

Drawing conclusions in Epsom and Ewell v Horley tie

30 September 2024



Epsom and Ewell FC 2-2 Horley Town. Combined Counties League - Premier Division South. Saturday 28th September 2024.

An entertaining contest took place at King George's Field on Saturday and although the visitors took a share of the points from this 2-2 draw with a late equaliser, it would have been harsh on them if they had lost, as both teams played their part in a fully committed and competitive encounter.

An official attendance of 94 was advised for this match, even though only 77 were counted half way through the first half, but maybe an inflation of the crowd was inevitable this week, following the poor number of attendees for the midweek win over Hilltop. Either way, our team went into this match in good form, having won five of our last six matches and bearing this in mind, the figure remains a disappointing one.

We made three changes to our line up after the win over Hilltop with Anthony Nazareth coming in for his first start in place of the injured Toby Young, while further forward Fabio Nunes came back in ahead of Luke Taylor. The final change was with Dan O'Donovan back in goal ahead of Faebian Witter, who was destined to be on the bench until he injured himself in the warm up. He was then replaced in the line up just before the kick off by young defender David Romer. He was joined there by fit again Ali Fofahan, following his injury at Tooting & Mitcham United and also Jason Bloor who had scored on his debut before missing the last couple of matches due to a holiday.

The visitors were first to fashion an opportunity when a right wing cross was met with a far post volley, but the ball struck a defender and was cleared. Horley dragged a free kick wide from a good position, but in the ninth minute we created a good chance of our own as Carl Oblitey, showing no effects of the hamstring twinge he suffered four days previously, beat two men and as he drew other defenders towards him, he sent the pass to the right where Luke Miller was in a large amount of space. Our tricky winger would usually bury this chance, but on this occasion he lashed it straight at George Hyde in the Horley goal from just inside the penalty area and he parried the ball to safety.

Then just a minute later a visiting defender sliced the ball straight into Oblitey's path, but he also sent his shot too close to Hyde, who blocked the ball up in the air and was alert to get up quickly and claw the ball away as it threatened to cross the goal line.

We were now well and truly in this match, yet surprisingly we then went behind in the 18th minute and it might well have been avoidable. Nazareth cut his head in a collision and had to leave the field to await the arrival of a clean shirt, which for some reason was still back in the changing room and he was still off the field when a right wing delivery was met by a close range header from former Salt Lewis Pearch that gave O'Donovan no chance.

Another cross was just headed wide by Mason Seagroatt as the visitors threatened to get a second goal and they then sent a low volley just wide of O'Donovan's right hand post. The frustrating thing about this last chance was that we had chosen to attack before losing the ball, yet by kicking the ball out of play, we would have been up to eleven men again. Instead, Nazareth was left standing there on the sideline and waiting to come back on, so to have conceded at this stage would have been a really serious error. Finally after nearly seven minutes off the field, our bandaged up defender finally returned to the field of play. It was all a bit Sunday League!

But with eleven men again we threatened to level things up when Oblitey sent Miller through in the left hand channel, from where his powerful shot just clipped a defender, sending the ball onto the crossbar and out for a corner. Then from the Adam Green corner, the ball skipped straight through everyone before hitting Ethan Nelson-Roberts at the far post only a couple of yards out, and as the ball rebounded back off him and into the danger area, Nazareth skied the ball from just eight yards out.

Horley were also making chances and a good ball down the right sat up nicely for Pearch to strike a volley towards goal, which O'Donovan just plucked out of the air. Then we had a bit of an issue after Nazareth was accused of stepping on a player. Obviously, we were a long way from the action, and he may well have caught him, but the referee either decided that it was accidental, or maybe he didn't get a great view of it, so no further action was taken. From the subsequent free kick O'Donovan got his hands to the ball but couldn't hold on and required a defensive clearance before we could relax. We nearly equalised right on the half when a deep Nelson-Roberts cross was met by a volley from Miller, but it was from a narrow angle and the ball zipped across the six yard area and out for a goal kick.

