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# Epsom & Ewell FC draw with leaders

7 October 2024

Redhill 2-2 Epsom and Ewell. Combined Counties League – Premier Division South. Saturday 5th October 2024.

I wrote last week that matches against Redhill and Fleet Town would give us a better idea of where our likely final position would be, and against the league leading Lobsters we recovered from a slow start and a two goal deficit to send a message to the League that we are perfectly capable of holding our own in this division, as we drew 2-2 at Kiln Brow on Saturday afternoon; only the second time this season that they have dropped points.

The sharp eyed amongst you may have noticed that this was our third consecutive 2-2 draw and wondered whether this has happened before, and the answer is NEVER! This week was the eighth time in our history we had recorded a pair of 2-2 draws; the last time in 2010, but this third consecutive “Desmond” was the first time in club history that this had happened.

We made three changes from the draw against Balham on Wednesday. Callum Wilson returned to the squad after some time out injured, ahead of the absent David Romer, while Ali Fofahan came in on the right wing ahead of Luke Miller who was at a wedding and Jason Bloor made his first start for our club in place of Fabio Nunes who was on the bench, possibly in preparation for his upcoming three match suspension. However, best laid plans don’t always work out and a pair of injury enforced substitutions ensured that both Nunes and Niall Stillwell were both on the field by the end of the first half.

For the opposition, former Salts Adam Grant and Tommy Smith were in the starting line up, with Gavin Quintyne joining the action in the second half, although another in Jaevon Dyer was injured. The connections weren’t restricted to the playing field though, as former Coach and Caretaker Manager Matt Chapman was in the Redhill dugout, along with our former Assistant Manager Jordan Clark, now in charge at Kiln Brow. The hosts were four points clear at the top going into this match, with only Cobham taking points from them to this stage and they kicked off in front of a very decent crowd of 264, which was boosted by a number of children that were invited along, providing an example for our club how to do things like that properly.

The hosts got off to a fast start and a near post corner in the first minute was flicked just over our cross bar, before a raking ball out to the left three minutes later was followed by a great cross, although the Redhill striker wasn’t quite able to get enough purchase on the ball. It would have been a superb goal if it had gone in.

Unfortunately, we didn’t have to wait long before the ball was in our net as in the ninth minute Kionte Gillfillian-Waul was robbed (mugged?) around the half way line by former Salt Adam Grant, who then set Nathan Hogan off down the right. Wilson almost got across to cut the ball out, but only got half a boot on it and Hogan continued his run and he cut in and smashed the ball past Dan O’Donovan from an angle. Some say a keeper shouldn’t be beaten at his near post, but to be fair, this was a very powerful strike and I’m not sure any keeper could have reacted quickly enough as the ball flew into the roof of the net.

Gillfillian-Waul had taken a blow to the head after Grant’s robust challenge and required treatment before walking off, clearly dazed and Nunes was thrown on down the left with Ethan Nelson-Roberts dropping to left back. Soon after this O’Donovan was on the deck after he had come out to head the ball clear, only to be clattered after this. There were to be a number of stoppages in this match for treatment and it was clear that Redhill were going to try and outmuscle us. They even struck a free kick directly against a retreating Carl Oblitey before trying to get him booked, which was a little classless and fortunately the referee wasn’t interested in such games.

We hadn’t created much to this point and Redhill were certainly worth their lead at this stage, but we had our first real opportunity in the 34th minute when a free kick in was met by a Craig Dundas header and as the hosts failed to clear, Wilson knocked it goalwards and it required the intervention of a defender to hook it clear before it crossed the line. For those wondering, it was about a foot away, but did have the momentum to go in, so it was an important clearance.

Regrettably we were unable to build on that chance as our opponents extended their lead just three minutes later with a right wing cross to the far post that was met with a downward header. It wasn’t the greatest or most powerful of contacts, yet it still squirmed past O’Donovan who may not have had much chance with the first goal, but will certainly be annoyed with this one.

