

Coroner visits Surrey cricket hero's mental decline

24 July 2025



Coroner's Inquest visits the loss of former England and Surrey batting great **Graham Thorpe MBE**, who died in August 2024 aged 55. Following an inquest held this week at Surrey Coroner's Court, his life and tragic death have returned to the headlines, casting fresh light on his legacy and personal struggles.

Born in Farnham, Surrey on 1 August 1969, Graham Thorpe rose through the county's cricketing ranks with prodigious talent and steely determination. He made his first-class debut for Surrey County Cricket Club in 1988 and quickly established himself as one of the most technically gifted left-handers of his generation.

Thorpe's early promise blossomed into a formidable career with Surrey, for whom he scored over 21,000 runs across formats. His stylish strokeplay, calm temperament, and ability to perform under pressure made him a linchpin for the county during the 1990s and early 2000s.

Surrey's return to success in the late 1990s—including their Sunday League title in 1996 and County Championship victories—bore Thorpe's fingerprints, and his bond with the club remained strong well beyond retirement. He later served as Surrey's batting coach, mentoring a new generation of cricketers at the Oval.

Thorpe made an instant impact on the international stage, scoring a century on his Test debut against Australia in 1993. Over a 12-year England career, he compiled 6,744 Test runs at an average of 44.66, with 16 centuries—cementing his place among the country's most reliable middle-order batsmen.

He was central to key series wins in the subcontinent, notably England's victories in Pakistan and Sri Lanka in 2000, and was named a Wisden Cricketer of the Year in 1998. His unbeaten 200 against New Zealand in 2002 was widely hailed as one of the finest innings of its era.

A naturally modest figure, Thorpe's contribution to English cricket went beyond runs. He embodied a quiet resilience and professionalism that won the admiration of teammates and opponents alike.

After retiring from playing in 2005, Thorpe remained in the game as a respected batting coach, including roles with Surrey and later as a key figure in the England coaching setup. He was part of the ECB's elite coaching team and served as a mentor to many of England's current generation of batters.

However, his career in coaching came to a sudden end in 2022 following the fallout from a video showing players drinking after a heavy Ashes defeat in Australia. Though not the subject of disciplinary action, Thorpe lost his role as England's batting coach soon after—an event that proved devastating.

This week's inquest at Surrey Coroner's Court revealed the full extent of Thorpe's mental health battle, casting a sombre shadow over his final years.

Thorpe had reportedly suffered from anxiety and depression since at least 2018. After the loss of his ECB coaching job in 2022, his condition deteriorated significantly. He became socially withdrawn, suffered from insomnia, and described feelings of shame and worthlessness.

His wife, Amanda, told the inquest that he had even asked her to assist him in dying, expressing an intention to seek assisted suicide in Switzerland. In April 2022, he attempted suicide and spent weeks in intensive care. Though he made a partial physical recovery, the psychological toll persisted.

On 4 August 2024, Thorpe tragically died after being struck by a train at Esher railway station. The coroner concluded that he had taken his own life. His family chose to speak publicly in the hope of raising awareness and encouraging open conversation around mental health in sport.

Surrey County Cricket Club paid tribute to Thorpe, calling him "one of the finest cricketers the club has ever produced." The club has honoured his legacy with a commemorative gallery at the Oval and moments of silence at matches.

Teammates and former England captains described Thorpe as a "warrior at the crease" and a "gentleman off it," highlighting both his cricketing prowess and quiet dignity.

Thorpe's story has also reignited national debate about the mental health pressures faced by elite athletes and the need for more robust support structures—both during and after their careers.

Graham Thorpe's life was rich in achievement, marked by loyalty to Surrey, excellence for England, and a deep love for the game. But his death also reminds us of the vulnerabilities behind even the most accomplished public figures.

As his family bravely noted, "Graham's legacy must be more than his cricket. Let it also be a call to look out for each

other.”

Thorpe is survived by his wife Amanda and their children. He remains, to many in Surrey and beyond, a hero of the game—and a symbol of the need to treat mental health with the seriousness it deserves.

If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health, contact Samaritans at 116 123 or visit www.samaritans.org.