A goal down at the break, and with the knowledge that we had missed some really good chances and still hadn't managed to score in the opening half of any of our ten League matches this season, it was important that we didn't concede again, but it nearly happened in the 50th minute when Pearch set up another former Salt in Warren Colman, but the shot at goal had the sting taken out of it by the covering Ethan Brazier and the ball dribbled tamely through to O'Donovan.

The visitors continued to seek a second and a loose header from Reece Tierney forced Nazareth to try and reach the second ball, which he failed to do; colliding with a Horley striker and picking up a yellow card for his troubles. Fortunately, Aaron Moody's free kick from twenty yards was straightforward for O'Donovan.

After this wobbly start to the second half we began to get a foothold in the contest and Oblitey set up Miller for a low shot, although Hyde made a decent save. Then Romer came on for his debut in place of Tierney. It was odd to see the new boy taking the field as the first substitute, seeing as he hadn't even been in the sixteen man squad originally, so I have to assume that Tierney had suffered an injury.

He didn't have much defending to do for a while as we continued to press. Nunes saw his shot take a slight deflection before Hyde was able to palm it beyond the far post on the hour and from the corner Nunes then saw his low shot blocked, but not held by Hyde, although he was up quickly to block the close range effort from Nelson-Roberts just wide. Finally, from the second corner, the ball reached Miller at the far post and his pinpoint cross back into the danger area was met by Oblitey eight yards out with a thumping header that flew into the net in the 61st minute for our equaliser.

We were well on top at this stage and Nelson-Roberts did really well on the left to turn his man and run in, sending an early delivery for the incoming Oblitey, but he had more time than he realised and snatched at the ball, slicing it wide from eighteen yards. Then Nunes saw his shot blocked by Hyde's legs and although it sat up kindly for Green, his header didn't have enough power on it to beat Hyde.

We continued to attack and Miller received a great pass from midfield, only for his cross to be just ahead of Oblitey. Miller was then caught by a defender after his delivery but the referee decided that it wasn't worth a penalty, even though our man was adamant that he had been fouled. Fortunately, it wouldn't make much difference as Bloor had come on in the 71st minute and within 120 seconds he made the breakthrough for his second goal in his second match. It was a nice move, coming from a throw on that Green flicked on, and Oblitey cleverly dummied, which gave Bloor a bit of space and he drilled the ball in at the near post from the edge of the area with Hyde unsighted to give us the lead.

Craig Dundas was next to test Hyde, and although the shot was well saved, Miller then blazed the loose ball high and wide from fairly close in. As time began to tick down though, Horley started to make some chances. Brazier picked up a yellow card for a foul that led to a bit of handbags between the players. One delivery whizzed across our six yard box, before an 85th minute Matt Rapson cross to the far post was met by a looping header from Seagroatt that O'Donovan couldn't reach and Horley were level at 2-2.

Both teams had one good chance in the closing minutes. Horley sent a ball in from the left that was just ahead of their incoming striker, while substitute Fofahan was put through on goal, but Hyde was out quickly to block the shot. Overall though, a draw was a fair result, and whilst the visiting keeper Hyde was the busier of the two keepers, our lack of clinicality meant that we hadn't done enough to deserve the win and we now face a trip to Tooting & Mitcham United on Wednesday where we will face Balham in our next attempt to get three points.

The final word goes to the referee Mr Sotimirin. I have not always been a fan of some of his performances, going all the way back to 2008, but he let the game flow nicely and although the players occasionally threatened to take advantage of his leniency at times, his handling ensured that this was one of the most entertaining matches of the season so far and credit is due for this.

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Ethan Brazier, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Reece Tierney, Anthony Nazareth, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Fabio Nunes, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: David Romer for Tierney (59), Jason Bloor for Nunes (71), Ali Fofahan for Oblitey (88)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk