

Salts get tangoed!

20 February 2025

Wallingford & Crowmarsh 3-0 Epsom and Ewell FC. Combined Counties League Cup – Third Round. Tuesday 18th February 2025.

On a chilly evening in deepest Oxfordshire we departed the Combined Counties League Cup at Third Round stage with little more than a whimper as Wallingford and Crowmarsh defeated us 3-0 and it could have been worse.

Forgive the 90s reference in the headline, but “Wally” as they are known by their supporters were resplendent in their orange and black kit, while we were wearing yellow and without being too harsh, it looked like oranges v lemons for large parts of the match.

We did at least have a four man bench for this cup tie, and following the departure of Will Kendall, we had one new face and one familiar one as Naseem James and George Owusu would both join the action later.

Unfortunately and with ironic timing, Carl Oblitey, who appears to have won the starting centre forward battle with Kendall was absent for this match, and it left a huge hole to fill up front. With Jason Bloor also unavailable as he was cup tied, Sean-Michael Anderson took on the 9 shirt, but we were toothless across the board all night, with Ali Fofahan, Luke Miller and Ethan Nelson-Roberts all equally unable to make any impact. We managed a sum total of four shots on target, but, aged 58, I could have saved all of them myself as they all dribbled towards the grateful Wally custodian, Alex Pratt.

The match started fairly evenly at first. The home side hooked a shot wide of our post, while Anderson saw his low shot blocked. Nelson-Roberts gave Pratt his hardest save of the match, with a shot from an angle that he had to move to his right to collect. However we went behind in the 20th minute when a pull back from the right wing was scuffed across goal by James Williams, yet somehow the ball crept in at the far post. As Pratt remarked to us behind the goal, “if he had hit it properly, it wouldn’t have gone in!”

Anthony Nazareth then made a fine defensive challenge to deny the hosts on a break and at the other end, a deep ball into the penalty area was headed back across goal by the ageless Craig Dundas although Adam Green’s strike was scuffed at goal. Green was making his 50th appearance for our club, although I doubt any of our players will remember this match for very long.

As we approached the break, Kevin Kardel made a good block, and then Callum Wilson made an even better one on the goal line as he denied the home striker with his chest that inevitably drew shouts for a penalty, but these were waved away. Anderson sent over a decent delivery in injury time but Fofahan miskicked and we went in at the break a goal down.

We had been better in a lot of recent second half performances and started brightly here with a delivery into the box that was headed up by a Wallingford defender and then claimed by Pratt. However, we created little else of danger in this period and in the 62nd minute a free kick was flicked on to Williams and he deftly lifted the ball over the exposed Kardel from just inside the penalty area to double their lead. Five minutes later another home player was sandwiched in the penalty area with Miller picking up a card for the greater part of the challenge and Williams completed his hat trick a minute after this with an unstoppable strike into the top corner to make the score 3-0.

Warren had seen enough by this point and went with a rare quadruple substitution which also included our two subs from Saturday, Ethan Brazier and Campbell Scott. Owusu made an instant impact, getting to the left wing touchline and sending a good cross over, but we were unable to get on the end of it and the home side hit the post as we began to fall away. Other shots were blocked by our defenders as we battled to keep the score down to three, but the contest was already over.

Much has been made of our cup form this season, but it is worth noting that all except one of our wins were secured at home. Our three defeats have all been against strong opposition in Carshalton Athletic, VCD Athletic and now Wallingford and Crowmarsh but even so, it is maybe just as well that our one remaining Cup tie is at home!

Epsom & Ewell: Kevin Kardel, Callum Wilson, Kionte-Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Anthony Nazareth, Jack Torbett, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Sean-Michael Anderson, Ali Fofahan, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Campbell Scott for Anderson (69), George Owusu for Miller (69), Naseem James for Torbett (69), Ethan Brazier for Gillfillian-Waul (69)

Sutton and Epsom Soar in Nine-Try Extravaganza

20 February 2025



Sutton & Epsom RFC 59 Dartfordians 20. Saturday 15th February.

1988, the first league season, was when Dartfordians last visited Rugby Lane on the final day of the season. On that occasion, the visitors were safe in the knowledge that they had retained their league status, but this time around, the Kent club were looking for vital points in their struggle to avoid the drop. Considering that the Black & Whites had to come from 21-3 down to win the reverse fixture, having been aided by injuries that reduced Dartfordians to 14, the Bexley-based club arrived with realistic hopes of success. By the final whistle, the visitors had endured another afternoon blighted by injuries and, despite a spirited performance, were overwhelmed 59-20.

On a chill and overcast afternoon, Sutton welcomed back not only the Stag weekend adventurers but also Matt Whitaker in his 199th league appearance. Dartfordians kicked off attacking the clubhouse end. No doubt responding to the need for a strong start, the visitors dominated the first 15 minutes of this encounter. Gareth O’Brien was soon scurrying to gather a ball rolling into the corner and was rewarded for his efforts by being bundled out of the in-goal area. Soon the Kent team were attacking from a 5-metre lineout. Though thwarted when held up in a maul, the visiting pack earned a reprieve as S&E fumbled at the first scrummage.

Under the baton of Jarlath Hetherington, the 10 orchestrated a telling attack from the subsequent set piece, switching the focus from the open side to the blindside. Resolute tackling was not enough to deny Dartfordians as lock William Tuffley did superbly to score in the corner. Hetherington’s touchline conversion missed, but his side had a morale-boosting 5-0 advantage after ten minutes.

Moments later, a superb kick ahead by winger Elliot Soler-Gomez produced a 50/22 and had Dartfordians in prime position to extend their lead. Stoic defence denied Dartfordians as they were held up over the line. Sutton shunned the traditional drop-out option of clearing as far as possible for an attacking short ball they hoped would initiate a telling counter. It did not, and the packs were soon settling down for a Darts scrum in a most advantageous position.

With clinical efficiency, they exploited the blindside with a powerful carry from Number 8 Harry Wright that saw him touch down in the corner. The conversion from the flank failed, but the hosts trailed 10-0 and had yet to have the ball in the opposition half. The second try was not a moment to allude to Wildean wit as stentorian words urged Sutton to raise their game.

The response was instantaneous as Adam Bibby pursued the restart and charged down the clearance kick. He appeared to be second favourite to reach the ball, but the bounce favoured S&E, and the centre scored, putting Sutton 5-10 down.

The Bourne Road boys viewed this as an unfortunate and temporary aberration as their excellent defence neutered the Black & Whites, who attempted to spread the ball wide. Using the same successful formula as before, Dartfordians kicked for territory and were soon in the 22 looking for another score. The S&E defence matched each assault and, for the second time, held up the visitors over their line.

It was the hosts who scored next. A surging break by Freddy Bunting gained a penalty, and he advanced his side into the enemy half. The ball was carried into the 22, and Tom Lennard caught a pass aimed at his laces, straightened the line, and passed to Josh Glanville, and the lock gave Sam Lennie his first try of the afternoon. Lennie intelligently dummied the touchdown in the corner and sauntered round under the posts. An appreciative Freddy Bunting added the extras for the 12-10 lead on the half-hour.

Moments later, the Kiwi hooker scored a sublime solo effort. Collecting the ball in the middle of the field, he set off with not only 40 metres to go but numerous defenders to avoid or dismiss from his presence. Changing pace and direction, he relentlessly advanced until he reached out to score with two tacklers hanging off him. Captain Bunting made it 19-10, and Sutton were in the ascendancy.

Before the break, with echoes of the reverse fixture, Dartfordians suffered the cruellest of blows. Prop Stephen Garrett collided with lock Lewis Potter, and after a lengthy delay and excellent work from the physio teams, they were patched up. However, both had ended their afternoon's rugby and departed for A&E to tend to their wounds. The visitors had lost two of their pack, both players having over 100 appearances, and they were forced into significant changes.

