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Epsom & Ewell FC drowned out by Sheerwater

4 November 2024

Epsom and Ewell 0-3 Sheerwater. Combined Counties League – Premier Division South Saturday 2nd November 2024

On a very mild Saturday afternoon at the KGF Salts fans were hoping for fireworks against Sheerwater, and indeed they started off like a rocket. However, rockets have a tendency to tail off very badly, and long before the end it had fizzled out completely as a 3-0 defeat handed the Sheers their sixth straight win over our boys.

In recent weeks we have won some and lost some, while we have also drawn a great many. However, in all of the matches we remained competitive, which regrettably was not the case in this contest against a clinical visiting team. We started well enough, before the opposition scored a couple of goals and then shut us out for the remainder of the match; scoring a third goal towards the end to rub salt into the wounds. By the end we looked quite disheartened against one of the few teams that had actually been below us in the table before kick off, which is concerning ahead of our big F.A. Vase match next weekend. In fact, the second half was most definitely the worst forty-five minute period we have produced for weeks.

In front of an “official” attendance of 106, which contained around twenty non-paying spectators from our young Colts teams, we made a number of changes, many of which were enforced. In goal Faebian Witter came in for the suspended Dan O’Donovan, and if you like your stats, this marked the first time in forty years to my knowledge where a goal keeper played against us in one match, only to then turn out for us in our very next match! For those wondering, it was Andy Abel who played so well for Addlestone & Weybridge against us in a pair of Surrey Senior Cup ties, that our Manager Adrian Hill signed him up for our remaining League matches in 1983/84! Also suspended was Niall Stillwell, while Adam Green also missed out after picking up five bookings this season. Green currently faces a further suspension from next Saturday and on the evidence of this match we will miss him badly, although there may be an opening for him as a cheerleader as he was doing a good job of directing the singing for the Colts behind the goal! Finally, in the opposition line up was former Salt Joel Onu, who would join the match from the bench later.

The visitors took the field in a quite frankly vomit-inducing combination of various shades of purple! On a bobbly looking surface that looked like it needed mowing, we started well and should have taken the lead in the 11th minute when Ali Fofahan pulled the ball back from the left wing, only for Kailan North to miskick the ball just eight yards out in a central position. Fofahan’s next delivery was a little too close to Fabio Suarez who punched the ball clear, but we were well on top at this stage.

However, the pattern of the match changed completely in the 17th minute when Sheerwater made their first foray into Epsom territory and won a corner, but we didn’t deal with this at all well and the far post delivery was headed back across goal by Liam Avery for Harvey Valter to head in from close range, with neither of the players being marked at all. Three minutes later it was two-nil as Elliott York sent a dipping shot at goal from outside the penalty area and Witter was unable to keep it out as the ball went to his left.

From this point Sheerwater made it clear that they were going to stick with what they had. Suarez slowed the game down with the referee complicit in allowing this to happen. However, the defenders in front of him were defending heroically, throwing themselves in front of every shot we sent towards the visiting goal. The first block came from a Will Kendall free kick, which was blocked out wide to Carl Oblitey, who then sent in a great cross that Kendall rose to meet with a header that clipped the crossbar and went out for a goal kick. Moments later another attack was met by a piledriver from Toby Young, but another great defensive block was enough to divert the shot just over the bar. As half time approached North also saw his shot blocked and Fofahan saw his shot bounce down and over the bar. As we went off at half time, it was hard to believe that we hadn’t scored, having had a significant majority of possession and chances.

We started the second half rapidly and almost had a goal back in the first fifteen seconds when Fofahan’s low ball across goal was wildly miskicked by a defender and went through to Kendall, but our man clearly hadn’t been expecting the present and snatched at the ball, slicing it wide from twelve yards. What we didn’t realise after fifty minutes of creating chances, was that this one would represent our last real opportunity in the match. The visitors started to shut us out of the game, almost as if they had seen what we had got, and decided that we weren’t hurting them. Anthony Nazareth picked up a yellow card for a challenge that looked more clumsy than malicious, and it was possible that he also injured himself at the time as he was replaced four minutes later. Then on the hour we saw a debut from Michele Maccari on the left wing, who replaced the out of sorts Luke Miller with Fofahan taking his place on the right. It seems that every week we have a new player, yet defensively where we have had most issues, there appear to be no changes. It would be nice for the club to provide some sort of player update for our patient supporters at some point in the near future.

One player that was back in Epsom colours was Fabio Nunes who had completed his suspension, and he nearly pulled a goal back for us with a twenty-five yard strike that took a wicked deflection off a defender, but Suarez adjusted brilliantly to stick out a hand and as the ball dribbled away, he recovered to claim the loose ball before Kendall could reach it, although our man was offside anyway.

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I referred earlier to Joel Onu, who had been on our bench for a few games, but only making one appearance. The supporters only knew he had left when he appeared in the opposition line up! Clearly Onu also wanted to send a message to our Management that they had made the wrong decision in letting him go, and in the 80th minute he broke our offside trap before slotting the ball under Witter to make the score 3-0. That third goal was also enough to put the visitors above us in the League table.

As the game petered out Onu got through again and although Callum Wilson managed to recover the position, he hurt himself in the process and needed to be replaced. As Luke Taylor came on, it was interesting to note that it was the first time this season that we had used all five substitutes, although Taylor hardly got a touch before the final whistle blew.

This was also our third defeat in a row and more relevantly it was our seventh League match without a win, during which time we have played three of the teams that were below us at the time in Horley, Balham and now Sheerwater without defeating any of them. Whilst we have had good spells in all three of the recent defeats, the results speak for themselves and it’s not great form to enter our big F.A. Vase match next Saturday, but at least we will have most of our suspended players back. It also transpires that the club are appealing Green’s red card from the Carshalton Athletic match, which on the face of it appears a complete waste of money, as contact was made, however accidental it may have been. Maybe he will be available, maybe he won’t; either way, the rest of the team will need to step up a couple of gears if we are to get out of this concerning slump.

In summary, Sheerwater weren’t three goals better than us, although it could be argued that they were three goals smarter!

Epsom & Ewell: Faebian Witter, Toby Young, Ethan Nelson-Roberts (c), Kailan North, Anthony Nazareth, Callum Wilson, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Will Kendall, Ali Fofahan

Subs: Kionte Gillfillian-Waul for Nazareth (56), Michele Maccari for Miller (61), Fabio Nunes for North (65), Jason Bloor for Kendall (80), Luke Taylor for Wilson (92)

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