



Cruel ending at Calthorpe Park for Epsom and Ewell FC

Fleet Town 2-1 Epsom & Ewell FC. Combined Counties League – Premier Division South. Saturday 12th August 2023.

Despite a slow start to our opening League fixture of the season, we fought back to equalise and deserve a draw, only to then lose the match to a long range deflected strike in the fourth minute of injury time as Fleet Town edged through by the narrowest of 2-1 score lines.

We made four changes from our win over Horsham YMCA. Our Assistant Manager Ash Snaddon was getting married, while Ade Batula and Chester Clothier were unavailable and Nick Inwugwu started on the bench. In their places came Rory Edwards, Ollie Thompson and Sirak Negassi who had all come off the bench the previous Saturday, while Ben Bauchop made his first appearance of the season. Snaddon's absence, together with both of our coaches Steve Springett and Kevin Espinosa being away, resulted in an emergency call for another of our previous keepers Dave Tidy to step into the role and help James Scott out on the sidelines. Tidy actually had a foot in both camps for this match as had also coached the opposition keeper Roan Strong!

As with recent previous matches we made a slow start and in front of a loud crowd that gave the impression of being more than the official attendance of 109 we went behind in the sixth minute after Bauchop was caught in possession and on a lightning counter attack the ball was fed through to Connor Young who slotted the ball past Harvey Keogh from around twelve yards.

It nearly got worse as our Captain Callum Wilson then also found himself robbed on the edge of the area, although on this occasion the shot was an easy one for Keogh to deal with. The home side were pressing us at every opportunity and it took us a while to come to terms with this.

However, as the half progressed we began to improve and Sirak Negassi got a decent shot away that Strong was able to beat away. Strong played in our colours back in a January friendly before spending the season at South Park and appeared very solid here. He was then alert to make a good save from Negassi a few minutes later after our man had won the ball after a Farnham defender had been caught in possession.

It was at times a very rapid contest with both teams really pushing the other and this energy was shown best by our left wing back Ethan Nelson-Roberts. He had been competing well against the dangerous Fleet winger Naz Miah and in the 39th minute he got forward and won a free kick out wide after the referee had decided we had no advantage. This was a crucial decision as Edwards then whipped in a free kick and Thompson met it about three yards beyond the far post with a solid header back into the net for our equaliser.

The second half started with a scare as Miah went down in the penalty area under a challenge, after making a good run, but it wasn't convincing enough and we escaped. We then had a great opportunity when Bauchop took the ball off a defender and we were suddenly three on two on the edge of the Fleet area, but he couldn't pick a pass to a waiting teammate and we were unable to take advantage.

The game was switching from end to end and if anything it was probably a little too open for both Managers' liking. It also became a bit scrappy in patches as both teams fought for every inch out there. On the hour, former Salt Sam Marks put a decent ball in from the right, although Wilson did well to clear the danger at the last minute with a stretching volley. Miah was then clattered by Thompson who picked up our second yellow card after Wilson in the first half and we made a couple of substitutions with Nick Inwugwu coming on for Thompson and Ben Amissah making his debut in relief of Jaan Stanley who had a quiet day by his standards.

Then things got a little nervy in our area and a close range header was well saved by Keogh. In response Amissah made a good run and found Negassi, although his shot didn't trouble Strong. We saw another debutant enter the fray as Ayran Kugathas came on for Tommy Williams on the right before it was our turn to press for a while. Nelson-Roberts put in a great burst on the left and his low ball in was turned away by a defender, even though a goal kick was awarded. Then Amissah got through on the left too and drew the keeper out, but his pull back was cleared for another corner. Tino Carpena was next to strike at goal from twelve yards but Strong made a good save.

It looked as though it was a matter of time before we would pinch the win, and the Fleet Manager was having kittens on the touchline, but a cruel twist of fate was waiting for us in the 94th minute when Mohamed Konte struck speculatively at goal from



around twenty-five yards. I've been advised by people from a different angle to me, who thought the shot was going wide, but the ball struck Inwugwu and flew into the opposite corner with Keogh helpless to do anything about it.

There was still time for us to have a couple of chances as the final seconds expired and Negassi saw his angled shot kept out by Strong. Then from the corner it was all hands to the pump as we rained in three shots on goal in about ten seconds; the second of which from Inwugwu hit a defender fully on the chest while he was standing on the line. A yard either side and we'd have been level, but there were no infringements by the home side and shortly after this the final whistle blew.

Did we deserve to lose this match? Absolutely not! However, for what it's worth and regardless of the entertaining contest, I felt that neither team had done quite enough to say they deserved the win and a 1-1 draw would have been a fair result from this most even of contests. Alas, it was not to be and we now face high-flying Redhill in our opening home League match in three days time.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Tommy Williams, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Zach Powell, Ollie Thompson, Callum Wilson ©, Sirak Negassi, Ben Bauchop, Jaan Stanley, Rory Edwards, Tino Carpane

Subs: Nick Inwugwu for Thompson (70), Ben Amissah for Stanley (70), Ayran Kugathas for Williams (77)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk