

Epsom and Ewell FC strike back for draw

2 February 2025



Sheerwater 2-2 Epsom and Ewell. Combined Counties League - Premier Division South. Saturday 1st February.

Two second half goals enabled us to earn a 2-2 draw and break a five game losing sequence to Sheerwater. For those who love a stat, it also ensured that we remained unbeaten away from home on this day since 1969! A poor first thirty minutes had allowed our opponents to build a deserved two goal lead at the Eastwood Leisure Centre, but we kept plugging away and a change in formation helped us fight back in a match where all four goals were in the same net!

Defensively we remained unchanged from our attritional 1-0 win over Spelthorne Sports eleven days previously, although we made three changes further forward with Craig Dundas coming in for Conrad Essilfie-Conduah. Further forward, Carl Oblitey came in for Will Kendall and Ali Fofahan returned at the expense of Ethan Nelson-Roberts, although the both on the bench and would come on to good effect later in the match.

We would have been pleased to see that the match was on the artificial surface at Sheerwater after encountering that bumpy surface at the KGF, but found ourselves a goal down in just the seventh minute when a foul in midfield resulted in the ball being delivered into our danger area from where we didn't clear the danger and Elliott York saw his first shot blocked back to him, before guiding the ball around Kevin Kardel and into the far corner from around 15 yards out. Kardel made an excellent block from Byron Mitchell to keep the score down to 1-0 soon after this, but we conceded another in the 16th minute when a low delivery from the left was forced in at the second attempt by Kareem Foster. It almost got worse and we required a brave headed intervention from Anthony Nazareth just as it looked we might concede a third goal. I was already beginning to think of what my report headline might be at this stage, certain that it would be including the word "limp" within it! It truly was an awful start against a team that we had a terrible recent record against.

We were looking unable to find our front men, while our hosts looked like they could score at any time, but around the half hour mark the balance of play began to change and chances began to be created. Nathan Best sliced one shot horribly wide, while Oblitey made a good run, only to see his shot blocked. Still it looked like we were going to struggle to actually find the net and this was summed up by a free kick from over thirty yards from Fofahan, that could best be described as ambitious and resulted in an easy catch for their keeper Fabio Suarez, although he did need to make a couple of good punches to clear some dangerous balls into his six yard area just moments before the break.

"Two-nil is a funny scoreline" Suarez said to us at the break, and I always wonder about comments like that, almost as if they are subconsciously thinking that they were going to be less adventurous and try to stick with what they had. Indeed Suarez had already produced a couple of "Pickford flops" towards the end of the opening forty-five minutes. This is always a dangerous tactic at this level as I think it actually inspires the opposition and the second half would be largely in our favour as the fightback started.

We also made a substitution at the break with Nicolas Bostan coming off and being replaced by Callum Wilson. It's not clear whether this was injury related or tactical, but we also changed our shape at the break and went with three at the back, giving us the opportunity to put more players forward; definitely a gamble worth trying after that opening period. Sheerwater appeared to struggle with this and we nearly got a goal back in the 49th minute when Nazareth's ball into the channel looked like it was going through to Suarez, but as the keeper came out to collect the ball, a defender stuck out a leg and diverted the ball to Luke Miller, only to see his ball across goal just evade the incoming Fofahan with Suarez stranded in no man's land.

Best then sent in a good delivery, but Oblitey couldn't get the header on target. It would be Best's final contribution as he was replaced by Nelson-Roberts. Within two minutes and with the clock ticking on to the hour mark we pulled a goal back. It was a strange one really as Fofahan's corner floated over Suarez and although a defender cleared the ball away with a smart volley, the Assistant was absolutely certain that the ball had crossed the line. I'll be honest, I wasn't convinced, but despite being just two yards from the ball, my angle obviously wasn't as good (or as important!) as the man in black and the goal was awarded. Having now seen the video, it looks like I may have been the one who was correct here! The home side were understandably annoyed about this, with some seeming to claim the ball hadn't crossed the line, while others were claiming that Suarez was fouled. There was certainly some contact on him, but I think the officials got it right and we were back in it. In fact, you could argue that this was the turning point in the match.

However, it was the least we deserved. We had been doing the bulk of the work for a while now and kept pushing for an equaliser against a by now subdued looking Sheerwater team. Miller sent in a good ball from the right wing that was just ahead of Oblitey and Nelson-Roberts sent his header over the bar from a very wide angle, so it would be hard on our substitute to class this as a good opportunity. Our opponents sent a volley from a long throw into our side netting but their threat was becoming less and we sent Kendall on for Fofahan in the 76th minute as we tried to salvage something from this match. And four minutes later it came when Miller's deep corner was headed back across goal by the recently introduced Kendall, where Wilson headed the ball goalwards and Dundas applied the finishing touch from less than a yard to get it over the line. This was a crucial intervention from our experienced midfielder as Wilson's header on its own would have been cleared by the defenders on the line, so you could class this as a typical poacher's finish.

Strangely enough, after being extremely quiet for the bulk of the second half, Sheerwater suddenly woke up. Kardel made a flying save for a corner and Wilson needed to head a shot away from the goal line. We still made chances of our own though, and at the other end Miller volleyed the ball at goal; while Suarez just reached it, he was a little slow getting down to it and only managed to palm the ball up into the air where Oblitey was just able to climb high enough to nod the ball over the line, but the celebrations were short lived as the flag was immediately raised for offside. Then in the closing minutes a Miller corner was sent wide by an unmarked Oblitey who will have been disappointed to miss the target by so much from the position he was in, but if you had told me after half an hour that we'd get anything from this game, I'd have laughed, as we were very much second best at that stage. This was an excellent point at the end of the day.

The draw also pushed us up a spot to sixteenth, while Sheerwater dropped a place to thirteenth, but the point did neither of us any harm in the grand scheme of things as we pulled further away from the bottom two. We now have a cup match in midweek before the final landlord v tenant derby against Corinthian-Casuals coming up on Saturday.

Epsom & Ewell: Kevin Kardel, Niall Stillwell, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Nicolas Bostan, Anthony Nazareth, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Ali Fofahan, Nathan Best

Subs: Callum Wilson for Bostan (HT), Ethan Nelson-Roberts for Best (58), Will Kendall for Fofahan (76)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk