



Epsom top the hill 4 - 1

25 September 2024

Epsom and Ewell 4-1 Hilltop. Combined Counties League Cup - First Round. Tuesday 24th September 2024.

Two goals, two assists and a position on the Hall of Fame for being one of our fifty top goal scorers in club history! Not a bad day's work for Luke Miller, who scored his thirty-fifth and thirty-sixth goals for the Salts, whilst also providing the deliveries for our first two goals, scored by Ethan Nelson-Roberts as we swept aside the challenge from Hilltop FC by four goals to one in the First Round of the Combined Counties League Cup at the KGF on Tuesday night. Hilltop are a club of mostly Somalian origin and currently play in the North Division of our League where they, like us had registered exactly a point per game, so a close contest was expected.

The scoreline might indicate that this was a comfortable win, but it was a slightly flattering one as possession was fairly even over the ninety minutes, although we were far more dangerous in front of goal where the visitors looked a little wobbly, and we appeared far more solid at the back. In fact, we are starting to look like quite a good team right now and even the early loss of Carl Oblitey to a hamstring injury didn't derail our attacking threat in this match.

We made three changes to our starting line-up following our mostly comfortable victory over Seaford Town on Saturday with Reece Tierney replacing the injured Stefan Aiwone and getting his first start since suffering a head injury against Jersey Bulls, whilst Luke Taylor also came in further forward for Fabian Nunes who is still working his way back from injury and was on the bench. Also watching from the sidelines was Dan O'Donovan as Faebian Witter was given a rare outing between the posts.

The visitors started brightly and passed the ball around nicely. Early indications were that this might be a long night, especially when Oblitey limped off, although he was replaced mostly as a precaution, with a more important League fixture coming up on Saturday. We conceded one of many free kicks around the edge of the area, but Witter was alert to reach the strike from Abukar Mohammed on the 15 minute mark.

And a minute later we were ahead. A pass out to Miller resulted in a dangerous low delivery that just eluded two of our players coming in, but was met just beyond the far post by Nelson-Roberts, who was too strong for his full back and slotted the ball past Hansel Coelho at his near post from about four yards out. Witter made another low save but we extended our lead in the 31st minute when Miller provided another deep delivery and Nelson-Roberts got ahead of his man to head the ball downwards and up into the net, just inside the post from around five yards out.

Tierney was alert to block a shot from the visitors but in the 35th minute we conceded in rather odd circumstances. It was hard to see exactly what happened, but it looked as though Witter came out wide to clear a ball and struck it against a team mate, leaving the easiest of finishes for Tahir Showkat to roll the loose ball into the empty net.

We responded well to the goal though. Substitute Sean Anderson made a good run, forcing Coelho into a save from a narrow angle, and although the ball fell nicely for Adam Green, his shot from eighteen yards went across the goal and out for a goal kick. However, in the 45th minute Green was largely responsible for our third goal as he put Coelho under severe pressure and his clearance went straight to Miller on the edge of the penalty area, and he guided the ball straight back past the keeper into the far corner of the goal to give us a 3-1 lead at the interval.

This goal placed Miller into the club Hall of Fame. For those who are unaware of this at: www.eefconline.co.uk it shows the top fifty players in club history in terms of appearances, goals and clean sheets. Miller thus joined a pair of players on 35 goals in our former Player/Coach Sid Faggetter who scored his goals in just forty matches in the 1950/51 season and former Captain and appearance record holder Graham Morris who scored them over 658 appearances from 1990-2004!

Seven minutes into the second half he had surpassed both of these players with his second of the night and again Green was the provider as he robbed a defender and set Miller up in stride, from where he ran in and clipped the ball across Coelho into the bottom corner.

With almost half of the match remaining, it might come as a surprise that this goal was the last of the match, although there were more chances for both sides. Nunes had been on the field for seconds when he had a shot blocked by a defender, while Witter was able to pick a shot out that was heading for the top corner. Another free kick from Mohammed forced Witter into his best save of the night, getting down low to push the ball away and then being ready to make a second save from an angle as the ball came back in. Our keeper needed a little help from a defender after failing to hold the next free kick from Benet Hashani, before a left wing cross from the visitors bounced off the top of our crossbar and away.

We then wasted a corner, which led to a rapid counter from Hilltop, but Witter was able to make another good low save to keep the score at 4-1. At the other end Coelho nearly dropped a shot from Nunes over the goal line after parrying it up in the air, but was able to recover without serious alarm and the only other concern came when substitute Niall Stillwell sent a header forward on the left where Coelho got to the ball to clear just ahead of Nelson-Roberts, who felt the full force of his challenge and limped off in the 88th minute. Electing not to put O'Donovan into the outfield, we had used our other four substitutes and so finished the remainder of the match with ten men.

The visitors, as you might expect with the player advantage, held the balance of the possession in those final minutes and another substitute Anthony Nazareth had to head the ball off the goal line after Witter had punched the ball against an opponent which had then looped up, while Ethan Brazier picked up a late yellow card for two fouls in quick succession. Nunes had the final word with a swerving strike from thirty yards, but Coelho kept the ball out and the final whistle confirmed our progress to the last 32 of the competition, which is scheduled to take place around the middle of October.

This was our fifth win in six matches and it was just a shame that only 40 spectators were in attendance; our smallest home crowd since February 2020 when we were playing our home matches at the remote High Road ground in Chipstead. I was provided with various excuses for the small number, ranging from Sky TV (when isn't there a match on Sky?) and that they had been refused permission by the League to reduce the entry cost, but I don't buy this at all. The League has a minimum entry rule, but we already charge well over that amount and could easily have reduced it at any time without requiring permission.

Quite simply, there is always an excuse or something being "spun" at our club, and there remains no sincere attempt by anyone in an official position to get more of our own supporters in. There are a number of things they could do, and engaging with the ones they currently have would be a start; something they have failed to do over the last three years. A few random pictures of player huddles on Instagram might get a few "likes", while a few Colts coming along on a few Saturdays might boost the numbers artificially, but neither help our short term plight. Three long-serving supporters were present at this match, who have in recent years all been on the Club Committee and were keen to help, yet were forced off because they held some different opinions to those who do not want to hear them. This remains a huge mistake by those currently running the club, who seem to think that they are not answerable to supporters. Whilst a new ground, if it ever occurred, would undoubtedly bring in new support for a while, you have to ask how the club would retain them for more than a few months once the novelty has worn off.

We host Horley Town on Saturday in an important League match; a club that have engaged with their local community in recent months and had two attendances well over 500 at the end of last season because they visited and invited all their local school children in with their parents. Whilst it is slightly more difficult for our club to do this as we can't recoup anything for the bar and catering, a crowd of this number would make a huge difference. Horley's attendances have been similar to ours in recent seasons, so there is no reason why we couldn't adopt a similar idea, and right now they would see a good team in decent form, which always helps!

Epsom & Ewell: Faebian Witter, Ethan Brazier, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Reece Tierney, Toby Young, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Luke Taylor, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Sean Anderson for Oblitey (13), Fabian Nunes for Taylor (54), Anthony Nazareth for Young (69), Niall Stillwell for Dundas (81)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk