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Out of the Cup

21 August 2024

Epsom and Ewell 1-3 Hayes & Yeading United. Emirates F.A. Cup Preliminary Round. Saturday 17th August 2024.

We were defeated in our latest F.A. Cup match by Step Four Hayes & Yeading United FC at the KGF on Saturday, but I couldn't help wondering how different this match might have been, had we not had such an awful start to the contest.

In terms of personnel, Craig Dundas returned from honeymoon while Adam Green was suspended after his Guildford indiscretion, so Callum Wilson took on the Captain's armband for the first time in twelve months. Up front Kenny Antony came in for Carl Oblitey who was on the bench. On a hot day, a decent cup tie crowd of 160 were present to watch the action as we kicked off towards the Chessington end of the ground with a switch to four at the back for this match, maybe respecting the level of our opponents, or maybe just due to player availability, as yet again we failed to name a full bench.

The visitors started off with an early sighter from the edge of the penalty area that was just wide of Faebian Witter's left hand post, but the next chance fell to us in the sixth minute, and it was a really good one. Will Kendall robbed a defender and Fabio Nunes sent the loose ball into the stride of Antony. Arguably he had too long to think about it though and sliced his shot high and wide from just twelve yards.

When playing a team from a higher league, it is not rocket science to suggest that we must take the chances we get, as we may not get many. This was clearly highlighted within seven minutes by which time we had conceded twice! The first goal in the tenth minute was a real morale sapper as a harmless ball in from the right wing should have been gathered by Witter, yet despite being under no pressure, somehow the ball rebounded off him and worse still, it went behind him and into the net! The visitors credited the goal to their man Adrian Clifton, so we'll leave it at that. Three minutes later there was no disputing Clifton's second goal as he took a nice touch and followed it with a clinical volley from twelve yards that gave our keeper no chance.

It would be easy to think that this was game over, just thirteen minutes into the match. Indeed, after missing a chance and then conceding in such bizarre circumstances, morale could drop here, but to our credit we continued to work hard. However, maybe unexpectedly, we then had two more great opportunities within a matter of minutes, firstly when the visiting keeper Juliusz Pazio kicked the ball straight out to Luke Miller, just twenty yards out, who inexplicably couldn't control the ball and ended up knocking it straight back to the keeper!

A pair of cards, one for each team, followed midway through the half as both teams battled for the middle ground before Antony sent a good cross over, but with no one there to finish it off. As we approached the 40 minute mark Miller put over a great cross to the far post, but Antony's volley, with his admittedly weaker foot, flew into the side netting from twelve yards out. Witter was being kept busy too and he had to come out of his area to chest the ball clear, but the final Epsom chance came in injury time when Antony did well to rob his man and square the ball to Kendall, who got there first, but a defender was there just afterwards and his contact slowed the ball down on its way, allowing Pazio to clutch the ball, almost in slow motion, just a couple of inches from the line. We had created four great chances, yet were 2-0 down at the interval!

The second half was a little quieter in terms of real chances and our only real opportunity in the opening twenty minutes came on the hour when Miller did well on the right but the pull back to Nunes was met by a slice that a golfer would have been unhappy with, as the ball skewed across goal and out for a throw!

The visitors then extended their lead in the 63rd minute with a corner that was met by a strike from Adam Martin, only for Hani Bircheche to get a close range touch to the shot, giving Witter no chance. This was a little harsh on our boys and we deservedly reduced the deficit in the 74th minute when Nunes played a one-two with our newly introduced substitute Fabian de Lima and finished off the return pass into the left hand bottom corner from twelve yards. It was such a simple goal, but the first one in competitive action at the KGF in nearly four matches. De Lima looks quite a lively player and he had a great twenty minute cameo on his debut.

Witter made a smart near post save as time ticked down and ultimately we were unable to threaten the visitors further in this match. However, you couldn't help but wonder whether this match might have ended with a different winner if we hadn't started so badly. Ultimately, we never got the chance to see what our opponents would have done under a bit of pressure, but make no mistake, we will have to start taking our chances, starting on Tuesday at Sandhurst Town, who also lost in the F.A. Cup this Saturday.

Epsom & Ewell: Faebian Witter, Toby Young, Ethan Nelson-Roberts, Stefan Aiwone, Callum Wilson, Craig Dundas, Luke Miller, Axel Kodjo, Will Kendall, Fabio Nunes, Kenny Antony

Subs: Felipe de Lima for Kodjo (61), Carl Oblitey for Dundas (75), Ethan Brazier for Aiwone (78)

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