Their cause was not aided when Sutton secured the bonus point before the break with their best rugby of the half. Excellent continuity and sweeping attacks resulted in winger Angus Findlay scoring in the corner, and the Bunting boot took the interval score to 26-10.

Dartfordians needed a reprise of their opening efforts of the match. To their great credit, they immediately put Sutton on the back foot. A wonderful break with beautifully timed passes saw the hosts desperately scrambling to cover in their 22. The initial thrust was parried, but eventually, sheer weight of numbers told, and the superb Jarlath Hetherington was rewarded for his efforts with a try. Though unable to add the conversion to his score, Dartfordians were back in the contest at 15-26.

Perhaps with Medway memories still resonating, the Black & Whites were in no mood to let a sizeable lead slip from their grasp again. Steve Munford took a quick tap penalty, and Rob Hegarty punished a retreating defence with a 30-metre break to the 22. The ball rapidly went to the flank, where Freddy Bunting stood his man up and strolled in for the try. The gluttonous points accumulator added the conversion for 33-15.

Hetherington tried to rally his troops with a wonderful kick and collect, but the visitors were superbly turned over in the Sutton 22. Replacement Matt Whitaker made a powerful break, ably supported by Adam Bibby, and yet again, Freddy Bunting was the man in the right place at the right time to collect his second try of the afternoon. The conversion failed, but the 38-15 lead appeared to be unassailable.

Approaching the final quarter, the Black & Whites cut loose, and Adam Bibby was at the centre of some of their best running rugby of the season so far. The NZ centre has won plaudits for his exceptional defensive qualities all campaign and has become an increasing attacking threat as each week goes by, but in this match, he was exceptional.

With a perfectly timed and angled run, he sliced through the defence, and a delightful dummy saw him cruise through to score his second. Freddy Bunting advanced his personal account, and Sutton led 45-15.

From the restart, Sutton attempted some champagne rugby from near their line. Sadly, the result was not a magnum of Dom Perignon White Gold but rather a flat spritzer. Some extremely speculative long passes culminated in an isolated Angus Findlay being put in a deep slurry pit of trouble. Ryan Chandler gratefully accepted the gift, and a joyous Dartfordians had scored their fourth try, equating to a vital bonus point.

Though the conversion slipped narrowly wide as referee Stronge blew the final whistle, the visitors had a much-deserved consolation as Sutton & Epsom won a highly entertaining match 59-20.

Once again, there is no league action next week, and the programme returns on 1st March with the Black & Whites heading to Thurrock. Meanwhile, Dartfordians will host Gravesend in a pivotal match in their fight for survival.

Sutton & Epsom:

O'Brien, Scott, Bibby, Bunting (C), Lennard, Munford, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, Glanville, McTaggart, Jones, Tame & Hegarty.

Replacements: Howes, Whitaker and Rea.

Dartfordians:

Scott, Cappuccio, Taylor J, Nichols, Soler-Gomez, Hetherington, Chappell, Garrett, Sweeney, Chapman, Tuffley, Potter, Williams, Chandler & Wright.

Replacements: Hooban, Taylor M. & Ola.

Photo credit: Robin Kennedy

Epsom and Ewell FC win for correspondent's 2000th match

20 February 2025



Epsom and Ewell 2-1 Abbey Rangers. Combined Counties League - Premier Division South. Saturday 15th February.

Richard Lambert, both a dedicated fan of Epsom and Ewell FC, a club historian and match reporter, was awarded with a team victory on Saturday on the occasion of his 2000th match since 1981. We thank him for sharing his reports that feature on his website www.eefconline.co.uk

For the fourth time in as many contests, a match against Abbey Rangers finished 2-1 to the home team as we claimed the points at the KGF on Saturday afternoon in front of a crowd needlessly exaggerated from the 56 who were present to an official figure of 70.

At the start of the match, it looked like it might be a long day, as we took the field with just two named substitutes available, one of whom was Ethan Brazier, who had been out for some time, while the other was a new player from Fleet Town, Campbell Scott, who suffered the same initiation of many Epsom players by having his name spelt wrongly on the line-up board. Nothing else quite says "welcome" to a new player, does it!

The match started well for us. Carl Oblitey shrugged off a defender's challenge and got through on goal in the fifth minute, only for former Salt Shay Honey to deflect his shot onto the post and away, but the visitors didn't heed the warning and in the ninth minute Oblitey turned provider with a cute ball over the top of the defence that Ethan Nelson-Roberts latched onto and holding off a defender, he clipped a shot back across Honey and into his bottom left corner from around twelve yards to open the score. This was the earliest goal we had scored this season and the first in the League in the opening ten minutes.

The visitors responded almost immediately as their Captain Luke Roberts almost broke through, but Stefan Aiwone was back to cover and blocked the shot. Chances were few and far between in this match, although Kevin Kardel turned a fierce volley onto the post to preserve the lead and five minutes later with the clock showing the 40th minute we extended it. Oblitey provided another great pass through, this time for Ali Fofahan to compose himself before guiding his shot beyond Honey's right arm and into the net from ten yards.

Although there had not been a great deal between the teams at the half, I felt we deserved our lead for the quality of the two goals. Interestingly a tweet from one of the Abbey accounts stated that they had been "in control". Football is of course a game of opinion! One thing was clear though; in our last League meeting we had recovered a 2-0 half time deficit at Sheerwater, so it was important that we kept our focus to ensure that the visitors couldn't do the same to us.

The second half was a little scrappy to start with; not always a bad thing if you are two goals up, as we appeared happy enough to play on the counter attack and break up the opposition attacks, which we did fairly well. Nelson-Roberts picked up a yellow card for throwing the ball away, while Jack Torbett; making his first start, appeared to be badly fouled, although nothing was given by the referee. Later in the match he would limp off, still clearly feeling the effects, giving Scott a debut at left back.

Jason Bloor sent a header just over the bar, but in the 59th minute Abbey pulled a goal back after a low shot was half stopped by Kardel, but no one reacted to the

loose ball and it was knocked in from close range by Stuart Mortimer.

The match was still fairly even and extremely competitive; then Craig Dundas linked up well with Nelson-Roberts, leading to a cross from the latter that was then met by a strike from Oblitey and then Luke Miller, both of which were well blocked by defenders. The visitors tried to force an equaliser and sent a dangerous ball just beyond the far post before seeing another shot blocked wide by a defender. At the other end Fofahan nearly got through, but was flagged offside and picked up a yellow card for then sending a shot over the bar, well after the whistle had blown. It was hard to argue with the decision.

There was just time at the end for a ten minute cameo from substitute Brazier, during which he headed a dangerous ball away from the goal line. Kardel then punched another delivery away and Brazier then got forward on the right, although his ball in was just cut out by a defender. It was a promising return and it is hoped that he is now over his long-standing hamstring injuries.

Overall, this was a typically hard-working performance and although at times, the play was congested in midfield, which affected the quality of the match, I think we had the better chances and deserved the win for that alone.

Epsom & Ewell: Kevin Kardel, Anthony Nazareth, Jack Torbett, Adam Green (c), Stefan Aiwone, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Jason Bloor, Ali Fofahan

Subs: Campbell Scott for Torbett (64) Ethan Brazier for Bloor (83)

Epsom and Ewell FC go to next round

20 February 2025

Reading City 1-1 Epsom and Ewell FC. Epsom and Ewell won 6-5 on penalties. Southern Combination Cup – Second Round. Tuesday 4th February 2025.

