

Salts falter at final friendly

Leatherhead 3-0 Epsom & Ewell Pre-season Friendly – Stella Lamont Trophy Wednesday 3rd August 2022. Report Source: www.eefconline.co.uk Reporter: Richard Lambert

Tanners ease to victory. In five days we have faced two Isthmian League Step Four teams in Walton & Hersham and Leatherhead and it's fair to say there will be little between the pair as our landlords repeated the scoreline we suffered at the Elmbridge Xcel Sports Hub. As with the previous match, the Tanners could afford to miss a penalty too in their 3-0 win.

This match was listed as the Stella Lamont Trophy, named after our long-serving Club President. It is most unusual to name a trophy after someone who is still with us and indeed Stella very much is; celebrating her 94th birthday on 1st September! We also took the opportunity to show off the new kit for this season, which regrettably followed a trend of recent years in gradually becoming more white than blue, with our players almost appearing to wear white bibs across their chests!

As a larger number of players have now signed, I am able to refer to more of them by name and all eleven of our starters in this match have put pen to paper. How many of them will make the starting eleven on Saturday remains a challenge for our Management who used seventeen players and had four unused subs available too, not to mention four other signed players who were not present!

In reality this was a very similar match to our contest at Walton & Hersham, but there were a lot more goal scoring opportunities for both teams over the ninety minutes, as neither team earned top marks for their finishing. We made a bright start though and Jahobi Maher sent an early strike a yard over the bar before a Ryan "Butch" Smith free kick was headed at goal by Steve Springett, only to see the ball superbly tipped over by the Leatherhead keeper. This would prove to be our best chance of the match.

In response a tame shot from our landlords was dragged across goal, but they had more success in the 11th minute when we failed to deal with an extremely long throw in and the loose ball was drilled low past Matt Walton by Tarpey although our new keeper, who has played well in pre-season, did well to even get a hand on the shot.

We were back on the attack soon after and Athan Smith-Joseph produced a good run and cut inside his man, but fired a curling shot just over the bar from 15 yards. There were plenty more efforts on goal from either side, although most of them came from Leatherhead and as the half progressed our good start became more of a distant memory. A 37th minute far post header was a good opportunity for our opponents to extend their lead, but this was sent over the bar from fairly close range and the teams went in at the break with a 1-0 scoreline.

Smith-Joseph saw another effort just high and wide as we opened the second half, and Leatherhead nearly scored in the 58th minute after a deep corner was headed back across goal, but a low shot flew away off our post to safety.

We then had some half chances around the hour mark, firstly when Smith-Joseph's shot from the right was parried by the Leatherhead keeper, but not in the usual way, as the ball spooned up off him over the bar, dropping onto the roof of the net. Then from the corner Jubril "Jibs" Adamson was unable to deal with a Smith corner in a good position and the ball hit him and was cleared. A few minutes after this Smith struck a shot from at least thirty yards which cleared the bar by a couple of feet.

The game then stopped for six minutes while a stretcher was required for a Leatherhead player who looked in a lot of discomfort. We wish him well. On the pitch we made five substitutions, but we created less as the half progressed and conceded a second goal in the 75th minute as Tarpey latched on to a long ball in a bit too much space and clipped the ball over the advancing but exposed Walton. Walton was replaced by our other regular keeper, but he suffered a similar fate eleven minutes later when the Leatherhead number three made a fine run from the full back position and took a return pass before clipping the ball over our man for a very good goal.

Substitute Adam Grant had a late chance when he received the ball from a poor keeper clearance, but his effort from 40 yards was a few yards wide of the vacant target. For all our attacking, 3-0 was a little harsh at this point, but it nearly got worse as a clumsy foul led to a penalty, although the same post came to our rescue again and the deficit remained at three.

There is a school of thought that says friendlies against top Four sides will teach us little, compared to a match against a team of a similar level and I largely subscribe to that theory. However, these two defeats have produced some positives and we will also enter the League season with our feet firmly on the ground when we open up on Saturday at Shoreham.