of our own two minutes later when a ball through towards Dundas came back off the Horley keeper George Hyde, rebounding kindly for our



Player / Coach to get a shot in, but he hooked his left footed shot just over the bar from eight yards out. We didn't know it at the time, but our best chance had already gone.

Kardel had to punch away a dangerous delivery, but we were on the attack soon after where Luke Miller saw his shot blocked only for Brendan Murphy-McVey to strike his shot wide from a good position, and whilst it took a slight deflection on the way, the corner came to nothing.

The home side were creating more than us though and had a spell of corners, from which they extended their lead in the 31st minute after one wasn't cleared and Ben Senior's shot from ten yards ended up in the net via at least one deflection. Clearly our boys were unhappy with this, although it wasn't clear from where I was standing exactly what had gone on, but it must have been important as Anthony Nazareth protested to the extent that he found himself in the sin-bin for his comments.

We didn't suffer too much during this enforced absence and Adam Green came quite close with a superb strike from around twenty yards that dipped just over the Horley crossbar, but we could have no real complaints at the scoreline as the teams went in at the break with the home side two goals up.

We had been playing for just a couple of minutes after the restart when we really should have gone three goals behind. Another former Salt, Lewis Pearch, made tracks down the right and his delivery in found Kendall six yards out and completely unmarked, from where he lashed his shot against the frame of our goal; rebounding down and away off our crossbar. It was a lucky escape, but could we use this let off to get back into the match? Regrettably not, as we created little by way of a threat from this point. Miller set up Green for another powerful strike that was just wide of the top corner.

Oblitey came on as we went with an extra man up front and it took Horley a few minutes to come to terms with it, during which we nearly got a goal back when a clever ball over the top from Brendon Murphy-McVey put Dundas through, only to be denied by a well-timed challenge just as he was about to shoot. Oblitey sent a dribbler straight at Hyde before Sean-Michael Anderson and Conrad Essilfie-Conduah were introduced, but the pattern of the match remained unchanged and our final chance of the match came when Green's cross was headed wide by our final substitute Bloor. Seven minutes of injury time were played, but we were unable to reduce the deficit and the final whistle confirmed another loss for our boys.

We can look at this result in two ways. We can look at the eight straight defeats and feel sorry for ourselves, or we could take in the simple fact that despite the losses, a win on Saturday at home to Balham will guarantee our survival. A loss to Balham would leave them just one point behind us and make for an extremely nervy end to the season, but we can consign all that to the history books with a home victory. It's not much to ask, but it would require a significant improvement from our recent performances if we are to achieve that.

Epsom & Ewell: Kevin Kardel, Ethan Brazier, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Anthony Nazareth, Toby Young, Luke Miller, Niall Stillwell, Craig Dundas, Brendon Murphy-McVey, Ali Fofahan

Subs: Carl Oblitey for Fofahan (58), Sean-Michael Anderson for Miller (71), Conrad Essilfie-Conduah for Stillwell (79), Jason Bloor for Dundas (87)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

A comedy of errors - but it wasn't funny as Epsom & Ewell FC lose again

25 March 2025



Tadley Calleva 5-2 Epsom and Ewell FC. Combined Counties League - Premier Division South. Saturday 15th March.

"We are right in the s**t now" stated our Manager Warren Burton after Wednesday's awful loss at Guildford City and if he felt bad then, who knows what he is thinking now after this self-inflicted implosion at Tadley Calleva who defeated us 5-2 without really playing that well. In fact, this was a dreadful advert for the Combined Counties League with six of the seven goals scored as a direct result of bad defensive errors, whilst the referee also got into the act with the worst display I've seen in over a hundred matches watching Epsom and non-Epsom matches this season.

On a bitingly cold day in front of a pitiful crowd, Burton handed Brendon McVey his debut after joining from South Park, but before he had a chance to get involved we were already up against it in a big way after Stefan Aiwone miscontrolled the ball and Alex Miller got through, only to be brought down for a penalty. Worse was to follow as the referee then decided our man should also receive a red card! Now, I'm aware that the rules state that this can still happen, but thought that it needed to be in cases where the defender made no effort to play the ball, which Aiwone clearly tried to do. Either way, Kieran Rodgers stepped up and sent Sami Nabbad the wrong way from the spot in just the fifth minute. It's possible this may have been our earliest ever sending off in a match and in my opinion it was the wrong decision.

This was a nightmare start but we were nearly level just three minutes later when McVey tried his luck from thirty yards, only to see the ball cannon off the face of the Tadley crossbar. It would have been a great way to mark a debut! Then Luke Miller drilled the ball low into the net, only for a foul to be awarded against Jason Bloor in the build up.

From that point though, we began to struggle as the home side began to make the extra man count. Nabbad made a great save when the Tadley player got through on goal and then a few minutes later in similar circumstances the shot was fired wide. Unfortunately Nabbad then came out for an ambitious long ball, but misjudged the bounce and caught it just outside the penalty area. The moment I saw the Assistant's flag go up, I knew we were in trouble, yet for some reason the referee awarded only a yellow card. Any thoughts of having had a lucky escape were crushed moments later when the free kick was saved but not held by Nabbad and Ash Neal knocked the loose ball in from close range to make it 2-0 in the 35th minute.

Despite the deficit, we were still competitive. Then the home side started to make errors themselves, firstly when a pass was sent back to the home keeper Donny Burke whose touch let him down and allowed Carl Oblitey to take the ball round him, but his own touch wasn't the greatest and allowed Burke to recover and reclaim the ball. We went in at the break 2-0 down and a man down, but also fortunate to not be down to nine men.