It's official, we are definitely a cup team this season! An improved second half enabled our boys to rescue a 1-1 draw at the Rivermoor Arena, home of Reading City and for the first time in club history we won a second penalty shootout in a season to clinch a passage to the Quarter-Final and a home tie with Balham. Although results like this go down in the club records as a draw, we have now progressed from eight cup ties this season; one more than the sum total of our League wins!

Cast your mind back (if you were alive!) to 16th August 1983. The venue was Stompond Lane; the old home of Walton & Hersham and the occasion was a Southern Combination Cup Final which had been held over from the previous season. The tie finished 1-1 after extra time and for the first time in history we faced a penalty shootout, losing 5-4. We have had a lot more of these endings in recent history, largely due to the removal of extra time from many of our contests, and this was our fourteenth, but it has taken us over four decades to restore parity, as this was our seventh win to balance against the seven defeats. Maybe this was an omen and we will go all the way to the final ourselves? Certainly a defeat of the cup holders was a good start.

I understand that players had trouble reaching the venue, which doesn't bode well for our League Cup tie even further away at Wallingford & Crowmarsh next week! As a result, we took the field with just two players on the bench, one of which, Ayran Kugathas, hadn't played all season. Although we had the first chance in the match with just 44 seconds on the clock when Luke Miller's low drive was well kept out at the near post by Jonathan O'Sullivan, we went behind in the fifth minute when a deep right wing cross from Josh Baines was met by a smart volley at the far post from Sacario Waugh, which sent the ball into the roof of our net, giving Kevin Kardel no chance.

On a chilly evening just 49 spectators were in attendance with much of the first half taking place in midfield, and punctuated only by the howitzer like throw ins from Edward Lazarczuk that, on the whole we dealt with quite well. The balance of possession was definitely with the hosts though and we were restricted to half chances, although we nearly scored with one of them when Will Kendall's low shot missed the left hand post by inches; clipping the wheel that supported the frame, it was that close!

Right on half time Sean Anderson was put through by Kendall and we registered our first shot on target; dealt with comfortably by O'Sullivan, but it was a fairly non-descript first half really. As we moved to the far end of the ground it was apparent that the lighting was very poor, but much like our League match at Sheerwater, our performance began to improve in the second half. Kendall set up Kionte-Gillfillian-Waul in an advanced position on the left side, but his shot was straight at O'Sullivan. The hosts still posed a threat and some good defending was required to block a shot for a corner, but more was required and Kardel made a great double save to keep the score level from an attack down the left.

Although we had more of the second half than we had in the previous forty-five, our goal in the 70th minute still came as a bit of a surprise as Nelson-Roberts received the ball in front of O'Sullivan, who just pulled him down in an attempt to reach the ball. He received a yellow card for his actions and it was also interesting to see Adam Green step forward for the spot kick instead of Kendall who had seen his effort saved against Spelthorne exactly two weeks previously. Green tucked away the penalty with comfort and we were level.

From that point I think everyone in the ground must have been thinking that this could end in penalties. Real chances had been few and far between throughout the match. However, the final ten minutes of the contest would prove to be the most interesting by some distance. Warren sent on Stefan Aiwone for Anderson on the 80 minute mark and the reshuffle sent Craig Dundas further forward and we looked more threatening, albeit a little more open at the back too! The game swung from end to end, while Gillfillian-Waul was also swinging an opponent away by his arm after he had been fouled. Both the offender and our man picked up cards for the incident, but Gillfillian-Waul was clearly enjoying his advanced role and in the 87th minute he broke on the left and sent in a superb ball for Kendall, in space and not far out, but he took too long to get the ball under control and his shot was blocked. A minute later the two players combined once again and Kendall chested the ball down and struck it on the half volley, but couldn't keep the shot down from around twelve yards.

At the other end we blocked another shot for a corner that Kardel had to punch clear, while Waugh missed his chance to get a second goal when he sent a shot from a good position tamely wide in injury time. The final chance of the match came from a Reading corner which was met by a thumping back post header, but fortunately it went straight at our keeper.

The penalties took place at the brighter end of the ground which was handy, and a large segment of the crowd, mostly home supporters, gathered in anticipation behind the goal. Green stepped up first, only to see his kick diverted onto the post and away by O'Sullivan, leaving the home crowd happy for a few seconds before Baines then saw his kick parried away by Kardel, diving to his right.

With both Captains having been denied, it was down to the supporting cast and whilst the penalties were not quite as clinical as in our previous League Cup tie with Berks County, Callum Wilson, Dundas, Anthony Nazareth and Luke Miller all netted, while the opposition did the same to leave the score at 4-4 after five penalties. We had a brief scare when Dundas sent his spot kick just inside the post, only to see it come back out after hitting one of the supporting stanchions, similar to those we had trouble with a few years ago at Chipstead. Fortunately, the officials were able to see that it had gone in, but it really is time for clubs to stop using those goal frames and use a different design, as they cause no end of trouble!

Kardel had got a hand to the Reading fifth penalty, and then Niall Stillwell stepped up and also scored "via the keeper", to put us 5-4 up, only for the hosts to level it up again at 5-5. Finally, Kendall stepped up to take the seventh penalty, which was surprisingly low in the order when considering he had been in the first five for our previous penalty lottery. However, he calmly tucked the kick away and when Luke Donville sent his attempt to Kardel's right, he made the save and we were through 6-5 on penalties!

So Kardel becomes the first Salts keeper to play in two winning penalty shootouts in the same season, although he is not the first Epsom keeper to take part in two wins as Conor Young was on the winning side for two of the three that he faced. Having said that, Kardel has a 100% record and who knows, there may even be more shootouts to follow this season as we remain in two cups.

Epsom & Ewell: Kevin Kardel, Niall Stillwell, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Anthony Nazareth, Callum Wilson, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Will Kendall, Sean Anderson, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Stefan Aiwone for Anderson (80)

Epic comeback against Sutton & Epsom RFC a fitting end

20 February 2025



Medway 32 Sutton & Epsom RFC 31. Saturday 1st February.

It was an emotional Saturday at Priestfields as the hosts had suffered the tragic passing of their cherished groundsman Mel Collins. The archetypal club stalwart, former player, club sponsor and Vice President passed away whilst marking out the pitch for a midweek Army fixture. Grassroots rugby is far more than promotion and relegation; it is about tradition, camaraderie and lifelong friendships, and it seemed entirely appropriate that Medway won this thrilling and highly entertaining encounter 32-31.

Sutton and Epsom were much changed following their Sidcup success as they endured that modern scourge of club rugby – the overseas stag weekend. Resources were stretched but Jack Butt on the bench was the only new face to the campaign. Following a minute’s silence, Medway kicked off, but it was the Black & Whites who had the perfect start, scoring from the opening scrum. Number 10 Tom Lennard’s intelligent switch to the blindside created an instant overlap, and winger Matt Symonds finished with ease. The conversion from the flank drifted harmlessly by as Sutton led 5-0.

The Kent team pressed hard for an immediate response, but the S&E defence stood firm through multiple phases. However, this effort came at a cost as prop Callum Gibson’s thunderous tackle left him prostrate with a shoulder injury that saw Richard Madadangoma enter the fray rather earlier than he had wished. This setback did not upset the visitors’ equilibrium. The Sutton defence again withstood a further assault until the referee awarded the hosts a penalty. The three points were surprisingly squandered. Moments later, Medway had a second chance and this time opted for the kick to the corner and the attacking lineout. Plan B was stymied by conceding a penalty.

Tom Lennard turned defence into attack with a massive clearance that left the Priestfield men deep in their 22. The Black & Whites again opted to give it swiftly to their backs. Adam Bibby made the break, and his sublime pass to his centre partner Josh Rea saw him score near the uprights. Tom Lennard added the extras for 12-0 at the end of the first quarter.

