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From 0-0 draw to 6-1 triumph

20 September 2022

Today we catch up with two match reports for Epsom and Ewell FC courtesy of Richard Lambert.

Forest Row 0-0 Epsom & Ewell – abandoned after 82 minutes – Southern Combination League – Division One
Wednesday 14th September 2022. Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

Despite holding the balance of possession in the match against Forest Row at their temporary ground of Oakwood FC, we rarely looked like scoring and with the match heading towards a goalless draw, the contest was cut short following an 82nd minute injury to Andy "Woody" Hall, which I'm informed was provisionally diagnosed as a break to one of the bones in his lower leg. Although I don't have stats for injuries, it feels like decades since we had a player suffering a broken leg and we wish Woody all the best for a speedy recovery.

It was way back in 1938 that we last won on this date and in my mind I had already written the headline. "Epsom return to the top of the table, winning for the first time on this date since the Queen was merely a Princess!" Alas it was not to be, and we actually fell one place to sixth in the table, although will retain this match in hand for now while we await a date for the rearranged fixture.

On a chilly evening that reminds you that Autumn is on its way, the players gathered together for an immaculate minute's silence in respect of our late Queen. In terms of personnel, Hall came in for Aaron Bogle, while further forward Nick Wilson, Adam Grant and Josh Owen were in the starting line-up at the expense of Ricardo Fernandes, Gavin Quintyne and Jaevon Dyer, although all three were on the bench and would join the action later. Meanwhile in the absence of the suspended Gideon Acheampong, Brad Peters took the armband and was by some distance our best player tonight.

In truth very few players enhanced their reputation in this match. On a tricky surface, albeit one where we had coasted to a five goal win over Oakwood only a fortnight earlier, we overplayed the ball in the first half and then went far more direct in the second, yet created very few real chances with either tactic over the course of the ninety minutes.

Our opponents didn't fare any better and we rarely looked in serious danger, although Matt Walton had to be aware to make a good block from a header in the 26th minute. We had a couple of shots on target by this point from Owen and Richard Pingling, but neither caused the home keeper much alarm. Our first really good opportunity came from a Peters run which was unfairly ended on the edge of the penalty area and Ryan Smith's strike to the far corner was well kept out by the diving keeper on the half hour.

As the half came to a close we started to put more pressure onto the home side, but Owen's shot was half blocked which took the sting out of it and then Smith's free kick was headed back into the danger area by Peters, where Owen headed over from close range. The hosts put a header wide from a good position before Jubril Adamson poked a shot just wide from twelve yards and the teams went in goalless at the break.

Going down the slope in the second half I still felt we would break through and go on to win, but it was Forest Row who began to grow into the match and had a few long range shots at our goal, Walton tipped one wide for a corner, while another just cleared our crossbar. Fernandes and Dyer joined the action on the wings but still we couldn't find a way through.

Wilson struck a low fizzing drive inches wide of the far post before Dyer had our best chance just after the hour, latching on to a pass through the defence and sending his defender the wrong way, but after doing the hard work and with only the keeper to beat, he lost his balance and never really got a shot in, stumbling over the ball which dribbled through to the grateful keeper. You begun to wonder if this wasn't going to be our day and those fears were confirmed after Peters made a mazy run through defence, only to clip the ball back across goal, again missing the far post by inches.

Wilson picked up a yellow card in the 82nd minute for persistent fouls, but the game never restarted as the referee was then made aware that Hall was lying in the middle of the field in considerable discomfort. It looked like it had been an innocuous contact, but after a few minutes it was apparent that he wasn't getting up any time soon and after twelve minutes with no sign of an ambulance to this point, the referee chose to abandon the match.