The second half had been in play for just three minutes when the referee; clearly struggling with the contest and appearing to be out of his depth, stopped the game for an injury and restarted it with a contested drop ball, yet this rule was removed in 2019 according to Law 8!

We tried to reduce the deficit and with the wind in our favour McVey tried a lob from 40 yards, but Burke was able to catch it comfortably. Unfortunately, in the 56th minute the contest was as good as over with the only goal of the entire match that could truly be credited to the attacking side, as Rodgers scored his second and Tadley's third with a good run and cut back before almost stroking the ball beyond Nabbad into the far corner from 18 yards.

Yet within three minutes of their third goal, the home side started to be generous too. A hopeful ball towards the penalty area wasn't dealt with at all, and Oblitey ran through on goal, guiding the ball just inside Burke's left hand post to reduce the deficit. We then had another chance as the Tadley defence was opened up with substitute Sean-Michael Anderson setting up Adam Green for a shot, but it was a difficult angle and his shot was kept out by the well-positioned Burke. The match continued to be end to end though and in the 64th minute the home side restored their three goal lead with a slide rule pass through to Rodgers as our defence parted which left Rodgers a simple finish from fairly close range to complete his hat trick.

However, we were soon back on the attack and Green saw his shot brilliantly tipped over the bar by Burke, although Burke was fortunate when his next clearance hit Anderson and could have gone anywhere, but went across goal with our man requiring treatment for a ball to the face for his troubles. Burke would not be so fortunate in the 74th minute though, when he went to claim a simple catch, only to completely fumble it and leave another of our substitutes Ali Fofahan with an empty net to fire into from ten yards out and reduce the score to 4-2.

Despite being two goals behind, there were enough errors being made to give us some small hope of turning things around, but that was extinguished in the 81st minute after another bizarre decision. Oblitey clearly thought he had been fouled and said something, earning him a visit to the sin bin. However, Oblitey clearly was injured and as he walked slowly towards the touch line, he went down again, only to be shown a second yellow card! I'm still not entirely sure what rule he broke here and many of our people were confused with the situation also. Either way though, we were down to nine men for the eleventh time in our history and any chance of recovery was gone.



There was still time for some more poor defending in the 88th minute when Nabbad kicked his clearance straight at Oliver Rowan who then put it straight back past him for a fifth Tadley goal. To be fair to Nabbad he then made two good saves in the closing minutes as we fell apart and these could be really important now, as goal difference may yet come into it, although we did ourselves no favours in this match. We could blame the referee for some of this, but he also let us off big time with Nabbad's handball, which was almost identical to the offence that led to a red card for the Guildford keeper on Wednesday.

So where does this leave us? Strangely enough, things have become a lot clearer after this week's results as Balham also lost. Quite simply this now means that a home win against them next Saturday will relegate them and require something miraculous from Spelthorne Sports to overhaul us, even if we were to accumulate no further points at all. However, a loss next week against Balham will leave us in a precarious position and it's clear that we are going to need at least three more points from our remaining seven matches, starting at Horley Town on Tuesday. We are not the only team looking over our shoulders though, as Chipstead, Sandhurst Town and Camberley Town are not safe either and all have played more matches than us. However, we can only focus at our own situation.

Epsom & Ewell: Sami Nabbad, Niall Stillwell, Ethan Brazier, Adam Green (c), Stefan Aiwone, Anthony Nazareth, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Brendon McVey, Jason Bloor

Subs: Sean-Michael Anderson for Bloor (59), Ali Fofahan for McVey (68), Conrad Essilfie-Conduah for Dundas (70), Kionte Gillfillian-Waul for Brazier (75),

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Salts beaten by ten men

25 March 2025



Guildford City 1-0 Epsom and Ewell FC. Combined Counties League - Premier Division South. Wednesday 12th March.

We made the short journey to the Spectrum Football Ground on Wednesday to play out a 1-0 loss against Guildford who, despite having a player sent off just before half time, proved to be the better team over the 90 minutes.

The game started slowly with neither side really taking control in the opening 20 minutes, although Guildford registered their first shots which both went wide. The first shot on target for either team came in the 33rd minute when we lost the ball on the right flank in our own half, and after a poor clearance the ball came back in and was headed weakly to Sami Nabbad in goal for a simple catch.

This brought a small patch of intensity to the game for the next five minutes as Guildford had a shot from the edge of the box which ricocheted off the outside of our near post. It was now our turn to attack, which we did with good passing on the left wing between Luke Miller and Kionte Gillfillian-Waul who crossed for Jason Bloor to miss narrowly to the Guildford keeper Jacob Terry's right.

Almost on the stroke of half-time, a ball forward was claimed outside of the box by Terry under pressure from Bloor. This was deemed to be worthy of a red card by the ref after a brief discussion with his assistant which meant that Guildford would have to play the second half with ten men and that Alex Stingelin would replace Terry in goal as well.

Although Guildford had shaded the first half, having more possession and shots, I felt that we had the better chance in the second half with the man advantage. Our first impact in the second half was through a free kick that we were awarded after Bloor was fouled about 25 yards out. Miller took the free kick and it was saved low to Stingelin's right.

Their goal came in the 62nd minute when Darrell Jon-Peter spotted Nabbad off his line and lobbed the ball over him from 40 yards. This was one of their first decent chances of the half and also one of their last as we created more chances with the extra player. We made our first substitution at that time with Sean-Michael Anderson coming on for Niall Stillwell who had been given 60 minutes as a right winger.