Image: Graham Thorpe selfie in 2005. Attribution: Jguk at English Wikipedia Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported

Epsom and Ewell will judge change at their leisure

24 July 2025



When Epsom & Ewell Borough Council announced that **Better** will hand over management of the Rainbow Leisure Centre to **Places Leisure** in October 2025, many locals who have experienced booking glitches, understaffed gyms, and declining poolside conditions breathed a silent sigh of relief. The question now: how quickly will the promised improvements materialize?

Why the Council Doesn't Run Itself

The council does not manage leisure centres directly—instead, it contracts out operations. That's why swathes of public facilities across the borough, including the Rainbow Centre, are run by third-party providers. The rationale? Private operators like Better specialise in facility management, class programming, and membership administration. But that also means the council steps back, paying providers rent and oversight rights in exchange for promised upkeep and performance.

Transparency and Value for Money—Still in Question

Although the council has described Places Leisure as a “social enterprise,” it has offered no specifics about terms: contract length, rent paid, baseline investment, or expected improvements remain undisclosed. Without that data, taxpayers and users have no firm guarantee of value—simply a brand change.

Councillors have stressed that this switch aims to bring greater “community focus” and better reinvestment of any surplus—hallmarks of the social enterprise model. Yet sceptics point out that social enterprises aren't automatically transparent: some still report hefty executive pay packets. In particular, the CEO of **Places for People** the ultimate owners of Places Leisure reportedly earned £565,426 in 2023-2024, raising eyebrows among voters who wonder.

A Closer Look at Places Leisure's Reputation

The local press release paints Places Leisure as a community-minded organisation, but reviews from employees and users tell a different story. Feedback on sites like Indeed and Breakroom varies significantly. Some praise friendly culture and flexible working, while others warn of poor management:

“Management loved to bully young lifeguards... poor pay”

“Awful communication, awful leadership... spend too much time fixing their mistakes”

On Trustpilot, users have lodged complaints about broken equipment, overcrowded classes, and appalling changing-room hygiene—low-grade experiences raising legitimate concerns over upkeep standards as they transfer from Better to Places Leisure.

The Case of the 'Midnight Lane-Booking' Mystery

Among the most frequent user frustrations at Rainbow Centre is the so-called **midnight lane-booking blackout**—where lane reservations vanish at midnight, impairing swimmers' schedules. While formal documentation is scarce, social media posts and member forums share similar experiences, consistent with online complaints directed at Better about buggy booking systems. Whether this was down to software limitations or internal policy remains unclear—but users will expect Places Leisure to fix this fundamental flaw.

A Moment for Accountability

This handover is more than a change of logo: it's a test of the council's commitment to local services. Users are invited to watch the roll-out carefully, demanding updates, realistic targets, and transparent accounting. Social enterprise status

sounds progressive—but without openness, it can be nothing more than a sticker on the door.

The Bottom Line

Epsom & Ewell's move away from Better reflects mounting pressure from dissatisfied users. But who wins—the community or the balance sheet—depends on what happens once the ink is dry. Will we get a truly improved Rainbow Centre, or just a rebranded disappointment?

Time—and transparency—will tell.

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Epsom's six races; five handicaps and a fillies' maiden

24 July 2025



Epsom Racecourse presents its latest meeting on Thursday evening, which consists of six races; five handicaps and a fillies' maiden.

*Read on for a full preview of the Epsom card, courtesy of Racing TV, who have the very latest horse racing **free bets** offers.*

The first race at the track - which is the UK's cheapest Grade One racecourse, according to the **Racing Post** Price Index - is a mile and a half three-year-olds' handicap (5.50). A competitive affair, this is a tough race to call. Stormy Monday is well proven over the trip, while Only One Blue and Nobleman look likely to enjoy the extra couple of furlongs, stepping up in trip for the first time. Newmarket trainer Harry Eustace is having a very good season and, therefore, his runner Vulcan Way is of some interest, but Sir Mark Prescott's Bosphorus Rose should be able to finish strongly here and win for a bang in-form yard.

A two-year-old fillies' maiden is next, run over seven furlongs (6.25). From a field of nine, four are newcomers, all with useful pedigrees. Ollie Sangster's Court Of Stars and Eve Johnson Houghton's Mystic Moment set the standard on form, both having picked up places, but the former looks to have the most potential on paper and ought to be today's winner.

Next is a seven furlong handicap (7.00). Both Daisy Roots and Finbar's Lad seek to make it back-to-back wins, although the latter does carry a five-pound penalty having won at Chelmsford only nine days ago. Course and distance winner G'Daay comes here in a good strain of form, having placed on both of his last starts, and is given a chance by the handicapper in remaining on the same mark. With a seven-pound claimer in the saddle, this could be his day.