This was only the second time in club history where we had an abandonment for a player injury, following a similar situation against Egham Town back in April 2008 up at Banstead Athletic. That match was rearranged and despite rumours of this result being allowed to stand, a replay will surely be ordered. As an example, last season Worthing United v Storrington was abandoned in the 90th minute for a player injury, yet had to be contested again, and whilst our abandoned match at Dorking Wanderers Reserves was allowed to stand, the circumstances of that one were completely different! Actually, the fact that the match will be rearranged was probably the only positive to take from the evening as it would give us another opportunity to win the three points. In the meantime I can confirm that everyone's appearance will be recorded as a competitive fixture in accordance with all other abandoned matches in our history.

Epsom & Ewell: Matt Walton, Johnny "Sonic" Akoto, Zach Powell, Ryan 'Butch' Smith, Brad Peters (c), Andy "Woody" Hall, Richard Pingling, Nick Wilson, Jubril "Jibs" Adamson, Josh Owen, Adam Grant

Subs: Jaevon Dyer for Adamson (56), Ricardo Fernandes for Pingling (56), Gavin Quintyne for Owen (80)

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Epsom & Ewell 6-1 Wick Southern Combination League – Division One Saturday 17th September 2022

We registered our fifth straight League win on Saturday as top of the table Wick visited Fetcham Grove and received a bit of a hiding as we ran up a 6-1 victory which, coupled with other results on the day, enabled us to rise from sixth place to take our opponent's position at the head of the table. We currently have the highest number of goals scored and the best goal difference, as of course was the case in our division last season, even though it would prove only good enough for sixth place in the final reckoning. This time I have a feeling that this might be different.

In truth this was a strange match, which started slowly and was played at quite a slow tempo, which enabled our boys to show what they could do, particularly in the early stages of the second half when we were dominant. However, for large parts of the match there wasn't a lot between the sides, even though we did look more dangerous throughout and in Jaevon Dyer we had the best player on the park, providing a constant threat to the opposition and eventually winning a penalty in the final seconds of the first half that put daylight between the teams at the break and arguably allowed us to express ourselves freely in that second period.

In terms of personnel, the only bit of bad news was that Club Captain Gideon Acheampong remained suspended, due to Wednesday's match at Forest Row being abandoned and therefore not counting as his one game off. However, Johnny "Sonic" Akoto continued in his place and such is the strength in depth with this squad that it proved a seamless transition. Aaron Bogle came in for the Andy Hall, whose bad injury on Wednesday led to the abandonment and will keep him out for some time. Also returning to the starting eleven alongside Dyer were Athan Smith-Joseph, Gavin Quintyne and Ricardo Fernandes, so Richard Pingling, Jubril Adamson, Josh Owen and Adam Grant returned to the bench after starting in Wednesday's underwhelming performance. Finally, Steve Springett remained unavailable after his injury at Worthing United but the cast will be off shortly and he was kicking a ball in the warm up, so it won't be long before he is pressing for a recall.

The afternoon commenced with another impeccable minute's silence for Queen Elizabeth II and this was followed by something that may well become a new tradition at Fetcham Grove; that of counting the crowd! Our club have recently taken the sad step of inflating the size of the gate in a misguided attempt to show that support is increasing, even though the only news the supporters get told, comes from this website. For the record, three independent counts put the attendance at 87. Performances like this one will surely lead to an increase in support, but until this practice stops, the crowd number will be recorded here.

It was clear right from the start that the visitors were playing a very high line at the back, which meant that a number of our early passes ran through to their goalie, playing on the edge of his penalty area in a sort of sweeper/keeper role. This high line had a direct effect of compressing the play into midfield and provided proof to me, which some people doubted, that Zach Powell's opener was a genuine strike at goal from fifty yards. Under normal circumstances, it might have been seen as an over hit pass from midfield, but because of the high line, it would have required a pass of no more that twenty yards. Powell's strike flew at least forty yards through the air, just cleared the retreating keeper and bounced into the net in the 14th minute. It was clearly deliberate.

We had a bit of a scare a few minutes later as Matt Walton's scuffed goal clearance from out wide went directly to Wick's danger man Dave Crouch in a central position, and from 25 yards out he struck at the vacant goal. The ball seemed to run for ages before it just went the right side of the post from an Epsom perspective.