We had another good chance on the 70-minute mark when Adam Green played a deep ball into the box which led to a shot that was deflected onto the bar and over. In the next 10 minutes we had good chances that weren't taken as we had two shots and two corners that didn't test Stingelin in goal.

We made two more subs with Anthony Nazareth and Conrad Essilfie-Conduah replacing Stefan Aiwone and Craig Dundas respectively. We then needed to make a fourth substitution as a result of a high tackle on Nicholas Bostan who made way for Toby Young to make his first appearance in months after injury. The challenge earned itself a yellow card for Jon-Peter although a fan who was much closer than me said that he should have seen red for it.

From this point on we recorded several chances throughout the resultant ten additional minutes, with some shots on target and a couple that missed by a fair distance. We finished the stronger side but it wasn't enough to score against a defensively strong Guildford side who definitely earned their clean sheet from this game.

So where does this leave us? We are still in 18th place after our loss, four points clear of Balham with four games in hand. As we have played the joint lowest number of games in the league this season, we could still mathematically finish anywhere between 6th and 20th but with our last six games all being lost we are in bad form which must change.

Epsom & Ewell: Sami Nabbad, Ethan Brazier, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Stefan Aiwone, Nicolas Bostan, Niall Stillwell, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Jason Bloor, Luke Miller

Subs: Sean-Michael Anderson for Stillwell (63), Anthony Nazareth for Aiwone (78), Conrad Essilfie-Conduah for Dundas (81), Toby Young for Bostan (89)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Reporter: Nathan Lambert

Sutton & Epsom Win But Gravesend Earn Vital Points

25 March 2025



Sutton & Epsom RFC 33 Gravesend 28. Saturday 8th March.

Gravesend were the final visitors to Rugby Lane for this campaign, though there are a couple of road trips for the Black & Whites before the season concludes. In



November, the Rectory Field crowd bore witness to yet another last-gasp defeat as the Kent team lost 23-22. On that occasion, it was a late Freddy Bunting penalty and heroic defence on the Sutton & Epsom line that thwarted a spirited comeback. This time, with the spectre of relegation looming, Gravesend had a degree of consolation with two bonus points in a 33-28 loss.

Angus Nelson made his Sutton & Epsom debut from the bench and became the 41st player to play in 1st XV league matches this season. The squad had eleven personnel or positional alterations from the one that triumphed at Thurrock the previous Saturday.

On a gloriously sunny afternoon, the visitors set the game in motion. The opening exchanges included the usual industrious forward play, ferocious tackling, and a pleasing desire to release the backs. For all the endeavour, the opening quarter remained pointless as well-drilled defences closed down the space and frustrating errors thwarted the telling moments.

Gravesend, having shown exemplary resilience against the Sutton catch and drive, escaped to the S&E half. Pouncing on an interception, the Kent team made a minimal gain, but from the next phase, scrum-half Nirees Kanaharajah kicked ahead. The ball rolled towards the line, and the cover was left prostrate and flailing haplessly as the Number 9 strolled past to score. Jack King split the uprights for a 7-0 lead for Gravesend.

No doubt, nothing focuses the collective mind of a team more than conceding the opening score, and Sutton's riposte was instantaneous. Swift handling and a break on halfway were exploited with a wonderful run by lock Josh Glanville, whose perfectly timed pass gave the glory to Adam Bibby, who touched down near the uprights. Freddy Bunting chipped over the conversion to level the scores.

S&E made early changes on the half-hour as props Johnson and Hilton were replaced by Boaden and Gibson. The hosts started to monopolise territory and possession as Adam Bibby's influence on proceedings increased with every passing minute.

As the first half was reaching its conclusion, Sutton & Epsom pressed hard for the lead. A simple penalty in front of the posts was declined and was kicked to the corner. The catch and drive routine ran into heavy traffic, and the Rugby Lane pack were held up over the line. Moments later, a delightful handling move looked certain to see winger Matt Symonds score in the corner, but he was obliterated by a thunderous covering tackle.

Gravesend were demonstrating heroic defence, roared on by the many Rectory Field travelling supporters who had made the journey. As is so often the case in the modern game, play was brought back for an earlier infringement.

Take 2: Penalty kicked to the corner, and on this occasion, a rather more favourable action for Sutton. The catch and drive was exploited to the full as hooker Sam Lennie scored. The familiar sight of a Bunting touchline conversion made it 14-7.

Shortly after, Mr Scouler ended the first period. At the break, the game was in the balance. The tenacious Gravesend defence meant that Sutton would need to work hard and play with quality to win. Equally, with memories of the reverse fixture, if the hosts' performance dropped, the visitors would no doubt take advantage of any lapses. As is always the case, the opening exchanges of the second half would probably determine the final outcome.

Sutton & Epsom made the perfect start to the second period. A delightful restart descended just outside the Gravesend 22 and was expertly taken, but formidable counter-rucking resulted in a penalty to Sutton. The familiar kick to the corner ensued.

From a scrappy lineout, S&E eventually secured the ball. First, Hegarty advanced, and then McTaggart got to within inches. The Rugby Lane XV was awarded a scrum near the posts. The ball was spun wide, and a long pass was propelled to Matt Symonds, and the winger juggled the ball before touching down in the corner. On this occasion, the Bunting conversion narrowly drifted wide as Sutton extended their advantage to 19-7.

The Black & Whites started to take control of the game but were being hampered by errors that thwarted their best moments. Gravesend were most unfortunate when they were awarded a penalty in their half. A prodigious clearance was picked up by the breeze and remarkably rolled the length of the pitch, and play returned to where it started.

