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Epsom and Ewell FC beat landlords

28 March 2025

Corinthian-Casuals 1-2 Epsom and Ewell FC. Combined Counties League – Premier Division South. Tuesday 25th March 2025

It could be argued that our opponents were the ideal team to play as they had not won any of their last 15 League matches dating back to November, but we of course went into this match on a nine match losing run of our own; our worst run since the relegation season of 2003/04, (when we went down with just one point fewer than Corinthian-Casuals!) so nothing was ever going to be straightforward in our battle to escape relegation, which was brought into sharp focus by our 3-2 defeat to Balham on Saturday.

Although Dundas was technically in charge yesterday, he continued his role up front, so the bulk of the match decisions were in the hands of Max Johnson and the rest of the Coaching team. It could therefore be argued that there was not a lot of difference, but our performance in this match was more aggressive and attacking than we had been in recent matches.

We made a couple of personnel changes from Saturday's match. Former Casual Sami Nabbad came in between the posts against his old club while Ethan Brazier returned to the starting eleven, resulting in Niall Stillwell moving forward into a midfield role in place of the absent Sean-Michael Anderson.

It was clear from the opening exchanges that this was going to be a more open encounter. Both sides fired early sighters just wide of the goal and Nabbad had to come out smartly to head clear. Young gave away a foul out on the touchline but the free kick was claimed by Nabbad as the "home" team shaded the early possession. As the half went on though, we began to gain a foothold in the match. The 44 year old Dundas set a fine example by chasing down a lost cause and retrieved the ball just before it went out of play, which led to a shot from Brendan Murphy-McVey that smacked against Murillo Bernardes' left hand post with a defender just preventing Jason Bloor from knocking the rebound into an empty net.

Adam Green tried his luck from distance with Bernardes turning the ball around the post before Murphy-McVey saw his shot flick up off a defender, requiring an acrobatic save from the keeper to claw the ball away. The best chance of the half came for us in the 45th minute when good pressure from Dundas and Green allowed Luke Miller to have a clear shot at goal from fifteen yards, but he dragged the shot horribly across goal when he should at least have hit the target. Still, as the half time whistle blew, we appeared to be in the ascendency, despite the goalless scoreline.

Of course this counts for little as we found out three days previously if you don't sustain things in the second half and in the 48th minute we were behind after Ben Checklit drilled a low shot across Nabbad into the far corner from just inside the penalty area to put us in a difficult situation. We were going to have to come from behind to win for the first time since winning at Phoenix Sports in an August F.A. Cup tie.

It is sometimes easy as a supporter to focus on your own club's shortcomings on the field of play without realising that other clubs have their own issues too. For example, our nine match losing run had been underlined by our inability to hold onto a lead against Balham. However, Casuals had concerns of their own, having failed to win for so long themselves and from the point when they took the lead, they started to exhibit the same signs that we had been guilty of so recently. A defensive error let Miller in on goal just four minutes after we had conceded, but with just Bernardes to beat, he lifted his shot over the bar from just twelve yards.

Then in the 57th minute came the turning point in the match as a hopeful ball forward took a very solid bounce and completely deceived Bernardes who could only get a faint glove on the ball, enabling Bloor to continue the run he made and nod the ball into the empty net from eight yards! It was a massive lifeline and we had taken it to level the scores.

Seven minutes later it was Bloor again who received a ball on the left and as he cut in, he was brought down in the penalty area by Marcus Dos Santos who then received a second yellow card for his foul. Ironically, their powerhouse midfielder will now be suspended for their next fixture against…. Balham! Adam Green tucked away the penalty in the 65th minute and we had a lead. In fact, we had turned the match around in a ten minute spell, much the same as Balham had done to us on Saturday, but could we hold on?

Against ten men it should have been fairly straightforward to manage the game, but it was never going to be quite that simple as our opponents began to push forward in search of an equaliser. Our bench cleverly broke up any momentum with some regular substitutions during this period with Ali Fofahan, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Stefan Aiwone, Callum Wilson and Nicolas Bostan all joining the action over the next twenty minutes and it was interesting to see Wilson stationed up front as we tried to relieve any pressure with a clearance in his direction, although we kept trying to push forward in this match instead of sitting back and Miller sliced a shot wide in the 70th minute before his pull back from the touchline was cleared just ahead of the incoming Green.

At the other end Toby Young made a great defensive block but we looked dangerous going forward and Fofahan saw his shot turned around the post, before receiving a superb crossfield ball from Miller a couple of minutes later, which really should have brought success, especially when he had done the hard work to cut inside the defender, but with just the keeper to beat, he put the ball over the bar from ten yards.

Nabbad had to be alert to block a shot at the near post, but the final whistle blew soon after and celebrations commenced. Although we are not mathematically safe yet, the relief was everywhere to see and the exuberance was justified on this occasion. We now sit four points clear of Balham who have just two matches remaining and also now sit above Chipstead with a better goal difference. We can guarantee safety with a win at bottom club Spelthorne Sports on Saturday, or with a win for Corinthian-Casuals over Balham on Saturday and failing both of those outcomes we still have three more fixtures

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to play. We're almost there now and for the first time in a while we have momentum; one of the most important things to possess in any sport. New Manager bounce? It definitely exists!

Epsom & Ewell: Sami Nabbad, Ethan Brazier, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Adam Green (c), Toby Young, Anthony Nazareth, Luke Miller, Niall Stillwell, Craig Dundas, Brendan Murphy-McVey, Jason Bloor

Subs: Ali Fofahan for Murphy-McVey (66), Kionte Gillfillian-Waul for Bloor (68), Stefan Aiwone for Dundas (78), Callum Wilson for Nelson-Roberts (79), Nicolas Bostan for Brazier (87)

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