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Salts rescue a point from the Kiln

10 March 2024

Redhill 1-1 Epsom & Ewell FC. Combined Counties League – Premier Division. Saturday 9th March 2024

An 85th minute equaliser from Zach Ingham-Wright earned us a well-deserved point from a 1-1 draw at Kiln Brow after the hosts had taken the lead early in the second half. Although they put us under pressure after an even first half, I felt we were worth a draw for our display in the final fifteen minutes, during which time we equalised and very nearly pinched all three points!

Following the confirmation that Warren Burton was now permanent Manager, we made just one change from our important 6-2 win over Sandhurst Town as Shay Honey was replaced between the posts by Faebian Witter. Our Captain Nick Wilson completed his two match ban here and so Ethan Nelson-Roberts kept the Captain's armband for this contest. We knew our opponents fairly well with a pair of our former Assistant Managers, Jordan Clark and Matt Chapman in charge and there were four former Salts in their line up in Adam Grant, Gavin Quintyne, Ben Dyson and Tommy Smith. Redhill were of course looking for a League "double" following their 3-1 win in August at the Madgwick.

We opened up in confident mood against a team who were also in decent form, if you excluded their surprise 2-0 defeat at Camberley Town in midweek. Tijani Eshilokun had a go from around twenty yards with his curling shot missing the far post by a couple of feet, before Carl Oblitey headed an Adam Green corner just over the crossbar inside the opening ten minutes.

Oblitey then set up Luke Miller for a shot, only to find it blocked by Smith, before a long throw was knocked on by Thompson Adeyemi for Oblitey to try his luck with an overhead kick, but it went straight at Isaac Ogunseri in the Redhill goal and he made the easy catch. This would prove to be the only save made by either keeper in the first half, although the home side sent a header wide at full stretch, before a string of injuries to our players led to an extended appearance on the field by Physio Alfie Wyld and an additional five minutes at the end of the period, during which time Redhill headed towards goal, only to see the effort headed away by Reece Tierney from near the goal line just before the half time whistle.

We were obviously familiar with many of their players, but of course, the reverse applied too, and the two teams were cancelling each other out a bit, with our tricky wingers, Miller and Jaevon Dyer being kept very quiet. With Redhill's lofty League position, I expected them to try and change things up in the second half and they came out with more intent, pushing us back quite a lot. However, we weren't totally out of it either and in the 50th minute Eshilokun sent the ball across to Dyer, only to see it deflected for a corner. From the Green delivery Oblitey rose highest and was really unfortunate to see his header hit the full face of the bar and rebound directly to the keeper, even though he was by that time standing about eight yards away from his goal. It could have gone anywhere!

This scare clearly woke Redhill up and they forced four successive corners. From the last of these, a deep delivery was met at the far post by the unmarked Smith, who met the dropping ball with a textbook low side footed volley that gave Witter no chance from about eight yards in the 57th minute. One nearly became two just four minutes later as a header was blocked on the line by Green with Quintyne sending the loose ball over the closing defenders, but also over the bar from close range.

The hosts had another chance soon after with Witter forced into a good low save, with the ball parried out wide. It was then sent back in for a header that just missed our far post. We made a couple of substitutions with Matt McGillivray on for Ayran Kugathas and Sirak Negassi on for Dyer and the newly introduced Negassi had a chance to score with his first touch as the ball crept under a defender's foot, but his shot from twenty yards went beyond the far post.

Ingham-Wright came on for the injured Eshilokun who had taken a bit of a battering in this match and had been on the field for about a minute before he scored our equaliser in the 85th minute. An unnecessary foul out wide gave us a free kick and Green's delivery was flicked on by Tierney to Adeyemi at the far post, who headed the ball across goal for our substitute to nod in from close range. If I'm honest, a few of us behind the goal all looked across at the Assistant, just in case there was an offside, but he was happy and we were then able to celebrate.

But could we hold on? Late goals had given us trouble all season, so we needed to be careful, but in reality, it became more a matter of whether we would score again as we took the match to a suddenly wobbly Redhill team and started to attack them on the flanks. We should have had a second goal when we cut them apart with a good move involving Oblitey and Ingham-Wright who fed Negassi on the right, but his perfect cross was somehow headed back across the vacant goal by Miller from just two yards out! The ball was retrieved by Oblitey, but he was at a very narrow angle by then and he clipped the post before the home side were able to scramble the ball to safety!

I'm still not too sure how we didn't take the lead at this point, but an away win would have been harsh on Redhill and they were probably frustrated enough with the draw. We saw out a rather inflated seven minutes of injury time with only a couple of nervy moments before we were able to celebrate a point that in all honesty, I didn't expect us to get before the match, but that's football! With both teams below us picking up points, it's a little tighter at the foot of the table than

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anyone involved with our team would like it to be, but with six matches remaining, survival is still most definitely in our own hands!

Epsom & Ewell: Faebian Witter, Ayran Kugathas, Ethan Nelson-Roberts (c), Adam Green, Reece Tierney, Callum Wilson, Luke Miller, Thompson Adeyemi, Carl Oblitey, Tijani Eshilokun, Jaevon Dyer

Subs: Matt McGillivray for Kugathas (74), Sirak Negassi for Dyer (78), Zach Ingham-Wright for Eshilokun (84), Jerry Antwi for Oblitey (92).

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