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Epsom and Ewell FC go to next round

5 February 2025

Reading City 1-1 Epsom and Ewell FC. Epsom and Ewell won 6-5 on penalties. Southern Combination Cup – Second Round. Tuesday 4th February 2025.

It's official, we are definitely a cup team this season! An improved second half enabled our boys to rescue a 1-1 draw at the Rivermoor Arena, home of Reading City and for the first time in club history we won a second penalty shootout in a season to clinch a passage to the Quarter-Final and a home tie with Balham. Although results like this go down in the club records as a draw, we have now progressed from eight cup ties this season; one more than the sum total of our League wins!

Cast your mind back (if you were alive!) to 16th August 1983. The venue was Stompond Lane; the old home of Walton & Hersham and the occasion was a Southern Combination Cup Final which had been held over from the previous season. The tie finished 1-1 after extra time and for the first time in history we faced a penalty shootout, losing 5-4. We have had a lot more of these endings in recent history, largely due to the removal of extra time from many of our contests, and this was our fourteenth, but it has taken us over four decades to restore parity, as this was our seventh win to balance against the seven defeats. Maybe this was an omen and we will go all the way to the final ourselves? Certainly a defeat of the cup holders was a good start.

I understand that players had trouble reaching the venue, which doesn't bode well for our League Cup tie even further away at Wallingford & Crowmarsh next week! As a result, we took the field with just two players on the bench, one of which, Ayran Kugathas, hadn't played all season. Although we had the first chance in the match with just 44 seconds on the clock when Luke Miller's low drive was well kept out at the near post by Jonathan O'Sullivan, we went behind in the fifth minute when a deep right wing cross from Josh Baines was met by a smart volley at the far post from Sacario Waugh, which sent the ball into the roof of our net, giving Kevin Kardel no chance.

On a chilly evening just 49 spectators were in attendance with much of the first half taking place in midfield, and punctuated only by the howitzer like throw ins from Edward Lazarczuk that, on the whole we dealt with quite well. The balance of possession was definitely with the hosts though and we were restricted to half chances, although we nearly scored with one of them when Will Kendall's low shot missed the left hand post by inches; clipping the wheel that supported the frame, it was that close!

Right on half time Sean Anderson was put through by Kendall and we registered our first shot on target; dealt with comfortably by O'Sullivan, but it was a fairly non-descript first half really. As we moved to the far end of the ground it was apparent that the lighting was very poor, but much like our League match at Sheerwater, our performance began to improve in the second half. Kendall set up Kionte-Gillfillian-Waul in an advanced position on the left side, but his shot was straight at O'Sullivan. The hosts still posed a threat and some good defending was required to block a shot for a corner, but more was required and Kardel made a great double save to keep the score level from an attack down the left.

Although we had more of the second half than we had in the previous forty-five, our goal in the 70th minute still came as a bit of a surprise as Nelson-Roberts received the ball in front of O'Sullivan, who just pulled him down in an attempt to reach the ball. He received a yellow card for his actions and it was also interesting to see Adam Green step forward for the spot kick instead of Kendall who had seen his effort saved against Spelthorne exactly two weeks previously. Green tucked away the penalty with comfort and we were level.

From that point I think everyone in the ground must have been thinking that this could end in penalties. Real chances had been few and far between throughout the match. However, the final ten minutes of the contest would prove to be the most interesting by some distance. Warren sent on Stefan Aiwone for Anderson on the 80 minute mark and the reshuffle sent Craig Dundas further forward and we looked more threatening, albeit a little more open at the back too! The game swung from end to end, while Gillfillian-Waul was also swinging an opponent away by his arm after he had been fouled. Both the offender and our man picked up cards for the incident, but Gillfillian-Waul was clearly enjoying his advanced role and in the 87th minute he broke on the left and sent in a superb ball for Kendall, in space and not far out, but he took too long to get the ball under control and his shot was blocked. A minute later the two players combined once again and Kendall chested the ball down and struck it on the half volley, but couldn't keep the shot down from around twelve yards.

At the other end we blocked another shot for a corner that Kardel had to punch clear, while Waugh missed his chance to get a second goal when he sent a shot from a good position tamely wide in injury time. The final chance of the match came from a Reading corner which was met by a thumping back post header, but fortunately it went straight at our keeper.

The penalties took place at the brighter end of the ground which was handy, and a large segment of the crowd, mostly home supporters, gathered in anticipation behind the goal. Green stepped up first, only to see his kick diverted onto the post and away by O'Sullivan, leaving the home crowd happy for a few seconds before Baines then saw his kick parried away by Kardel, diving to his right.

With both Captains having been denied, it was down to the supporting cast and whilst the penalties were not quite as clinical as in our previous League Cup tie with Berks County, Callum Wilson, Dundas, Anthony Nazareth and Luke Miller all netted, while the opposition did the same to leave the score at 4-4 after five penalties. We had a brief scare when Dundas sent his spot kick just inside the post, only to see it come back out after hitting one of the supporting stanchions, similar to those we had trouble with a few years ago at Chipstead. Fortunately, the officials were able to see that it had gone in, but it really is time for clubs to stop using those goal frames and use a different design, as they cause no end of trouble!

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Kardel had got a hand to the Reading fifth penalty, and then Niall Stillwell stepped up and also scored “via the keeper”, to put us 5-4 up, only for the hosts to level it up again at 5-5. Finally, Kendall stepped up to take the seventh penalty, which was surprisingly low in the order when considering he had been in the first five for our previous penalty lottery. However, he calmly tucked the kick away and when Luke Donville sent his attempt to Kardel’s right, he made the save and we were through 6-5 on penalties!

So Kardel becomes the first Salts keeper to play in two winning penalty shootouts in the same season, although he is not the first Epsom keeper to take part in two wins as Conor Young was on the winning side for two of the three that he faced. Having said that, Kardel has a 100% record and who knows, there may even be more shootouts to follow this season as we remain in two cups.

Epsom & Ewell: Kevin Kardel, Niall Stillwell, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Anthony Nazareth, Callum Wilson, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Will Kendall, Sean Anderson, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Stefan Aiwone for Anderson (80)

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