From the restart, Tom Lennard again illustrated his prowess with the boot as he sent the home defence scurrying back to their 22. From a scrum, Sutton faked the blindside attack and went open but were thwarted in the corner, needing an excellent tackle from Adam Bibby to stop a promising counter.

On the half-hour mark, it was Medway who again looked to be in the ascendancy as their pack relentlessly carried and their excellent backs kept the ball alive as they probed for weaknesses in the Rugby Lane men’s defence. The situation was transformed by a superb turnover from Jac Davies. Steve Munford’s awareness led to a kick over the top, and the chase was on. The bounce initially favoured Medway as the ball went backwards and evaded the first attacker, but it nestled obligingly in Tom Lennard’s hands. The fly-half set off on a magical jinking run that took him to within a yard. The quality of his pass was diabolical in comparison to his footwork, as the supporting 6-foot-7-inch Ewan McTaggart was offered the ball six inches off the turf. Credit to the lock who gathered the ball and scored. Tom Lennard converted, and Sutton led 19-0.

The crowd hardly had time to digest the score before the Black & Whites added a fourth bonus point try. From the restart, another telling territorial kick put the visitors on the front foot. Flanker Dan Jones made a surging break, and Sutton attacked the left-hand corner. An inspired Tom Lennard summoned his inner Antoine Dupont and lofted an inch-perfect cross-field kick that just cleared the defender and landed in the hands of a grateful Finlay Scott, who touched down. The Sutton 10, who was enjoying his finest display of the season, added the touchline conversion.

The 26-0 score was hardly a fair reflection on the balance of play in the first half, but Sutton had been brilliant in attack. With the clock running down, Medway went in search of a morale-boosting score before the break. On this occasion, S&E failed to cope with the restart, and the Priestfields crowd were rewarded with the first try from their men. Once again, the home forwards carried with passion and precision against the stubborn defence, but this time the hosts would not be denied. Hooker Jack Nickalls was on hand to score out wide. Jamie Ford’s kick from the flank unluckily came back off the upright, and the hosts trailed 5-26.

Inspired by opening their account, they stormed back into the Sutton 22 looking to reduce the deficit further, but they were thwarted by another superb Jac Davies turnover. A wonderful first half ended with Sutton & Epsom 26-5 ahead.

From the outset of the second period, Medway ratcheted up the pressure by several notches. Within five minutes, Anthony Clement’s blistering break looked certain to create a try, but he was trumped by a Steve Munford cover tackle in the corner. But the hosts were not to be denied, and John Sipawa forced his way over. Jamie Ford did the necessary, and the home team trailed by 12-26.

Soon the fullback was adding three more points to his tally, and the Sutton lead was 26-15. The sizeable Priestfields crowd sensed the game had turned in their favour and urged their team ever onwards. They were rewarded when scrum-half Noah Hyde ended a most profitable third quarter with his side’s third try after John Sipawa was hauled down just short of glory. With the extras banked, the deficit was down to four points at 22-26.

With 22 unanswered points, the last thing the visitors needed was another injury, and to make matters worse, it was prop Dan Johnson who departed with a deep cut on his forehead. There was no easing up from the hosts, and their back play got better with every passing moment as players coming from deep with pace were put into gaps with precisely timed passes.

S&E defended valiantly, with Adam Bibby tackling himself to a standstill in midfield. Medway were awarded a kickable penalty but opted for the scrummage. Under severe pressure, the Sutton set-piece was creaking, and the home team had a free ball. Jamie Ford timed his entry into the line to perfection and glided in for the try. Though the 15 hooked his conversion attempt, the comeback was complete as Medway led 27-26.

A few minutes later, a now rampant Medway had their fifth try, and it was the forwards’ turn to demonstrate their handling skills as flanker Dan Jackson triumphantly crossed the whitewash. With under ten minutes to go, the hosts led 32-26 and looked to be favourites to stretch their lead.

The Kent team had monopolised possession in the second half to such an extent that many Sutton players might have forgotten what the ball looked like, let alone felt like. The travelling supporters were probably looking at damage limitation and holding on to the losing bonus point. Then the game offered another twist as Gareth O’Brien set off on one of his familiar sidestepping runs. Winger Finlay Scott, who had been starved of possession, devoured the ball and squeezed home in the corner for his second try. The challenging conversion was missed, and Sutton trailed 31-32.

Medway were not to be denied their epic comeback on this most special afternoon. The hosts returned to the offensive, and following another penalty, they were once more on the S&E line. Courageous defence denied the hosts, who were held up over the line. Sutton and Epsom had the drop-out behind their line and had the length of the pitch to cover if they wanted the win. On this occasion, there was to be no last-play drama, and Medway held on for a 32-31 win.

Sutton & Epsom Team:

O’Brien, Symonds, Rea, Bibby, Scott, Lennard, Munford ©, Johnson, Lennie, Gibson, Tame, McTaggart, Jones, Davies & Hegarty. Replacements: Hilton, Gibson & Howes.

Medway Team:

Ford, Chalmers, Bullock, Revell, Sipawa, Clement, Hyde N, Oyesola, Nickalls, Campbell, Cole, Stubbington, Jackson, Hyde J & Ajuzie. Replacements: Perry, Mason & Price.

Epsom and Ewell FC strike back for draw

20 February 2025



Sheerwater 2-2 Epsom and Ewell. Combined Counties League – Premier Division South. Saturday 1st February.

Two second half goals enabled us to earn a 2-2 draw and break a five game losing sequence to Sheerwater. For those who love a stat, it also ensured that we remained unbeaten away from home on this day since 1969! A poor first thirty minutes had allowed our opponents to build a deserved two goal lead at the Eastwood Leisure Centre, but we kept plugging away and a change in formation helped us fight back in a match where all four goals were in the same net!

Defensively we remained unchanged from our attritional 1-0 win over Spelthorne Sports eleven days previously, although we made three changes further forward with Craig Dundas coming in for Conrad Essilfie-Conduah. Further forward, Carl Oblitey came in for Will Kendall and Ali Fofahan returned at the expense of Ethan Nelson-Roberts, although the both on the bench and would come on to good effect later in the match.

We would have been pleased to see that the match was on the artificial surface at Sheerwater after encountering that bumpy surface at the KGF, but found ourselves a goal down in just the seventh minute when a foul in midfield resulted in the ball being delivered into our danger area from where we didn’t clear the danger and Elliott York saw his first shot blocked back to him, before guiding the ball around Kevin Kardel and into the far corner from around 15 yards out. Kardel made an excellent block from Byron Mitchell to keep the score down to 1-0 soon after this, but we conceded another in the 16th minute when a low delivery from the left was forced in at the second attempt by Kareem Foster. It almost got worse and we required a brave headed intervention from Anthony Nazareth just as it looked we might concede a third goal. I was already beginning to think of what my report headline might be at this stage, certain that it would be including the word “limp” within it! It truly was an awful start against a team that we had a terrible recent record against.

We were looking unable to find our front men, while our hosts looked like they could score at any time, but around the half hour mark the balance of play began to change and chances began to be created. Nathan Best sliced one shot horribly wide, while Oblitey made a good run, only to see his shot blocked. Still it looked like we were going to struggle to actually find the net and this was summed up by a free kick from over thirty yards from Fofahan, that could best be described as ambitious and resulted in an easy catch for their keeper Fabio Suarez, although he did need to make a couple of good punches to clear some dangerous balls into his six yard area just moments before the break.

“Two-nil is a funny scoreline” Suarez said to us at the break, and I always wonder about comments like that, almost as if they are subconsciously thinking that they were going to be less adventurous and try to stick with what they had. Indeed Suarez had already produced a couple of “Pickford flops” towards the end of the opening forty-five minutes. This is always a dangerous tactic at this level as I think it actually inspires the opposition and the second half would be largely in our favour as the fightback started.

