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Madness at the Meadow

15 November 2023

Sandhurst Town 4-4 Epsom & Ewell. Combined Counties League – Premier Division. Tuesday 14th November 2023.

A superb advert for the Combined Counties League took place on the excellent artificial surface at Bottom Meadow; the home of both Sandhurst Town and their larger neighbours Bracknell Town, as two fully committed teams shared eight goals in an all out attacking encounter that unfortunately spilled over at times and led to a pair of red cards as a result.

We made just the one change to the starting eleven from our win at Tooting & Mitcham United and this was enforced as Ethan Nelson-Roberts had issues reaching the venue. Luke Miller stepped up from the bench, while amongst the substitutes was the returning Nick Wilson, who was a part of our successful promotion side last season.

The home side opened proceedings with an early shot into the side netting but we were soon attacking at the other end with Tijani Eshilokun going close with a shot from the edge of the area after good work from Miller on the right. Miller then sent over a teasing cross that the extremely tall keeper Henry Pidgeon was just able to reach at the second attempt before Harvey Keogh then made the first save of the night as he was down well to make a stop that was then cleared. His next save in the 15th minute was an even better one as the referee played an excellent advantage and allowed Jose Sani to break through on goal but Keogh stood up well and blocked the shot from fairly close range.

However, Sani would only have to wait two minutes before opening his account as a left wing break was followed by a cross to the far post that was knocked in by the unmarked player from close range. We then had another worry when a dangerous ball was played in and Nick Inwugwu turned the ball out at the far post for a corner, although his clearance was about a foot wide of the post which was a little too close for comfort!

At the other end, Miller was fouled on the edge of the area, although Steve Springett's free kick was just inches over the bar from a central position. We were building pressure though and a wayward back pass caused Pidgeon to concede a corner. From Springett's touch back Eshilokun delivered a near post delivery and Thompson Adeyemi's deft header from eight yards out went across Pidgeon and into the far corner to level things up in the 34th minute. We then took the lead just three minutes later when a ball towards the edge of the area was reached by Jaan Stanley, just ahead of the advancing Pidgeon. He nodded the ball past the keeper and was just able to get to the ball ahead of covering defenders to clip the ball over them into the net from a couple of yards out to register his fourth goal for the club, but his first in open play.

As we approached the break Keogh made two fantastic saves. Firstly, he got down well to save a powerful thirty yard free kick that threatened to zip past him on the wet surface and then in injury time he reacted well to tip a dipping shot over the bar at full stretch. We went in at the break with a narrow 2-1 lead but the knowledge that we would surely need more goals if we were to win this match.

We opened up the second half well and Eshilokun's free kick deflected over the bar for a corner. From the Edwards delivery Pidgeon jumped to claim the ball, but Adeyemi jumped in front of him and nodded the ball just inside the post from three yards out to give us a 3-1 lead in the 48th minute. Things got better still six minutes after that as Stanley made a run on the left and sent over a delightful far post cross that Miller controlled before smashing the ball low and back across Pidgeon from six yards; the ball going in off the Sandhurst far post to make it 4-1!

However, there has hardly time to advise the description of the goals on Twitter (@EEFCOnline) before the hosts pulled a goal back as Keogh's clearance went straight to Dylan Ive who lobbed our keeper with a speculative effort from twenty-five yards that dropped over everyone into the far corner of the net in the 57th minute.

Despite being 4-2 up you could never say we were comfortably ahead, although the eleven men would probably have held on and maybe scored more. However, the match turned against us in the 63rd minute when Tommy Williams brought down Logan Coles just outside our penalty area and near the touchline. It was hard to see exactly what went on from a hundred yards away, but it looked as though there was a reaction from Coles and Williams retaliated to it, leading to our man receiving a red card and Coles getting a yellow. Unfortunately as it is the second dismissal of the season for Williams, he will face a four game suspension for this action.

Most concerningly the whole incident was unnecessary as we were leading at the time and this gave the home side added impetus. Despite a couple of substitutions with Ethan Charles-Brazier making his debut and Wilson coming on for his first Epsom action of the season, the deficit was halved in the 70th minute when substitute Harvey Seeman volleyed in an equaliser from a low right wing cross. Keogh then made another close range save but the home side were rampant at this point and Seeman broke the offside trap to slot past Keogh to level the scores at 4-4 just five minutes later.

However, there was no denying that the match had become a little bit niggly and a Sandhurst substitute was fortunate not to see a red card for a horrible foul on Adeyemi; the referee determining that the yellow card was sufficient. Then in the 88th minute Wilson sent in a powerful long range free kick that Pidgeon did well to parry away and as Miller battled for the ball with Coles out wide, the Sandhurst man brought ours down and then attacked him. This was surely the easiest decision of the night for the referee, and to be fair the red card was raised very quickly in the direction of Coles. The match would finish as a ten v ten contest.

The final chances of the match took place in our penalty area as Keogh made a couple of important blocks before their final chance of the night was headed wide and after five minutes of injury time had been played, the final whistle blew and everyone was able to take a breath again. Well, except for those who had to leave immediately to get their cars out of the nearby car park that was due to close in a matter of minutes!

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This was a breathless and pulsating end to end contest; one of the best Epsom matches I have watched in many years, and whilst you could look at this from a perspective of never wanting to lose a three goal lead, it has to be said that Sandhurst were well worthy of a draw over the ninety minutes and a point isn't such a bad position to be in as it takes us five points clear of the bottom club Colliers Wood United and with two matches in hand. Remember, regardless of tables you may see showing two clubs going down, only one club will be relegated this season, due to size increases to the Step Four Leagues for 2024/25. The two Management teams may not have enjoyed the openness of the play when a bit of control was needed to slow the game down, but it was a fantastic match for the neutrals!

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Tommy Williams, Nick Inwugwu, Steve Springett, Reece Tierney, Ollie Thompson, Luke Miller, Rory Edwards, Tijani Eshilokun, Thompson Adeyemi, Jaan Stanley

Subs: Ethan Charles-Brazier for Stanley (63), Nick Wilson for Springett (69), Sirak Negassi for Edwards (78), Ade Batula for Eshilokun (78)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

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