This was to prove costly as, soon after, the ball was in the hands of Sam Lennie. The hooker is a genuine force of nature in open play, and he had plenty to do, but bouncing off tackles and brushing defenders aside, he raced in for the try. Normal service resumed for the Bunting boot, and Sutton led 26-7 entering the final quarter.

Gravesend could have been thoroughly deflated by this turn of events, but they responded with renewed vigour. It was their turn to pressure the line with 5-metre lineouts. Sutton were stubborn in defence as they resisted the opposition pack.

Success was temporary as the visitors were awarded a penalty. The Black & White line stood firm and turned over the ball to clear. In the blink of an eye, the reinvigorated Kent team were laying siege once more to the S&E line. Despite a defensive effort to make Horatio proud, flanker Nathan Fouche crossed the whitewash. Jack King did the necessary, and the visitors trailed 14-26.

Hopes of a famous revival for the Rectory Field faithful appeared to be scuppered five minutes later. Another sublime break by Adam Bibby into the 22 put flanker Dan Jones in under the posts for his tenth try of the campaign. Freddy Bunting added the extras, bringing his season's tally to 207 points.

33-14 up and three minutes to go, it looked destined to be a case of plucky Gravesend returning home empty-handed. To the eternal credit of the visitors, they responded in the manner any coach would want from a team threatened with relegation.

They proceeded down the pitch, aided by a penalty. Their excellent lineout secured the ball and won another penalty. This time, the catch and drive was executed to perfection, and flanker Brad Money cashed in with the try. The conversion by Jack King meant that if they could score another try, they would gain not only one bonus point but two as the scoreboard read 33-21 with the match already in injury time.

The above scenario looked impossible as Sutton took the restart and attacked in the 22. Ten metres out, they dropped the ball, knocking it on, and it was fly-hacked towards touch.

The fairy tale writers reached for their quills. The ending was happily Hans Christian Andersen for Gravesend followers but felt more like the Brothers Grimm for Sutton. Incredibly, the ball stayed infield several times, and by the time play was halted for a Gravesend penalty, it was deep in the Sutton 22.

Once again, it was kicked in the corner, and the visitors took the 'double your Money' option as the flanker scored his second try, and his side's second, in time added on. Jack King made it four from four, and the referee concluded proceedings with Sutton the victors by 33-28.

For Sutton, Adam Bibby was exceptional in defence and attack as his personal performances continue unabatedly on an upward trajectory. In addition, the second-row firm of Glanville & McTaggart demonstrated not only remarkable fitness, popping up all over the paddock, but also great handling skills with telling passes.

After so many agonising defeats this campaign, only the coldest heart of Ebenezer Scrooge would begrudge Gravesend such a joyous finale. If the Kent club survive the drop, they may reflect on that eleventh-hour score as their moment of divine deliverance, and we wish them well in their final two fixtures.

The league goes into abeyance next weekend, and rugby supporters will be able to gorge themselves on the trio of Six Nations contests.

Regional 2 South East returns on 22nd March, with the Black & Whites travelling to Whiteley Village to face Reeds Weybridge, whom they defeated in December 17-11.

Sutton & Epsom:

Findlay, Scott, Bibby, Bunting (c), Symonds, Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Lennie, Hilton, McTaggart, Glanville, Tame, Jones & Hegarty.
Replacements: Boaden, Gibson & Nelson.

Gravesend:

White, King, Cooke, Sims, Huckle, Kite, Kanaharajah, Brooker, Dadson, Shorter, Bird, Hampshire, Money, Fouche & Chahal.

Photo credit Robin Kennedy

Cobham 10 beat Epsom and Ewell 11

25 March 2025



Epsom and Ewell FC 1-3 Cobham. Combined Counties League - Premier Division South. Tuesday 4th March.

Back in November, a Will Kendall free kick enabled us to secure a 2-1 victory against Cobham at the Madgwick, but any thoughts of repeating that win were dashed in the opening fifteen minutes as a much improved opposition got off to a flying start and then kept us at arm's length for the majority of the match, despite having ten men for a large part of the contest; eventually winning by three goals to one at the KGF and providing us with our fifth straight defeat into the bargain.

We made three changes from Saturday's defeat at Knaphill. Sami Nabbad came in for Kevin Kardel in goal and it was also good to hear the news that Dan O'Donovan has recovered from a broken finger and is now training again. In other changes Conrad Essilfie-Conduah came in for Craig Dundas who was on the bench, and Ethan Nelson-Roberts was back in for the absent Ali Fofahan.

For the second week in a row we kicked off six minutes late in front of a crowd of 59 which was inflated to 70 once again. If you exclude last week's match against Balham, recent official attendances have been 60, 65 and 70 along with this one, also advised at 70, which does give the impression that our club are just guessing currently. However, we made a bright start with a delivery into the Cobham area being half cleared to Niall Stillwell who chested and then volleyed the ball at goal, only for it to be blocked and cleared. Stillwell was also involved in the next incident when he tugged a Cobham player back as he threatened to break away. It was early in the match, but it was the right decision.

The visitors opened the scoring in the sixth minute with a goal of real simplicity, as a pass to Patrick Murray in the right hand channel left him free to run close to thirty yards unchallenged before firing powerfully past Nabbad from twelve yards. It was a horrible way to start. Whilst it's above my pay grade to suggest whether the goal came about because of a missed assignment or the three man defensive formation, this is one of those goals that needs to be analysed, as it was a bit Sunday League.

Things got worse in the 13th minute with a decent Cobham move, added to a huge stroke of fortune, enabled them to double their lead. A move down the right was followed by a deep far post cross to Derick Hayford, who set the ball up for a team mate to strike. Had the ball gone in at that stage, it would have quite rightly been lauded as a fine goal. However, the strike was then scuffed badly, but fortuitously straight back to Hayford who then drilled the ball in from a narrow angle!