We also made a substitution at the break with Nicolas Bostan coming off and being replaced by Callum Wilson. It’s not clear whether this was injury related or tactical, but we also changed our shape at the break and went with three at the back, giving us the opportunity to put more players forward; definitely a gamble worth trying after that opening period. Sheerwater appeared to struggle with this and we nearly got a goal back in the 49th minute when Nazareth’s ball into the channel looked like it was going through to Suarez, but as the keeper came out to collect the ball, a defender stuck out a leg and diverted the ball to Luke Miller, only to see his ball across goal just evade the incoming Fofahan with Suarez stranded in no man’s land.

Best then sent in a good delivery, but Oblitey couldn’t get the header on target. It would be Best’s final contribution as he was replaced by Nelson-Roberts. Within two minutes and with the clock ticking on to the hour mark we pulled a goal back. It was a strange one really as Fofahan’s corner floated over Suarez and although a defender cleared the ball away with a smart volley, the Assistant was absolutely certain that the ball had crossed the line. I’ll be honest, I wasn’t convinced, but despite being just two yards from the ball, my angle obviously wasn’t as good (or as important!) as the man in black and the goal was awarded. Having now seen the video, it looks like I may have been the one who was correct here! The home side were understandably annoyed about this, with some seeming to claim the ball hadn’t crossed the line, while others were claiming that Suarez was fouled. There was certainly some contact on him, but I think the officials got it right and we were back in it. In fact, you could argue that this was the turning point in the match.

However, it was the least we deserved. We had been doing the bulk of the work for a while now and kept pushing for an equaliser against a by now subdued looking Sheerwater team. Miller sent in a good ball from the right wing that was just ahead of Oblitey and Nelson-Roberts sent his header over the bar from a very wide angle, so it would be hard on our substitute to class this as a good opportunity. Our opponents sent a volley from a long throw into our side netting but their threat was becoming less and we sent Kendall on for Fofahan in the 76th minute as we tried to salvage something from this match. And four minutes later it came when Miller’s deep corner was headed back across goal by the recently introduced Kendall, where Wilson headed the ball goalwards and Dundas applied the finishing touch from less than a yard to get it over the line. This was a crucial intervention from our experienced midfielder as Wilson’s header on its own would have been cleared by the defenders on the line, so you could class this as a typical poacher’s finish.

Strangely enough, after being extremely quiet for the bulk of the second half, Sheerwater suddenly woke up. Kardel made a flying save for a corner and Wilson needed to head a shot away from the goal line. We still made chances of our own though, and at the other end Miller volleyed the ball at goal; while Suarez just reached it, he was a little slow getting down to it and only managed to palm the ball up into the air where Oblitey was just able to climb high enough to nod the ball over the line, but the celebrations were short lived as the flag was immediately raised for offside. Then in the closing minutes a Miller corner was sent wide by an unmarked Oblitey who will have been disappointed to miss the target by so much from the position he was in, but if you had told me after half an hour that we’d get anything from this game, I’d have laughed, as we were very much second best at that stage. This was an excellent point at the end of the day.

The draw also pushed us up a spot to sixteenth, while Sheerwater dropped a place to thirteenth, but the point did neither of us any harm in the grand scheme of things as we pulled further away from the bottom two. We now have a cup match in midweek before the final landlord v tenant derby against Corinthian-Casuals coming up on Saturday.

Epsom & Ewell: Kevin Kardel, Niall Stillwell, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Nicolas Bostan, Anthony Nazareth, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Ali Fofahan, Nathan Best

Subs: Callum Wilson for Bostan (HT), Ethan Nelson-Roberts for Best (58), Will Kendall for Fofahan (76)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Sutton and Epsom rugby away win

20 February 2025



SIDCUP 24 SUTTON & EPSOM RFC 34. Saturday 25th January. Crescent Farm has produced a bounteous harvest this season with a maximum crop yield of 35

points from a magnificent seven wins. In addition, last season’s visit by Sutton and Epsom was seen by many levelheaded observers as the nadir of that campaign. Originally planned for January 18th, before the intervention of Jack Frost, this fixture came with the usual proviso of a rescheduled match: Who is available? In a quality encounter, Sutton and Epsom, playing their best rugby of the season, inflicted the first home defeat of the season on Sidcup by 34-24.

The Black & Whites welcomed back Messrs Johnson & Lennie to the front row union but were bereft of the veteran Munford and Number 8 Rob Hegarty who had scored a hat trick against Old Tiffinians the previous Saturday. Job 1:21 springs to mind. The hosts kicked off in glorious sunshine on a windless afternoon. S&E were swiftly into their stride opening their account after a few minutes. Freddy Bunting kicked a penalty to the 22 where Ewan McTaggart obliged with clean lineout ball. A dominant carry by Josh Glanville set up the backs and slick passing resulted in a Gareth O’Brien dummy and a try. Captain Bunting converted from the flank for 7-0. Sutton now demonstrated vastly improved kicking from hand with the highlight being a sublime 50-22 from Tom Lennard. Sidcup have conceded the least points by any club in the league this season so excellent defence was expected. A second try was denied but they came back for a penalty that Freddy Bunting nonchalantly converted for 10-0.

The home team hit back with multiple phases and great intent. Deep in the Sutton 22 they had a free ball and looked to cross the whitewash. It was the turn of the Surrey men to defend valiantly and the Kent team to have the consolation of a penalty. Josh Twyford obliged to trail by 3-10. It had been a thrilling start but the best was still to come. On the quarter hour Sutton produced their try of the season. The forwards carried with pace and conviction with Sam Lennie and Josh Glanville making gains. The ball was then passed along the backs with pace and precision to exploit an overlap, and winger Finlay Scott ran in untouched from near halfway. Freddy Bunting’s conversion extended the advantage to 17-3 at the end of an inspired first quarter.

Sidcup fought hard to get back into the game but not only was S&E tackling first rate but also the coverage of the host’s kicking game was most efficient. Another penalty gave Freddy Bunting the chance to put the Crescent Farm team into the corner. The lineout was secured but all momentum appeared to have dissipated, and the drive was halted. Sutton lost yards and were recycling the ball on the 22 when Number 9 Laurence Wise dummied at the ruck and made a clean break. Ben Tame’s fine support run was rewarded with his try under the posts. A simple conversion added to the burgeoning Bunting account for the season for 24-3 on the half hour.

There was no easing off from the visitors. Playing with a high tempo combining powerful carrying from the pack and astute kicking from the backs, the hosts were forced to defend in their 22. With normal time nearly complete, winger Matt Symonds picked up a loose ball near touch as Sidcup tried to break out. The ball arrived at the Brobdingnagian lock Ewan McTaggart who strode towards glory only to be denied by courageous cover. Despite two 5-metre penalties under the posts, and Sidcup being reduced to 14 when Ben Ibrahim saw yellow for an additional 10-minute siesta, the visitors failed to extend their lead. S&E had replaced their front row in its entirety as Gibson, Hilton and Howes came off the bench, but despite these fresh legs the first period ended with no further addition to the scoreboard that read 24-3 to Sutton and Epsom.

Winning at home has not only become a habit but it is the norm for Sidcup this term. Sutton may have excelled in the first half with a comfortable lead at the break but all those present were expecting the hosts to raise their game. Still with the numerical advantage, the second half began where the first had left off with the Black & Whites besieging the home line after the Bunting restart was dropped on the 22 gifting S&E a scrum. Sweeping attacks, superb defence and the usual penalty kicked to the corner. However, there was variety as Sutton erred with an accidental offside followed by a Sidcup infringement on their put-in and culminating with S&E giving away a penalty at the ruck when in prime position. Would the visitors rue their failure to secure the fourth try either side of the break?

