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Epsom Derby football cup defeat

10 November 2023

Epsom & Ewell 1-2 Sutton United. Surrey Senior Cup – Second Round. Tuesday 7th November 2023.

Our first match back in the Surrey Senior Cup for five years, coupled with the fact it was our first meeting for twelve years against our old rivals Sutton United, ensured that a healthy crowd, counted at 135, were present at Cobham for this encounter, maybe like me with memories of past encounters and rivalries long consigned to history.

It is obviously difficult to assess the quality of this performance. This was often the case back when we were at Step Six and played Development and Reserve teams and you never really knew quite what standard of opponent you were going to face. Indeed we defeated a Sutton United Development eleven by seven clear goals in the Surrey Premier Cup not long ago, but it was clear from the start that this wasn't going to happen in this match. It was also good to see two former Salts in the Sutton dugout as Jimmy Dack and Ross White took charge for the visitors. Dack played for us as a 16 year old under Ricky Kidd from March 1989 before moving up the footballing pyramid, while White made his debut in March 2011, although it was his younger brother Sean that made the lion's share of their appearances for our first team.

Our club chose to insult people's intelligence on its social media by making out that we had narrowly lost to a team five divisions above us, when quite obviously we weren't playing their first eleven. Their Academy side provided more than enough of a challenge though and deservedly won this match 2-1, despite our boys taking the lead just after the hour. In fact, the margin of victory would probably have been greater, had Harvey Keogh not made half a dozen superb saves in what was arguably his best performance for the club.

Keogh made his first start with the Captain's armband on in the absence of injured Zach Powell, and it was also good to see Tommy Williams back on the field after his own injuries, while Caretaker Manager Steve Springett made his first start of the season too. Further forward Thompson Adeyemi came back into the starting eleven along with George Owusu as Sirak Negassi and Ade Batula dropped out, although the latter would join the action from the bench later. Finally, Ollie Thompson was good to go again after being withdrawn just before kick off against Knaphill and he came in for Ash Snadden.

We had an early scare in just the seventh minute when Jack Phillips sent an early strike just beyond out far post, but in response Luke Miller put Owusu through on goal and his shot was tipped onto the bar by Bradley House, although the offside flag would have ruled the strike out anyway. Adeyemi was next to strike the Sutton bar with a header, but he too was offside.

Just after the half hour mark Keogh made the first of his fine saves with a point blank range save from a far post header and he had to make another low one to keep the scores level at the break. However, the second half was just ten minutes old before he had to make a further good block from a header that was definitely going in.

Despite threatening rarely to that point, we then won a penalty in the 60th minute. A good move down our left flank ended with a trip on Edwards right in the corner of the penalty area. With Jaan Stanley on the bench and Marlon Pinder absent, Miller stepped up to take the spot kick, only to see it well reached by House, diving to his left to parry the ball for a corner. With the visitors maybe thinking they had got away with it, a Steve Springett corner eluded everyone and was nodded in from close range at the back post by Ethan Nelson-Roberts in the 62nd minute.

We made a couple more substitutions with Lewis Elsom, joining from Aldershot Town, made his debut when he came on for Williams, while Stanley replaced Miller, probably wishing he had come on ten minutes earlier to take the spot kick! Stanley was soon attacking and his deflected strike from twenty yards had House scrambling to keep the ball out, although the ball was going just wide anyway.

Unfortunately for us, as the match reached the closing stages the visitors drew level. With the clock showing the 76th minute a deep ball in from the right was knocked back across goal where a powerful low shot was again well blocked by Keogh, but the loose ball was then knocked in from ten yards out by George Vorster.

It was the least they deserved though, and Keogh had to be alert once again to tip a Sutton header over the bar, but was powerless to stop their winner in the 86th minute as a dangerous run from the left resulted in the ball being laid back into the path of Vorster who drilled a low shot into the far corner from around 15 yards out which proved to be the winner.

The game turned around quite rapidly here and it is becoming noticeable that we are conceding a lot of late goals. If you look at those which have come after the 80th minute of our matches, we have scored twice, yet conceded thirteen! I'm not sure if our people were aware of this, but hopefully something can and will be done that will increase either our fitness or our game management, or both. Luckily this match was largely irrelevant in the grand scheme of things, but with important League matches coming up against Tooting & Mitcham United, Sandhurst Town and AFC Croydon Athletic, we need to tighten up in those final stages.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Tommy Williams, Nick Inwugwu, Steve Springett, Reece Tierney, Ollie Thompson, Ethan

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Nelson-Roberts, Rory Edwards, George Owusu, Thompson Adeyemi, Luke Miller

Subs: Ben Amissah for Owusu (55), Lewis Elsom for Williams (64), Jaan Stanley for Miller (67), Tino Carpene for Springett (75), Ade Batula for Nelson-Roberts (81)

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