Across the park it was easy to see why Cobham are now firmly involved in the playoffs. They were bigger and stronger than us and clearly had a little more to play for. Our boys were trying, but our best chance, coming on the half hour, summed up our plight as Luke Miller sent a ball into Carl Oblitey, only for our striker to overhit a simple pass to the unmarked Adam Green, who had bust a gut to get into that position in the first place. Oblitey then sent a header from a corner just over the bar as we briefly threatened to pull a goal back.

Then in the 38th minute we received some inadvertent assistance in our chase as Ryan Marklew was sent off for his second yellow card. It certainly looked like a foul on Jason Bloor that was deserving of a caution, but there was just one problem; you could see clearly from the visitors reaction that it was the wrong man who was getting the card! It is ironic that a team can lose a man for over 50 minutes of a match with no recourse, yet we lost Luke Miller for less than ten minutes last week against Balham and managed to get a match replayed, but Cobham had no such opportunity and still hadn't calmed down by the time that Reis Stanislaus was pulled up for a handball two minutes later and his reaction earned him ten minutes in the sin-bin, leaving the visitors down to nine men.

Unfortunately, in the period without Stanislaus which was spread fairly evenly across either side of the half time break, we managed the sum total of zero shots on target and the only real alarm during that time came was for us when Stillwell appeared to foul a Cobham player in the corner. It sounded like a foul, although I'm assured by people nearer to me that no contact was made. Either way, and once the impassioned Cobham pleas for a second yellow card had fallen on deaf ears and died down, Warren brought Ethan Brazier on in his place, probably earlier than was originally planned.

Cobham were back up to ten men in the 53rd minute and moments later we had a shout for a penalty when Bloor rounded his man before being brought down, but I had a really good view of this and it looked like a solid challenge, with the referee agreeing with that view and awarding the corner instead, which came to nothing.

Little else happened of note as our eleven men matched up well against their ten men, without a great deal of goalmouth action for either side, but insult was then added to injury in the 67th minute when the ten men scored a third goal. A raking pass down the right wing required Nabbad to come out and clear; palming the ball away with his hand just ahead of their winger, but his intervention didn't get the ball out of play and the winger simply retrieved it and sent it over, where Hayford reacted first to head the ball into the vacant net from close range.

With the contest over we threw three substitutes on with Nicolas Bostan making his first appearance for a few weeks. This gave us some life and Miller saw his strike deflected wide by the head of a defender. From the half cleared corner, Miller received the ball again and his low shot was saved, but not held by Cobham's keeper Conrad Knight and Oblitey was first to reach the loose ball to tap it across the line from about a yard to pull a goal back in the 73rd minute.

For a few minutes maybe we had a chance, but Miller's cross was just above Oblitey and as Cobham weathered the brief spell of pressure Anthony Nazareth picked up what looked like a fairly harsh yellow card for a foul, although he probably didn't help his case by then kicking the ball away! Either way, we were done by this point and a late Oblitey header from a Miller corner was sent just wide of the far post in the final minute of normal time with the final whistle following not long afterwards.

It's hard to assess our performances recently as I look back at this five match skid. There have been some good patches in there; most notably the first halves against AFC Whyteleafe and Knaphill, but we were dreadful against Balham and Wallingford & Crowmarsh and barely laid a glove on Cobham, although this one isn't just on us, as I thought Cobham were very good and may well surprise someone in the playoffs. They may not have been expected to be in the top five when the season started, but other teams should take note; they are there on merit. We now have a Saturday off before making the short journey to Guildford City on Wednesday evening for what should, on paper, be a perfectly winnable match. However, we went into the first match this season against them in a similar mood, following our F.A. Cup win over Step Four Phoenix Sports and the 0-5 home defeat that followed was a chastening experience. Maybe it will be our turn for revenge there.

Epsom & Ewell: Sami Nabbad, Niall Stillwell, Anthony Nazareth, Adam Green (c), Callum Wilson, Stefan Aiwone, Luke Miller, Conrad Essilfie-Conduah, Carl Oblitey, Jason Bloor, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Ethan Brazier for Stillwell (48), Craig Dundas for Essilfie-Conduah (71), Sean-Michael Anderson for Nelson-Roberts (71), Nicolas Bostan for Wilson (71), Jack Torbett for Nazareth (86)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Sutton & Epsom rugby's thorough victory

25 March 2025



Thurrock 28 Sutton & Epsom RFC 53. Saturday 1st March.

Back in November, Thurrock were very unlucky to lose 33-29 at Rugby Lane as the mighty McTaggart crashed over for a try on the final play. The Black & Whites had only ventured once to Thurrock for a league fixture this millennium, and that was in November 2000 when they won 28-13 - not even Steve Munford was playing then. So, a return to Oakfield was long overdue. It is a wonderful facility, not only offering a magnificent pitch but also live streaming of their matches. Whether watching in situ or remotely, it was a superb spectacle with a dozen tries, with Sutton prevailing 53-28.

Having accommodated the stag weekend against Medway, the Sutton social calendar encompassed the wedding this weekend. Good news - I understand that none of the players will be attending the honeymoon of their erstwhile hooker. It is enough to make coaches pray for agamists. On the plus side, it was a delight to welcome back Kyren Ghumra to the colours. The hosts kicked off on a chilly but sunny afternoon on the occasion of Number 8 Matt Whitaker's 200th 1st XV league appearance.