In the third quarter, Sutton and Epsom were forced into demonstrating their defensive qualities. They were assisted by a lack of discipline by the hosts. After a 5-metre lineout had been neutered, Sidcup had the consolation of a scrum under the posts. Not only did they concede a penalty but in addition a quizzical comment saw them retreat ten metres more a second time. The cacodoxy in rugby is to argue with the referee. The second 10-metre forced march for Sidcup hinted at an outbreak of logorrhoea from a certain quarter and Mr Pedro Diogo would not tolerate the dissentient voices. Finally, the hosts made their possession, territory, and pressure count. The popular combination of a penalty, kick to the corner and the catch & drive try. Replacement Harry Large was the beneficiary of the fine forward effort. The reliable boot of Josh Twyford added the extras and optimism swept through Crescent Farm as their team trailed 10-24.

Sutton reintroduced Lennie and Johnson for Howes and Hilton. The gains from the Sidcup goal were quickly negated by another penalty which gave Freddy Bunting the opportunity to extend the lead to 27-10. From the restart the Rugby Lane men tried to run it out of their 22 but knocked on. From the scrum the hosts took full advantage as the forwards carried deep into the 22 before centre Sam Leek’s astute line of running saw him touchdown by the uprights. Josh Twyford made it 27-17 and the comeback was on. Ewan McTaggart then received a yellow card at the restart and suddenly the game took on an entirely new complexion. An emboldened Sidcup threw everything at the visitors and looked favourites to add another quick score. However, credit to the character of this current S&E vintage. They rallied, scrapped for every ball and were defensively dogged.

The decisive blow came with ten minutes to go and the Black & Whites still with 14. A loose ball was picked up by prop Dan Johnson. There is no more popular sight in rugby than a prop forward on the charge. This was a classic with an impressively high knee-lift he set off like a Highland warrior eager to decapitate an Englishman and bearing an expression of deranged ferocity as he covered the 40 metres to score unchallenged under the posts for a memorable first try for Sutton. Freddy Bunting chipped over the easiest of conversions for a 34-17 lead and a bonus point.

Returning to their full complement, the Black & Whites doubled down defensively and looked to control territory. A penalty was kicked to the 22 was followed by a fine grubber by Tom Lennard and the hosts were stuck deep in their own half. The game entered time added on and the deficit was too great but credit to Sidcup as they kept pressing. The Crescent Farm crowd were rewarded when their team scored their third try of the afternoon. A penalty was kicked into the corner and from the ideal platform of the 5-metre lineout they crossed the whitewash. Josh Twyford being presented with the close-range try after the hard yards from the forwards. He added the conversion for 24-34. There was just time for one more play but there was to be no further addition to the scoreboard and Sutton recorded a notable scalp winning away 34-24.

Without doubt, this was the performance of the season that has included fine wins over the table toppers at Rugby Lane on three separate occasions. It was a wonderful team effort from 1 to 18 with the forwards providing quality ball and the backs playing with a fluency not previously seen. Laurence Wise at 9 had an exceptional game for a man with only a handful of caps. The kicking game was unrecognisable from recent times, the defence was back to its high standards but it was the tempo and continuity that really caught the eye. It needed a performance of this nature to defeat a Sidcup XV that has made Crescent Farm a fortress this season.

Next week, the Sutton charabanc heads to Medway who will be looking to redress the balance. They arrived at Rugby Lane in October in pole position and returned with a 28-24 defeat.

Sutton and Epsom: O’Brien, Symonds, Bibby, Bunting ©, Scott, Lennard, Wise, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, Glanville, McTaggart, Rea, Jones & Tame. Replacements: Hilton, Gibson & Howes.

Sidcup: Ellison, Sheridan, Leek, McMahon, Keeley, Twyford, Ibrahim, Conlon, Fordham, Carmen, Epps, Evans, Williams, Healey & West. Replacements: Gibbons, Large & Masters.

Epsom and Ewell’s 11 to 9 win 1 to 0

20 February 2025



Epsom and Ewell 1-0 Spelthorne Sports. Combined Counties League – Premier Division South. Tuesday 21st January 2025.

It was hard not to feel sorry for the visiting Spelthorne Sports team on Tuesday evening at the KGF. Well aware of their precarious league position, they battled throughout the match and held their own for much of the contest, only to have to replace their keeper due to injury and end up with just nine men after a pair of dismissals, yet it took a 96th minute goal from Craig Dundas to finally end their resistance as we defeated them by a goal to nil in an attritional encounter at the KGF.

It was interesting to see Kevin Kardel back in goal for the Salts, seeing as he had only tweeted his goodbyes to our club four days previously, but an injury to Dan O’Donovan required him to return and he had a fairly quiet evening, which leaves his stats for the club currently standing at an impressive 66.7% of clean sheets! We made three other changes from the VCD match and welcomed back Anthony Nazareth and Luke Miller to the starting eleven along with Nathan Best, who had

been unavailable for the last two matches because he was cup-tied. Nazareth was involved in the first nervous moment of the match for supporters who collectively held their breath for a minute when he appeared to bring a Spelthorne striker down in the area, but the referee was happy that no foul had been committed and play went on.

The remainder of the first half was played out mainly in midfield. Conrad Essilfie-Conduah struck from distance, but it was an easy save for Henrey Podle in the Spelthorne goal. At the other end Adam Green picked up a yellow card for upending a visiting player near the edge of the penalty area, but the free kick was sent over Kardel's crossbar.

The only real chance of any kind in the first half came almost by surprise as Best tried his luck from long range. His attempt to lob the keeper didn't appear to be working as the ball actually landed in front of him, but it bounced up and the keeper missed it completely with the ball just grazing the face of the crossbar on its way out for a goal kick. It would have been an embarrassing way to concede, but the teams went in goalless at the break. Here's a quick stat for those of you who like such things; we have not scored a League goal in the first thirteen minutes of any match all season!

The second half opened up with a scare as the visitors fashioned a good chance just two minutes into the second period, but screwed the shot across the face of goal when they really should have hit the target. It looked like that would cost them in the 53rd minute when the match took a turn in our favour after one of our players was tugged in the area as we tried to reach a right wing Miller delivery. No one really appealed, yet the referee awarded a penalty and then gave their defender Shaun Preddie a second yellow card, to go with the card he had picked up early in the match. Kendall stepped up but scuffed the spot kick straight at Podle who made the save. We have just one goal from a penalty all season, which came back in August at Phoenix Sports.

The drama wasn't over though as Podle appeared to injure himself in making the save and required treatment. Although he continued, he went down again a few minutes later after keeping out a Green volley and was replaced on the hour. Despite the addition of Dundas from the bench and a strike from Kendall that was deflected just wide, it didn't stop the visitors from making a good fist of things and a mêlée in our penalty area concluded with a shot just wide of Kardel's left hand post. All of a sudden we had some defending to do and Nicolas Bostan headed a dangerous ball away with Kardel having to punch the next delivery clear. Then a free header bounced kindly in front of Kardel from fairly close range.

This was becoming a little embarrassing. To find ourselves pushed back by the team rooted to the foot of the table despite holding a man advantage was concerning. We were holding more of the ball, but passes kept going astray and although the surface was not great, we created little, although a high ball in from Green was headed just beyond the far post out of a crowd of players.

In the 88th minute our left back Kionte-Gillfillian-Waul was brought down by Daniel Watts and although the referee allowed our advantage, he soon had to stop play as it became apparent that the two players were clearly not happy with each other, to put it mildly. Then we saw something I don't believe I've ever seen before as our man picked up a yellow for the "afters" only to then see the referee say quite clearly to Watts that he was getting one booking for the foul and one for the afters. A double yellow card! The visitors couldn't quite believe it and we would be up against nine men for the remaining period of time, which turned out to be nearly eight minutes of added time.

