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EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

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Epsom and Ewell FC form rising

13 March 2023

Pos		Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	Diff	Pts
1		Shoreham	25	17	7	1	69	22	47	58
2		Epsom & Ewell	26	17	3	6	58	31	27	54
3		Dorking Wanderers B	27	16	4	7	51	27	24	52
4		Wick	26	16	3	7	52	36	16	51

Epsom & Ewell FC 2-1 Montpelier Villa. Southern Combination League – Division One. Saturday 11th March 2023

Some days they go in and some days they don't! Saturday's meeting with Montpelier Villa definitely fits into the latter category as we dominated proceedings throughout almost all of the match, creating a number of chances. However, only two of those were converted and it led to a bit of a nervy ending before we were able to properly celebrate clinching all three points.

With no information released by the club since Anthony Jupp resigned as Manager, but was then appointed Director of Football, it is still unclear whether Matt Chapman has the job now, or whether the club still intend to advertise for a replacement, or maybe have someone in mind. Either way, Chapman was in charge again for this match and despite the occasional flat period, we were good value for this win. Tom Theobald returned in goal, while Steve Springett came in at left back making his 50th appearance in place of the absent Kevin Moreno-Gomez. In fact we had three new defenders this week as Chris Boulter and Ollie Thompson were not available either, so Alex Penfold and Nick Wilson came in at the back and both looked solid there, even if Wilson would be somewhat harshly penalised later when being adjudged guilty of a foul in the penalty area.

Up front we were almost the same as for the Godalming match with one notable exception; Jamie Byatt coming into the starting eleven for the absent Mario Quiassaca and although Quiassaca had played fairly well on Tuesday, we just do not possess another goal scorer like the ageless Byatt. It is no surprise that he was part of the reason why we were able to cause so many threats in this match as everyone knows where he will be!

The match started off in a rather odd fashion when Penfold picked up the ball, explaining to the referee that he thought it was damaged! Luckily the referee saw common sense and the game restarted once the ball had been checked!

We pushed the visitors back in the early stages and the concern on the visitors bench was clear with many instructions being given out. Athan Smith-Joseph worked a clever one-two with Byatt, but his final delivery was beyond his incoming teammates. This was followed up by a good run from the right by Jaevon Dyer who set up Jaan Stanley for a low strike that was fairly comfortably saved.

However, we took the lead in the 18th minute in rather "Sunday League" circumstances as a long ball from (I think) Theobald straight up the middle was chased by Smith-Joseph who just got a toe to the ball ahead of the advancing Toby Gardner in the Villa goal, diverting it into the path of Byatt who finished off into the open net from inside the six yard box. The Villa Management tried to gee their young team up, but seven minutes later we doubled our lead and this came from the wing play of Dyer who beat his man and cut in before laying the ball back to Stanley, who flicked the ball on for Smith-Joseph to tap in from a yard.

A tactical substitution followed for the visitors in an attempt to stop the damage and in the 29th minute they were back in the game, admittedly against the run of play when Wilson was adjudged to have brought down a striker. Mayckoi Sabino tucked away the penalty, giving Theobald no chance and it was 2-1. If someone had told me at that point that we'd already seen all the goals for the day I'd have been extremely surprised, but that is how it turned out.

It wasn't for the want of trying though. Stanley saw his shot from Byatt's pull back well saved by Gardner and then in injury time Dyer's ball in was inches away from a full stretch Byatt.

The second half also started with a strange incident as Sabino was grappling with Gideon Acheampong for the ball. It was a physical battle and our man ended up on the deck with a free kick awarded in our favour, but for some reason the yellow card was waved at Sabino, when I really couldn't see any reason for it.

In the 56th minute after some more pressure Dyer just got his toe to the ball ahead of a challenge which then took him out in the penalty area, but he then blotted his copybook by sending the penalty Harry Kane style, just over the bar to the keeper's right! Byatt then headed over from eight yards before a much better downward header forced Gardner into a smart near post save with his legs.

After 68 minutes he gave way to new signing Lewis Pearch and the new man had a good opportunity in the 74th minute when a clever pass put him through, only for his shot to hit Gardner's right hand post with Ryan Smith striking the loose ball into the side netting from a wider angle.

Despite the chances being missed, we were still well in control and just needed to see the game out sensibly, which made it all the more frustrating when Gavin Quintyne spoilt his good performance with a comment to the referee that earned him his second visit to the sin bin in five matches. This was worrying because we absolutely couldn't afford to drop any points in this fixture, particularly after being so much in the ascendancy. Luckily we were still well in control through this period and Stanley was really unlucky to see his piledriver from over thirty yards just dip over the bar, clipping the top of the netting.

We added George Owusu and Owen Higgins also came on after some time out, although Higgins was guilty of a clumsy foul just outside the penalty area in the 92nd minute, which was a concern until Sabino sent it flying over our crossbar.

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Stanley, by now playing at left back after an injury to Springett had forced him off, and our final sub Theo Lukyamuzi both picked up yellow cards for time wasting and you wondered whether these would have happened had we scored a third goal earlier in the match. Lukyamuzi forced a final decent save out of Gardner in the 98th minute and finally after eight extra minutes we were all able to breathe a collective sigh of relief. Everyone in the ground knew we had been the better team and we were more than worthy of the win, but it was one of those matches where you just couldn't quite relax until it was all over!

Six matches, or more likely eight matches remain as we continue to aim for promotion and with Shoreham remaining four points ahead and holding a game in hand with a far superior goal difference, we have to be sensible here and accept that second place is a more realistic target. Still, we kept on course for that spot and on another day we might have substantially boosted our goal difference. Maybe next time!

Epsom & Ewell: Tom Theobald, Gideon Acheampong, Steve Springett, Ryan Smith (c), Alex Penfold, Nick Wilson, Jaevon Dyer, Gavin Quintyne, Jamie Byatt, Jaan Stanley, Athan Smith-Joseph

Subs: Lewis Pearch for Byatt (68), George Owusu for Dyer (86), Owen Higgins for Springett (91) Theo Lukyamuzi for Smith-Joseph (93)

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