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

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

Up to £1 where sold

ISSN 2753-2771

Face saved by late rally

26 February 2024

Epsom & Ewell FC 3-4 Alton. Combined Counties League – Premier Division. Saturday 24th February.

A competitive and entertaining, if niggly encounter at the Madgwick on Saturday ended with visitors Alton scraping a win by four goals to three after a couple of late strikes from our boys gave us a hope of pinching a point right at the end. It wasn't to be though and to be honest, if we had, it would have been harsh on our opponents, who were well in control in the first half and should probably have been out of sight by the break anyway, even if the second period was more even. The fightback did at least help us with our goal difference and who knows how important that might prove to be for both teams at the end of the season.

Alton remain solid bets for one of the four playoff spots after this victory and were well on top for large periods, with one of the biggest differences between the two teams being the quality of service into the danger areas. Alton were able to get down our flanks on a regular basis and sent the ball in for the big men in the box which caused us trouble all day long, while our opportunities and in particular our set pieces were really poor in this match. However, it is impossible not to ask if things would have been different had a key flashpoint not been better dealt with, and yes, regrettably I do have to question the performance of our match officials a little after this encounter.

With many other matches called off and even with a number of travelling supporters, our attendance was advised as an extremely disappointing 68. Yes, results haven't been great, but using the club's figures we averaged 92 in the League last season (110 if you include the playoffs) while this season we average 81, despite larger away support and more local matches. Our club doesn't currently engage with the few really loyal supporters it has and our match programme doesn't even welcome them to the ground any more. The player stats within it were also wildly inaccurate and it even carried a full page advert for our "home" match this coming Tuesday, when in fact we are away! Our club recently advised on Twitter that much hard work is being done by our Committee, yet all of this "work" is apparently deemed too important to tell mere supporters what it is, while the attention to detail in the limited club output is really poor. The club actually has one fairly big story which I'm told will be announced very shortly, but even this has been an open secret on the circuit for the last three weeks!

We only made two changes from our fine win at Camberley as Rory Edwards was unavailable and was replaced by Reggie Savage, making his first start, while our goalkeeping turnstile rotated for the fifth straight week with the addition of new keeper Shay Honey who played against us for Spelthorne Sports back in October. Whilst we had five keepers in four matches almost exactly a year ago, this is the first time in club history that we have started five different ones in consecutive matches. Honey performed well on his debut and it is hoped that our Management have now found someone they are happy with between the posts, although alarmingly once again we only named four substitutes.

After a fairly even opening ten minutes we had the first strike at goal, although Savage's strike was well kept out by Lewis Mees in the Alton goal before anyone noticed that the offside flag had been raised anyway. The visitors started to gain the ascendency and opened their account in the 22nd minute with a deep corner that was met with an unmarked downwards header from close range by Ryan Stepney that Honey had no chance of keeping out. A combination of keeper and defenders blocked another chance on goal minutes later. We had an opportunity in the 27th minute after the tricky Sirak Negassi was brought down some twenty yards out, but the subsequent free kick was probably one of the worst in our history as Nick Wilson stuttered over taking it, before being replaced by regular taker Adam Green who then ballooned the strike way over the bar!

However, the next issue in this match came when Jerry Antwi picked up a facial injury on the half hour. Having seen the video of the incident it was really clear that Pat Cox raised an elbow above his head and it clattered into our player's head. The bright orange sleeved arm was really clear to see, even though the video was taken from sixty yards away, yet the referee who was much closer, didn't even award a free kick for the assault that absolutely warranted a red card. Insult was added to injury when a clearly incensed Antwi also had to be replaced by Ayran Kugathas and Wilson made his views clear, only to find himself in the sin-bin as a result! The number one priority for a match official has to be the protection of the players and it wouldn't surprise me if during the injury break, the referee realised he had got this one wrong as his performance was very shaky from this point with both teams taking the opportunity to appeal for almost everything from that point onwards.

With one of our defenders off the field for ten minutes we looked very vulnerable and the only Epsom person winning a header during this period was long-serving supporter John Bonner who headed the ball back into play from the sidelines! Green was alert to clear the ball off the line from another free header that had beaten Honey, before a right wing cross was met by a superb half volley from Cox that Honey tipped over. Whilst that corner was cleared, the visitors kept up the bombardment and a left wing cross from right out on the touchline was as good as any you will ever see in the Premier League, leaving Cox the simple task of nodding the ball in at the far post from a couple of yards out in the 45th minute. Whether Cox should still have been on the field was of course extremely debateable, but in the five minutes of injury time

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd.
Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY

ISSN 2753-2771

that followed, we were grateful to Honey for making two further good stops in that time. We were very fortunate to be only two goals down at the interval.

