EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
For the community, by the community. A not-for-profit service

19th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

Up to £1 where sold

ISSN 2753-2771

Epsom and Ewell’s 11 to 9 win 1 to 0

22 January 2025

Epsom and Ewell 1-0 Spelthorne Sports. Combined Counties League – Premier Division South. Tuesday 21st January 2025.

It was hard not to feel sorry for the visiting Spelthorne Sports team on Tuesday evening at the KGF. Well aware of their precarious league position, they battled throughout the match and held their own for much of the contest, only to have to replace their keeper due to injury and end up with just nine men after a pair of dismissals, yet it took a 96th minute goal from Craig Dundas to finally end their resistance as we defeated them by a goal to nil in an attritional encounter at the KGF.

It was interesting to see Kevin Kardel back in goal for the Salts, seeing as he had only tweeted his goodbyes to our club four days previously, but an injury to Dan O’Donovan required him to return and he had a fairly quiet evening, which leaves his stats for the club currently standing at an impressive 66.7% of clean sheets! We made three other changes from the VCD match and welcomed back Anthony Nazareth and Luke Miller to the starting eleven along with Nathan Best, who had been unavailable for the last two matches because he was cup-tied. Nazareth was involved in the first nervous moment of the match for supporters who collectively held their breath for a minute when he appeared to bring a Spelthorne striker down in the area, but the referee was happy that no foul had been committed and play went on.

The remainder of the first half was played out mainly in midfield. Conrad Essilfie-Conduah struck from distance, but it was an easy save for Henrey Podle in the Spelthorne goal. At the other end Adam Green picked up a yellow card for upending a visiting player near the edge of the penalty area, but the free kick was sent over Kardel’s crossbar.

The only real chance of any kind in the first half came almost by surprise as Best tried his luck from long range. His attempt to lob the keeper didn’t appear to be working as the ball actually landed in front of him, but it bounced up and the keeper missed it completely with the ball just grazing the face of the crossbar on its way out for a goal kick. It would have been an embarrassing way to concede, but the teams went in goalless at the break. Here’s a quick stat for those of you who like such things; we have not scored a League goal in the first thirteen minutes of any match all season!

The second half opened up with a scare as the visitors fashioned a good chance just two minutes into the second period, but screwed the shot across the face of goal when they really should have hit the target. It looked like that would cost them in the 53rd minute when the match took a turn in our favour after one of our players was tugged in the area as we tried to reach a right wing Miller delivery. No one really appealed, yet the referee awarded a penalty and then gave their defender Shaun Preddie a second yellow card, to go with the card he had picked up early in the match. Kendall stepped up but scuffed the spot kick straight at Podle who made the save. We have just one goal from a penalty all season, which came back in August at Phoenix Sports.

The drama wasn’t over though as Podle appeared to injure himself in making the save and required treatment. Although he continued, he went down again a few minutes later after keeping out a Green volley and was replaced on the hour. Despite the addition of Dundas from the bench and a strike from Kendall that was deflected just wide, it didn’t stop the visitors from making a good fist of things and a mêlée in our penalty area concluded with a shot just wide of Kardel’s left hand post. All of a sudden we had some defending to do and Nicolas Bostan headed a dangerous ball away with Kardel having to punch the next delivery clear. Then a free header bounced kindly in front of Kardel from fairly close range.

This was becoming a little embarrassing. To find ourselves pushed back by the team rooted to the foot of the table despite holding a man advantage was concerning. We were holding more of the ball, but passes kept going astray and although the surface was not great, we created little, although a high ball in from Green was headed just beyond the far post out of a crowd of players.

In the 88th minute our left back Kionte-Gillfillian-Waul was brought down by Daniel Watts and although the referee allowed our advantage, he soon had to stop play as it became apparent that the two players were clearly not happy with each other, to put it mildly. Then we saw something I don’t believe I’ve ever seen before as our man picked up a yellow for the “afters” only to then see the referee say quite clearly to Watts that he was getting one booking for the foul and one for the afters. A double yellow card! The visitors couldn’t quite believe it and we would be up against nine men for the remaining period of time, which turned out to be nearly eight minutes of added time.

And in the sixth minute of that time we finally broke through. A high ball in from the right hand side that may have been delivered by Bostan was knocked forward by Kendall where Dundas reached the ball ahead of the replacement keeper. People who were a little closer than I advised that our man may have controlled the ball with his hand as it bounced up, but then with his next touch he fired it into the roof of the net from a couple of yards for the winner.

The visitors certainly appeared on the receiving end of most of the rough decisions in this match, but I suppose that’s what happens when you are at the foot of the table. I don’t believe that either team really did enough to say they deserved the win, even though we held the balance of possession, particularly after the first dismissal, and it could be argued that if Spelthorne play with that sort of spirit for the rest of the season then they may stay up, but they also failed to take the

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ISSN 2753-2771

chances that they had and sit well adrift now. I cannot see a way back for them this season.

From a playing perspective, the commitment was definitely there and I'm sure people will point to the playing surface, but we wouldn't have found a way past most of the teams in our League on this performance. The good news is that we moved up a couple of places to sixteenth as a result of this win and are just two points away from Sheerwater in twelfth with five games in hand! More relevantly we are now 17 points clear of Spelthorne Sports and 12 clear of Balham with two games in hand. It's going to take a massive turnaround for either of those clubs to catch the lower midtable pack, which I'm sure will be a relief to a number of those clubs, including ourselves!

Epsom & Ewell: Kevin Kardel, Niall Stillwell, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Nicolas Bostan, Anthony Nazareth, Luke Miller, Conrad Essilfie-Conduah, Will Kendall, Nathan Best, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Craig Dundas for Essilfie-Conduah (62), Tobi Falodi for Nelson-Roberts (81)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

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