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# Epsom and Ewell FC get marching orders from Sandhurst

18 December 2024

Epsom and Ewell FC 1-2 Sandhurst Town. Combined Counties League – Premier Division South. Tuesday 17th December 2024.

Following our defeat at Chipstead in November I advised that we regularly seemed to struggle to produce a good performance against any of the teams below us in the League. Although that trend was bucked with a good win at Alton, we were back to our old ways as a starting eleven that was unchanged from our Vase victory over Burnham failed to keep their intensity up and slipped away in the second half to a 2-1 defeat at home to Sandhurst Town, allowing them to claim a League double over us and leapfrog us in the table too.

We were a little slow out of the blocks and Mark Holley produced a good early run that ended with a shot that was sliced wide. However, we began to get back into the match and Conrad Essilfie-Conduah sent a header over the bar from an Adam Green free kick, although our man was offside in any case. Our next chance came from a great crossfield pass from Will Kendall that was perfect for Sean-Michael Anderson, but his strike on target was closed down immediately by a defender.

We started to push our visitors back a little more from this point and took the lead in the 19th minute, when a Green corner was missed by the Sandhurst keeper Harry White and then appeared to strike the thigh of Elliott Miles, rebounding into the net from a couple of yards out. It was at first suspected that our defender Anthony Nazareth had got a touch, and he certainly celebrated as though he had done, but it was later confirmed by a couple of sources that this would go down as our fifth own goal of the season, which was a shame really, as a goal just before Christmas from Nazareth would certainly have been appropriate!

Ethan Nelson-Roberts was next to try his luck from 18 yards, but his powerful strike was just over the bar. Then suddenly, it nearly all went pear shaped as a pinpoint crossfield pass from our opponents put Shane Qolori through on goal, only for Dan O'Donovan to make a superb save with an outstretched leg to keep them out. They also struck another warning shot just over our crossbar in injury time after a good move. We went in with a lead, but by no means a secure one.

And so it proved early in the second half. With Sandhurst kicking towards the Tolworth end, Qolori had an opportunity. It looked at first as though his team mate had got in the way, but he retained the ball, and then drew a couple of defenders before drilling the ball low into O'Donovan's left hand corner from fairly close range in the 52nd minute to level the scores.

We had a brief shout for a penalty when Kionte Gillfillian-Waul just reached the ball ahead of a defender and nodded the ball past him before going to ground, but in all honesty, I felt that there wasn't quite enough there to award the spot kick and the referee felt the same way.

The match began to meander and we were no longer as dominant as we had been in the first half. Then we started to make errors. Firstly, Nazareth miskicked a clearance just a matter of yards out and the visiting striker saw his shot well blocked by O'Donovan with Nazareth himself able to recover to make a block from the next shot. Our defender was then clattered into by one of the opposition and although he recovered a little after treatment, he limped off a few minutes later and was replaced by Callum Wilson.

We then picked up another injury after Niall Stillwell was caught by a high foot that earned Morgan Elliot a yellow card, and again, he would limp off a few minutes later for debutant Tobi Falodi from Guildford City to take his place. We then had our best chance of the half after Gillfillian-Waul sent in a long throw that was flicked on by Craig Dundas for Green to strike, although White did well to parry the strike away to safety. Another opportunity followed after Green had split the defence with a pass to Kendall, but although he was through on goal, the defender chasing him probably did enough to force him into an earlier shot than he would have liked and he put the ball wide from only twelve yards out.

The visitors could have been 3-1 down in that time, but they weren't, and began to grow in confidence as the game reached its closing stages. They had a great chance in the 88th minute when a ball through on goal looked harmless enough until O'Donovan sliced his clearance on the bobbly surface, leaving Frazier Osunkaya with a good opportunity from an angle, but the contact wasn't the greatest and our keeper was able to reach the ball just before it crossed the line. We failed to heed the fairly large warning though and just a minute later Holley finished the game in a similar way to how he started it; with a good run from left to right, although this time he produced a much more accurate strike that O'Donovan could only palm into the goal from twelve yards.

Ultimately, this proved to be the winning goal and although I don't believe we deserved to lose over the ninety minutes, we hadn't really worked hard enough to win it either and if I'm honest, we probably should have done from the position we were in. It would be easy to say that this wasn't a very important League match, and it's true that we've had many

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more pivotal fixtures this season. However, this was another flat performance, particularly in the second half and will become a concern if repeated too often.

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Niall Stillwell, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Nicolas Bostan, Anthony Nazareth, Ali Fofahan, Conrad Essilfie-Conduah, Will Kendall, Jason Bloor, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Callum Wilson for Nazareth (65), Luke Miller for Anderson (68), Tobi Falodi for Stillwell (83)

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