The second half had to be better if we were going to get back into this match, but that's exactly what happened. An early chance for Ethan Nelson-Roberts was blocked before Savage drove the rebound just wide from the edge of the area and whilst Alton had an appeal for a penalty after a header on goal struck Green's arm, it would have been extremely harsh had it been given. As we entered the 53rd minute Savage chased down a ball in midfield, winning the tackle and setting up Negassi to streak down the right wing. We were a bit short of options in the middle, so he tried to cut back onto his left foot and was brought down in the area as he did so, earning a rare and uncontested spot kick that Wilson tucked away a minute later to give us hope.

We had to make an adjustment just before the hour as Ethan Brazier limped off, and with Luke Miller coming on we had to move a few players around to accommodate. This took a little bit of time to bed in and we found ourselves being pushed back, although there was time for an Alton player to volley the ball away after it had already crossed the touchline, which as regular supporters will recall, earned our Captain Wilson a yellow card just seven days previously! However, we were grateful to Honey again as another ball in from the right was struck at goal and turned away by our debutant keeper. Unfortunately our defence had little chance in the 66th minute as we were pushing forward, but lost the ball in midfield and the counter attack was brutal, sending the ball inside the advanced Kugathas, by now playing at right back, with the square ball in being knocked in from close range by former Camberley favourite Jamie Hoppitt to make it 3-1.

Alton missed a good chance with a close range header before Wilson picked up a yellow card for a foul. Moments later someone took revenge on him, leaving him to require treatment, but the referee didn't want to know how it occurred, even ignoring an Assistant who was flagging on the far side. Then in the 80th minute Tijani Eshilokun unwisely chose to speak out to the referee after Nelson-Roberts was pulled up for a foul out on the Alton right wing and found himself having a ten minute breather as a result. As with our first half sin-bin we then conceded while short handed as the free kick was met by another close range finish, this time giving Staples his second goal of the match and giving the visitors an probably unsurmountable 4-1 lead in the 82nd minute.

Oddly enough we then produced our best ten minutes of the match and Negassi was pulled down right on the edge of the area by Archie Larkum who picked up a yellow card. Whilst the free kick from Green from wide out wasn't a very good one, it squirmed through the wall and was diverted goalwards from six yards by Wilson, completely deceiving Mees at his near post and giving us a second goal in the 87th minute. We continued to press and Negassi sent in a powerful shot from 20 yards which had a lot of swerve on it. Mees did well to parry the strike but Miller was on the loose ball in a flash and as Mees spread himself expecting Miller to strike at goal, our man held the ball up skilfully before strolling round the prostrate keeper to tap in from a couple of yards to make the score a scarcely believable 3-4!

With that goal coming in the 90th minute there were probably about seven additional minutes to play, but even with the reappearance of Eshilokun we were unable to engineer any further real chances. Instead the game continued in its niggly way and wasn't helped by some strange decisions, firstly when Kugathas was pulled back yet no card was issued, and then bizarrely when an Alton player fell to the ground in the 96th minute. Was he wasting time or genuinely injured? Well, if you are a physio, you can't take that chance and our physio Alfie Wyld came on to look after what he felt was a potential head injury, only to then receive a yellow card from the referee for entering the field of play without permission! I am certain the referee thought he was carding an opposition physio and had no idea it was our man. Either way though, our man may now think twice before rushing to help someone on the field, which is a concerning development, although pretty much summed up the day for the man in the middle and he faced a fair bit of criticism from both sides as he departed the scene moments later.

For our boys it was a much improved second half, but Alton are a very solid side who play good football and get the ball into the danger areas well and consistently. We simply couldn't afford to give them a two goal head start and hope to get away with it. We face another tricky match at Knaphill on Tuesday evening but once this match is complete, the fixture list eases significantly after a brutal February where we have played many of the top teams. Although Colliers Wood United closed the gap between us and them to four points at the foot of the table after their pivotal 2-1 win at Sheerwater, I'm seeing enough from our boys in patches to remain confident that we can stay up, although it would be nice to see a full bench again and some better club advertising and information to try and welcome more people as we enter this critical phase of the season!

Epsom & Ewell: Shay Honey, Ethan Brazier, Jerry Antwi, Adam Green, Reece Tierney, Nick Wilson (c), Sirak Negassi, Thompson Adeyemi, Reggie Savage, Tijani Eshilokun, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Ayran Kugathas for Antwi (35), Luke Miller for Brazier (56), Mekhi Savage for R.Savage (68)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

© 2021-2026. No content may be copied without the permission of Epsom and Ewell Times Ltd.
Registered office: Upper Chambers, 7 Waterloo Road, Epsom KT19 8AY