

## Epsom and Ewell FC escaping relegation zone?

Epsom & Ewell FC 2-1 Abbey Rangers. Combined Counties League - Premier Division. Saturday 20th April 2024.

A 2-1 victory over Abbey Rangers marked the end of our brief tenure at the Reg Madgwick Stadium on Saturday and at the same time gained a measure of revenge over our opponents after we lost by the same scoreline over there in November. This win also ended any mathematical hopes they had of reaching the playoffs.

After our superb win over Fleet Town on Tuesday, I felt that this match was a bit of a “freebie” as a Salts win over Guildford City in our final match would have guaranteed safety anyway. However, this result means that we now only require a draw to confirm our survival, and by the time we take the field at the Spectrum next week, it’s even possible that other results may have assured our safety. Indeed, had Sheerwater not secured a last minute winner over Cobham this same afternoon, we would be celebrating already!

Maybe unsurprisingly we made only the one change to our line up with Carl Oblitey coming in for the absent Nick Wilson and we stuck with the recent formation of playing three at the back, which was a brave policy playing against a solid and physical Abbey team, but by and large it worked.

Chances were few and far between in the opening exchanges. Jaevon Dyer shot at goal from 20 yards, but it was a fairly easy save for Sam Grey in the Abbey goal. At the other end Dan O’Donovan had one excursion out of his area to clear a break, but we were soon back on the attack and a great pass from Ethan Nelson-Roberts set Will Kendall down the left, although his first time low cross was just out of reach of the incoming Oblitey.

Our opponents probably had more of the ball than we did in the opening half, but we looked solid at the back as they rarely threatened, apart from a decent move on the left that ended with a strike at goal from George Frith that was headed away from goal by Reece Tierney. You could tell from Frith’s reaction that he knew the shot was on target, yet within a minute we were the team celebrating after a pass came in from the left towards Oblitey, but before he had a chance to control it, a defender knocked it away, but only into the path of Will Kendall, and although he was at quite an acute angle on our left, his powerful shot from 12 yards went across Grey and into the net off the far post to give us a 36th minute lead.

In response O’Donovan was alert to punch a delivery clear, while at the other end Kendall fell in the penalty area after a coming together between him and Dale Burnham, but nothing was given, which I think was the right call. Then in injury time a break on the right wing resulted in the ball being swept across goal, but fortunately Ross Murdoch, who had scored a hat trick at Camberley a week previously, skied the chance from a good position. Moments later we had a rather generous free kick on the edge of the area, but Adam Green hit the delivery into the defensive wall. We went in at the break a goal ahead.

It was hard to say that we really deserved to be ahead at the break, but we were certainly as dangerous as our playoff chasing opponents and we fashioned a few chances during the second half too. Oblitey saw his long strike deflected, which took all the power off it, while next to try his luck was Green with a free kick from thirty yards after Luke Taylor was fouled, but the shot went just over the bar. Burnham became the second Abbey player in the book for the foul, joining his team mate, former Salt Daryl Cooper-Smith in the first half, but in the 55th minute Dyer collected the ball out on the left and then sent in a superb strike towards the top corner, only for Grey to produce a stunning save to keep his side in the match.

His reward for this great save was precisely nothing as we extended our lead six minutes later when a delivery in from the left was headed out by a defender under pressure from Kendall only for it to fall to Miller, who cut onto his left foot and thumped the ball into the top corner with his so called weaker left foot from 18 yards. It was a goal deserving of winning any match and at 2-0 it certainly looked as though we would be picking up another three points here. However, we received a reminder of our situation just three minutes later when a ball in over our defence was collected and finished past O’Donovan by Ferrey Danso to reduce the scoreline. The goal means that we haven’t kept a clean sheet since our goalless draw on 16th December at Colliers Wood United!

At 2-1 up things were a little nervy for a while. Brazier picked up a yellow card for a late foul out on the touchline as we started to get pushed back a little. A tactical substitution was made with Jerry Antwi coming on at the back for Taylor as we reverted to four at the back and we started to look a bit more comfortable again. In fact we nearly scored a third goal in the final minute of normal time when Miller attempted to replicate his earlier strike, but this time he cleared the bar by about a foot.

As time started to run out the visitors pushed forward in the hope of an equaliser and won a free kick right on the edge of our penalty area, but it was deflected wide from a corner, only for O’Donovan to drop the fairly easy catch from the subsequent set



piece which led to a little bit of panic in the six yard box before the ball was cleared. Finally, after around seven minutes injury time, which was about the right amount, the final whistle blew and Salts fans could relax again.

It's been a horrible season, but whilst we are not completely safe just yet, the odds are a lot more in our favour than they were seven days ago! One more match remains. See you at the Spectrum!

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Ethan Brazier, Ethan Nelson-Roberts (c), Adam Green, Reece Tierney, Luke Taylor, Luke Miller, Thompson Adeyemi, Will Kendall, Carl Oblitey, Jaevon Dyer

Subs: Jerry Antwi for Taylor (71)

Report Source: [www.eefconline.co.uk](http://www.eefconline.co.uk)