EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
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19th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

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Cobham 10 beat Epsom and Ewell 11

6 March 2025

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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ISSN 2753-2771

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

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

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

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

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

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

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