EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
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12th November 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

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League victory takes Epsom & Ewell up 3 places

17 November 2024

Cobham 1-2 Epsom and Ewell. Combined Counties League – Premier Division South. Saturday 16th November 2024

Momentum is a funny thing! At times this season, we have found ways to lose matches that we ought to have taken points from, yet on Saturday we managed to take three points from high flying Cobham on their own ground, when we probably didn't deserve them. However, last week's Vase win has given the players some confidence and this may have been the difference in our 2-1 win.

This second win in a row, and our first in the League for eight matches dating back to September was achieved despite a continual rotation of our squad in recent weeks, with three more players making their debuts in this contest. Callum Wilson came in for Toby Young at the back, while Conrad Essilfie-Conduah came in for Craig Dundas who had an afternoon spent mostly on the bench. Will Kendall came in for Oblitey and looked much more his old self in this one, scoring the winner with one of the worst free kicks you'll witness!

We took the field at the Reg Madgwick Stadium in our yellow kit and kicked towards the main entrance end, which we didn't do that often in our season as tenants here, so I assume we lost the toss. Either way though we made a fast start and Kendall fed Luke Miller, only to see our tricky winger's shot on target well blocked by a defender, before Adam Green also saw his shot blocked and cleared in the opening ten minutes. We were doing most of the attacking, although our hosts forced Dan O'Donovan into a good low save soon after, with the follow-up shot blocked by Anthony Nazareth, playing against his old club.

We continued to press and an Ali Fofahan cross was just reached by Ryan MacLean in front of his keeper and the ball was cleared. Our boys were looking the more dangerous of the two sides at this stage and approaching the half hour a Fofahan corner was met by a glancing header from Kendall that hit the post and went away, with only our man ending up tangled in the net instead.

Elijah Simpson then got through, winning a one on one with Nazareth, but O'Donovan was out to smother the opportunity quickly. It also transpired that our defender had only been beaten to the ball as he had been injured a few minutes previously and his replacement at the back was Nicolas Bostan, who had joined us from Hampton & Richmond Borough in the last 24 hours.

However, by the time of that substitution we were already ahead, as another Fofahan corner required an intervention from Conrad Knight, who tipped the ball over his crossbar but from the next set piece, Fofahan sent the ball over to Ethan Nelson-Roberts on the left wing, and he cut inside onto his right foot before drilling the ball straight between the legs of MacLean and completely wrongfooting Knight as it flew into the bottom corner of the Cobham net from about twelve yards in the 39th minute.

Unfortunately, we held the lead for just five minutes before Cobham drew level with a good run down the right and delivery to the near post, where Derick Hayford was able to head the ball powerfully into the net from a few yards out via the crossbar. It was a proper centre-forward's header and they always seem to look more spectacular when they go in off the frame of the goal!

We went in at the break level, but within 55 seconds of the second half played Kendall was sitting on the bench as a result of something he said. The hosts clearly saw this as an opportunity and began to push us back. We had a lucky escape when Patrick Murray struck the ball wide from close range and had to make some timely defensive blocks, but Kendall came back on after serving his ten minutes and at that point I thought we would take control again.

But it didn't really work out that way. Cobham remained the more dominant of the two teams and at this stage it looked like a matter of when, not if they would take the lead. Wilson made a couple of great blocks and the game started to get broken up. That wasn't helped by O'Donovan needing a couple of sessions of treatment for an injury that had earned Charlie Alexiou a yellow card earlier. There would clearly be a fair amount of injury time required! Before that though the home side continued to press and a ball in from the right bounced straight into the path of a Cobham player who smashed the ball at goal, only for O'Donovan to make an astounding save to deflect the ball over the crossbar from close range.

Blessing Hombessa, late of Knaphill, joined the fray as a substitute ahead of Miller, but his first contribution was to lose the ball in midfield, leading to a Cobham counter attack that earned a corner. Fortunately though it came to nothing and his second contribution was far better as his pass put Kendall through with just MacLean to beat, and the defender brought him down on the edge of the penalty area, earning a card of his own. As Adam Green lined up to take the set piece in the 85th minute, Will Kendall ran in and smashed the ball straight at the wall instead, at what you might like to call "upper groin height"! Nine times out of ten this free kick would be blocked by the wall, but on this occasion it parted like the Red Sea and Knight was once again left with no chance as the ball flew into the net.

There were nine minutes of injury time, during which Cobham pushed for an equaliser, but their attacks came to nothing.

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ISSN 2753-2771

Kionte Gillfillian-Waul picked up an injury in the closing stages and was replaced by Jack Torbett, who became the third player to join us from Langley, but apart from one close range effort that went just over our bar it wasn't a particularly nervy ending and the final whistle confirmed that the points were heading to Epsom. For those who love a stat, this win was our first ever League win on this day at the ninth attempt in the last hundred years!

This victory also lifted us up three places in the League and helps to reinforce most people's belief that we are too good to go down. However, despite our performance, we had been struggling to pick up the points, so these were most welcome even if we have played better before this season and lost. We now visit Chipstead in pursuit of what would be our first ever League "double" against them. They go into our meeting having lost 7-0 at AFC Whyteleafe, but I'm sure that was just one of those days. Let's hope we can keep our momentum going against the Chips as our tour of former landlords continues on Tuesday.

Epsom & Ewell: Dan O'Donovan, Niall Stillwell, Kionte Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Anthony Nazareth, Callum Wilson, Luke Miller, Conrad Essilfie-Conduah, Will Kendall, Ali Fofahan, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Nicolas Bostan for Nazareth (40), Blessing Hombessa for Miller (74), Craig Dundas for Fofahan (83), Jack Torbett for Gillfillian-Waul (93)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

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