Smith-Joseph provided a nice low ball across goal just ahead of Fernandes and with Dyer having done the same just before our goal, I was wondering about the wisdom of playing one of our hard-working midfielders in such an advanced position. This became more apparent in the 35th minute when Dyer produced a great run and low shot from 18 yards that hit the inside of the Wick post and bounced across towards Fernandes, but his attempt to knock in the loose ball from less than six yards was denied by a combination of defender and then keeper. However, Fernandes would have the last laugh by the game's end.

We had a brief stoppage a few minutes from the end of the half which seemed to come out of nothing, but led to a scuffle between a few players and accusations of foul play from both sides, but it all settled down and we began to get on top again. Dyer was causing real trouble now and he beat three men on another run before setting up Smith-Joseph for a strike, but it was an easy save for the keeper in the end. However, Dyer wasn't finished though and in the second minute of injury time, he chased another ball on the right, twisted and turned his defender who then brought him down. Ryan Smith then stepped up to score his first goal for the club from the penalty spot with the same accuracy he uses for his free kicks. The half time whistle blew immediately after the restart and we went in two goals ahead.

We came out for the second period in a more relaxed frame of mind and at times played some of our best football of the season. Smith-Joseph started to torment his opponents, pulling the ball back from the left, but Quintyne blazed over from just inside the area. Whilst Akoto was in my opinion harshly booked soon after, we extended our lead in the 55th minute when Smith-Joseph produced one of his trademark mazy runs and finished off with an unstoppable strike from ten yards into the roof of the net to make it 3-0.

If it wasn't game over then, it certainly was three minutes after that when a great pass from midfield broke the Wick high line and with their players claiming offside, Fernandes carried on his run, drew the keeper and then slotted the ball under him for our fourth goal. I had a fairly good view of this one, but even I couldn't say for certain whether he was onside or not. It was certainly a tight call. either way though the dog's abuse that was directed at the Assistant by at least three players was inexcusable and the Wick number 6 was rightly sent to the sin-bin. He could easily have been accompanied there by other team-mates.

While the visitors were down to ten men we extended our lead to five-nil in the 65th minute as Smith-Joseph got around the back of the defence on the left and his pull back was finished off superbly into the top corner by Fernandes from fifteen yards, who in one match doubled his goals tally for the club from two to four and proved me wrong in the process for suggesting he was playing too far forward. Sorry Ricardo!

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The visitors returned to eleven men soon after, while we made a number of substitutions. Whether this disrupted our play is hard to say, but either way Wick pulled a goal back in the 77th minute as Ronald Kardos ran at goal and we stood off him, inviting him to shoot, which he then did into the far corner with Walton possibly unsighted at first. This was a pity but we bounced back in style four minutes later when a great pass from Pingling put Grant through the colander-like offside trap and he finished as clinically as Fernandes had earlier to make it 6-1.

In the final moments Crouch had a shot tipped over by Walton and Owen shot weakly from a good position but it made no difference as we were convincing winners by that time and while we now sit at the top of the table it should be pointed out that we have only played two home games and scored eleven times in those matches. Has anyone else in the country got a better home scoring record right now? Yes of course it is early days, and the performance at Forest Row on Wednesday is useful to remind us that we can still play poorly at times, but Saturday's win was more than just three points, it was a statement to the rest of the league. We are here and we don't intend to let it slip this season.

Epsom & Ewell: Matt Walton, Johnny "Sonic" Akoto, Zach Powell, Ryan 'Butch' Smith, Brad Peters (c), Aaron Bogle, Athan Smith-Joseph, Nick Wilson, Jaevon Dyer, Gavin Quintyne, Ricardo Fernandes

Subs: Josh Owen for Quintyne (72), Adam Grant for Smith-Joseph (72), Louis Chin for Akoto (76), Richard Pingling for Dyer (76), Jubril "Jibs" Adamson for Wilson (82)

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