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Miller hat-trick saves Epsom and Ewell FC

1 April 2025

Spelthorne Sports 1-4 Epsom and Ewell FC. Combined Counties League – Premier Division South. Saturday 29th March.

It's like London buses; you wait eight matches for a win and then along come two at once! The same story could be applied to our little winger Luke Miller, who had scored 36 goals for our club previously, but not a single one since September, and yet his well taken second half hat trick was enough to break a fairly weak Spelthorne resistance as we won at the Sports Club by four goals to one, confirming our mathematical escape from relegation this season.

Maybe unsurprisingly, we stuck with an unchanged starting eleven for our meeting with the club at the foot of the League in the hope that momentum gained in Tuesday's win over Corinthian-Casuals would continue. Going into this contest we knew that a win would guarantee our survival at Step Five for 2025/26, but anything less would leave us looking over our shoulders at the fast improving Balham team.

We got off to a fine start at the Spelthorne Sports Club; a venue we have never lost at in five previous visits, and were ahead as early as the seventh minute after some early pressure led to the ball being passed around on the edge of the Spelthorne Sports penalty area and out of nowhere, Brendan Murphy-McVey struck a shot across home keeper Aaron Etukado with the outside of his left foot. It was a cultured and clinical finish and was also our new man's first goal for the club, having been unfortunate when hitting the post four days previously.

The home side were forced into an early substitution due to injury and after Jason Bloor was brought down on the edge of the area, Murphy-McVey's strike forced Etukado into a low save. Bloor sent a strike over the bar from distance and Toby Young headed wide from a deep Miller free kick. It was interesting to see the Spelthorne number ten Glenn Yala stumble in the penalty area and then receive a yellow card for simulation which looked harsh, before a card was issued in the direction of our bench for something that was said. Just before half time Ethan Nelson-Roberts saw his shot take a heavy deflection wide and from the corner Anthony Nazareth headed wide at the far post.

As the players went off at half time there was only really one team in it, but a substitution at the break worked instantly as Oliver Jovanovic came on and with just 20 seconds having elapsed, he tried his luck with the breeze now in his favour and it flew right into the top corner, leaving Sami Nabbad helpless.

A week or two ago this might have caused us to wobble, but the home side rarely challenged and we soon picked up where we had left off in the first half. There was time to see Craig Dundas trying a cheeky throw in off the back of a retreating opponent in an attempt to get the ball straight back, but he was pulled up for the foul throw! However, it didn't take much time before we restored our lead and it arguably came from an unlikely source. Miller had missed three good opportunities against Casuals on Tuesday and hadn't troubled the scorers for a few months, but this time he was far more clinical and when he ran on to Ethan Brazier's great pass over the top of a static defence, he ran in on goal before cheekily flicking the ball, again with the outside of his foot like Murphy-McVey had, to send the ball beyond Etukado's left hand and into the far corner of the net in the 64th minute.

We then posed a tricky problem for the referee when substitute Kionte Gillfillian-Waul made good ground on the left before colliding with the keeper. It wasn't clear to see who was at fault here, but despite our appeals, the man in black waved away the penalty appeals. Again though, it didn't matter as we made the game safe in the 80th minute. This time Gillfillian-Waul did well down the right flank and his pull back enabled Adam Green to strike a low shot at goal from just outside the area. Etukado got down to make the save, but couldn't hold on and Miller was there at the far post to firstly win the ball off a defender before tucking it in from a narrow angle just a couple of yards out.

Etukado was badly injured in making the save and required treatment for a lower leg injury before being replaced in some pain. This required the home side to throw in an outfield player and as they had used all their substitutes by then, they were also down to ten men as a result. I thought the same was going to happen to our Captain Green in the 89th minute after he needed treatment, as we had also used our subs by then, but he recovered to rejoin the action and Miller wrapped things up in the third minute of injury time with a cheeky lob from an angle, only twelve yards out, that went in off the far post to give him his third hat trick in Epsom colours, and his first one away from home after registering triples against Mile Oak and Billingshurst, both at our temporary home ground of Fetcham Grove in 2021/22.

Spelthorne will now take a season or more out in Division One of the Combined Counties League, having fallen away quite badly this season, while Corinthian-Casuals will surely dispense of their Manager at season's end having just about survived at this level, when they will have been hoping to bounce straight back. What I will say in our favour is that these two wins were pivotal and you can only beat who is in front of you. We'll get a better idea of whether we have really turned the corner on Tuesday against in-form Balham, but either way, assessing the performance is not really important right now; it was all about the points, and as it was at the end of last season we have made it count just when we needed to. The same could also be applied to Miller, who now jumps five places on our Club Hall of Fame list to 42nd after not moving for such a long time. I think he would agree, it was overdue!

Epsom & Ewell: Sami Nabbad, Ethan Brazier, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Adam Green (c), Toby Young, Anthony Nazareth,

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Luke Miller, Niall Stillwell, Craig Dundas, Brendan Murphy-McVey, Jason Bloor

Subs: Kionte Gillfillian-Waul for Stillwell (63), Ali Fofahan for Bloor (75), Jack Torbett for Murphy-McVey (83), Stefan Aiwone for Nelson-Roberts (85), Nicolas Bostan for Brazier (85)

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