And in the sixth minute of that time we finally broke through. A high ball in from the right hand side that may have been delivered by Bostan was knocked forward by Kendall where Dundas reached the ball ahead of the replacement keeper. People who were a little closer than I advised that our man may have controlled the ball with his hand as it bounced up, but then with his next touch he fired it into the roof of the net from a couple of yards for the winner.

The visitors certainly appeared on the receiving end of most of the rough decisions in this match, but I suppose that's what happens when you are at the foot of the table. I don't believe that either team really did enough to say they deserved the win, even though we held the balance of possession, particularly after the first dismissal, and it could be argued that if Spelthorne play with that sort of spirit for the rest of the season then they may stay up, but they also failed to take the chances that they had and sit well adrift now. I cannot see a way back for them this season.

From a playing perspective, the commitment was definitely there and I'm sure people will point to the playing surface, but we wouldn't have found a way past most of the teams in our League on this performance. The good news is that we moved up a couple of places to sixteenth as a result of this win and are just two points away from Sheerwater in twelfth with five games in hand! More relevantly we are now 17 points clear of Spelthorne Sports and 12 clear of Balham with two games in hand. It's going to take a massive turnaround for either of those clubs to catch the lower midtable pack, which I'm sure will be a relief to a number of those clubs, including ourselves!

Epsom & Ewell: Kevin Kardel, Niall Stillwell, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Nicolas Bostan, Anthony Nazareth, Luke Miller, Conrad Essilfie-Conduah, Will Kendall, Nathan Best, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Craig Dundas for Essilfie-Conduah (62), Tobi Falodi for Nelson-Roberts (81)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Sutton & Epsom RFC just fail to mount comeback

20 February 2025



SUTTON & EPSOM RFC 42 OLD TIFFINIANS 46. Saturday 18th January. *Sutton and Epsom* started this campaign with a rollicking runaway win over Old Colfeians.

Since then the Rugby Lane crowd has enjoyed an overwhelming diet of tense, low scoring affairs with defensive defiance the common theme. The avalanche of points in the 48-43 loss to Old Reigatians being very much the statistical outlier. However, a glance at the reverse fixture, a 41-19 Tiffinians triumph, and the bonus point penchant of OTs perhaps gave a hint to another Old Boy try-fest. In a seesaw encounter of thirteen tries the visitors edged it 46-42.

Sutton and Epsom kicked off with prop **Alex Mount** celebrating his 100th league appearance and desperate to eviscerate the memory of that chastening October loss. The opening salvoes were fast and furious with both sides hinting that it would be an entertaining afternoon on a favourable surface with minimal elemental interference. After ten minutes an accidental offside from a lineout offered Freddy Bunting the chance to peg the Old Boys back into their 22. This initiated an all-out assault as the forwards looked to open the scoring against a resilient Tiffinian defence. Ironically on this red-letter day for the centurion it was the ultimate unsung hero, Josh Glanville, who took the best supporting Oscar with the opening try on his 50th appearance. The stalwart second row is worth many a verse of praise as he is always at the heart of the action doing the less glamorous hard work that is much admired by not only his teammates but also the supporters. Bunting added the extras for a reassuring 7-0 lead.

Five minutes later the hosts had doubled their advantage. Benefiting from two quick-fire penalties the Black & Whites were gifted a 5-metre lineout in the corner. With commendable precision and control the forwards ushered Rob Hegarty over the line. If Sutton and Epsom had started with the single-minded determination to redress the balance from the unpalatable defeat at Summer Avenue then their opponents demonstrated admirable sangfroid. As Bunting prepared to make it 14 zip there were no splenetic recriminations under the posts but just a calm assessment from Captain Hobbs that they were playing well. Little did we know that we had the heir to Nostradamus in our midst.

There followed a remarkable twenty minutes. To describe it as a reversal of fortunes would be a grotesque understatement. It was a tectonic shift of cataclysmic proportions that altered the landscape of Rugby Lane with 29 unanswered points from a rampant Old Tiffinians. It started with some familiar ineffective kick tennis followed by a couple of penalties conceded by the hosts. The visitors pressed hard and the livewire scrum half Matt Fowler collected the first of his trio of tries. The touchline conversion failed and 5-14. Sutton and Epsom seemed to shrug off this aberration with a promising attack from a tapped penalty but good work was undermined by poor handling. Tiffs next incursion in the home 22 saw winger Segun splendidly exploit a Sutton and Epsom error with a stylish finish. The touchline conversion struck the crossbar and went over for 12-14. The comfortable cushion had deflated to a miserly 2-point advantage.

An emboldened opposition were certainly not finished. More penalties ceded territory, more errors were punished and two more tries followed in the next five minutes. Matt Fowler was the major beneficiary as his excellent support play and eye for the tryline saw him complete a first period hat trick. Coach Blackburn

must have been delighted at the response of his charges with the high tempo play, slick passing and a lethal awareness that led to four clinical finishes and a 26-14 lead. With the interval approaching Sutton and Epsom conceded another penalty in front of their posts but with the 4-try bonus point already securely banked Sharif Dougramaji took the three points meaning that Sutton and Epsom required three scores as now they trailed 29-14.

In time added on in the first half the home crowd urged their team to respond. Captain Bunting perhaps motivated by an understandable despair at the horrific turn of events adopted the motto of the suffragettes: “Deeds not Words”. He set off on a stunning break combining pace, power and changes of direction before being halted in the OT 22 and gaining a penalty. With the lineout operating like a metronome the kick was declined in favour of the 5-metre lineout. With the throw safely secured Sutton and Epsom advanced to the line. Desperate defence could not stop the drive and Mr Maynard spotted skulduggery and trotted under the posts to award a penalty try. The whistle blew to conclude a breathless 50-point first half with Tiffinians 29-21 to the good.

Sutton and Epsom opened the second period on the front foot and despite missing an early opportunity to cross the whitewash they were given a second chance with a prior indiscretion. The supporters waited in anxious anticipation for the 5-metre lineout. Once again the forwards delivered and Rob Hegarty had his second score and Sutton and Epsom had the bonus point. The reliability of the lineout was rivalling the Bunting boot that made it 28-29. The penalty count mounted against the visitors. Five minutes later Sutton and Epsom faced the familiar question: Take the simple three points or go for the maximum? Their positive approach and the excellence of the lineout gave Rob Hegarty his hat trick. Freddy Bunting impressed once more with a touchline conversion and the Black & Whites had regained the lead 35-29 but there was still 30 minutes on the clock.

The restart should be a moment to refocus and heighten one’s concentration. Sadly Sutton and Epsom reacted in statuesque fashion to the kick. To compound this error they conceded a completely unnecessary penalty for a high tackle on a man in the maul. For the umpteenth time the ball arrowed into the corner from a penalty. This time there was some variation on the theme as the ball was shipped wide to the backs. The Sutton and Epsom focus on the catch and drive left an overlap and Sharif Dougramaji bulldozed his way over the line. The centre converted his try and the pendulum swung back in Old Tiffinians favour as they led 36-35.

Ineffectual kicking and penalties now haunted Sutton and Epsom as the Old Boys were in the ascendancy. They declined a simple penalty in front of the posts in search of another try. There was a return to the popular catch and drive theme as Number 8 Jaewon Jang completed the score. The missed conversion left Sutton and Epsom trailing by 35-41 knowing a goal would inch them ahead. Moments later and it was roles reversed. Sutton and Epsom had the penalty and another lineout opportunity. Once more the excellent throwing in by Alex Mount found its mark. The home pack bullied their way to the line and prop Callum Gibson scored from a couple of centimetres out. The highly lubricated crowd roared their approval as the Bunting conversion sailed over and his side led 42-41 with ten to go.