Race four is a six-furlong handicap (7.35). Harry Eustace's Kisskodi seeks a hat-trick, having won his last two starts at Leicester and Brighton. With rider Jack Nicholls' seven-pounds in hand, they could go well again, but this might be a tall order for a three-year-old up against older, hardened handicappers. 11-year-old Muscika has a good record at this track and is back down to a workable mark, so should be right there at the finish.

The penultimate race is a handicap run over the extended mile (8.10). Orbaan carries a penalty having won last Friday at Beverley, so this may prove to be too much of an ask. Golden Circet looks promising equipped with a visor for the first time, back down in trip from 10 furlongs last time, while Virtue Patience looks well primed for a win here. Rab Havlin won on the gelding in March and rides again for Amanda Perrett, whose stable is doing very well at present.

Finally, a mile and a quarter three-year-olds' handicap rounds off the evening's racing (8.45). James Fanshawe's Inquisition comes here hoping to complete a hat-trick and might be able to do so, with rider Fred Daly's seven-pound claim counteracting the six-pound penalty the filly carries here. Pergola, Without Burlington and Marmalade Kid make their handicap debuts here, but this does look like quite an ask.

Epsom selections - Thursday:

5.50 - Bosphorus Rose

6.25 - Court Of Stars

7.00 - G'Daay

7.35 - Muscika

8.10 - Virtue Patience

8.45 - Inquisitio

Image: Horses racing Image: Credit Paul. CC BY 2.0

Why Does No One Care About Epsom & Ewell Football Club?

24 July 2025



By most measures, Epsom & Ewell Football Club should be one of the borough's proudest institutions. Founded in 1918, steeped in history, and once a beacon of non-league ambition, it's a club that has worn its local colours with pride for over a century. And yet, in 2024, it plays its home matches outside the borough, in front of modest crowds, with little official support, and almost no recognition from those it nominally represents. How did it come to this?

From Wembley to Nowhere

The club's golden era came in the mid-1970s. Under manager Bob Smith, Epsom & Ewell reached the FA Vase final at Wembley in 1975, taking more than 10,000 fans to the twin towers. They lost narrowly to Hoddesdon Town, but the day cemented their status in the non-league elite. Just two years later, they were crowned Athenian League champions, playing stylish football and regularly attracting crowds of several hundred to West Street Ground in Ewell.

That ground, tucked between residential streets, was a symbol of grassroots football. A modest stand, small clubhouse, and rickety fence ringed the pitch — but it was home. Children ran the lines as ball boys, pensioners leaned on the barrier rails, and on Saturday afternoons, you could hear the cheers echo down Ewell High Street.

All that changed in 1993. Pressured by rising costs and development interest, the club sold the West Street Ground, and with it, lost its physical and emotional anchor in the borough. The land was sold for housing. Since then, Epsom & Ewell FC has led a nomadic existence, groundsharing with clubs like Banstead Athletic, Merstham, Leatherhead, Chipstead, and currently Corinthian-Casuals in Tolworth — nearly six miles from the borough boundary.

A Club Without a Borough

It is now 31 years since Epsom & Ewell FC played a competitive fixture in Epsom or Ewell. An entire generation has grown up without ever seeing their town represented in senior men's football. Few children wear the club's blue and gold; few adults even realise it still exists.

What happened? And more to the point — where was the borough council?

In the three decades since losing West Street, the club has repeatedly tried to secure land for a new stadium within the borough. Sites have been proposed, explored, and rejected. Discussions about Long Grove, Court Recreation Ground, and even sharing facilities with local colleges have all ended in failure. Most recently, informal talks about part of the Horton area being earmarked for community sports development went nowhere.

Supporters point to the contrasting support other councils give their clubs. Sutton United, for instance, receives backing from Sutton Council, which helped secure funding for facilities upgrades when the club was promoted to the Football League. In Epsom, the silence has been deafening. There has been no public plan, no council-led consultation, no transparent effort to bring the borough's only senior football club back home.

Struggling for Survival

The club is currently playing in the Combined Counties League Division One — the 10th tier of English football. It exists thanks to a dedicated band of volunteers, a threadbare budget, and the goodwill of its landlords. Crowds rarely exceed 60-70. With no clubhouse revenue, limited sponsorship, and minimal visibility, it's little wonder the club's financial situation is precarious.

In 2019, the club formally became a Community Interest Company (CIC), a status intended to attract grants and funding by aligning with social benefit goals. While that has helped underpin youth development and safeguarding policies, it hasn't solved the central issue: without a home, the club cannot grow.

Even now, Epsom & Ewell FC runs youth teams, junior girls' sessions, and has engaged in local community coaching schemes. But ask any parent at those sessions where the senior men's team plays, and many will shrug.

The Missed Potential

What's so frustrating is how easily this could be different. Epsom is one of the largest towns in the South East without a senior football club playing within its boundaries. The borough's population is over 80,000, and youth football is thriving — the likes of Epsom Eagles and Ewell Saxons run dozens of sides from U7s to U18s. Local talent is not in short supply. But with no flagship club, no clear pathway, and no local stadium to rally around, that energy is scattered.

The irony is that other non-league clubs across Surrey have built strong community models with much less historical pedigree. Why not Epsom?

Councillors have, over the years, said that land availability, planning complexity, and infrastructure costs make a return difficult. That may be true — but where is the political will? Where is the long-term strategic thinking about using sport to promote community health, pride, and youth engagement?

With millions spent on new housing, green infrastructure, and civic regeneration, a modest community stadium with a few hundred seats, changing rooms, and floodlights should not be an insurmountable dream. Yet for 30 years, it has been exactly that.

Do You Care?

This brings us to the title question: *Why does no one care about Epsom & Ewell FC?*

Maybe it's because we've forgotten how important sport can be to a town's identity. Maybe because the club's quiet survival hasn't shouted loudly enough. Or maybe we just assumed someone else would fix it.

But the truth is, without meaningful public interest — and without council support — Epsom & Ewell FC will remain a ghost club. It will still play fixtures in Tolworth or elsewhere, cheered on by a few die-hards who remember the old days, while the borough it bears in its name carries on, unaware.

It doesn't have to be this way.

A Special Correspondent

Image - an imagined modest stadium that could be Epsom and Ewell FC's.

Epsom race tips for Wednesday meet

24 July 2025



Epsom Racecourse presents its latest Flat card on Wednesday evening, hosting six races; five handicaps and a maiden.

*Read on for a preview of Epsom's card, courtesy of Betano, who provide the latest **horse racing betting**.*

Up first is an Apprentice Handicap, run over a mile and a quarter (6.20). Ed Dunlop's Bobacious won last time out at Leicester under Mason Paetel, who rides again, giving five pounds. With the stable in good form, this gelding should make a decent showing of himself and is generally good at holding his form. Jim and Suzi Best's nine-year-old gelding Early Morning Dew looks a good option for the win, though, due to having winning course form, and will relish the conditions. His age and experience might counteract the inexperience of his nonetheless capable rider Ashley Lewis.

Next is a two-year-olds' maiden over seven furlongs (6.50). Only two of the six runners have been seen on the track before; Gary and Josh Moore's Eschweiler and Richard Hannon's filly Ibshara, whose twice placing form is the best of the two. A newcomer for Roger Varian, Starlight Time was inexpensive as a yearling, but does have a smart pedigree and might do well on debut for a yard whose juveniles are going well.

Race three is a six-furlong handicap (7.23). Jennie Candlish's Alzahir carries a five-pound penalty having won at Chester just four days ago, but the trainer may get around this by employing the very valuable five-pound claiming rider Warren Fentiman. He still shoulders a lot of weight in comparison to his rivals, though, which might leave Huscal with a good chance under Billy Loughnane.

A mile and a half handicap follows (7.58). Big Bear Hug won his first start for Jim Boyle just under a month ago and has good course form, but would probably prefer the ground to be softer to show his best side. Graham has dipped to a career

low Flat mark, but is out of form judged by his last appearance at Goodwood, ninth of nine, leaving Vaynor looking tempting down to a very workable mark for Charlie Hills. He ought to get on with conditions and could get back to winning ways here.

Our penultimate race is another handicap over a mile and half (8.30). With the biggest field of the day, made up of 11 runners, it's not an overly strong race, but there are plenty of horses here with a chance. Jack Langley and Rupert The Prince make their handicap debuts here having both run well in classified stakes last time out, so could improve in this class of race. Richard Hannon's Emily Rebecca should have a good chance having shown signs of improvement in her last couple of runs. With Sean Levey an asset in the saddle, she could be our winner.

