EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
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12th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

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Fofahan makes FA fans as Epsom & Ewell progress in Vase

21 October 2024

Epsom and Ewell FC 3-1 Berks County. Isuzu F.A. Vase – First Round. Sunday 20th October 2024

Just 6 days before the 50 year anniversary of our very first F.A. Vase match against Reigate Priory, we played our 94th match in that competition against a new opponent in Berks County FC; a club formed as recently as 2009 and playing in the North Division of our League, and we were good value for our 3-1 win at a soggy KGF. For those interested, it was our 45th win in that time.

This result improved our recent form to just one loss in our last eleven matches and it is a shame that our club don't seem to be able to keep up with this off the field. They may claim this was a healthy looking attendance of 145 which, on the face of it, might seem ok for a Vase match, but when you bear in mind that there were only two other games at this or a higher standard anywhere in the Southern half of the country, we really missed an opportunity to pull in a crowd well over the 300 mark and it's really time that questions were asked about those people who are "running" our club, who appear uncaring or more worryingly oblivious to the opportunities they keep missing, instead believing that bringing in about fifteen of the Colts and a few of their parents each week is somehow sufficient to tick the "family club" box. Throw in a number of unanswered requests on the club Twitter site relating to whether there was going to be an inspection, which was a perfectly valid question following our postponement on Tuesday and you wonder whether our club really do care about your attendance at these matches. And in case anyone is wondering, yes, I have offered my services on many occasions.

There was only one person connected with the club who seemed to show a bit of energy and he was the chap on the tannoy system. Maybe he will even benefit the club, once he can actually get our own players names right!

The club held a minute's applause for supporter Peter Mitchell before the kick off. Whilst he may have been deserving of a minute's recognition as he was a fairly loyal supporter over the two and a half seasons he was following us, I see no reason whatsoever for any supporters or club officials to receive this fairly recent fad of a minute's applause. In my opinion, a minute's silence should be sufficient, with applause given only to former players and maybe some Managers. Having said that, our club never even bothered to hold a minute's acknowledgement of any kind for recently passed strikers Gerry O'Rourke and Ben Forey, the latter of whom even sits on our goal scoring Hall of Fame, so it will be interesting to see what happens next time one of these tributes is required at an Epsom match.

We made four changes from our recent 2-2 draw against Fleet Town. Ethan Brazier was fit again and resumed at right back in place of the absent Niall Stillwell, while David Romer came in for Callum Wilson who had suffered a small injury issue at Thursday's training session. Faebian Witter came in between the posts ahead of Dan O'Donovan, while further forward we had a debut for Kailan North who had recent spells with Colliers Wood United and Banstead Athletic. He came in for the cup-tied Jason Bloor, who had made an appearance for Langley earlier in the competition.

As the pre-match rain eased, it became apparent that the match was not starting on time. For those who were wondering why this was, as the club chose not to advise the reason, it was due to the late arrival of the visiting keeper, Harvey Rackley-Hayes. I'm not entirely sure why this delay was allowed for just one missing player, but either way we kicked off twenty minutes after the original start time in conditions that were far better than originally expected due to the virtual non-arrival in our area of Storm Ashley.

We had an early opportunity when Kionte Gillfillian-Waul sent in a good ball, but it zipped across the wet turf and Carl Oblitey couldn't quite reach it. Then in the 17th minute we probably should have taken the lead when a free kick was half cleared to Ethan Nelson-Roberts and whilst his shot was deflected for a corner, Adam Green's delivery into the danger area looked like it would be met by Anthony Nazareth, but he missed his header from close range, only for the ball to fall back to him just six yards out at an angle, from where he sent his shot over the bar.

The visitors volleyed a corner wide at the near post, but we were back on the attack soon after and a deep Fofahan cross resulted in a drop from Rackley-Hayes, but as the loose ball was drilled into the net by Nelson-Roberts, the whistle blew as the referee felt that the County keeper had been fouled. It was a soft one for sure, but in the 26th minute we went ahead anyway after a poor back pass from Will Edwards was intercepted by Fofahan and he drew the keeper before slotting the ball between his legs and into the net from just inside the penalty area.

However, within two minutes of making the breakthrough, the visitors drew level as a deep right wing cross was met at the far post with a header back across Witter from George Gould. Our keeper got a hand to the ball but couldn't keep it

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ISSN 2753-2771

out.

Fofahan was giving the Berks County defenders a lot of trouble and he had a speculative effort from 25 yards that went wide, but in the 36th minute he struck the inside of Rackley-Hayes' left hand post from fifteen yards with the ball skewing across the goal and spinning out for a goal kick! Fofahan really should have scored here after he had broken through, but instead we went in at the break with the scores level.

I felt we had shaded the first half, but at 1-1, there was also the potential for a fifth straight 2-2 draw that no one would have wanted, as it would have meant that the tie would be decided on penalties instead! We then had an early scare in the second half as Brazier and Witter got in each other's way while trying to effect a clearance, but we just about got away with it and went back in front for the second time in the 55th minute after Brazier made tracks down the right, before cutting back and delivering a decent cross that Oblitey attacked. His header struck a defender but rebounded into his path and he drilled the ball low into the corner from just seven yards out, giving Rackley-Hayes no chance.

Fofahan forced a good save from a narrow angle by Rackley-Hayes before we had to reshuffle the pack after Gillfillian-Waul was replaced by Luke Miller with Fofahan moving to the left wing instead. This was our first substitution of the day, but by the end of the match all four of our starting defenders would be off the field! Romer would be one of those, but before he departed, he capped a fine performance with a run on the left wing and a low delivery in for Green to strike at goal, but Rackley-Hayes made a superb save with his right boot to keep the close range shot out.

Witter picked up a yellow card for time-wasting but in the 79th minute Gould went in high on Romer and received a straight red card for his challenge, which also caused the obligatory sixteen man scuffle! Toby Young came on in relief of Romer after his own spell out with injury and we made the game safe in the 86th minute with a great move down the right where Oblitey collected the ball and sent it square to the supporting Craig Dundas, but he cleverly dummied the ball which sold the defender completely and left Fofahan through on goal, although he still cut back to beat someone before drilling the ball low past Rackley-Hayes from 12 yards to make it 3-1 to the Salts.

There were more chances as the ten men tried to get back into the game, but we were picking them off and a clever pass put Fofahan through, although he chose to pass instead of shooting from eight yards and it came to nothing. I don't think anyone in the ground would have blamed our winger if he had tried to get his hat trick, but it was a selfless decision and he almost turned provider again in the fourth minute of injury time when his deep delivery from the left wing was headed in by Green from six yards, only for the offside flag to be raised against him.

Still, by the end of the match we were fairly comfortable winners and whilst we will see Berks County again in the League Cup in January, we now look forward to an appearance in the Second Round, or last 128, for the first time since 2017/18 when we were edged out 3-2 after extra time at Whitstable Town. The draw comes out around Monday lunchtime and there are some very good teams left in the draw that would be nice to avoid; Jersey Bulls, AFC Whyteleafe and Fleet Town amongst them, and I haven't even mentioned the top teams in Sussex and Kent yet (including Whitstable again!). But this is a competition in which we have a prominent history, so it's just great to still be involved in it, fifty years after that very first amazing run.

Epsom & Ewell: Faebian Witter, Ethan Brazier, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), David Romer, Anthony Nazareth, Ali Fofahan, Craig Dundas, Carl Oblitey, Kailan North, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Luke Miller for Gillfillian-Waul (59), Conrad Essilfie-Conduah for Nazareth (64), Toby Young for Romer (84), Luke Taylor for Brazier (91)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

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