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Not quite a “veni, vidi, vici” victory for Romans

1 October 2023

Tadley Calleva 1-0 Epsom & Ewell FC. Combined Counties League – Premier Division. Saturday 30th September 2023.

Ultimately our latest match was decided by a clinical Kieran Rodgers finish from an errant and arguably unnecessary Ollie Thompson pass in the 40th minute. However, this doesn’t tell the full story here as a resolute Epsom side more than held their own in this match and were most definitely worth a point against a Tadley side that had scored twelve goals in the last week.

In fact the **Romans**, so named because of the old Roman settlement of Silchester just down the road, probably thought this would be a fairly easy day at the office after their heavy FA Vase win on Saturday followed by a five goal romp against Sheerwater, who of course, we failed to beat two weeks ago. However that would not prove to be the case here as our boys ensured this would become a tight and competitive encounter between two evenly matched sides.

Many of our regulars were missing once again, although Zach Powell did return after a few games unavailable. He probably thought he would be eased in after being named on the bench, but an injury to Reece Tierney in the warm up forced our Manager’s hand and left us with only four other substitutes for the match. Additionally, Marlon Pinder and Sirak Negassi were absent and so Tino Carpene and Ade Batula came back into the starting line up, as did Ethan Nelson-Roberts at the expense of Jabari Ofosu-Hernandez with Ayran Kugathas moving from the left to his more regular position out on the right.

We started brightly and took the game to our hosts in the opening stages. George Owusu had a near post cross cut out from a dangerous position and then in the sixth minute Carpene set up Ade Batula for a low shot from the edge off the penalty area that took a slight deflection on its way and made the save by Tadley keeper Craig Atkinson even more special as he stuck out a right glove to keep it out when it threatened to creep under him. Atkinson has played against us on numerous occasions previously for Cove and Hartley Wintney amongst others and always performs well against us.

We forced another couple of half-chances as we continued to display the attacking threat from Tuesday’s League Cup match, but the home side gradually began to find a way around us and created a couple of opportunities of their own. Harvey Keogh dealt with the first of these fairly comfortably, although with the second, a weak punch nearly cost us as the ball fell for a Tadley striker whose shot was on target but blocked by Thompson Adeyemi amid futile shouts for handball.

We attacked again and Thompson’s far post header was on target but claimed easily by Atkinson, but we then had to defend for a few minutes after Powell cut his knee and was forced to leave the pitch for treatment and if we had conceded from one ball across the area, it would have been hard to swallow as I couldn’t see why the referee wasn’t allowing our man back on. Neal tried his luck from thirty yards as the home team seemed to be running out of ideas, but our set pieces weren’t any better with many deliveries either not getting past the first man, or way beyond all our players. We did have a good chance just after the half hour when a Nick Inwugwu ball towards the far post resulted in two defenders going for the same ball, which then fell kindly for Carpene, but his shot lacked real power and was easily claimed by Atkinson.

Next to try his luck was Nelson-Roberts whose corner was returned back to him out on the right, from where he cut in and struck at goal, but he missed the target with better options waiting in the centre.

It was beginning to look like a frustrating day for both teams when out of nowhere we conceded. Thompson out on the left played the ball square to where he thought Powell would be, only to give the ball straight to Rodgers who ran in on goal and gave Keogh no chance in the 41st minute. It nearly became two in first half injury time with a smart shot on the turn from Fragata, but Keogh was down well to turn the ball away as it was creeping inside his left hand post otherwise. Half time came with no one on either team particularly happy with the situation.

We made a change at the half with Jaan Stanley coming on in his favoured number ten position for Inwugwu as we reverted to a 4-3-3 which looked more like a 4-2-1-3 personally, and we had a good chance in the 48th minute when a ball across from Kugathas found Batula at the far post, but it was on his weaker left foot and he barely made contact; the ball dribbling through to Atkinson from six yards out. Then we were back on the defensive as Rodgers got through on their left but Keogh stood up well and made a good save from the close range strike. The game swung from end to end and Carpene and Stanley saw shots blocked in quick succession and then Kiyo Brown came on for Carpene and Stanley was moved from the “ten” to the centre-forward role after just twenty minutes.
Ofosu-Hernandez came on for Kugathas with fifteen minutes remaining and it was interesting to note that both he and Nelson-Roberts advanced more in this match when we were playing four at the back than they had in recent games where they had been wing backs! Still, we only really created half chances, the best of which came when Ofosu-Hernandez sent a deep cross over and Owusu jumped high to claim the header but couldn’t keep it on target.

In the 92nd minute Keogh stood tall again as he made a fine save, but we were unable to breach the opposition’s defences and had to accept our sixth straight League defeat. There have been signs of improvement in the last couple of games, but it is a little concerning that, Pinder apart, we haven’t seen any other new signings yet, as all of our other players have

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been at the club since the start of the season. We now enter a potentially pivotal three game stretch against teams at our end of the table as Balham and Colliers Wood United come to us before we go to Sandhurst Town a week later. On the evidence of the last two performances we should still have hope, but the fixtures get noticeably more difficult on paper after those, so it's now time for us to start picking up points or we will have a mountain to climb otherwise.

Epsom & Ewell: Harvey Keogh, Ayran Kugathas, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Ollie Thompson ©, Zach Powell, Nick Inwugwu, George Owusu, Rory Edwards, Tino Carpene, Thompson Adeyemi, Ade Batula

Subs: Jaan Stanley for Inwugwu (HT), Kiyo Brown for Carpene (66), Jabari Ofosu-Hernandez (74)

Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk

"Veni, vidi, vici" means "I came, I saw, I conquered" – attributed to Julius Caesar and refers to a swift and conclusive victory.

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