It did not take long for Thurrock to open their account. The visitors conceded a penalty for not rolling away, and the ball was advanced to the 22. A controlled catch and drive and considerable pressure from their sizeable pack put Sutton back on their line. A delightful overhead pass enabled prop Josh Boller to walk in under the posts. Henry Bird added the extras for a 7-0 lead.

Sutton pressed hard to level the scores as they spread the ball wide but were thwarted by poor execution. It was a case of third time very lucky. Matt Whitaker marauded into the 22 and chose the exotic rather than the practical with his pass. The ball went loose, bounced off a defender, and ended up in Adam Bibby's arms, and he sauntered in under the posts. Tom Lennard converted for 7-7.

Within five minutes, S&E had the lead. In the absence of Freddy Bunting, Steve Munford had the armband and did not hesitate in taking three points for a kick in front of the posts. It might have been anachronistic, but it was much appreciated by the travelling supporters. Minutes later, Kyren Ghumra's arcing run was stopped by a high tackle. Playing the advantage, Tom Lennard lofted a kick into the grateful hands of Angus Findlay on the wing to score in the corner. The challenging conversion failed, but Sutton & Epsom led 15-7 at the end of the first quarter.

For those who thought that Thurrock's opener was going to be a blemish on a processional afternoon for Sutton, they soon had a reminder that this was very much a contest. The hosts took a scrum against the head near halfway, and Henry Bird made a devastating break - only a superb cover tackle from Adam Bibby prevented a try. However, some chicanery on the deck led to the Kiwi getting a yellow card. The 14 men escaped as the Essex pack were held up over the line.

The hosts sensed their chance, and a superb weaving run by Harry Reynolds enabled Kodie Holloway to score from close range. Henry Bird added the extras to trail by a solitary point, 14-15. The host's revival was undone by a penalty for crossing that enabled the visitors to return to the Tees 22. Formidable lineout control had the hosts on the retreat, and Sutton scored.

What a popular try it was as Matt Whitaker crossed the whitewash for his 116th league try on his 200th outing. Tom Lennard converted, and the referee blew for the interval. Spectators gazed at the time and could only conclude, 'a good game is a quick game,' as S&E led 22-14 at the break.

The second period opened with a flurry of penalties being conceded by Thurrock. Sutton punished their lack of discipline with a classical catch and drive, with hooker Dan Jones ushered over the line. The touchline kick was missed as the visitors extended their advantage to 27-14.

It was now the turn for the Oakfield men to have a penalty and kick it towards the corner. Their fearsome forwards moved ever onwards, making a score look inevitable. Rather surprisingly, it was spun wide, but the excellent Henry Bird stepped through the cover to score, and he added the conversion for good measure. The scoreboard read 21-27, and the Essex men were refusing to lie down.

But a minute later, the Black & Whites had their fifth try as Josh Rea linked with winger Matt Symonds, who cut back inside for support, and prop Sam Lennie popped in under the posts. Tom Lennard made it 34-21.

The spirited hosts were rewarded for their fighting spirit and their determination to run the ball when they collected a bonus point for their fourth try 15 minutes into the second half. Having won a penalty in the Sutton 22, they opted for a scrum and spun it wide for Harry Reynolds to complete a thrilling score. Henry Bird made it four from four, and at 34-28, the game was once more in the balance.

The comeback was stymied when Thurrock were temporarily reduced to 14 for a late tackle, though it was a case of mistaken identity for the bemused miscreant who trudged off, no doubt to plead his innocence to the coaches. Then a dazzling run by Kyren Ghumra was denied by a superb covering tackle, but it was a temporary stay of execution. Soon after, it was the familiar catch-and-drive routine, with Dan Jones once more the beneficiary with his second score.

Trailing 28-39 with fifteen left on the clock, the valiant Thurrock team started to fade as Sutton looked to stretch the game. The Oakfield men were unable to gain the quick retort that had been the case earlier in the contest. Sutton & Epsom started to monopolise territory and possession and were eager to increase the score.

The next try came from the most familiar source as Matt Whitaker collected his second. If it is appropriate to get a try on one's 100th appearance, it is only logical to get two on your 200th. Tom Lennard split the uprights as the Surrey men led 46-28.

The match concluded with captain Munford deciding that Mr Whitaker should not hog all the glory for the old guard. He gathered a loose ball by the ruck 40 metres out, saw a gap, and scuttled his way in under the posts. An appreciative Tom Lennard made his personal tally 13 points, and Sutton had a 53-28 victory.

It was a splendid occasion - a magnificent St David's Day lunch preceded a thoroughly entertaining match on an excellent pitch, overlooked by the superb Howie Evans Stand. Regional 2 South East will be much the poorer without Oakfield and Thurrock RFC.

Next Saturday, 8th March, Sutton host Gravesend in their last home league fixture of this campaign.

Sutton & Epsom:

O'Brien, Ghumra, Scott, Bibby, Findlay, Lennard, Munford ©, Lennie, Jones, Gibson, McTaggart, Tame, Hegarty, Rea & Whitaker.

Replacements: Madadangoma, Hilton and Symonds.

Thurrock:

Frear, Aminu, Bird, Holloway, Reynolds, Clifford, Chew, Cowman, Percival, Boller, Catchpole, Locker, Watts-Adams C, Lewis & Jennings.

Replacements: Worster, Ulph & Watts-Adams M.

Epsom & Ewell FC caught knapping at the end

25 March 2025





Knaphill 2-1 Epsom and Ewell FC. Combined Counties League - Premier Division South. Saturday 1st March.