The finale is a seven-furlong handicap (9.00). Made up of eight runners, it is one of the more competitive races on the card. Hodler, Dream Of Mischief and Marlay Park are all course and distance winners, with the latter looking to have the best chance on this occasion. He will like the conditions, ran well enough last time on ground which was softer than ideal for him, and is down to mark which ought to be more than workable for him.

Epsom selections - Wednesday:

6.20 - Early Morning Dew

6.50 - Starlight Time

7.23 - Huscal

7.58 - Vaynor

8.30 - Emily Rebecca

9.00 - Marlay Park

Horses racing Image: Credit Paul. CC BY 2.0

Epsom Derby's Speed and Spirit Captured in New Station Art Project

24 July 2025



A new art installation at Tattenham Corner Station is shining a light on Epsom's rich racing heritage while adding a burst of creativity to commuters' journeys. This initiative, part of the Art@thestation project launched at Epsom main station in October 2024, transforms everyday travel into a gallery experience, offering young artists a unique platform to share their work.

Led by The Art Society Epsom with support from Southern Railway and its London head office, the project celebrates the energy and excitement of Derby Day and the iconic Tattenham Corner bend. Local artists were invited to explore the theme of 'Speed'—a nod to both the daily rush of life and the fast-paced world of horse racing.

The project's success has been driven by collaboration between Angie Child, Head of Young Arts Volunteers at The Art Society Epsom, and Ben Robinson, Commercial Development Manager at the University for the Creative Arts Students' Union (UCASU). Their efforts have brought together a striking collection of images that celebrate local identity and creativity.

One of the contributors, Richa Elangovan, a Master's student in Graphic Design at UCA Farnham, shared:

"My artwork and style consists of messaging through my concept illustrations: topics I'm passionate about include environmentalism, climate change, feminism, and human and animal rights. I use art as my tool for expression on issues otherwise sidelined."

The installation is a testament to how art can enrich public spaces, spark meaningful conversations, and bring the community together. Ben Robinson said:

"We're proud to support young talent and bring this celebration of the Derby into the heart of the community. A massive thank you to The Art Society Epsom for partnering with us on this. We're always looking to showcase student work and can't wait to see how these pieces brighten the station this summer."

For local artists and residents keen to get involved, Angie and her team welcome new participants—contact her at Volunteers.tase@gmail.com to be part of this dynamic project.

Meanwhile, the UCA Students' Union continues to seek out new venues for student art—anyone with a space that could use a creative spark can reach out to ben.robinson@uca.ac.uk.

Photo L to R: Ben Robinson, Alistair McGeachy, Richa Elangovan and Angie Child

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/romanasustar>

Epsom Derby Day Tips

24 July 2025



Derby Day at Epsom is one of the highlights of the British racing calendar, with a stellar card for racegoers to enjoy in Surrey on Saturday afternoon.

The Derby itself is a hugely historic race, having been held at the Surrey course for a remarkable 245 years. The free entry for the inner course makes the event even more unique, providing families the perfect opportunity to enjoy a day of racing, with seven races in total on the card.

Wet weather is projected for Derby Day, with thunderstorms presenting the possibility of disruption, but a top class cast of runners and riders will bring in the punters.

Read below for a preview of the Epsom card courtesy of **Racing TV**, who offer the latest horse racing free bet offers.

13:00 Princess Elizabeth Stakes (Fillies' And Mares' Group 3)

The opening race of the day will see 11 runners taking the just over a mile trip for this Group 3 contest. The two favourites for the race look to be Royal Dress and **Skellet**, with little to choose between this pair, the latter's scope for improvement this season and form on softer ground gives her the edge for this contest.

13:35 Betfred Diomed Stakes (Group 3)

For this second Group 3 contest, this race has an interesting triple Group 3 winner from Germany, in the form of Geography. However, a lack of UK experience and inclement weather conditions on good to soft ground suggests the likes of **Persica**, could fare better, having won in similar conditions in April at Newmarket.

14:10 Betfred 3yo 'Dash' Handicap

A large field will line up for the third race, which is a 5f 'Dash' which is the only Class 3 race of the afternoon. **Mademoiselle** looks a progressive type and made a strong second-placed start to this season having finished 2024 in fine form with two wins, although this is a step up in class.

