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Salts get tangoed!

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Wallingford & Crowmarsh 3-0 Epsom and Ewell FC. Combined Counties League Cup – Third Round. Tuesday 18th February 2025.

On a chilly evening in deepest Oxfordshire we departed the Combined Counties League Cup at Third Round stage with little more than a whimper as Wallingford and Crowmarsh defeated us 3-0 and it could have been worse.

Forgive the 90s reference in the headline, but “Wally” as they are known by their supporters were resplendent in their orange and black kit, while we were wearing yellow and without being too harsh, it looked like oranges v lemons for large parts of the match.

We did at least have a four man bench for this cup tie, and following the departure of Will Kendall, we had one new face and one familiar one as Naseem James and George Owusu would both join the action later.

Unfortunately and with ironic timing, Carl Oblitey, who appears to have won the starting centre forward battle with Kendall was absent for this match, and it left a huge hole to fill up front. With Jason Bloor also unavailable as he was cup tied, Sean-Michael Anderson took on the 9 shirt, but we were toothless across the board all night, with Ali Fofahan, Luke Miller and Ethan Nelson-Roberts all equally unable to make any impact. We managed a sum total of four shots on target, but, aged 58, I could have saved all of them myself as they all dribbled towards the grateful Wally custodian, Alex Pratt.

The match started fairly evenly at first. The home side hooked a shot wide of our post, while Anderson saw his low shot blocked. Nelson-Roberts gave Pratt his hardest save of the match, with a shot from an angle that he had to move to his right to collect. However we went behind in the 20th minute when a pull back from the right wing was scuffed across goal by James Williams, yet somehow the ball crept in at the far post. As Pratt remarked to us behind the goal, “if he had hit it properly, it wouldn’t have gone in!”

Anthony Nazareth then made a fine defensive challenge to deny the hosts on a break and at the other end, a deep ball into the penalty area was headed back across goal by the ageless Craig Dundas although Adam Green’s strike was scuffed at goal. Green was making his 50th appearance for our club, although I doubt any of our players will remember this match for very long.

As we approached the break, Kevin Kardel made a good block, and then Callum Wilson made an even better one on the goal line as he denied the home striker with his chest that inevitably drew shouts for a penalty, but these were waved away. Anderson sent over a decent delivery in injury time but Fofahan miskicked and we went in at the break a goal down.

We had been better in a lot of recent second half performances and started brightly here with a delivery into the box that was headed up by a Wallingford defender and then claimed by Pratt. However, we created little else of danger in this period and in the 62nd minute a free kick was flicked on to Williams and he deftly lifted the ball over the exposed Kardel from just inside the penalty area to double their lead. Five minutes later another home player was sandwiched in the penalty area with Miller picking up a card for the greater part of the challenge and Williams completed his hat trick a minute after this with an unstoppable strike into the top corner to make the score 3-0.

Warren had seen enough by this point and went with a rare quadruple substitution which also included our two subs from Saturday, Ethan Brazier and Campbell Scott. Owusu made an instant impact, getting to the left wing touchline and sending a good cross over, but we were unable to get on the end of it and the home side hit the post as we began to fall away. Other shots were blocked by our defenders as we battled to keep the score down to three, but the contest was already over.

Much has been made of our cup form this season, but it is worth noting that all except one of our wins were secured at home. Our three defeats have all been against strong opposition in Carshalton Athletic, VCD Athletic and now Wallingford and Crowmarsh but even so, it is maybe just as well that our one remaining Cup tie is at home!

Epsom & Ewell: Kevin Kardel, Callum Wilson, Kionte-Gillfillian-Waul, Adam Green (c), Anthony Nazareth, Jack Torbett, Luke Miller, Craig Dundas, Sean-Michael Anderson, Ali Fofahan, Ethan Nelson-Roberts

Subs: Campbell Scott for Anderson (69), George Owusu for Miller (69), Naseem James for Torbett (69), Ethan Brazier for Gillfillian-Waul (69)

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