At half time at Knaphill's Redding Way ground, we led 1-0 after one of our better halves of football in recent weeks, but a combination of us losing our way and an improved performance from the home team ensured that we would end up defeated by two goals to one, which was, I felt, a very harsh result for our boys.

Visits to Redding Way have not been successful in recent years, with our boys conceding six times in each of our last two matches there. Throw in the lack of a programme for the second successive season (time for a League fine, surely) and the fact that it is frequently cold and damp when we visit, and I'll be honest I wasn't particularly looking forward to this match, yet on arrival, we found a picturesque ground bathed in spring sunshine and everything looked much better! The sun had brought people out and there seemed to be a fairly large number of spectators present; far more than the official figure of just 83.

From a playing perspective, clearly something needed to change after our dreadful midweek showing against Balham and some changes were made. Anthony Nazareth and Callum Wilson returned at the back and we went with three players there and the unusual sight of Luke Miller playing at left wing back with the right wing back role being entrusted to Niall Stillwell.

Whether it was down to the formation or just an attempt to restore some pride after our home loss to one of the relegation favourites is hard to know, but we came out of the blocks in much better shape and actually started to pass the ball around quite a lot. We were looking like a team, rather than the group of individuals that had taken the field against Balham and we made the first chance when following some good pressure Craig Dundas received the ball, but he was a little wide and couldn't wrap his leg around the ball enough to get the shot on target.

Admittedly, we did nearly go behind a minute later when a superb right wing cross took out Kevin Kardel and was met by a thumping far post header which sent the ball against the underside of our crossbar and the follow up strike was then well blocked. This was an isolated attack though and we were soon back on the attack when a great crossfield pass from Miller found Stillwell running into the penalty area and he lashed a shot that was heading just inside the post and Sam Gray in the Knaphill goal had to be alert to keep out. From the subsequent corner Stillwell rose again at the back post but couldn't keep the header down. It may have gone out of play off a defender, but the goal kick was given.

Stillwell was the best player on the park in this first half and it was his left footed cross in the 15th minute that led to our opener, as the delivery was perfect for Carl Oblitey to head at goal. It would have gone in but was almost immediately blocked by the hand of James Glover. After he received a yellow card we then had a lengthy delay after the Knaphill Captain Dale Burnham suddenly required treatment in the penalty area; a cynical move that the referee fell for. However, our own Captain Adam Green kept calm and thumped the penalty out of Gray's reach in the 18th minute.

Although we never again had the dominance of those opening stages, we remained on top for the remainder of the opening period and Ali Fofahan broke through on goal but Gray tipped his early shot wide. He then had an even better opportunity after Oblitey put him through once again just before the half, but instead of smashing his shot at goal from about six yards, he chose to cut back onto his stronger left foot, by which time a defender was able to get back and block his shot. As we went in at the half, we held a deserved lead and nobody could have argued had that lead been greater.

There was only one concern in that opening forty-five which was when Jason Bloor went down with an ankle injury a few minutes before the interval, but he recovered after treatment and was back on the field for the second half, only to break down again within a couple of minutes. Ethan Nelson-Roberts came on in his place, but we missed Bloor's all round game and were never quite as strong in this match again. It is worth pointing out at this stage that the last match Bloor started was the last one we won, against Abbey Rangers, and right now we are not quite the same side without him.

Having said that, we nearly extended our lead in the 51st minute after Oblitey set up Fofahan once again on the right wing and although the delivery was just too far ahead of Oblitey, the ball struck Glover and bounced inches wide of his own goal, almost in slow motion. Despite our superiority, within seven minutes of this chance the hosts drew level. Matt Copland unleashed a powerful long range strike that was heading for the top corner until Kardel pulled off a fantastic save. Unfortunately from the corner Burnham was able to volley the ball in from close range.

From this point the match began to get a bit niggly. The Knappers had clearly been given a talking to at the break and were fighting for everything. Our boys seem quite happy in those situations and battled back, leading to a flurry of stoppages. Wilson picked up a yellow card for a fairly agricultural challenge too, and whilst a Miller shot curled just beyond the far post and Oblitey sent a header from a hanging Nelson-Roberts cross towards Gray, it was the hosts who were next to score in the 75th minute after their new signing Sid Cannon ran through our defence and planted a shot beyond Kardel from around 15 yards to register his second goal in his second match for them. It would prove to be the winning goal as the game degenerated further. A foul on Nazareth earned a card and this was followed by another for Jack Watts after he clattered into Kardel, leading to the obligatory scuffle between a number of players and things also threatened to kick off between the benches too.

In the 92nd minute we then had an incident of rank stupidity from the Knaphill sub Ben Mitchell. Despite having been on the field only for a short period of time, he then also smashed clumsily into our young keeper, despite already having picked up a yellow for a foul on Nazareth, leading to the clearest "second yellow" you may ever see at this level. However, there was little time to take advantage of the extra man and after seven minutes of injury time the final whistle blew to confirm that the points were staying at Redding Way for the third straight time.

It's hard to know exactly how we didn't come away with at least a point from this match. We were the more superior side in the first half and although we seemed to run out of steam in the second half, maybe we struggled with Knaphill's second half intensity a little, so credit must also go to our opponents for their fightback. Certainly the loss of Bloor didn't help us either. At this stage of the season and with little to play for, Warren will probably be trying to find out which players he wants to retain for next season and which formation works best. Although Stillwell produced an excellent hour on the right in his advanced wing back role, I'm not sure that we learned much else from this defeat, even if it was an undeserved one.

