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Epsom and Ewell FC progress in FA Vase

10 November 2024

Epsom and Ewell 2-0 North Greenford United. Isuzu F.A. Vase – Second Round. Saturday 9th November 2024.

It's official! This is now definitely a Vase run! We may have had a bye in the opening round, but since then, Seaford Town, Berks County and now North Greenford United have been defeated to give our boys a place in the last 64 for the first time since we hosted St Neots Town in 2010/11 as we defeated our opponents by two goals to nil at the KGF on Saturday.

North Greenford reached the Quarter-Finals of this competition last year; narrowly losing by the only goal against eventual winners Romford, and went into this match in second place in the North Division of the Combined Counties League, presumably hoping to go a step or two further this time. However, whilst on paper, we may not have been expected to win this tie, particularly after our recent form, we rode an early storm before taking the lead and extended it in the second half, by which time the visitors, for all their energy and effort, seemed to have run out of ideas against a well organised Salts team. In fact, for those who were present seven days previously for our 3-0 home defeat to Sheerwater, this match followed almost exactly the opposite pattern, with only a world class save at the end preventing us from recording a 3-0 scoreline of our own!

The first piece of good news came with the news that our Captain Adam Green had seen his red card at Carshalton Athletic overturned at an F.A. hearing, along with the four match suspension that went with it.

Having Green available was a massive bonus as he has grown in stature this season, while we also welcomed back Dan O'Donovan and Niall Stillwell after serving their suspensions incurred against Abbey Rangers, although we did have a few players cup tied. We also welcomed Surrey football royalty as S.C.F.A. President Ray Lewis was joined by League Chairman and newly elected F.A. Council member Chris Conlon. I am pleased to report that they had an enjoyable and entertaining contest to watch!

Against an away side playing with three at the back, we made a couple of early forays down the flanks with Ali Fofahan and Luke Miller but soon found ourselves on the defensive as a succession of corners were earned at the other end. This was then followed by an unnecessary seventh minute challenge from Green way out on the touchline that was at best exuberant; at worst, very clumsy! The referee made the easy decision to award the yellow card and our Captain would be on a tightrope for the remainder of the match.

O'Donovan was forced into a low save soon after this, and while the ball spun up off him, it was headed away from the danger area by a Salts defender. All of this in the opening nine minutes, yet in the tenth we took the lead. Ethan Nelson-Roberts cropped up on the right wing and pulled the ball back from the touchline where Miller dummied the ball cleverly, giving Fofahan space to pick his spot and sending the ball flying into the far corner of the net, about half way up, from just inside the penalty area.

The goal was a little against the run of play at that time, but the F.A. Vase is no respecter of possession stats or form, and if I'd had a pound for every time we lost out in the Vase when we didn't deserve to, I'd have a fair sum of money, so we took the lead and ran with it! Not that we were home and dry at this stage by any means as our opponents spent much of the remainder of the first half pushing for an equaliser. O'Donovan nearly got caught out when he left his area and lost the ball out on the touchline. As he retreated, a cross was sent over him, although fortunately it didn't fall for a visiting striker and we were able to escape.

In truth, very little really fell for the opposition throughout the match as they repeatedly tried and failed to link up with their front men; the ball often running out of play. They had a free kick that was flicked on at the near post, but the chance was headed over at the far post and Toby Young also had to make a headed clearance. However, we could and probably should have extended our lead just after the half hour when Nelson-Roberts closed down a clearance from Greenford keeper Ryan Lehane with the ball squirting out to the right hand side where Carl Oblitey was able to feed Miller, but our tricky winger, usually so clinical, poked the ball wide from twelve yards out.

Green then spurned a great opportunity as he was first to reach a Fofahan free kick, but instead of the thumping header that was required, he made only the merest of touches as he dived and the ball went well wide of the goal. Green then turned provider in first half injury time with a quick delivery in from the right that Fofahan reached first and diverted on goal, although it was almost instantly cut out by Anotida Mano. Although the half went on for another seven minutes, largely due to another injury to Young who made a solid challenge, but came off worse and required Callum Wilson to replace him, we went in at the break, aware that we'd had less possession, but also aware that we had carried at least as much threat from our attacks. But could we hold on to our narrow lead in the second half?

As it turned out, the answer would be yes, and in truth, fairly comfortably as well. After an even few minutes to open the second period, we extended our lead in the 54th minute and it came with one of the best passes I've seen in ages, curling with the outside of the foot and straight into the path of Miller. I'm ashamed to say that I didn't see who made it, as I was by then following the attack, but was informed afterwards that it was Anthony Nazareth who deserved the credit. Miller

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took the ball in stride and drew his defender before rolling the ball perfectly through to Fofahan who was through on goal, and whilst a defender hurried him into the shot, and even got a touch to the ball some eighteen yards out, the ball still crept into the far corner of the goal to give us a 2-0 Salts.

Green then sent a teasing ball across the six yard box as we threatened a third goal, before we all then had a slight interval while Lehane was treated for cramp, which seemed odd as he hadn't really been that involved in the match! Craig Dundas tested him soon after with a low drive before we created another good chance when substitute Michele Maccari was put through and as he reached the ball ahead of the exposed Lehane, he just had the task of knocking the ball into the empty net. Only one problem though; he was over thirty yards out and his shot dribbled agonisingly beyond the far post.

The visitors continued to raise the tempo, although their football was becoming more frantic and desperate, trying to force things instead of remaining patient and their attacks broke down more frequently. Occasionally we needed to step in with fouls to break up the play and Dundas, Stillwell and Kionte Gillfillian-Waul all picked up cards, while O'Donovan had one waved in his direction for time wasting too, although he did well with a reflex save to deny a close range shot in the closing moments. Luckily we didn't exceed the five booking mark and it was only an amazing point blank save from Lehane that kept out substitute Kendall from a couple of yards after Miller had set him up with a low right wing cross. A third goal might have been harsh on the visitors, but by the end, there was no denying that we had deserved the win.

So far we have had a full house of home draws in the F.A. competitions this season (two in the Cup, three in the Vase) although the next round traditionally includes clubs all the way down to the South West, so we might well get a long journey. In fact, the last time our club had an away tie in the Third Round was in 2009/10 when we visited Wellington AFC; right on the border between Somerset and Devon! That said, who would bet against a sixth straight home F.A. competition encounter being revealed in the draw on Monday and taking place at the KGF on 7th December!

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Niall Stillwell, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Anthony Nazareth, Toby Young, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Ali Fofahan, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Callum Wilson for Young (45+6), Michele Maccari for Nelson-Roberts (74), Will Kendall for Fofahan (85)

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