14:45 Aston Martin 'Dash' Handicap (Heritage Handicap)

Another short race to precede the main event of the afternoon, with this one being a Class 2 contest. Oisín Murphy's presence on board **Jer Batt** is a positive indicator for a horse who is also on a competitive mark for trainers David & Nicola Barron, making this one to watch.

15:30 Betfred Derby (Group 1)

One of the highlights of the season, The Derby is run over 1m4f with prize money of £909,628 for the winner making it the richest race of the British Flat season.

Vying for this prize will be the leading trainers and jockeys, with the combination of Aidan O'Brien and Ryan Moore winning an 11th Oaks for O'Brien on Friday, a feat they could repeat for the Derby. They will combine to boost Delacroix's hopes, but **Pride Of Arras** is a huge hope after just two races for Ralph Beckett and good pedigree for this trip.

16:15 Encore Lifestyle Northern Dancer Handicap (GBBPlus Race)

Up next, another race run over 1m4f, but this time a handicap. An interesting contest, but with a favourite who has gone well in the mud for Ralph Beckett, it will be hard to look past **Valvano**, who also has handicap form.

17:00 Hong Kong Jockey Club World Pool Lester Piggott Handicap (GBBPlus Race)

The penultimate race of the day is a Class 2 with a £38k prize for the winner, to keep the punters entertained following the main event. Despite a disappointing handicap debut, **Hornsea Bay** has since been gelded and could go well under Danny Tudhope.

17:40 JRA Tokyo Trophy Handicap

The final race of the day, and the 2025 Derby meeting, is a 6f sprint. For this, **Eye Of Dubai** looks like an interesting

proposition for a yard which has won this race twice before, and has two Class 2 wins under their belt to call upon when checking the form book.

Selections:

13:00 - Skellet - 9/2

13:35 - Persica - 5/2

14:10 - Mademoiselle - 6/1

14:45 - Jer Batt - 13/2

15:30 - Pride of Arras - 5/1

16:15 - Valvano - 9/2

17:00 - Hornsea Bay - 11/2

17:40 - Eye Of Dubai - 13/2

Image: Horses racing Image: Credit Paul. CC BY 2.0

Epsom Racecourse: Preview and Tips for Oaks Day

24 July 2025



The Derby meeting is upon us and the greatly-anticipated Oaks Day card hosts seven intriguing races.

Read below for a preview of the Epsom card courtesy of **Racing TV**, who offer the latest horse racing **free bet offers**.

Kicking off the afternoon's top class action is the Listed Surrey Stakes, run over seven furlongs (1.30). Topping the ratings is The Waco Kid, whose two starts so far this season has been far below his best, so connections try him in first time cheekpieces here in the hope that he can recapture his Tattersalls Stakes winning form of last year, in which race he finished ahead of Diego Ventura. Given a fair amount of weight by the colts, Formal might spring a surprise on a track which just might suit her.

Next is the two-year-olds' Woodcote Stakes over six furlongs (2.05), which introduces just one debutant in the shape of George Baker's Trinculo, who has his work cut out for him on his first try here amongst a high quality field. Charlie Appleby has a very good strike rate at Epsom, therefore his talented, fast colt Maximised looks the most likely of these, but Havana Hurricane could be a close second.

The Group 1 Coronation Cup is next, with a quality multi-national field of seven runners (2.40). French raider Calandagan tops the ratings, has beaten some of his opponents here in the past and is fit from a run in Dubai in April. He's tough and will be up to this, but is untried at this tricky track. Bellum Justum ran a good race in the Derby over course and distance last year and has taken a step forward this term already, so could pick up a place at least. Irish Oaks winning filly You Got To Me musn't be underestimated in this company, but does lack a prep run.

3.15 brings the Nifty 50 Handicap, run over a mile and quarter. John & Thady Gosden have a very strong strike rate of 31% at Epsom, therefore their runner Mutaawid is worth considering after a particularly impressive six-length win last time at Newmarket, but he has been heavily penalised for that performance by the handicapper. Roger Varian's Defiance should have a chance, having finished a close second over course and distance last year in the Blue Riband Trial, but may need this run to get up to speed for the season, leaving Rathgar looking a good option with proven ability over undulating tracks and remaining on the same mark as his last three starts.