Epsom & Ewell: Kevin Kardel, Anthony Nazareth, Luke Miller, Adam Green (c), Callum Wilson, Stefan Aiwone, Niall Stillwell, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Ali Fofahan, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Ethan Nelson-Roberts for Bloor (48), George Owusu for Fofahan (67), Ethan Brazier for Stillwell (71), Conrad Essilfie-Conduah for Dundas (83), Campbell Scott for Wilson (84)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

"....., it is now!"

25 March 2025



Epsom and Ewell 0-1 Balham. Southern Combination Cup - Quarter-Final. Tuesday 25th February 2025

So it's all over! A long and fairly successful 2024/25 cup campaign, covering fourteen matches in total, has now come to an end following our disjointed exit from the Southern Combination Cup at home to relegation threatened Balham by a goal to nil at the KGF on Tuesday evening.

As always, there was plenty of commitment from our boys, but this was arguably our worst cup display of the season as we struggled to put together anything of real danger against a Balham side, fresh from securing a rare League win on Saturday, who battled for everything, won almost every header and in the end could have won by more, as we registered just one decent shot on target in the entire match.

Kevin Kardel returned from injury to reclaim his spot in goal ahead of Sami Nabbad, while Craig Dundas came back into the starting eleven for the injured Callum Wilson from our spirited defeat to AFC Whyteleafe on Saturday, leading to Adam Green taking Wilson's place in the back four for this match, but it is quite clear that our boys like to play on artificial surfaces and the KGF was the complete opposite! If I'm honest, I didn't expect the match to pass the afternoon inspection, and whilst play was deemed possible, it was very heavy and cut up quite badly.

We kicked off six minutes late on a chilly evening in front of a crowd counted at 48 and it was the visitors who showed first, sending an early corner straight through our six yard box. They took the lead in the tenth minute from a free kick deep out on the left which was met towards the far post by a solid header that sent the ball back across Kardel and into the far corner of the net. It was an unstoppable header, although it would have been preferable to have actually seen some marking and from their response it was clear that our bench felt the same! But it was still early and there was plenty of time to fight back. Ethan Brazier combined well with Niall Stillwell who set up Ali Fofahan who then saw his shot blocked by a defender and a few minutes later Ethan Nelson-Roberts and Carl



Oblitey did well before a delivery went straight across goal. Fofahan reached the ball just inside the touchline before a sliding challenge appeared to take him out, earning his opponent an early yellow card, although, whisper it quietly, but I don't actually think any contact was made and that was certainly the opinion of some of the other nearby Balham players.

However, we created little and had an escape of our own when a Balham corner was met by a decent half volley that hit the full face of our crossbar and rebounded to safety. It was a niggly, scrappy match that normally suits us, but instead, players were shouting at each other, while our bench also hurled a couple of insults that I can't print! As we approached the half Brazier pulled down his man as he threatened to break away, earning a yellow card for his challenge and in the third minute of injury time Marlon Galivanes reached a low ball in from the left wing, but Kardel kept the shot out from close range. We went in at the break maybe fortunate to be trailing by just the one goal.

It has been documented here previously that we have only won one match all season from a trailing position, which came way back in August at Phoenix Sports. We also had never beaten Balham in our previous five meetings, so the omens weren't looking great. Still, Balham's league position was enough to tell you that we were almost certain to get chances in this second half.

The half started with a foul on Green, or at least, that's what everyone else thought, while the referee chose to play on. In his defence, he had been trying to keep the play flowing where possible, but he got this one wrong! Then Green popped up at the other end but couldn't keep his header from a Luke Miller corner on target. As we neared the hour the visitors had another good opportunity; the first shot being blocked by Stefan Aiwone and as they reached the loose ball first, the shot was parried away by Kardel for a corner. There was no denying that our keeper was the busier of the two and when Kionte-Gillfillian-Waul limped off we reverted to a back three in an attempt to get players forward. Ironically our next chance came a few minutes later from Niall Stillwell who had been playing in midfield before moving into the back three. He struck the shot well from just over twenty yards, but it went straight at Theo Lloyd in the Balham goal.

Time was running out and we weren't helped by an incident in the 85th minute when Miller was harshly pulled up for a foul. His frustrations were understandable, but even after the referee had warned him, he wouldn't let it go and was sent to the sin-bin for what would prove to be the remainder of the match. During this time Noah Bartram should have scored a second goal as he latched on to a ball over the top, but Kardel again did well to deny him keep our hopes alive. But not for long as the final whistle went after four minutes of injury time to signify our exit from the competition.

Or was it? Rumours abounded at the end of the match that the referee had erred in applying a sin-bin in a competition that didn't allow it. I have no idea whether this is a fact, as I do not have a copy of the rules to hand, but if this actually is the case, then it's fair to say that we might have a case for a replay. We'll no doubt find out soon enough, but in the meantime it is Balham that will visit South Park Reigate in the Semi-Final and it has to be said that they thoroughly deserved the win. They may be seven points adrift in the League, but if they play like this for the rest of the season there is every possibility that they could close the gap on the pack above them and this last few days may well kick start and even define their season.

For us it was a disappointing way to go out of a cup we must have fancied our chances in; instead all we now face are eleven jeopardy free League matches, starting at Knaphill on Saturday where we have conceded six times on our previous two visits. A performance like this one could see us in serious trouble at Redding Way once again!

Epsom & Ewell: Kevin Kardel, Ethan Brazier, Kionte-Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Stefan Aiwone, Niall Stillwell, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Ali Fofahan, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Conrad Essilifie-Conduah for Fofahan (64), Sean-Michael Anderson for Brazier (64), Jack Torbett for Gillfillian-Waul (74)