It was the traditional tense ending for the assembled crowd as has become the norm at Rugby Lane but that certainly did not ease the tension. Errors and infringements far outnumbered moments of quality as all involved knew that the next score might be the decider. As the hosts ran the ball from just outside their 22 disaster struck as a pass was intercepted. Sharif Dougramaji kept his composure and scored lucky try number 13 in the match. However, once again he failed with the conversion and with the OTs leading 46-42 Sutton and Epsom required a try to lead. In the in-goal area a disconsolate and exhausted Alex Mount left the field having given his all. He may not have scored a try but his excellent lineout service had provided a remarkable six tries for his pack.

There was to be no last gasp glory and Old Tiffinians held on to complete the double over Sutton and Epsom. The hosts’ errors had been costly but great credit to the visitors who pounced on every opportunity and did not squander a chance all game. Hat trick hero Matt Fowler exemplified their ruthless streak and the first half purple patch was the foundation of their success. Rob Hegarty joins the illustrious trio of Will East (Luton), Kyren Ghumra (Shelford) and Ollie Baptiste-Wilson (Royal Wootton Bassett) who have scored a hat trick in the league for Sutton and Epsom in a losing cause. The match was a curious affair because there was much to applaud in the Sutton and Epsom performance but their demise was the result of self-inflicted wounds that were deep and proved to be fatal. Next Saturday sees the visit to Sidcup to play the fixture that was recently frozen off. There can be no doubt about not only the severity of the task but also that the hosts will be equally unforgiving if the Black & Whites repeat such an error-strewn performance.

Sutton and Epsom:

O’Brien, Scott, Bibby, Bunting ©, Rea, Lennard, Munford, Mount, Boaden, Gibson, Glanville, McTaggart, Tame, Jones & Hegarty.

Replacements: Hilton, Davies & Wise.

Old Tiffinians:

Day, Segun, Dougramaji, Sabania, Marshall, Taylor, Fowler, Hobbs ©, Blackman, Turner, O’Connell, Noeh, Dore, Graham & Jang.

Replacements: Oram, Turnbull & Burgess.

Epsom & Ewell FC knocked out by narrow loss

20 February 2025



VCD Athletic 1-0 Epsom and Ewell FC. Isuzu F.A. Vase – Fourth Round. Saturday 18th January.

After four home wins in the competition, we departed the F.A. Vase in our first away tie at high-flying VCD Athletic by a goal to nil, which on the balance of play it was hard to disagree with. However, our boys battled all the way in this match, only to be concede midway through the first half and the home side then defended that lead cleverly, showing good organisation and experience to break up the play when necessary and to keep us at arm’s length from that point. As a result, the Vickers can be added to a small list of clubs alongside Eastbourne United, Hailsham Town and Long Buckby who have ended our interest in the Vase at the last 32 stage in the fifty years since we reached the inaugural final.

In terms of personnel and from looking at our bench, it looks like we are getting back to full strength, which is just as well bearing our League position and the upcoming challenges we face in that and the other two cups we remain in. Additionally, Dan O’Donovan returned between the posts after completing his suspension. Conrad Essilfie-Conduah, Ethan Nelson-Roberts and Nicolas Bostan returned to the starting eleven after our last match against Berks County, while Craig Dundas moved into a role further forward in place of the cup-tied Jason Bloor.

170 spectators were present on a chilly afternoon at Old Road and both teams opened up with half-chances. Kionte Gillfillian-Waul sent a dangerous ball into the danger area, but it was cleared, while at the other end Bostan made a good block for a corner. In the ninth minute Will Kendall was fouled close to the edge of the penalty area, and as Kendall and Ali Fofahan stood around the ball, I was surprised to see that our Captain Adam Green didn’t appear to be involved, but found out soon after as Kendall tapped the ball across to him, leaving him with a more central angle for the shot, but it was blocked and the chance was gone. I appreciate the variety here, but this was a really good opportunity to test the keeper with our first set piece and it just didn’t work. As it turned out, this would be the best chance we would get in the match.

We had a scare in the 14th minute when a foul by Essilfie-Conduah out wide gave the home side a chance to deliver the ball in and O’Donovan reached it at full stretch, only to then drop it at the feet of a striker. It happened too quickly for him to react though and the ball struck him and headed goalwards, where Niall Stillwell was well positioned to clear it off the goal line.

We had an opportunity on the twenty minute mark when the VCD keeper Andy Walker sent a clearance straight to Fofahan, who then found Dundas, but from twenty yards he was unable to keep his shot down. Three minutes later though, we were behind after Bostan was adjudged to have committed a foul out wide in the middle of our half, but the free kick seemed to go straight through a crowd of players and was met at the far post by Michael Fenn who smashed the ball into the net off the crossbar. I thought it had stayed out at first, but it was not to be.

This was obviously not good news. Particularly when you realise that we have only come from behind to win on one occasion this season out of the eleven wins we have registered, which took place about a mile away from this ground at Phoenix Sports back in August. This would be a real mountain to climb.

Ollie Freeman was next to try his luck with a stinging shot from close to twenty-five yards out, but O’Donovan pulled off a superb save to fingertip the ball over the bar, while our chances were of a less threatening manner. A Green corner was punched away by Walker straight to Kendall, but his shot flew over the bar from the

edge of the area. On another day it might have gone in the top corner, but we were unable to punish them and Bostan had to make another great block at the other end as the home side threatened to extend their lead. We went off at the break trailing by the one goal.

An early opportunity for the hosts just missed our post before we registered our first shot on target in the 55th minute when Essilfie-Conduah's shot took a slight deflection on the way but Walker was able to make the save. We nearly had a chance just after that when Kendall's ball in from the right wing seemed destined to be met by the head of Dundas, only for the VCD Captain Ben Fitchett to get the faintest touch to it and deflect it away. Fitchett had clearly been detailed to keep an eye on our experienced midfielder and did an excellent job throughout the match.

We picked up a couple of yellow cards with Gillfillian-Waul being most upset by the decision, and then made a pair of substitutions with Carl Oblitey and Luke Miller coming on, but we were unable to create much, although we did get one more opportunity when Kendall robbed a defender and set up Essilfie-Conduah, but our man was out wide and was unable to thread the needle; the ball nestling in the side netting instead.

As the game entered the closing minutes we were indebted to O'Donovan who made a good block after a striker had broken through on the left and run in on goal. We were unable to equalise though, which was a shame as any Salts supporter who had seen our penalties in our shoot out victory over Berks County would have fancied our chances. During the last week I cautioned our club against publicising our penalties from that match online, but this was ignored, and it was interesting to see that Walker had his water bottle in the goal covered with penalty notes, and it is to be hoped that our opponents in the two cups we remain in are not minded to look at our "official" social media channels, as for the first time in ages they might see something of relevance! VCD Athletic now have the excitement of a home tie against Hartpury University or Fareham Town in the next round, although I should point out that the previous three teams that knocked us out at this stage of the Vase went out in the last 16, so they will need to buck that particular trend!

Back in 2010/11 we departed the FA Vase at home to the favourites St Neots Town who fought back to lead us 2-1 and then promptly snuffed out the game, giving us very little to work with. This match felt a bit like that, particularly in the second half and sometimes you just have to admit that we were beaten by the better team. They will face harder challenges, but I wouldn't be totally surprised if VCD Athletic were walking out at Wembley Stadium in a few months.

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Niall Stillwell, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Nicolas Bostan, Callum Wilson, Ali Fofahan, Conrad Essilfie-Conduah, Will Kendall, Craig Dundas, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Luke Miller for Gillfillian-Waul (67), Carl Oblitey for Dundas (67), Jack Torbett for Kendall (90)