At 2-0 down this was an important test of our resilience. We really needed something back before the half time break and that’s exactly what happened, and from an unlikely source too. In the 43rd minute we won a free kick out wide on the right. Adam Green usually takes most of our set pieces, but appears to have reduced his workload in that area and Fofahan sent the delivery in, but before it could reach one of our players the Redhill Captain Eoin Fraser jumped higher and diverted the ball superbly past Luke Roberts in the Lobsters net from about eight yards out.

We were to play an extra five and a half minutes of injury time but plenty would still happen before the break. Wilson picked up a booking for a foul before Fraser took one for his team by bringing down Bloor as he threatened to break through. In the third minute of injury time we were forced into another replacement as Stillwell came on at right back in place of Brazier who has struggled at times this season with his hamstring and after feeling it was tight, had to make way.

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Finally, we had the unusual sight of another former Salt in Tommy Smith, cropping up on the right wing to send a decent cross over, although the header wasn't on target, and after O'Donovan had comfortably gathered Ethan Ford's low shot the players finally went for their half time break.

Our boys came out with a little more belief and we had an early chance in the 50th minute when Oblitey saw his shot blocked with the loose ball being struck only just over the bar by Wilson from the edge of the area. Redhill's lead looked vulnerable and a great ball over the top of the defender from Stillwell set Fofahan through on goal before he was brought down by Joe Dyett. Or so everyone else in the ground thought. The referee was clearly awaiting an indication from the Assistant, but it never came and as Fofahan lay crumpled on the ground there was a lot of protestation, particularly from Bloor who was treading a very fine line on the sin-bin rule. It's possible the referee gave him a little more leniency because he too thought that his colleague had got it wrong!

Bloor then told the Assistant to concentrate just ahead of our next free kick, which was ironic as our man was then pulled up for a foul! However, the pressure continued and as we pressed, Oblitey collected the ball and guided it over the advancing Roberts from ten yards to level the match up at 2-2 in the 58th minute.

The hosts looked rather wobbly at this stage and Nunes then got away on the left wing and his delivery found Fofahan just five yards out, but Roberts spread himself to make a superb block of his strike, and he was up quickly to repel the follow up from Green before Bloor's attempt was blocked by a defender. Somehow Redhill survived this and Roberts continued his one man defiance by heading clear from outside of his area before being well positioned to save another strike from Fofahan. Both Bloor and Nunes picked up yellow cards as our threat began to wane and in the final minutes the hosts finished the stronger of the two sides as they made a belated attempt to claim a winner that they didn't deserve. Stillwell cleared from a dangerous position and then Anthony Nazareth produced a great tackle to dispossess a Redhill forward as they pushed, but without success.

Overall, we were well worth at least a point and it looked to me as though we just gave our opponents a bit too much respect to start with. Maybe we do need to start better, as this was the fourth time in eight days that we had gone behind, all in the first half. We have still only scored two League goals in the opening forty-five minutes all season, and one of those was the own goal in this match! However, we didn't lose any of the recent games where we trailed and now have just one defeat in our last nine matches. Another difficult challenge awaits us when Fleet Town visit on Saturday, but another good result will set us up for the League Cup and F.A. Vase ties at home to Berks County. Yes we are playing them at home in both cups!

The final word today goes to the Redhill programme. As a programme editor for thirteen seasons with nearly a dozen top ten finishes in the National awards, I think I'm qualified enough to comment that this was undoubtedly the best I have seen at this level all season, and it is an example to all that a few random photos and "static" pages moved into different places each week do not make for interesting reading, as you need actual articles to go with them, and at just £2 it is far better value than the others I've seen this season. If Redhill go up this season I'll miss their programme, although on this performance it appears to me as though Redhill still have much work to do, regardless of their current League position.

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Ethan Brazier, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Callum Wilson, Anthony Nazareth, Ali Fofahan, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Jason Bloor, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Fabio Nunes for Gillfillian-Waul (10), Niall Stillwell for Brazier (45+3)

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