The eagerly anticipated feature is next; the Group 1 Oaks over a mile and a half (4.00). Godolphin's 1,000 Guineas winning Desert Flower is the best on ratings by a long way, but she is untried over this trip. There is, however, plenty of staying power throughout her pedigree, so this is unlikely to have too great an impact on her ability to win the second leg of the fillies' Triple Crown. Aidan O'Brien's Miinie Hauk ought to be her main competition, but Ed Walker's Qilin Queen, who is well equipped with a staying pedigree and shouldn't be underestimated.

The penultimate race of Oaks Day is a handicap run over a mile and half a furlong (4.35). Ebt's Guard is slowly improving and could be at the sharp end here, while Bopedro comes from David O'Meara's bang in-form stable and wouldn't be without a chance having placed on both his last starts with an eye-catching jockey booking in Rossa Ryan. Two Tempting is last year's winner, but has risen sharply in the weights since that performance. A lower weighted, reliable sort such as Mr Baloo might be a better option.

The finale is a seven-furlong handicap of 13 runners (5.10). Rhoscolyn was last year's winner of this race, and returns on a one-pound lower mark than his victory, but he might want slightly good to soft or soft ground. Although well beaten by Rhoscolyn that day, Darkness does have good course form and, having won well last time out at Thirsk, arrives in good

sorts. He might prefer good ground here, but is versatile enough to cope with softer going if the rain comes.

Epsom selections - Friday

1.30 - Formal

2.05 - Maximised

2.40 - Calandagan

3.15 - Rathgar

4.00 - Qilin Queen e/w

4.35 - Mr Baloo

5.10 - Darkness

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Feast of Finals see Sutton & Epsom RFC runner-up

24 July 2025



On Saturday, Dings Crusaders RFC hosted a veritable feast of four finals. A large and enthusiastic crowd was bathed in unbroken sunshine.

The day began with the amuse-bouche of Ashley Down Old Boys downing the colours of Hastings & Bexhill to the tune of 34-20. Next came the hors d'oeuvres, as Cheltenham North overcame Honiton 38-32. The penultimate plate served up a thrilling 28-24 win for Ealing Trailfinders over Old Bristolians.

The afternoon culminated in the main course: the Papa Johns Regional 2 South Plate Final between Sutton & Epsom and Drybrook. The latter, having lost this fixture 42-29 to Reed's Weybridge last year, came into this match on a season of unbridled success. Champions of the Regional 2 Tribute Severn League and winners of the Forest of Dean Combination Senior Cup with a 37-27 triumph over Cinderford, Drybrook now completed a trophy treble by vanquishing Sutton 36-27.

Freddy Bunting initiated proceedings, and the Squirrels dominated the early exchanges. A penalty was advanced to the 22. Having secured possession from their throw, Drybrook cut through the defence but lost the ball near the line. Fortunately, the referee brought play back for an earlier infringement. Fullback Haydn Lewis stepped up to give Drybrook a 3-0 lead. Sutton's start was further hampered by a cut to Ewan McTaggart's eye that temporarily forced the gargantuan lock off to be bandaged up.

The first signs of recovery came from a searing break by Tom Lennard that brought Sutton close to the enemy 22. Awarded a penalty, Sutton drilled it into the corner. McTaggart returned, the ball was won, and hooker Sam Lennie crossed the whitewash for the first try of the afternoon. Captain Bunting added the extras to give Sutton a 7-3 lead.

Invigorated, Josh Rea made a fabulous break that led to another penalty on the 22. However, the doughty Drybrook defence held firm. The game flowed end to end. On the half-hour mark, Sutton were awarded a penalty and Drybrook's Jack Moss was shown a yellow card. Opting for a try over points, S&E were rewarded as Sam Lennie forced his way over for a second try. Though the conversion missed, the Sutton supporters were soon celebrating again. McTaggart and Glanville secured the restart, and Adam Bibby jinked his way 40 metres to score a stunning solo effort. Bunting converted, taking Sutton to a 19-3 lead.

As has so often been the case in this annus mirabilis for Drybrook, it was their talismanic captain Mitchell Bourne who provided inspiration. He powered over the line from a catch-and-drive, with Lewis adding the conversion from the flank to close the gap to 19-10.

Approaching the break, Sutton were awarded a penalty near halfway. With clock awareness, Bunting knocked over the long-range effort to give Sutton a 22-10 lead at the interval.

The second half began swiftly. Drybrook's Mitchell Baldwin made a searing 40-metre break before flanker Bailey Watts applied the coup de grâce. Lewis converted to make it 22-17. With momentum on their side, Drybrook surged forward again. Cai Rogers made a stunning break, and McTaggart received a yellow card for high contact. Drybrook capitalised, scoring twice in five minutes. Cai Roberts crossed to level the match at 22-22, and Mitchell Baldwin added another try. Lewis converted to take the lead 29-22.

In a parallel to the first half, Sutton responded. McTaggart returned just in time for another attacking lineout. Lennie completed his hat-trick. Though Bunting missed the conversion, the score stood at 29-27.

Moments later, the pendulum swung again. Bibby was shown a yellow card, meaning the influential centre would miss most of the remainder. Sutton were awarded a penalty from 45 metres, but Bunting's kick narrowly missed.

Drybrook came close again with a clever kick that exposed Sutton's cover, but the defence scrambled back just in time. However, the respite was brief. Replacement Ioan Jones strode over for the crucial score, converted again by the nerveless Lewis to make it 36-27.

Sutton fought to the final whistle but could not close the gap. Drybrook's celebrations began at the final whistle.

Though Sutton came up short, their performance capped a season of definite upward trajectory. Drybrook were worthy winners, concluding a triumphant campaign—one that may require a carpenter to extend their trophy cabinet.

Teams:

Sutton & Epsom:

Scott, Ghumra, Bibby, Bunting (capt.), Huie, Lennard, Findlay E, Johnson, Lennie, Boaden, Glanville, McTaggart, Rea, Jones, Hegarty.

Replacements: Hilton, Madadangoma, Duey, Tame, Davies, Nelson, Symonds.

Drybrook:

Lewis, Chappell, Price, Baldwin, Roberts, Morgan B, Rogers, Jelf, Addis, Morgan L, Moss, Watkins, Watts, Peaper, Bourne (capt.).

Replacements: Hale, Morgan C, Greenway W, Rowley, Tinker, Greenway R, Jones

Image credit: Iain Frazerr

Surrey Uni Research Exposes Toll of Controlling Coaching on Athletes' Health

24 July 2025



Controlling coaching tactics shatter athletes' wellbeing, says new study

Controlling coaching styles disrupt athletes leaving them vulnerable to physical and psychological strain, according to a new study from the University of Surrey and the Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada.

This exposes a critical flaw in current sporting culture that prioritises results over athlete welfare. The research argues that coaches who micromanage and belittle athletes are fuelling both acute stress and burnout in their teams.

The study, published in *Motivation and Emotion*, tracked 72 student-athletes from Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada, using daily diaries to capture their experiences and heart rate variability (HRV) measurements to assess their stress responses. This combination of psychological and physiological data provides a comprehensive picture of how coaching behaviours seep into athletes' daily experiences, affecting their motivation and mental state. Researchers analysed how athletes perceived their coaches' behaviour and then linked these perceptions to both their psychological needs (satisfaction or frustration) and their psychobiological health.

Autonomy-supportive coaches – those encouraging choice and collaboration – boosted athletes' mental resilience. In contrast, controlling tactics like public criticism and arbitrary punishments spiked acute stress and eroded long-term wellbeing.

Dr Sebastiano Massaro, Associate Professor of Organizational Neuroscience and co-author of the study at the University of Surrey said:

"It's heart-breaking to see how these controlling tactics, often masked as 'discipline' or 'tough love', are fundamentally damaging our athletes."

Florence Jauvine, at the Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada, added:

"We're not just talking about hurt feelings; we're seeing measurable increases in stress and burnout that can have long-term consequences for their careers and their lives."

The research highlights a crucial counterpoint: when coaches support athletes' autonomy – giving them choices, acknowledging their perspectives, and encouraging their growth – it fuels their psychological needs, leading to greater engagement and acting as a buffer against burnout. The data shows a powerful connection between autonomy-supportive coaching, need satisfaction, and positive athlete outcomes.

Dr Sebastiano Massaro continued:

“We urge sporting organisations and governing bodies to implement urgent changes. This includes mandatory training for coaches at all levels, focusing on autonomy support and the detrimental effects of controlling behaviours. A shift in emphasis is required, moving away from a win-at-all-costs mentality towards a model that prioritises the holistic well-being of athletes.”